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The Unsung Stream: the Ethnic Continuum in U.S. Literature and Film, From John  
Rollin Ridge to John Sayles

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

in

Literature

by

Linda Renee Torres

Committee in Charge:

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2012

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The Dissertation of Linda Renee Torres is approved, and it is acceptable in quality and form for publication on microfilm and electronically:

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Chair

University of California, San Diego

2012

*Dedication:*  
*In Loving Memory of My Father*  
*Who Taught Me to Hold Fast In the Face of Strife and bother...*

*Hector Torres*  
*3-6-27 to 3-2-12*



## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS:

I would like to acknowledge a great example of womanhood, my mother, Lupe Torres. The greatest gift was hers to me: the love of books and learning. Thank you, Mom. Adele, my sister, whose love and warmth sustains me always – thanks for listening for what must seem like eternity sometimes – you are a truly wonderful woman, who inspires me with your courage and strength – and most important, who makes me laugh and believe again. Jake and Jason: You brought me books, and you both know how and when to keep a secret – Homer, thank you for taking care of Princess Cleopatra Kitty and getting her out of Kitty jail. I won't soon forget baseball at Petco and Karaoke in Ensenada. Lastly, Rosaura, please forgive my embarrassingly shopworn clichés here...but the simple truth is that without your years...years! Of patience and support I really, truly, would not have finished this process. I only hope that someday I can live up to your incredible example as a teacher and a scholar; a great woman.

## VITA

### **Education**

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Ph.D. Literature

Dissertation: *The Unsung Stream: the Ethnic Continuum in U.S. Literature and Film, From John Rollin Ridge to John Sayles*

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Bachelor of Arts, English; Second Major, Chicano Studies, May 2000.  
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Associate of Science: Associate Degree of Nursing, May 1993.

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	World Literature and Culture: Civilians and Soldiers: War and the Individual.
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“On John Rollin Ridge and Joaquín Murrieta: The Life and Adventures of the  
Celebrated California Bandit.” American Studies Association, Atlanta, GA.  
November, 2004.

McNair Program Graduate Student Orientation Panel: “Refining the Personal Essay.”  
California State University, Fresno, Summer, 2002.

“From the Valley” Reading from unpublished manuscript, California State University,  
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“For Ye Know the Heart of a Stranger:” Consciousness, Moral Integrity and Moses in  
Joseph Conrad’s “The Secret Sharer.” Ronald E. McNair Program Research  
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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

The Unsung Stream: the Ethnic Continuum in U.S. Literature and Film, From John  
Rollin Ridge to John Sayles

By

Linda Renee Torres

Doctor of Philosophy in Literature

University of California, San Diego, 2012

Professor Rosaura Sánchez, Chair

*The Unsung Stream: the Ethnic Continuum in U.S. Literature and Film, From John Rollin Ridge to John Sayles* challenges the historical position of ethnic literature as perennially marginal and resistant. It traces a continuum in the historical construction of U.S. crime/western texts and their theoretical connections to specific contemporary aspects of the genre. It finds that critical concepts of identity and cultural adaptation applied to much ethnic cultural production today are not only outdated and static, but lead to the critique of ethnic productions from a disproportionate sociological optic at the expense of its historical-literary value. My argument reexamines the concept of assimilation as well as paradigms that construct pathological identity, namely double consciousness, hybridity

and mestizaje. I posit an alternative framework of a fluid subjectivity that does not take for granted ethnic subject identities striving toward unification of multiple selves, but sees multiplicity as equilibrating in many U.S. ethnic subject identities.

I question long-accepted critical views of Ridge, arguing that he and his work have been consistently misread – Ridge as a bigoted “assimilationist,” his work as conservatively apologist for U.S. imperial practices, and *Joaquín Murieta* as a work of little literary merit. Some commonly held critical assertions regarding Ridge’s material striving and his family’s uncomplicated “assimilative” agenda are questioned. I examine Ridge’s use of literary conventions and the tropes therein that share continuity with today’s crime/western filmic productions. I use Raymond Williams’ concept of “structure of feeling” wherein lived experiences of particular historical moments emerge in cultural products and interact with a dynamic hegemony, and Antonio Gramsci’s concept of counter and alternative hegemonies, where Ridge’s work occupies a dynamic space in the hegemonic structure; one that works over time to alter such hegemonic components as consensual or “common sense” knowledge as it functions in U.S. culture.

*The unsung stream* challenges the now traditional, hegemonic approach to U.S. ethnic literature – a sociologically based approach,

implicative of pathological identity dynamics, and a critical habit of regarding U.S. ethnic cultural productions as discursive reflections of the dominant, that is, as marginal, and/or merely responsive/resistant, of which the critical history of John Ridge and his novel are emblematic.

# The Unsung Stream: the Ethnic Continuum in U.S. Literature and Film, from John Rollin Ridge to John Sayles

## Introduction

In the spring of 2005, I attended the *Ramona* Pageant, an iconic event held each spring since 1923 in the town of Hemet, Riverside County, California. The pageant reenacts the story created by Helen Hunt Jackson in her best-selling novel *Ramona*, the 1897 story of a tragic romance between an American Indian-Scottish woman, Ramona, and her great love, the California Indian sheepherder, Alessandro. After eloping to escape the disapproval of Ramona's powerful, aristocratic grandmother, Ramona and Alessandro eke out their lives in poverty, displaced from their homes several times by racist, land-grabbing Anglos. By the conclusion of the novel, Alessandro has become so emotionally depleted and psychologically disoriented that he randomly steals a horse, after which he is hunted down and murdered by a gang of townsmen carrying out the brand of "justice" emblematic of early California vigilantism.

The production is conducted outdoors in an impressive natural amphitheater known as The Ramona Bowl. The pageant features a four hundred-member cast, made up largely of area residents, a good percentage of them cast as "Californios" dressed in elaborate, Spanish-

style equestrian garb. The *Ramona* Pageant is the largest and longest-running outdoor play in United States history (Ramona Bowl). Spectators sit on bleachers facing a natural set made up of a towering rock mountain, a replica hacienda adobe, and several outbuildings. At the climax of the play I attended, the Anglo cowboys descended the steep mountain on horseback in pursuit of Alessandro whereupon the audience, which I would estimate to have been 85 % Anglo, erupted in a chorus of loud booing, stamping their feet on the metal bleachers and shouting derisively at the pursuing cowboys. A short while later there were cheers and applause when the Anglo sheriff was “shot” and “killed.” It was obvious during this and other, minor, scenes that the audience was enthusiastically on Alessandro’s “side.” Struck by the raucousness of the display, I pondered the cultural and societal changes that had to have occurred from the inaugural 1923 performance to that Saturday afternoon enactment in 2005. Had the *Ramona* attendees of the 1930s, during the inhumanely oppressive deportations of Mexican workers (many of whom were actually U.S. citizens) been as quickly demonstrative in their acknowledgment of “American” injustice? Were the spectators at the *Ramona* play in the 1940s as enthusiastic in their condemnation of white lawmen even as police and servicemen were beating Chicano and Asian youth bloody in the streets of Los Angeles?



If so, what would account for such disconnect? As we enter the grounds of the Ramona Bowl and are immersed in the usual trappings of tourist commerce – offerings of “Indian” art and T-shirts bearing portraits of 19<sup>th</sup> century genocide resisters (complete with tags proclaiming “made in China”) – and as we make our way through the venue among children dressed in tiny beaded buckskin and feather costumes riding aloft the shoulders of leather-clad fathers playing cowboy for the day, we have the disconcerting feeling of being transported, strangely, to a parallel space. We have not stepped back in time, but sideways perhaps, into California’s “Fantasy Heritage,”<sup>1</sup> where American “Spanish” equestrians perched on purebreds perform an historical fiction. This is not Jackson’s fiction, but a reconstructed, culturally sanitized social fiction of the shameful era *Ramona* was meant to expose. Perhaps we are just a little eager, safe in the anonymity of the crowded company of strangers, to condemn the “fictional” injustices, for they afford us here an emotionally, politically, safe distance in this particularly festive simulacrum. Such an illusory

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<sup>1</sup> Term coined by Carey McWilliams in his 1949 book *North from Mexico* to refer to the Anglo-American penchant for idealizing the “Spanish” and denigrating the “Mexican” in construction of the “mission myth,” a reinvention of a noble “Spanish” history for California.

environ might even serve to intensify our righteous disgust at the “bad” white men; and so we stamp our feet and hoot with an indignation amplified by shame.

While of course the villains in the novel had always been Anglo, and there must have been negative displays toward them in the performances since 1923, it occurred to me that a monumental change in U.S. cultural ethos had occurred over the ensuing decades – monumental albeit incremental – in which the barbarous Other had become by the 21<sup>st</sup> century the moral hero of many, if not the majority of U.S. genre productions, with the central opposition constructed between such heroes and usually hegemonically supported, corrupt white villains. I began to think of tracing the changes that had to have occurred to have brought U.S. genre productions to that reversal. Obviously, there had been broad social change as a result of the ethnic empowerment movements of the 50s through 70s, but I was interested in tracing the dynamics of that change as specifically effected by ethnic cultural production. As I had already done substantial work on John Rollin Ridge’s novel, *The Life and Adventures of Joaquin Murieta, the Celebrated California Bandit*, (*Joaquín Murieta*) I had noted trope inversions and plot situations there that seemed to be echoed in contemporary works, from early western films to contemporary crime novels and films. When I began to read extensively on Raymond

Williams' concept of structure of feeling, a continuum clearly emerged. In structure of feeling, lived experience or the culture of a particular historical moment emerges in works of art and literature and infuses those with emergent or pre-emergent ways of thinking and feeling which later become formalized, classified, and in many cases built into institutions and formations (Williams 132). My overarching argument became that the reversal of trope in the popular genre cultural productions we see today arose in great part from the cultural moment, the lived experience of Anglo oppression of ethnics of color<sup>2</sup> in California and the perversion of U.S. ideals which I saw as prototypically portrayed in Ridge's novel. I became interested in examining the trajectory of ethnic literary production to see how it had interacted within the continuum of U.S. literature. I was curious as to

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<sup>2</sup> Throughout this work, unless otherwise noted, the term "ethnic" refers to ethnics of color, or those people whose ethnic origin has historically rendered them the recipients of social, legal and economic oppression; these most often have been American Indian, Chicana/o, Asian, Black, and mixed-race U.S. Americans. This focus is not meant to exclude from consideration that regional and era-specific systems of oppression have also affected white-ethnics including Irish, Italian, Jewish, Armenian and Eastern European U.S. Americans, however, those "white" ethnics, by virtue of their skin color have assimilated to such a degree that by the late 20<sup>th</sup> C. were, for the most part, as invested in the hegemonic structure as wholly as "white" or "Anglo" U.S. Americans.

how much the ethnic continuum itself had effected this change over time, but as a foundational part of the U.S. literature continuum, rather than as marginal or merely resistant to that stream as it has been studied at least since the mid-late 1980s. By the advent in American studies of the turn away from U.S. exceptionalism, U.S. American ethnic writing had already been categorized as resistant, as outside the mainstream, and as marginal (And while the term marginal has taken on a patina of progressive desirability over the years, I use it here in its more common definition, as to mean barley seen, on the periphery). I argue that we have continued to teach ethnic literature largely exclusively from this, arguably, now static optic – that curricula, from Junior High School to the University would be best served if it were more in alignment with the theory that has been produced in American Studies in the last decade by scholars such as Michael Denning and George Lipsitz. An important result of the shift in American Studies away from U.S. exceptionalism and the view of U.S. literature as monolithic and Anglo-American and western European-centered, is the work of scholars who, like Denning and Lipsitz, examine the past in terms of (dis)continuities. This study is indebted in part to Denning's landmark work, *The Cultural Front*, which inspired several of my concepts, as we will see in chapter 3. Lipsitz writes: "[...] discontinuity between the past and the present can also serve as a generative source of insight and

understanding. In times of crisis we often see that we need a new understanding of the past as well as of the present, that developments that might strike us as fundamentally new and unexpected also have a long history of their own” (443). The entire project of *The Unsung Stream*, in fact, is to reconcile what seem to be discontinuities between the past and present, by examining continuities between cultures and eras, and so, the examination of the cultural parallels between structures of feeling in the 1850s and 1930s, the 1960s through 1996. The suitability of Ridge’s text as a vehicle which so clearly shares cultural structures with contemporary works would become progressively apparent as critical issues arose; however, one of the first to pique my critical interest was the parallel of Ridge’s text itself to the concept of the continuum.

Ridge’s *Joaquín Murieta* is considered here as foundational in the Murieta story, as it was the Ridge text that first recuperated what until 1853 had been newspaper items and speculative gossip across the state, attributing myriad surnames, physical descriptions and anecdotal details to the spectral presence that Ridge solidified into the singular character of Joaquín Murieta. An inner continuum then, a continuum of works that have Murieta as their focus, came into relief as I learned about the effusion of works that had emerged over the last 150 years featuring Murieta. There were the well-known adaptations such as

Pablo Neruda's play and an outflow of novels and films over the decades, but also lesser known productions such as the first musical rock opera in the Soviet Union.<sup>3</sup> More recently a best-selling crime novel by award winning writer T. Jefferson Parker appeared, in which his protagonist is the great-great-great granddaughter of Murieta – a history teacher by day and a daring robber-outlaw in the Los Angeles of 2008.<sup>4</sup> To extend the continuum paradigm even further, Ridge's reputation has progressed from such descriptors as "hack writer" and decades of critical disparagement to recent mainstream recognition and critical appreciation. For instance, Phillip Rothman, a well-known composer of film and television scores, symphonies and chorale works, as well as composer in residence for a number of large U.S. city symphonies, drew inspiration for a recent chorale piece, "Let Earth be Glad," from Ridge's poem, "The Atlantic Cable." It is interesting to note Rothman's comments:

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<sup>3</sup> *Zvezda i smert' Khoakina Mur'ety* — The Star and Death of Joaquin Murrieta, 1976, by Alexei Rybnikov and Pavel Grushko. The opera was published as a double LP in 1978 and produced as a film in 1982. Both are now available on CD and DVD, respectively.

<sup>4</sup> T. Jefferson Parker. *L.A. Outlaws*. New York: Penguin Group. 2008. Print.

What is so striking about this work...is its unabashed optimism and celebratory nature ...Ridge is celebrating a great technical accomplishment of the century, the laying of the trans-Atlantic cable between the United Kingdom and the United States. It was Ridge's belief that such advancement in communications technology must lead all people to live in kindred spirit, and that peace was necessary for such progress to occur - a theme which was quite relevant to his political and social views. In researching many texts to set to music, none matched the clarity and appropriateness of this poem, so direct and hopeful in its meaning and still relevant a century and a half later. (Rothman)

Ridge has also been cast as a central figure in a multi-media Public Broadcasting Service/Annenberg Learner historical production entitled “American Passages” described as “A Literary Survey [that] provides professional development and classroom materials to enhance the study of American Literature in its cultural context” (American Passages). The series is organized into 16 Units; each unit explores canonical and “re-discovered” texts, and presents the material through an instructor guide, a 30-minute documentary video series, literary texts and an integrated study guide. “Masculine Heroes,” the section in which Ridge appears, examines three writers of the early national period, and places Ridge firmly between James Fennimore Cooper and Walt Whitman – heady literary company indeed for a figure who up until recent years has not received much praise for his literary efforts, to say the least.

Ridge’s novel challenges the critical belief that I attempt to disturb in this work – that “American” literature is a homologous

stream and especially that the place of ethnic work is both historically and in terms of literariness, on the margin of the stream of U.S. literature proper. The popular western and crime genres in particular are believed to have disseminated notions of a unified “American” subject. These popular genres have stirred the U.S. imagination as “All American”; the brave cowboy by his virtuous action and the cowardly criminal by his wretched example both inculcating the supposed “American Values” in the national consciousness. Historically the genres have been seen to equate virtuosity with a white subjectivity while constructing the criminal from the Other – be that the Asian, Mexican, American Indian, mixed race, or black subject. In the preponderance of American Studies criticism, especially since the 1992 publication of Jane Tompkins’ landmark work, *West of Everything: the Inner Life of Westerns*, the western has been seen to idealize the exclusionary and racially elite dogmatism that surrounds “our” construction of national identity; it has been critically accepted that those elements in the western are historically conventional. Yet, as I will argue in this study, there has been all along a continuum of creative process constructed in part by the dynamics of ethnic structures of feeling – an ethnic continuum – that even while still largely unacknowledged, has functioned in a culturally significant space inside “mainstream” U.S. culture. I argue that the titular stream



of the present study has become progressively forceful among the currents of popular business as usual. Rather than simply reinforcing the status quo, as some critics contend, ethnic productions (of which Ridge is my primary example) and a greater body of “non-ethnic” productions than has been critically allowed disturb conceptions such as minority-margin and mainstream-dominant. Ethnic criticism has, in recent critical texts especially, become more concerned with trans-cultural influences and more nuanced, less rigid boundaries in regard to the intersections between “mainstream” and ethnic work; in the early days of American studies, one would be hard pressed to encounter ethnic criticism that found popular cultural work to be a worthwhile source for serious examination. Those who did turn their attention to popular genre ethnic productions dismissed them as John Cawelti did when writing in 1976 about the emergence of African American centered westerns:

In its simplest and least interesting form this new western myth is simply the old formula with an ethnic hero at the center. Thus black westerns like *The Legend of Nigger Charley*, *Buck and the Preacher*, and *Soul Soldier* are more or less traditional westerns with black heroes and plots that have some of their conflicts generated by racial tension... aside from this substitution of a black for a white hero, the new black westerns have not as yet involved any major departures from traditional western formulas. (116)

Ward Churchill, writing in 1992, broadly contends that all genre productions, ethnic or not, western and/or crime, are always already

compliant, working to strengthen the homologous hegemonic, since they are generated from within the hegemonic system of production. In any case, examining early Hollywood westerns exposes a rudimentary ethnic point of view which has been obscured by our late twentieth century critical focus on stereotype and representation that are to a certain extent a function of historical ethos, of anachronistic ignorance and language that was considered within the norm at the time of their production. The pervasive critical focus on racist and sexist elements in early U.S. film, while crucial for the war of position waged by ethnic empowerment activists early on, has had the effect of obscuring whatever progressive examples of pro-ethnic representation may exist in those early “mainstream” productions. This focus elides the fact that often, films, especially those produced in years leading up to and during intense social upheaval such as the 1950s and 1960s can reflect cultural flux by adhering to certain consensual stereotypes while simultaneously containing elements of progressive sensibility. The continuum which comes into relief in this study then, is the space within the conventional, hegemonically conceived body of U.S. literature where two streams, the ethnic and certain white-ethnic and/or Anglo productions share the same space, existing in parallel dimensions of cultural sensibilities, fusing or overlapping at mutually agreeable political, social and cultural intersections. I argue that the

ethnic and many “Anglo” creative works are facets of the *same* prismatic construct that is U.S. literature: that the ethnic continuum flows within and in some places forms the bedrock of U.S. or “American” literature. I intuit that this contention very well may be viewed as self-evident, perhaps mundane – inarguable. However, I maintain that it is important to consider ethnic literature from this perspective because in practice, in everyday use in many university and college courses, in much critical work, ethnic literature is still considered as minor, as marginal (and not in the progressive sense of the term), as ever. John Carlos Rowe’s work in regard to Ridge in particular is an example of the consequence of discontinuity between theory and practice in American studies as we will see in chapter two of *The Unsung Stream*. For as we examine Rowe’s major essay on Ridge and *Joaquín Murieta*, how tenacious the tendrils of U.S. exceptionalism ideology can be becomes apparent. Rowe, in the landmark American studies text, *The Futures of American Studies* writes: “Cultural complexity is often invisible when historical changes are viewed primarily in terms of the assimilation of “minor” cultures to a “dominant” social system”(168), yet that very invisibility is marked in many places in Rowe’s essay, as he recuperates both Ridge and Murieta as frustrated American assimilationists.

It is central to my argument that Ridge's innovations have become, over time, and through the processes of structures of feeling, "built in" to U.S. formations and institutions – and that his thematic innovations in popular genre literature have eventually become manifest in the institution of U.S. film production, and in mainstream genre fiction.<sup>5</sup> Further, these changes gradually and incrementally effected an alteration in the hegemonic systems that have become, although strikingly counter-hegemonic, incorporated into the wider hegemony, accepted and utilized in mainstream productions despite the anti-hegemonic characterizations and the challenges to the "common knowledge" of the authenticity of U.S. practices of equality and justice "for all." This process has been largely unexamined, possibly due in part to the fact that all along, as noted above, there are more than enough representations of crude stereotypes for critics to focus upon in

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<sup>5</sup> Clearly however, Ridge's innovations do not alone account for the complex and historically protracted change in cultural ethos that I am positing here. I'm arguing that moments in myriad forms and works that transcend the white-centric tradition have functioned in aggregate over time to push transformations in representations of ethnic subjectivity to the surface of mainstream consciousness, and incrementally have manifested the complete reversal of trope *The Unsung Stream* examines. Ridge's "Joaquín Murieta" is one of the more powerful, literary, examples of those moments.

genre productions. To complicate matters further, even productions that have been critiqued as successfully inclusive or “sympathetic” to ethnic issues, upon deep analysis are found to be partially reactionary, despite the inclusion of appropriate casting or language usage.<sup>6</sup> Nevertheless, I argue for the concept of the continuum as interactive, and that the protracted space in which the posited streams converge is where the reversal of trope begins to become manifest in popular consciousness. In what follows, I examine certain aspects of U.S. historicity as culturally simultaneous in the late 1800s and the 1930s, the 1960s and the 1990s, to delineate such a convergence as it proceeds through those decades, shaped by historical events and movements. In chapter one I discuss issues of subjectivity in relation to Ridge, particularly as they relate to assimilation having been prevalently posited in ethnic criticism as a binary social process. My argument necessarily examines paradigms that, like assimilation, construct pathological identity, namely double consciousness, hybridity and mestizaje. I posit an alternative framework, one of a fluid subjectivity that does not take for granted that ethnic subject identities strive toward unification of multiple selves, instead seeing multiplicity as equilibrrious in many U.S.

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<sup>6</sup> See Michael Walker. "Dances with Wolves." *The Book of Westerns*. By Ian Alexander Cameron and Douglas Pye. New York: Continuum, 1996. 284-93.

ethnic subject identities; such subjects comprise a population that has gone largely unexamined – ethnics of color who negotiate throughout their lives with personal and institutional bigotry and racism from the dominant culture, while at the same time being often met with suspicion and disdain from members of their own ethnic community, often resulting in their social placement “outside” of that community. I argue that this same dynamic was not only operating during Ridge’s lifetime, but has been carried on in most of the contemporary critical analyses of his work.

In chapter two I propose that *Joaquín Murieta* can be considered as foundational in a strand of U.S. ethnic literature that simultaneously utilizes and subverts literary conventions and formulates new conventions that I will analyze in the final chapter as having become significantly manifest in certain twentieth century “mainstream” texts. This strand, or the ethnic continuum, is a continuum that is seen here in terms of social change in process – process that contemporarily has effected a major inversion of media tropes – so that we see, in contemporary productions, a complete reversal of certain stereotypes in a great many cultural productions, literary and filmic, ethnic and “mainstream.” I argue that Ridge’s novel embodies contemporarily progressive characterizations in terms of ethnicity and gender; innovative adaptations of European literary

conventions such as the “Noble Outlaw” and further, that the literary aspects of his writing, including his extensive and largely uncommented upon use of humor, satire and irony in *Joaquín Murieta* have gone largely unexamined due to the historical critical emphasis on the sociological aspects of his work, when his work has not been dismissed outright as decidedly inferior literarily. Through the formations of new semantic figures that arose out of the tensions inherent in structure of feeling, *Joaquín Murieta* opposed the cultural system of injustice based on “color prejudice” and over time and in concert with social movements had at least a small hand in hegemonic, mainstream, change – change in common sense, consensual knowledge.

Chapter three interrogates spaces of rupture in the 1930s and the late 1950s and 60s to 1996. These cultural spaces are linked here to Ridge’s nineteenth century by structure of feeling. Williams defines that structure as “the distilled residue of the...lived experience of a community over and above the institutional and ideological organization of the society” (134). The works studied in chapter three illuminate, like Ridge’s *Joaquín Murieta* the lived experience of communities that recognize the tension between that lived experience and the official version of reality, or the “American” ideals of equality, justice and freedom. However, in the 1930s we see these counter-hegemonic communities beginning to function in concert with social

movements that anticipate the upsurge of the 1960's civil rights-ethnic empowerment movements, which then catalyze significantly in the popular culture what Michael Denning terms the "laboring" of American culture, priming the national culture for the structural changes to come – structural changes which effect, by the time of the production of the film "Lone Star" in 1996, a virtual inversion of popular convention. I view these structural changes through the lens of, following Denning's work, the "ethnicizing" of U.S. culture. I first examine Philip Levine's poem, "They Feed They Lion," as exemplary of a "white, mainstream" work, one of those that merge with the ethnic of color work to widen the ethnic stream. Levine, Marlon Brando and John Sayles are viewed in this chapter as cultural producers who have transcended in their work the hard boundaries between "white" and ethnic or "minority" in terms of U.S. American subjectivity. Theirs are productions which have been referred to as "sympathetic" to ethnic issues and sensibilities, but in opposition to the sense that these authors are consciously beneficent in their ethnic characterizations, I argue that genuine renderings of ethnic elements are organic to their own fluid subjectivities. A main aspect of what we find operating as a binary opposition between ethnic and traditional or mainstream is the Williamsonian tension produced in the gradient between practical consciousness and official consciousness, which is explored in depth in



the two films in chapter three, Marlon Brando's 1961 *One-Eyed Jacks* and John Sayles 1996 *Lone Star*. Chapter three examines social Change as manifested by refiguring of social space. I conclude the chapters by examining these two filmic texts which I argue are solid examples of the manifestation of the ethnic continuum as it proceeds in conjunction with "mainstream" projects in contemporary time.

## CHAPTER 1: Subjectivity and Assimilation in Ethnic Literature

### Introduction

Much of today's scholarship in the analysis of ethnic literary and filmic production has entered more nuanced territory from the pointing out of stereotypes and identity confusion, but has seemed to be mostly focused on questions of alienation and resistance, or the ethnic writing *against*. My intention in this dissertation is to shift the optic to one that sees alternate hegemony functioning on a continuum from within the structure itself. I argue that these critical approaches have amounted to what is a traditional approach to ethnic literature – one that is sociologically based and largely implicative of pathological dynamics concerning identity issues. John Rollin Ridge and his *Joaquín Murieta* are entirely emblematic of these problems in critical analyses of ethnic work.

Recent critics have examined the proliferation of U.S. ethnic crime fiction<sup>7</sup> with critical approaches that consider these texts in relation to Anglo-hegemonic crime literature. These ethnic genre texts have been measured in large part in relation to the dominant where the dominant is most often posed as a monolithic hegemony, the margins of which are seen to pervasively contain the ethnic as discursive reflections of the dominant. Proceeding from that episteme, very often ethnic subject identities are figured as dissonant, predicated on issues of ethnicity and notions of “Americanness” which are themselves often structured by a critical binary of assimilation and authenticity. This simple binary is still at work in many critical analyses despite shifts by some interdisciplinary scholars who have found the notion of assimilation as an aspirational choice in which ethnic identity is voluntarily lost and replaced by the “dominant” Anglo cultural identity to be no longer viable.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> While many scholars of ethnic fiction focus on detective fiction specifically, here I examine ethnic genre production from the broader optic of crime fiction, which encompasses detective as well as mystery and thriller fiction. Throughout, my focus is on the subgenre of crime fiction which can be described as western-crime fiction and in chapter 3 includes the genre as represented in two films.

<sup>8</sup> The concept of assimilation is defined in this study in the traditional paradigm of sociological theory, which posits a voluntary process by which

Overarching the simple binarial critical mode is a view of historical eras as concrete, fixed blocs of history in which social change is examined not on a continuum of process, but as a series of finished (and mostly failed) discrete movements. For instance, there have been more than a few studies made and theories posited that analyze the “failure” of the two most catalytic social movements in the U.S. in the twentieth century: the popular front, labor-focused movement of the 1930s and the tumultuous civil rights, ethnic-empowerment focus of the 1960s. Both ostensible failures of these movements have generated what are strikingly similar narratives, especially when considered without bearing in mind Raymond Williams’ barrier of reduction of

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immigrants homogenize to an imagined unitary U.S.-Anglo culture, resulting in a total loss of ethnic origin culture. A large part of my argument is that assimilation by ethnics of color is mythical to a large extent, that no matter how acculturated the ethnic of color subject becomes, the fact of her/his non-whiteness precludes comfortable or total assimilation. Additionally, multitudes of ethnics of color who are categorized as assimilated are not immigrants, but 2<sup>nd</sup> and consecutive generation U.S. citizens, which greatly problematizes the traditional paradigm of assimilation. Richard Alba and Victor Nee (Sociology) in *Remaking the American Mainstream: Assimilation and Contemporary Immigration*, state that “the old conception of assimilation has become passé” (2). They propose a reworking of the “canonical model” and remove from their model “any normative implications that groups *should* assimilate (x). For a thorough overview of assimilation in the U.S. from the 19<sup>th</sup> C. to contemporary time, see Williams, et al. in *Journal of Family Issues* (May 1993).

human experience which he posits in explaining his theoretical concept of structure of feeling.<sup>9</sup> Michael Denning likewise describes one reductive view of the 1930s:

W.H. Auden dates the end of the ‘low, dishonest decade’ in his poem “September 1, 1939” and many literary and cultural historians have followed suit. Within five short years, they argue, the left cultural renaissance was over, lost in the betrayals of the Moscow trials, the Nazi-Soviet pact, and the onset of global war. For these memoirists and historians, the thirties tell a cautionary tale: a story of impetuous youthful radicalism, of seduction and betrayal, of a “god that failed” (21).

Not surprisingly, the death of the sixties narrative bears a similitude to that same view, since both are predicated on the supposed failures of traditional radicalism. As with the thirties and the failure of proletarian revolution to materialize, the end of the sixties is said to have marked a breakdown in the revolutionary model of political/social change and so supposedly have failed to effect any revolutionary social transformation. In the death of the 60s narrative, that era’s radicals are also blamed, for excessively naïve idealism and the failure to forestall

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<sup>9</sup> Williams writes: “The strongest barrier to the recognition of human cultural activity is the immediate conversion of experience into finished products...procedure in conscious history is habitually projected ...into contemporary life...in which formations in which we are still actively involved are converted into formed wholes rather than formative processes...now, as in that produced past, only the fixed, explicit forms exist, and the past is always, by definition, receding” (ML128).

the ironic commodification of their utopian values. This time, though, the “god that failed” was transmogrified, in the 1980s and 1990s into the god of consumerism, presiding over the once again victorious, monolithic hegemonic “mainstream” always and inevitably able to absorb dissent. In a similar vein, Ralph Rodriguez writes, in his foundational, award-winning book, *Brown Gumshoes: Detective Fiction and the Search for Chicana/o Identity* that his text “Examines the Chicana/o subject in the post-nationalist period (roughly the 80’s to the present) in order to historicize and understand how and why Chicana/os construct the identities they do. These detective novels demonstrate the emergence of new discourses of identity, politics and cultural citizenship that speak to the shifting historical moment in which Chicana/os have found themselves *since the demise* of the nationalist politics of the Chicana/o movement (ca. 1965-1975)” (2 italics added)

There is no doubt of course that the Chicana/o movement as well as the other ethnic empowerment movements in the mid to late twentieth century effected continuing discourses of identity, but my emphasis here is on a broader continuum. I propose that while the movements in question may have ended the hope of traditionally radical and rapid social transformation, when viewed as social/cultural processes within a dynamic Gramscian/Williamsonian framework,

these models of social transformation can be refigured as on-going processes rather than as a series of “failures” of discrete, past movements. I also argue that when social movements are “converted into formed wholes rather than...being considered... forming and formative processes,” (Williams 128) ethnic subject identity is also likely to be examined reductively as perpetually embryonic, epiphenomenal to successive, finished movements.

A reading of ethnic identity in terms of a continuum in ethnic fictional texts is possible in the ethnic crime genre as it provides an opportunity for scholars of ethnic literature to map alternative spaces within a new paradigm of criticism where ethnic literary production can be analyzed on its own terms. This is significant since I argue that ethnic literary identity construction has historically been critically perceived as perpetually identity-dystonic relative to an always dominant mainstream. Instead, ethnic genre production will be seen here as functioning to depathologize ethnic subject identity in regard to its foundation within a dynamic U.S. hegemony, or the “mainstream” of U.S. literature. Presenting ethnic genre texts as the continuous working out of problematical identities obscures important cultural connections, historical-literary contexts that led to their emergence, and does not accord them consideration as participating in the formative processes that cohere to contemporary social and literary movements.

In order to do so here, I argue for the study of Ridge's *Joaquín Murieta* as the earliest U.S. ethnic crime text<sup>10</sup>, positing that since at least the nineteenth century there has been a continuum of salient ethnic identity formation evident in ethnic genre texts that has functioned in relation to progressive social processes and over time has broadly transformed socially representative fictive constructions along that continuum.

The narrative motif emergent in Ridge's text is one which has continued to reflect material social realities in the U.S. since the nineteenth Century. Said motif uses the theme of an ethnic protagonist suffering white racism and oppression, in which the white oppressor is drawn with particular characteristics, namely, violence, cruelty, ignorance and hypocrisy that is state sanctioned and often state sponsored; indeed, the white oppressor is very often merely a reflection of the larger oppressive and law-backed hegemony. Following the

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<sup>10</sup> Ridge's *Joaquín Murieta* was the first novel to be published in U.S. California, and the first known to be written by an American Indian. While the romanticized outlaw has literary precedent in Europe, Ridge's Joaquín was in fact the first U.S. representation of what would become a stock character, the outlaw hero. As Daryl Jones writes, "The noble outlaw made his debut ... on October 15, 1877 when the house of Beadle and Adams released Edward L. Wheeler's *Deadwood Dick, the Prince of the Road; or, the Black Rider of the Black Hills*" (653). While some might dispute Ridge's Joaquín as the first noble outlaw in U.S. literature, he is most certainly the first ethnic U.S. noble outlaw.



continuum paradigm, we see William Apes, María Amparo Ruiz Burton, and Martin Delany intervening in discourses of U.S. freedom and equality with this motif before and after Ridge, although while all of their texts incorporate crime to a certain extent, they cannot be figured as crime texts as definitively as *Joaquín Murieta*.

My study in this chapter and in much of chapter two is meant to engage with the Ridge/*Joaquín Murieta* critics who focus on Ridge's supposedly problematic identity as the logic in the writing of the novel; part of my argument is that many Ridge critics have focused on his ostensible symbiotic relationship to his text at the expense of the text's value in terms of ethnic subject representation and its literary aspects. Excepted in this regard are works which study the story of the mytho-historical figure of Joaquín Murieta by taking a more inclusively broad view of the story, placing it in a national and international historical context. These are works with chapters, forewords and introductions offered by scholars Shelley Streeby, Susan Johnson, and Luis Leal. All of these credit the Ridge text as foundational to the widely and internationally disseminated Murieta versions, though some do not see it as foundational to U.S. literature. They do acknowledge that while there existed newspaper accounts of the Joaquín story statewide from 1853, it was Ridge's text that finally attributed the surname of Murieta to Joaquín, distinguishing him from the speculative other "Joaquíns"

abounding in newspaper accounts, and transforming the array of stories into a cohesive narrative. There are differing views, however, about whether Ridge's *Joaquín Murieta*, as Streeby questions, should be "privilege[d] as an authoritative text, implicitly distinguishing it from the sub-literary newspaper accounts that preceded it in the 1850's as well as from the mass cultural texts, such as the "California Police Gazette" and the dime novels, which followed it." Streeby wishes instead to place Ridge's text within "...the larger, violently divided inter-American field of popular knowledge about crime that responded to and helped reshape class and racial formations in the wake of the American 1848" (275). *The Unsung Stream* does privilege the Ridge text, in the sense that I argue for its prototypical creation of a U.S. noble bandit and more specifically consequential, a noble bandit of color. However, I do follow Streeby in placing it within a popular knowledge context, and focus in later chapters on the reshaping in the text of class and racial formations which Streeby points out, as well as its contribution to a reshaping of familial, military and gender formations.

The foremost problem that other critics with whom I engage in chapters one and two have worked through is the seemingly contradictory currents in the text, Ridge's conservative, expansionist and according to some critics, even "racist" views as they are theorized

to manifest in the *Joaquín Murieta*. I examine Ridge from an optic of subject identity fluidity in terms of his bicultural/mixed blood subjectivity and his text in terms of dynamic processes of the hegemonic, including alternative and counter hegemonies. This approach troubles the heretofore critical conceptions that recuperate *Joaquín Murieta* as “doing the work of cultural normalization” as a result of the supposed assimilative subjectivity of its author (Rowe 98).

I use a methodological framework extrapolated from Antonio Gramsci’s and Raymond Williams’ theoretical writings calling for resistance to the critical habit of approaching the historical and the social – the culture – in terms of concrete conceptions of fixity, that is, as a series of events fixed and static in a completed past, and a monolithic hegemony exerting one-way power. The overarching sense here is of a posited critical failure to capture the movement, the dynamism of cultural and identity processes: the movement in culture and in ethnic subjectivity between and within the social forces. I write contra a purely teleological notion of history, problematizing concrete, oppositional, compartmentalized constructions of subject identity. I use an optic that finds cultural simultaneity among several historic U.S. moments, by which such seemingly disparate eras as the California gold rush, the popular front movement of the 1930s and the ethnic empowerment movements of the 1960s share specific features relative

to structures of feeling, thereby not adhering to the notion of cultural time, or eras, as concrete. At the same time, I examine ethnic subjectivity as a process also partaking of simultaneity, a simultaneity of response to experience and interpellation that I describe as fluid, in contradistinction to the assimilation paradigm I find no longer useful in ethnic identity formations because it posits U.S. ethnic subjectivity as necessarily pathological, notwithstanding the sometimes tortuous late twentieth century attempts at “inclusion,” “diversity” and “multiculturalism.”

### Fluid Subjectivity

In this chapter, I am discussing issues of subjectivity in relation to Ridge, particularly as they relate to assimilation having been prevalently posited in ethnic criticism as a binary social process. My argument necessarily examines paradigms that, like assimilation, construct pathological identity, namely double consciousness, hybridity and mestizaje. I posit an alternative framework, one of a fluid subjectivity that does not take for granted that ethnic subject identities strive toward unification of multiple selves, instead seeing multiplicity as equilibrious in many U.S. ethnic subject identities. Such subjects comprise a population that has gone largely unexamined – ethnics of color who negotiate throughout their lives with personal and institutional bigotry and racism from the dominant culture, while at the

same time being often met with suspicion and disdain from members of their own ethnic community, often resulting in their social placement “outside” of that community. I argue that this same dynamic was not only operating during Ridge’s lifetime, but has been carried on in most of the contemporary critical analyses of his work. My understanding of these issues is inevitably informed by my own negotiation through those cultural channels.

Having been born in East Los Angeles before moving to the central valley town of Madera and later to an all Anglo middle class suburb in Fresno, I was the recipient since age eight or so of a complexity of prejudicial interpellation from both my white neighbors, schoolmates, playmates’ parents and the Chicana/o and black schoolmates who were later bussed to the junior high school where I was enrolled. “Dirty Mexican” and conversely, “Coconut” were epithets applied to me often in my milieu: the first by Anglo classmates, the latter by Chicana/o classmates. In the fourth grade, an Anglo “friend” composed a manifesto entitled “The Hate Linda Torres Club,” which listed the reasons that I should be shunned: my parents owned only one car; my clothes were handmade by my mother; we picked grapes in the summer; in an age of avocado-green shag carpeting being the height of fashionable décor, my mother insisted upon hardwood and tile floors, and we ate beans at dinner every night.

Later, in junior high, I was routinely met on my walk home with taunts and invitations to fight from Chicana schoolmates, because, as they said, I lived on the “white” side of town and “acted like a white girl.” Still later, my cousins rejected me and my siblings for our suburban, custom built home in an all Anglo neighborhood, the fact that my siblings and I did not speak fluent Spanish, and that I was a “bookworm;” yet our Mexican roots were never in doubt.

My mother, a second generation U.S. American, has a gift for storytelling. Many times she recounted the story of her own mother, born in Arizona in 1910:

She was just a schoolgirl in Arizona when the great town on this side and so we needed to capture him. With all the money and troops, all the might of the American military, they never did find him. He hid out in the mountains as long as it took for them to give up. (Torres)

My father, also prone to storytelling, related the history of his father’s conscription at different times into armies on opposing sides of the Mexican Revolution. I take the liberty of relating these anecdotes in order to concretize an alternative experience of what I see as a too often reductive either/or characterization of the concept of assimilation, a question that is central to an analysis of Ridge and his novel. My exposure to theories of identity/subjectivity in the academy disposes me now to deconstruct the prejudicial attitudes of my peers in childhood as

well as the ostensibly simple bits of parental storytelling. Those experiences were full with the cultural transmission of two separate but simultaneous messages. They have to do with my parent's (and consequently my own) organic connection to U.S. nationality and history as well as to a "patriotic" feeling associated with U.S. American citizenship, and in the case of my mother and Villa, the U.S. military's emblematic representation of that. At the same time, the stories have to do with iterations of organic ties to Mexico and the obvious admiration in my mother's mien for the legendary figure of Villa. There was no doubt that my mother was delighted to relate that the Mexican underdog Villa had succeeded in confounding the "Mighty," rich, U.S. foe with wit and nerve; he was the resister. Her use of the pronoun "we" in her story along with her admiration for Villa, also evident when she challenged the characterization of him as an illiterate drunk as we watched the movie matinee "Viva Villa" on television, speaks to a simultaneous referencing of historical background that has undoubtedly affected the subjective consciousness of generations of Chicana/o/Mexican Americans as well as American Indian, Asian and black Americans. Simultaneous to my parents inculcating my consciousness with a strong sense of my Mexican/American/Chicana ethnicity were the almost daily race and ethnicity charges that were leveled by my peers, and sometimes even by teachers; on one occasion

I was told to “Go back to Mexico” by an Anglo history teacher. The fact is that many “assimilated” subjects, contrary to what has been historically posited, when faced with prejudice and discrimination in a situation of primary integration, do not seek acceptance from the dominant culture in their environment by attempting erasure of their ethnic identity. Yet an entire population of “assimilated” subjects, while continuing to amplify their claim and value their own ethnic identity from within the space of the dominant culture, indeed, to often wage a very substantive, even daily, struggle to do so, very often do not enjoy the fraternal support of their ethnic community, many times being excoriated by that very community for appearing to “assimilate.”

The paradigm of assimilation that I am problematizing here is the one that remains entrenched in the critical imagination as conscious and voluntary, based on a posited idealized valuation of “American/white” identity, and the desire to “melt” into that identity, in the process choosing to disassociate from one’s culture of origin; it is closely related to “passing.” This episteme leaves no space of possibility for the lived experience of those seen as assimilating. In the interest of examining the interstice of subjectivity that I see as an alternative paradigm, one must take into account the fact that the issue of ethnicity has proved to be a ground for fragmentation and contention, in California especially, since the U.S. invasion and



colonization of the Northern Mexico territories. As Rosaura Sanchez observes in her important study of the Californio testimonios,

[...]ethnicity is a readily available discourse, a type of umbrella construct that often subsumes a number of economic, political and social antagonisms that also call for disarticulation. As an identity of subalternity, ethnicity can seemingly allow for a collective identity across classes, at least momentarily, especially when the community as a whole suffers the brunt of racist attacks, but the fact that ethnicism does not obliterate class distinctions and ideological differences leads invariably to group fragmentation. In the case of the Californios, it meant that socially mobile members of the same community could be found riding alongside vigilantes out to lynch Mexicans. (269)

In 2012, group fragmentation means that members of the same (Chicana/o/Mexican American) community are found leading groups such as the Minutemen to patrol the U.S. Mexico border armed with the fervor of nativism along with their more immediately lethal weapons. However, it also means that members of the same community can be found teaching progressive readings of texts in the colleges and universities, writing progressive legislation in California, and heading activist agencies that monitor human rights within U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement processes.

When I began to write for the Master's degree, I posited the fluid subject theory, intuiting that the concepts of hybridity, double-consciousness and mestizaje were not sufficient to express the nuances I was attempting to articulate. I was troubled by the assumption of

pathology in those terms, by the seeming model they posed that appeared to me to be based upon irreconcilability. Due to my inability at the time to clearly and fully articulate how I meant to express the fluid subject, I was met by challenging questions from various scholars, the most troubling one at the time being, “Are you simply replacing ‘contradictory’ with fluid?” I had not yet studied Ramon Saldívar’s foundational text *Chicano Narrative* in preparation for the Master’s thesis, but now having done so, find it to be one of the earliest critical gestures toward the fluid/simultaneity paradigm. In examining Ernesto Galarza’s *Barrio Boy*, Saldívar states, “In *Barrio Boy* we are not offered a tale of assimilation; instead we see the complex historical-psychological process of acculturation unfold, as a discursive formation in which the historically constituted possibilities for identity are complexly dispersed” (167). Saldívar, in comparing *Barrio Boy* with Richard Rodriguez’s *Hunger for Memory*, finds that Galarza’s work differs crucially from Rodriguez’s in that Galarza,

Handles...turmoil not by rejecting his Mexican world as he develops a public self, but by ‘navigating’ between both the ‘intimate’ sounds of Spanish in favor of the distanced forms of English...here the private self is as appropriated by its public role as the public self is fashioned by its private experiences. The opposition between the two versions of *selfhood has become fluid, dynamic*...in this way Galarza establishes a continuing correspondence between personal identity and a radical ethnic identity (168 italics added).

This sense of fluidity is also implicit in the work of theorist Jane Flax, who writes in 1993: "...complex processes of subjectivity interact with, partially determine and are partially determined by many...complex processes including biological, political, familial, and gendered ones" (35). She asks, "Can there be forms of subjectivity that are simultaneously fluid, multi-centered and effective in the "outer" worlds of political life and social relations? Can a multi-centered and over-determined self-recognize relations of domination and struggle to overcome them?" (37).

My concept of fluid subjectivity owes a debt to Nicole King's study of C.R.L. James, and her UCSD graduate seminar on Caribbean literature. It was there that I noted the similarity between the concept of Creolization and the fluid subject concept I was beginning to formulate, most notably in the central idea of Creolization – specifically the aspect of non-fixed being. The concepts of hybridity and mestizaje are in some aspects similar to the concept of fluid subjectivity, but for my purposes, inadequate for articulating the syncretism I consider a crucial aspect of fluid subjectivity. As King writes, "Creolization and hybridity are similar, they are not synonymous" (333). Creolization is referenced here as a process by which to solidify the conception of fluid subjectivity. I follow King also in the distinction from hybridity: "Perhaps their greatest

distinction is hybridity's geographical non-specificity and Creolization's desired rootedness in a specific Caribbean space/experience" (16). In relation to Ridge, the "desired rootedness" of fluid subjectivity is in the specific nineteenth century U.S. civic space, and his experience within that space as a bicultural/mixedblood subject.

Fluid subjectivity does not bear the associative freight that is attached to the term *mestizaje*, which has functioned on a continuum of use from "an official doctrine of the state...expressed in official rhetoric, mythology and public ceremonial (*Mestizaje 1*) to "nothing to be proud of. It is a damaging concept that – like everything else from the conquest – has served to crush our indigenous heritage" (*Mejia, 2*). *Mestizaje* as a concept, then, has run the gamut from a term coined simply to refer to the offspring of the indigenous and the invader, to a term that culturally privileged the European and erased the indigenous, to a term that privileged the indigenous in the social movements in the 1960s, to a reviled term in some post-movement ideologies.

Fluid subjectivity is diametrically opposed to the phenomenon of double consciousness, a concept mostly if not exclusively associated with W.E.B. Dubois. In order to intervene in that received mode, a short examination of the term's provenance follows. Ralph Waldo Emerson, William James and W.E.B. Dubois form a triadic link by

virtue especially of their conceptualizations of the term “double consciousness.” The term was first used by Emerson, applied in a medical/psychiatric sense by James (and later Freud), and adapted by Dubois, who wrote eloquently of the painfully dichotomous duality of the consciousness of the African American. In a lecture read at the Masonic temple of Boston in 1842, Emerson spoke about the contradiction between reason and understanding: “The worst of this double consciousness is, that the two lives, of the understanding and of the soul, which we lead, really show very little relation to each other, never meet and measure each other...with the progress of life the two discover no greater disposition to reconcile themselves” (379). The most meaningful difference between double consciousness and fluid subjectivity is that the latter does not construct a pathological state. Emerson’s, James’ and Dubois’ conceptions speak of a dichotomous consciousness. The seemingly insurmountable task then is to reconcile the split parts, but is precluded in Dubois’ formation by the pervasiveness of the racist judgment of the dominant: “It’s peculiar, this double consciousness, this sense of always looking at one’s self through the eyes of others, of measuring one’s soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity” (5). Dubois’ “Negro” is seeing himself through an immovable veil of interpellation from a white voice.

The syncretism of ideologies in a fluid subject is not predicated on resistance per se, or above all – it is not voluntary or even fully conscious, (un)consciousness being dependent on variable processes of interpellating events in time and circumstance, and to an extent whether those are experienced as public or private. The fluid subject does not internally or emotionally privilege one culture over another as “authentic” or assign value to one and degradation to the other based on interpellation, even though s(he) recognizes that such value and degradation has existed historically and continues to exist in societal structures and in certain individuals and/or groups in the society around them, and even though they experience hurt, shame and anger from their own interactions with those structures, individuals and/or groups.

### Critical Binaries

Ridge’s mixed heritage has been at the core of much of the critical work surrounding his novel, and has consistently been posited as either/or subjectivity. That is, Ridge has been figured as either essentially assimilated or as a rage filled “shape shifter.” In what has been viewed as the seminal reading of *Joaquín Murieta*, Louis Owens posits a view that finds Ridge has constructed his novel, and more pointedly his protagonist, from his own conflicted past; in large part, Owens argues that the text is a “masquerade” in which Ridge enacts a symbiotic relationship to his text, one that in Owens’ own larger view

points to the dialectical relationship Ridge has with his own cultural identity: “It (the novel) is a fascinating testimony to the conflicts and tensions of its mixed-blood author...that marks the thinly camouflaged beginning of a long campaign by Native American writers to wrench a new genre – the novel – free from the hegemony of the dominant and (to Native Americans especially) destructive culture of European America. Ridge’s Joaquín Murieta is a disguised act of appropriation, an aggressive and subversive masquerade” (32-33). In the same vein, some critics, such as Cheryl Walker and Timothy Powell, complicate reductive and binary racial and cultural paradigms of “oppressor/oppresed” and “dominant/marginal” in regard to Ridge’s text; however, at the same time they frame their analyses of Ridge’s cultural complexities in oppositions of assimilation and resistance, most often the former posed as a voluntary, conscious process and the latter a subconscious one, resulting in Ridge writing out of a pressing psychological need to express the sublimated rage of one who “... moves easily within the dominant white culture but cannot forget or forgive the denigration by that culture of his indigenous self” (Owens 32). Even when the arguments are complicated by nuanced thought in relation to former, essentialized views of Ridge and Joaquín Murieta, they continue to construct larger binaries. I am addressing here the

majority of the arguments and logic that is set forth in Ridge criticism which presupposes a problematic relative to his identity issues.

I propose that much of Ridge criticism to date is predicated on a certain amount of presentism. I see the term “assimilation” in relation to Ridge as contemporarily fraught with judgment relative to necessary views of his subjectivity as loaded with simple “contradictions” – a subjectivity structured by the supposed dilemma of being “caught between two worlds.” This view is necessary for structures of criticism that want to situate him as an example of a figure who, “choosing” assimilation in opposition to authenticity as an indigene, somehow betrays his “authentically ethnic” Indian self, producing the posited “divided against himself” psychological schism. This is the schism that ethnic, “minority” or “marginal” U.S. writers have been and continue to be placed in, which I argue is parallel to King’s observation regarding Creolization: “Creolization’s advocates and practitioners emphasize how it challenges colonialism and, more inclusively, Western systems of value that presuppose stability through singular national histories and absolute identities. Such presuppositions have notoriously confined black people in many nations to static, subordinate positions in history” (10). (The term “black people” here is extended to include what I see as other creolized cultures in the U.S.).



Criticism which fixes Ridge as a subject who can only be either “assimilated” or “resistant” or whose subjectivity “shifts” between the two and produces the romantic notion of being “caught between two worlds” is somewhat anachronistic when we examine Ridge’s views in the light of historical processes at work during his lifetime. Such criticism is based on modern views of “assimilation” and reads Joaquín Murieta through a framework of a reductive model of assimilation. The critics engage consistently with moments of subversion and transgression in the text, but seem to ascribe them to Ridge’s assimilative “contradictions.” Part of the problem is that so much of the critical work assumes that Ridge is “contradictory” based (but not only) on his failure to adhere to our contemporary standard of pan-Indianism in his stridently conservative ideologies. Consider critic John Lowe’s essay:

The narrative seems intent...on making us see Joaquín as more of an Abel/victim figure. Still, we must be careful in building this parallel; as his biographer notes, Ridge *paradoxically* favored assimilation as the ultimate answer to the “Indian question,” and eagerly pursued wealth and position in Anglo America for himself and his family. More recently *John Carlos Rowe has reminded us of Ridge’s white mother and wife, his excellent education in the Northeast, his ‘white’ appearance and his elegant dress...* at least psychologically Ridge seems to have been caught in limbo, neither inside or outside a secure “American” identity... (2 italics added)

This particular passage is quite common in its tone in Ridge criticism. In my view of Ridge’s identity, his political and social views are not

those of one who is “caught in limbo” as a result of his “white” blood, nor by his dressing himself in apparel appropriate to his time and place, (how would Lowe and Rowe have had him dress?) but of one whose identity was at least partially constructed by fixed structures of the material from birth, and by the legal and educational apparatuses of his time and place. I would also point out that at the time of Ridge’s arrival in California in 1850, barely three years after the U.S. takeover of Mexican California, a “secure ‘American’ identity” is still somewhat oxymoronic. Further, I question whether “eager pursuit” of financial support for his family and his work toward a literary career should be obliquely posited as a drive associated with his “white” blood. Is this not indicative of a deep-seated archaism concerning the “nature” of the American Indian? To ascribe traits to “white” blood seems an unconscious slippage into the “surrogate literary reality” posited by Ward Churchill who writes that the nineteenth century “present” of the Native American was “perpetually precluded through the maintenance of a seamlessly constituted surrogate reality” (33). This reality was in part constructed by the dichotomous literary representation of “Indian” as noble/savage. When Lowe and Rowe ascribe “eager” pursuit of “wealth and position” to Ridge here, they are doing so as evidence that such pursuit is somehow innately “white,” in support of the view of him as conflicted and “caught in limbo.” They are placing him in

Churchill's "surrogate reality," then pointing to his imagined conflicts based on their perceptions of what a nineteenth century "Indian" should have pursued as opposed to what Ridge did.

As Lowe points out above, Rowe writes of Ridge as:

"Handsome and cultivated in his speech, elegantly dressed, even in the rough mining towns...Ridge apparently did not experience racial discrimination or exclusion... in the few months he worked in the gold fields...he must have known how important his education, speech, and dress were in protecting him from the violent xenophobia experienced by other "foreigners" (101). Timothy Powell's statement, "American" identity needs to be reconceptualized not as a static, abstract ideology, but as a ceaseless, fluid contestation..." appears partially aligned with my concept of fluid subjectivity, but he continues on with a striking disconnect between theory and practice, warning, "...It is theoretically important...to critically reconstruct the multi-cultural complexities of Ridge's life and not become caught up in his self-conscious attempts to portray himself as a 'genuine red man'...There is perhaps no clearer example of the problems inherent in trying to appropriate an authentic 'Cherokee' or 'Indian' identity than the tragedy that befell the Ridge family" (195). Where Rowe and Lowe see Ridge inhabiting "whiteness" or the 19<sup>th</sup> Century white conception of "American,"

Powell sees him as inhabiting a somehow “appropriated” Indian identity.

I would also like to point out Rowe’s description of Ridge in the context of “other foreigners.” Rowe’s designation of Ridge as a foreigner, in addition to being factually inaccurate, is just as problematic in a critical sense as is Powell’s posited “appropriation” by Ridge of an “authentic” Indian identity. Powell, surprisingly, seems to be attributing, at least in part, the “tragedy that befell the Ridge family” to what he views as their conscious effort to mask their “assimilative” agenda with a somehow inauthentic inhabitation of their own ethnicity. As we shall see, the dramatic events that Powell is referring to are much more complicated than such a risible proposition; we shall also see that the issue of the Ridge family’s “assimilative” position has been highly simplified and under-researched in the critical work.

In his innovative treatment of the mixed-blood literary subject, *Injun Joe’s Ghost: the Indian Mixed Blood in American Writing*, Harry Brown juxtaposes hybridity and authenticity in arguing that these subject formations are similarly dialectical. He defines hybridity as “the condition of mediating two competing racial, cultural, or discursive realities,” and authenticity as “the potential of the hybrid subject for self-representation as he or she is circumscribed by the dominant discourse” (9). He compares Spivak’s argument that the

subaltern cannot speak consequent to transformation of that speech into dominant terms of articulation, with Bhabha's argument that the subaltern is always speaking, "...if not directly...in the ways it fractures the dominant discourse that can never fully contain it" (9). Brown refers to both discussions as dialectical in that while Spivak's view is of a relatively stable hegemony and Bhabha's of hegemony in flux, they are both predicated on "fundamental oppositions between the self and the other, the dominant and the subversive..." Brown points out that "neither view recognizes the potential for a third discursive dimension in which the subject is not alternately, not ambivalently, but *simultaneously and permanently* self and other, dominant and subversive, white and Indian: a *synthetic rather than a dialectical* understanding of hybridity" (10 italics added). My argument parallels Brown's that heretofore models of subjectivity that recognize dual or multiple aspects in a subject are not adequate in the analysis of "those who are neither and yet simultaneously white and Indian" and that "the incongruous lack of scholarship attest(s) to the limitation of our theoretical vocabulary," as well as a critical imperative to study this alternative discursive space. He advocates the "expansion of binary analytical tools (which) cannot yet account" for this discursive space. (12)

I propose that fluid subjectivity with its central optic of simultaneity is such an expansion of binary tools. I do not wish to argue that contradictions do not exist in fluid subjectivity, but that those contradictions are not necessarily pathological, as current criticism seems to render them when they “diagnose” them as inconsistent. Brown finds that both William Apes and Ridge as well as Mourning Dove “...exploit the conventions of mass fiction and the expectation of readers, raising romantic ideals of degeneracy, only to detach them from their familiar, nationalized contexts” and further maintains that “these texts seem rhetorically inconsistent to some critics *because* these critics are yet unable to recognize *that texts, like people, may simultaneously embody two opposing ideals*” (30 italics added).

The aspect of Raymond Williams’ concept of ‘structure of feeling’ that deals with the social as still “in process” and how such processes are easily misrecognized is useful in analyzing the interaction of counter and alternative hegemonic processes as far as the ethnic motif that Ridge establishes in his text which operates against the “common sense,” or received knowledge of the time. With the concept, Williams distinguishes practical, evolving, lived experiences within hegemonic processes from the more fixed “ideology” or world-view of a given time. According to Williams, one aspect of structure of feeling is that it signifies a nuanced and tense relationship between a

culture's consensual beliefs and the actively lived and felt meanings, experiences and values of its members. Structure of feeling includes,

Characteristic elements of impulse, restraint and tone; specifically affective elements of consciousness and relationships: not feeling against thought, but thought as felt and feeling as thought: practical consciousness of a present kind in a living and interrelating continuity...we are also defining a social experience which is still *in process*, often indeed not recognized as social but taken to be private, idiosyncratic and even isolating, but which in analysis has its emergent, connecting and dominant characteristics. (132)

Williams argues that such practical consciousness, or present thought, is habitually expressed and evaluated as past tense, and “drawn toward fixed, finite, receding forms” (128). In this way, certain thought, in this case modes of thought from the “margin,” can be conceived of as a system and “procedurally excluded as peripheral or ephemeral” (109). Williams contends that “What [the dominant] exclude[s] may often be seen as the personal, or the private, or as the natural...Indeed it is usually in one or other of these terms that the excluded area is expressed, since what the dominant has effectively seized is...the ruling definition of the social”(125). *Joaquín Murieta* has indeed been considered by certain critics, especially in work before 2003, more toward the personal, as historically ephemeral, and peripheral. It has been the critical habit to reduce Ridge's subjectivity to imagined inconsistencies that can only be reconciled by construing his “assimilation” reductively as endorsement of and aspiration to mid-

nineteenth century dominant ideologies. As mentioned above, a critical consensus speaks to a view of sublimated rage in *Joaquín Murieta*; many critics state outright that Ridge wrote the story from an internal need to resolve his own family history. This seems to recapitulate Williams' theory about relegating social formations, in this case Ridge's formation of state sanctioned and sponsored oppression as a result of "color prejudice," to the realm of the private, the personal. Critics who view Ridge as fueled by rage and fantasies of revenge in the writing of the text cite both the murder of his family by a rival Cherokee faction and the dispossession of Cherokee lands as an impetus for his creation; they posit that Ridge was driven by *personal, emotional* inspiration, even as he himself explicitly relates that it was out of a wish to add to the history of the State that he undertook the project.

### The Critics and Cherokee Factions

The main point critics settle on in the argument that Ridge was acting out fantasies of rage and revenge in the writing of the novel are the murder of John Rollin Ridge's uncle, grandfather and father by the opposing Ross faction, which came about as a consequence of the signing of the New Echota treaty, in which the Ridge family agreed to the Indian removal policies of the Jackson Administration. Until 1832,



John Ridge, John Rollins' father, and Ridge relatives, the Boudinot family, had been as vehemently opposed to removal as John Ross, the principal chief of the Nation from 1827 to 1866, also a mixedblood, who along with the Ridge family comprised the elite leadership of the Georgia Cherokee. However, between 1828 and 1832 events occurred which convinced the Ridge faction that the only course for survival was to acquiesce to the U.S. plan and remove west of the Mississippi.

First, Andrew Jackson was elected to the presidency and during his first address to Congress announced his intention to support legislation to remove all Indians to the West. In that same year gold was discovered in Georgia, which increased the fervor of the whites for land. Georgia had extended its authority over Cherokee land in 1828, and this was to take effect in 1830. In 1831 the Cherokee presented a case to the Supreme Court, to ask it to nullify those acts on the basis that the Cherokee Nation comprised a foreign state. The court ruled that it had no jurisdiction on the matter. Emboldened by Jackson's attitude and the clamor of many of its citizens for land, Georgia extended its laws over the Cherokee Nation and annexed large tracts of Indian land. The resulting flood of white intruders precipitated incidents of forced entry into Cherokee homes and threats of other violence; as Ridge's Biographer writes, "Sometimes strangers lurked in the woods bordering the Ridge farm, terrifying everyone" (Parins 18).

In 1832, amid this increasing pressure, the news arrived that the Supreme Court had invalidated Georgia's authority over the Cherokee Nation. However, any sense of relief that this news may have engendered was crushed by Jackson's response: "John Marshall (Supreme Court Justice) has made his decision; let him enforce it if he can" (Eaton 56). Ross, the Ridges and the Boudinots had traveled to Washington numerous times before the summer of 1832, when John Ridge traveled once again to request a meeting with Jackson in order to ascertain Jackson's position on the Supreme Court decision petition. Parins writes, "He was told that the U.S. would not act against Georgia" and that "It was probably at this point that (John) Ridge saw the futility of further resistance to removal" (21).

Historically, the two factions have been seen in remarkably simple, opposing terms. Walker writes: "To this day the voluntary compliance of the Treaty Party is regarded with contempt by other Indians" (116). American Indian writers M. Annette Jaimes and Theresa Halsey state in an essay that "Despite much groveling by the sell-outs, Andrew Jackson ordered removal of the Cherokee... after the removal, the assimilationist faction continued to do substantial damage to Cherokee sovereignty" (321). Jaimes and Halsey go on to mention the Ridge faction's eventual endorsement of and involvement in a "... disastrous alliance with the Confederacy from which the Cherokee

Nation never recovered” (321). Walker states that, “The Ridge family was thoroughly assimilated,” (116) and that they “... upheld views that were repugnant to those who wished to maintain traditional Indian practices” (111). As we shall see however, the events leading to the Ridge faction signing the New Echota treaty were extraordinarily complex; they were not at all as simply oppositional as many Ridge critics have portrayed them. Perhaps this superficial, dichotomous portrayal can be attributed at least in part to Karl Kroeber’s assertion that,

Our current tendency, an unconscious heritage of the Cold War, is to think of political emotions in solely oppositional terms, but it seems arguable that the strength of Ridge's loyalty to his Cherokee heritage (scarcely "blind," since his family had been victimized by his own people) could give power to an idealized Americanism, and such Americanism support his native culture. (10)

By the time of Ridge’s birth, the mode of his “assimilation” was already firmly, generationally, established in his environment – in his family’s history and their way of life as Cherokee in 1827. Kroeber’s point above regarding Ridge’s “idealized Americanism” is salient to my argument, as it is just that idealism that renders Ridge’s support of political assimilation and the preceding stance of his grandfather, father and uncles on removal as ideologically complex.

Rowe argues that Joaquín Murieta should not be read as an ambivalent expression of Ridge’s bi-cultural, mixedblood identity, but

“...as the novel of an educated, cosmopolitan, urban professional who repeatedly endorsed the values of progressive individualism” which performs “... ideological work...in ways thoroughly compatible with the Native American politics of the wealthy, slave-owning, assimilationist Ridges and their Treaty party” (102-103). Rowe’s work usefully situates Joaquín Murieta within the complex intersection of race and political discourse in mid-nineteenth century California, but conflates assimilation with uncomplicated Americanism, as do many other Ridge critics. However, early American Indian texts are replete with evidence of a sincere belief and acceptance of ideals set forth by U.S. constructions of equality and liberty, as well as the deep disillusionment arising with the dawning of the reality that those values and ideals were not applicable to them. The point is, there is no evidence that Ridge or his family advocated the loss of Cherokee cultural traditions; When they, as part of the Western Cherokee who had been doing so since at least the early nineteenth century, advocated political assimilation, it was seen as a way to preserve their rights as Cherokees, and as a sovereign nation, with the rights to govern and preserve cultural traditions as the people saw fit.

Like Rowe, virtually all Ridge critics make a point of revealing that the Ridges were “wealthy” and “slave-owning” and apparently these facts are meant to speak for themselves in constructions of a

politically taxonomic depiction of the Ridges, but they are isolated from a wider view of Cherokee cultural practices, and in regard to the owning of slaves, historically contextualized in virtually none of the accounts I have read. Rowe writes, “Ridge exemplified the cultivation and cosmopolitanism he argued Native Americans could achieve within Euro-American society. He also typified everything that was abhorrent to the Ross faction, and when he participated in the 1845-1846 treaty negotiations between the Cherokee Nation and the U.S. government he renewed the deep enmity between the Ross and Ridge Factions” (102).

It is quite fascinating, as well as perplexing, to note that none of the critical analyses which recount the Ridge/Ross history mention that John Ross also owned slaves. Renarte Bartl writes, “Slavery was not unknown in some North American tribes before the arrival of the first Europeans” (164). She includes the Cherokee among those, and goes on to qualify that slavery as the term is understood today did not exist among some Cherokees groups, but that “African slavery was grafted onto pre-existing forms of institutionalized unfreedom” among them (165). My point here certainly is not a tacit defense of the institution of slavery in any form; it is to point out that some critics have isolated certain cultural practices and attributed them solely to the Ridge family. Indeed, equally interesting is that none of said critical studies mention that Ross was also a mixedblood, being 1/8 Cherokee and did not speak

the Cherokee language, that he was one of the richest men in north Georgia before the removals, having founded the town that was to grow into Chattanooga, Tennessee, which he developed from a trading post he owned. He fought alongside Jackson as an adjutant in the War of 1812 and again with Jackson in the war against the Creek Indians in 1814. Ross also organized the 1<sup>st</sup> Cherokee Mounted Rifles regiment in support of the Confederacy.

Consistently, the critical work fails to contextualize the signing of the New Echota treaty relative to a long standing history of Cherokee ceding of portions of their lands and relative to the complex factionalism of Cherokee groups prior to and after the Ridge/Ross divide. Instead, it appears in these accounts that the Ridge faction's signing of the treaty was an aberration, a singular event that is attributable to the "elite" social location of the Ridge faction, and their supposed preference for assimilation at the expense of Cherokee tradition. This view posits the treaty as the "sale" of Cherokee lands, as if monetary compensation in every treaty since the first with whites in 1821 had not occurred. Indeed, an early cession of Cherokee land in Georgia was obtained through a treaty in which John Ross figured prominently. In February 1819, a delegation headed by Charles Hicks and John Ross went to Washington D.C. where "The Indians were persuaded to sign a treaty document that ceded a 6,000 square-mile

tract, embracing parts of Tennessee, Alabama, North Carolina and Georgia. Those Cherokee accepting American citizenship in lieu of removing to the west would be awarded 640 acres” (Hoig 121). Ross was one who received a “reservation” which was in fact an allotment “for life.” (Ross, did not however, follow through with becoming an American Citizen). In that same treaty, Ross was successful in securing an education endowment wherein permission was given for the government to sell a portion of valuable Cherokee land, the proceeds of which were to go to the Moravian missionaries to provide formal education in the Cherokee nation. (Ehle 300). It would appear then, that the contemporary charging of the Ridge faction with “selling” Cherokee lands is somewhat suspect.

The selling of land is a significant charge in relation to Ridge’s family history. It allows another simple dichotomy to be built, wherein the Ridge assassinations by the Ross faction are viewed as a de facto death sentence, justified by the Ridges violating a Cherokee law forbidding such sales, upon punishment of death. The facts presented here about Ross are not purposed to construct a dialectical discourse of prerogatives of cultural authenticity that apply to one against the other of the two factions. In fact when the Civil War began, Ross was torn by ties to the Union and sympathies with the Confederacy, and initially opted for a policy of neutrality as the best means of unifying the nation

and ensuring that the rights of the Cherokee were not lost prior to enacting what he perceived as a majority wish of the Nation in alliance with the Confederacy. (Moulton, John Ross 182).

The schism and resultant formation of factions in 1835-6 over the question of the removal itself was extremely complicated and included a third faction led by Andrew Ross, John Ross' brother. From the summer of 1834 to February 28<sup>th</sup> of 1835, all three factions would offer proposals to the U.S. government for removal, conditions in Georgia having become abominable for the Cherokee nation following Andrew Jackson's election in 1831. First, Andrew Ross offered to sign a treaty to cede all Cherokee lands in the East in return for modest allowances and advantages. When none of the other Cherokee representatives would sign on the treaty, it was rejected by the U.S. Senate. In August of 1832, the Ridges began an earnest attempt to persuade their fellow Cherokee that there was no other sane course but removal, and for the Cherokee to make the best treaty they could. On February 8, 1835 the Ridge faction suggested to Secretary of State Lewis Cass that they negotiate a "preliminary treaty" to be signed by the Ridge delegation and submitted to the Cherokee Nation for ratification. These negotiations were well underway when Ross announced to Secretary Cass that his group had another proposal. The Ridge delegation put aside its discussions with the U.S. and waited for



ten days. Ross made his proposal on February 28: “We propose therefore, to meet the proposition of the President for an arrangement on the basis of a gross sum being paid to our nation for its title to all the lands lying within the charter limits of Georgia...that the United States will stipulate to pay to the Cherokee Nation...the gross sum of Twenty Millions of Dollars” (Moulton, Letters 325). The offer was rejected. Ross then offered further; he was willing to let the dollar amount be set by the Senate, as he writes in a letter to Lewis Cass: “... being extremely desirous that this unhappy controversy might be speedily adjusted and deeply sensible of our dependent condition...we are prepared, as far as we are concerned to abide the award of the American Senate upon our proposition...” (Moulton, Letters 328). The Senate recommended an award of five million dollars, after which Ross retreated and Cass and Jackson resumed negotiations with the Ridge faction. There is no evidence that the signing of the New Echota treaty signified any break with the Ridge’s commitment to rights for the Cherokee people. Indeed, the issue of Cherokee rights and sovereignty were to be part of John Rollin Ridge’s legacy and an enduring theme of his life until its end in 1867.

Given the fact that Ross, by the set critical standard, was just as “assimilated” as the Ridges and was just as involved in the treaty process except that his proposals were not accepted, an obvious

question arises as to why these facts about Ross are widely critically ignored, and the Ridges characterized as “sellouts,” while the Ross faction is valorized as cultural traditionalists. The 1836/38 removals were specific to the Cherokee that remained in the South after previous, voluntary removals by some 10,000 “full-blood,” or traditionalist, “Old Settler” Cherokee – those who had removed themselves west of the Mississippi so as to preserve their culture, which had left the vacuum of leadership filled by the mixed blood elites composed of the Ridge and Ross families. If a real comparison should be drawn, it might be between the Old Settlers and the mixed-bloods, given that there is no real difference between the Ridge/Ross factions in their “elite” class standing or their attempts to preserve the unity of the Nation by making the best deal possible, as they saw fit, considering the extreme pressure that began to be applied in 1830 with Andrew Jackson’s Indian Removal act and steadily grew to an unspeakable degree in the following six years.

The answer to the question above regarding the disconnect between the historical facts and the critical failure to consider them is complexly faceted. Class issues are certainly pertinent in the discourse of assimilation; I argue that, in fact, the issue of inter/intra-ethnic class differences is the most central aspect of formation in attitudes toward assimilation which run the gamut of expression from the pathologic

tragic mulatto model to the more immediately pejorative “Oreo, coconut, banana” designations. However, class issues are mostly obscured by reductive binaries that fail to dissect interstitial links between ethnic self-fashioning, the differences intra-ethnically *and* inter-ethnically between modes and histories of immigration patterns, and processes of hegemony in which binaries such as assimilated/resistant are politically useful. The hegemonic processes are not necessarily aligned with one another, or flowing in one direction since intra-ethnic binaries are politically useful both to the “dominant” mainstream and the “resistant” margin.

### Assimilation and Critical Binaries

Assimilation theory reached its peak early in the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century; its rise and demise loosely parallels the trajectory of the civil rights movement. In order to establish a real sense of pride and empowerment as ethnic “Americans” ethnic groups’ identity paradigms began to emerge. Inculcating a sense of identity for U.S. ethnics of color in the logic of demands for equal justice and civil rights during the 60s was partly based on re-establishing cultural similitude with original ethnic cultures. The external markers of this affinity (or their rejection) became crucial in the creation of the binary of assimilation and authenticity. In the simplest sense, those markers could be evaluated by one’s mode of personal style, but at the time, material

style was also used as an evaluation of one's identity as far as the wider cultural binary of straight/radical. Political markers of assimilation and resistance/authenticity were more often predicated on class distinctions, such as socio-economic differences, linguistic differences and to an extent, variations in skin color. It is here, I argue, that the present critical problem germinated. Certainly ethnic self-othering was a necessary stage in the progressive movement for justice; however its corollary, intra-ethnic othering has outgrown its usefulness some 40 years after the upsurge of ethnic empowerment in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The persistence of post nationalist intra-ethnic othering has served to consolidate an overarching sense of othering in the Academy as well as in the larger culture. The intransigence of at least some stereotypical images in contemporary culture is a consequence of those ethnic-self fashioning processes as they developed through hegemonic processes. The binary of authenticity has become institutionalized in such a way as to have become counter-productive in critical analysis of ethnic creative production, as well as in reductively interpellating ethnic cultural producers. As we shall see below, the cultural landscape is littered with such reductive interpellation.

In conversation with a graduate student colleague, I mentioned that I had been asked to read my poetry at a venue in downtown San Diego called "Voz Alta." The poet Adrián Arancibia had just opened

this performance space and was eager for local participation. When I stated I would be reading there, my colleague looked at me in surprise and said “Oh, I didn’t know you wrote poetry.” When I assured him that I did, he queried further, “But, I mean, do you write *Chicana* poetry? The question was meant to question my identity, but it also raised the issue of whether ethnic identity determines a type of writing.

An internationally renowned poet, with whom I had the privilege of studying, related an anecdote about participating in a panel at an academic conference where he was to read his works. He related that he was introduced as “One of the foremost African American poets of our time.” He questioned the need for that distinction: “No one else on the panel was referred to first by his or her race; it would’ve been silly to say ‘the white poet,’ right? Just once, I would have liked to be introduced as a poet. Period.” (Troupe 2003).

Rolando Perez, in his article “What is Minor in Latino Literature” relates his experience in having his work solicited for the “Norton Anthology of Literature.” Perez writes that “When I told [a colleague] that my work was going to be included in the “Norton Anthology” she asked, ‘will that be the regular “Norton” or just the Hispanic one?’” Perez had authored “The Lining of Our Souls” a “...book of ‘Deleuzean Fables based on selected paintings of Edward Hopper.” He points out that Hopper’s biographer, who wrote the

Foreword to the 2<sup>nd</sup> edition of Perez's book is "...A bit mystified herself by my interest in such a prototypical 'American' painter as Edward Hopper; she wrote, almost by way of explanation to herself and to the reader: 'Today Hopper boasts admirers in the United States and elsewhere, who agree that his work is very American'" Perez goes on to observe, 'She likened my general interpretation to the Japanese American painter Ushio Shinohara; our cultural outsidership being the tacit link to this "other" Hopper. But she made no mention of [the book] in connection with the work of other American poets like Mark Strand, John Updike, Joyce Carol Oates, John Hollander, et al., who have also been inspired by Hopper's evocative images" (90).

Sherman Alexie writes, "I guess the problem is not that I'm labeled as a Native American writer, but that writers like John Updike and Jonathan Franzen aren't labeled as White American writers. They are simply *assumed to be the norm*, and everybody else is judged in reaction to them" (italics added, 153). We should note that Perez refers to "other" American poets, and Alexie speaks of "the" problem, and does not use the personal pronoun, "my" problem. They problematize an episteme that has gone largely unchallenged; the notion that ethnic writing arises in the shadow so to speak of "American" literature; it is not only separate, but is in reaction to "American" literature whether that reaction be in the mode of resistance or assimilation, a false binary

often constructed by ethnic critics themselves, and embraced by some Anglo or white ethnic critics in their analysis of John Rollin Ridge as a writing subject.

A most ironic manifestation of the effects of critical binaries of authenticity involves the work of Cherokee artist Jimmie Durham. Durham's work was to be included in a massive exhibition in Paris in 1989 entitled "Magiciens de la Terre." The exhibition was highly publicized and controversial, bringing together indigenous artists from around the world. Durham's work problematizes the discourse of cultural identity beyond conventional limits, challenging and parodying dominant stereotypes of Indianness. Because his highly fragmented artifacts, which he refers to as "sociofacts" and "scientifacts", did not reflect a supposedly "pure" indigenous essence, his showing in Paris was rejected in favor of a Navajo painter whose work better accommodated the organizers' perceptions of Indian experience. Durham states: "I am Cherokee, but my art is simply contemporary and not 'Indian' art in any sense." And in an open letter to the selection body he writes, "We are given authenticity. We have it inflicted upon us. Authenticity is a racist concept which functions to keep us 'enclosed' in our world" (Qtd. In Schiff 76).

While Durham's politics do not consign him as clearly to the assimilative side of the critical binary as do Ridge's, both cultural

producers are enclosed by notions of authenticity. Ridge espouses conservative views, was educated by whites and was born into wealth, therefore his novel must be *either* assimilative (and thus supportive of “U.S. ideologies of Individualism”) *or* authentic, in which case he must be a “rage filled shape shifter,” a Tragic Mixed blood, “caught between two cultures.”

### Assimilation in (Critical) Action

In order to examine how these dynamics of othering play out in ethnic criticism in the work of ethnic critics, I consider the work of Jorge Mariscal, who is not one of Ridge’s critics, but whose approach is representational of the dynamics of intra-ethnic critical othering. Mariscal’s *Aztlan and Viet Nam: Chicano and Chicana Experiences of the War (Aztlan)* is a rich and complexly edited anthology of Chicana/o writing that seeks to correct the fact that “With few exceptions, the study of the Viet Nam war era has become, like the rest of American studies, largely the domain of middle-class European-Americans.” Mariscal points out, “That this should occur in the study of a war fought in great part by working-class people of color is an intellectual and political problem of some magnitude” (2). The underlying logic of ethnic authenticity is not a central theme of his work, and does not render it any the less important. As a matter of fact, that Mariscal uses, in part, the “assimilation” rhetoric to construct a stronger experience of



these texts illustrates my arguments about intra-ethnic othering and the following examination of his text can be shown to illustrate my argument about the critical problem of analyzing from the starting point of the assimilative/authentic binary when we uncritically utilize a rhetoric of assimilation.

Mariscal begins with a definition of Aztlán, and concludes, “Today Aztlán continues to be a relevant ‘space,’ not in the fight to regain a lost land, but in the ongoing struggle for economic and social justice” (1). He then proceeds however, subtly and perhaps even unconsciously, to marginalize and eject from that ideological space those whom he has continued, at the time of publication in 1999, to identify as assimilated in the sense that they were/are less invested in their identity as U.S. ethnics of Mexican descent than in melting into the whiteness of “Americanness.” In the time that the writings in *Aztlán* were produced, this distinction and the rhetoric of assimilation as “sell-out” was perhaps inevitable, as the movement was in the stages of defining and constructing a Chicana/o subjectivity that was specifically and exclusively predicated upon the indigenous aspect of Mexican ancestry. Mariscal establishes a dichotomy between his own implicit motives for seeking Chicana/o inclusion in the written history of the Viet Nam war and those of others: “In the years immediately following the war some regional publications chronicled the deeds of local

Chicano heroes...it is unlikely that these tributes could've been written by any other than intimate friends of the deceased, yet their motives seem to extend beyond the personal. In fact, they are shaped by...the need to construct monuments to lost heroes in order to reaffirm the community's patriotism and loyalty" (4). In a note, Mariscal relates that "one example of this powerful desire for recognition is the Eugene A. Obregón Congressional Medal of Honor foundation, an ongoing project to construct in Los Angeles a monument to all 38 Latino winners of the Medal of Honor" (304). The tone of these observations becomes clear when Mariscal goes on to cite "One poignant example," *Part of the Team: Story of an American Hero*, a book written by Sol Marroquín covering the life of Freddy Gonzalez, a Congressional Medal of Honor recipient who died in combat in Viet Nam in 1968. Mariscal relates that "The book is replete with images of patriotism, loyalty, military glory...Mexican Americans are referred to as 'Latin Americans,' thereby obscuring their status as U.S. citizens; in an exaggerated rhetoric of assimilation, the term 'Chicano' is avoided" (4). I question Mariscal's distinction between the motives of those he contends were displaying an assimilative subjectivity in those examples and those such as one he cites a few pages later as he interprets for his readers a sign carried by a protestor in a 1968 photograph of a demonstration: "One sign strikes with particular force: 'our kids don't have blue eyes

but they go overseas to die.’ Some would say that the sign-maker’s mistake was to use the conjunction ‘but,’ for it is precisely because they did not have blue eyes that young Chicano men were sent overseas. But the sign-maker’s point was a different one: ‘Give us credit for dying for our country. We too are Americans’ (26). I fail to grasp the qualitative difference here. Both groups seem to be desirous of the same thing, an accurate portrayal of the sacrifices made by Chicana/os whether they are referred to or refer to themselves as such or by the term Latin American. It is important to keep in mind here also that in 1979, as now, there are still those who absolutely are not “assimilated” and still would not refer to themselves as Chicana/o. As Alice Reich finds in her 1989 work *The Cultural Production of Ethnicity: Chicanos in the University*, “Some of the problems of defining a Chicano population are reflected in the earlier methods of identification and in the current method of self-identification. Not only are all Chicanos not recently from Mexico, nor speakers of Spanish, nor bearers of Spanish surnames, but there is not even a label with which all will identify. Some prefer to be called Hispano or Spanish American, some, Latin American, some Mexican American, some Mejjicano, and some, Chicano. The heterogeneity of the Chicano population is often ignored in the literature, but, in fact, it is much more supportable than the contention that there is a single Chicano population. (21)” Mariscal

discusses "...the shift from an earlier generation's unqualified patriotism to the Chicano generation's ambivalent attitudes toward the war," including a letter written by "...a WWII veteran and LULAC (League of Latin American Citizens) activist father to his son, Douglas MacArthur Herrera, who was in the military but refused to obey orders to ship out to Viet Nam" (29). The letter is filled with consternation over the son's actions and mentions patriotism, the long tradition of military service of the family and issues a plea that the son not "make us ashamed of you." Mariscal concludes, "From the father's point of view, the son has brought...profound shame upon his family. In effect, by disrupting the long line of Mexican American service in U.S. wars, the younger Herrera threatens to destroy one of the most important roads to assimilation" (29). That Mariscal notes the elder Herrera's activism in LULAC is ironic given Mariscal's conclusion that the letter proves an overriding concern for "assimilation." Not only was this sort of generational opposition quite pervasive between fathers and sons of all ethnicities when the younger opposed the war from a new political consciousness, but when we view activism from a Williamsonian perspective, there is no doubt that that the political consciousness in the Chicano movement of the 60s was preceded by a long history of Mexican American activism, beginning most visibly with the establishment of the Sociedades Mutualistas in the 1870's. The

Chicano movement itself did not occur in a vacuum, emerging solely as a response to the injustices related to the Viet Nam war or contemporary social injustice, but was a newly radical continuation of a long history of contestation, resistance and reform struggles. While many agree that LULAC is “A fiercely patriotic and assimilationist organization since its founding in the 1920’s” which has “stayed true to its original goals of making Latinos palatable to dominant U.S. culture” (Mariscal, Interpretation), it should be pointed out that even with the historical evidence of LULAC’s pro-integration, anti-Mexican immigration and Americanization ideology, to dismiss out of hand the historical importance of LULAC, The GI Forum and other Mexican American reform groups in the struggle for recognition of Chicano civil rights and construct them as working for assimilation as an end in and of itself is at best disingenuous. At worst such a dismissal is an oversimplification of complex histories of political endeavor and demonizes one in the interest of casting the other in the righteous light of “pure” motives. It is interesting to note that many websites currently demonize LULAC, some as an extreme Left organization, and some as an extreme Right one. Other sources consider the ideological shifts and complexities that LULAC and other Mexican American organizations have undergone in a cultural/historical context. David Gutiérrez writes

about such a shift that began to occur in the wake of repressive immigration laws enacted in the 1950s:

[...]after their initial support of government immigration enforcement efforts...a growing groundswell of opinion sympathetic to the plight of immigrants began to emerge in...LULAC, the GI Forum and NAWA...such sentiments eventually contributed to greater assertions of a positive sense of ethnic identity among many politically active Mexican Americans...most Mexican Americans continued to integration no longer necessarily meant complete assimilation, for Mexican American activists increasingly began to demand acceptance of their people on their own terms – that is, with the recognition that they were of Mexican descent and proud of it. (178)

I argue that Mariscal's assertion that the earlier generation was possessed of an "unqualified" patriotism" is problematic. Mariscal refers to the prologue in Everett Alvarez Jr's *Chained Eagle*, an autobiographical work about Alvarez's time as an aviator and an eight year prisoner of war in Hanoi, as a "...stunning example of patriotic discourse as it was reformulated in the 1980s by Reaganite ideologues and a large sector of Viet Nam Veterans..." He finds that given that Alvarez is "a member of a relatively disempowered minority group, the grandson of Mexican immigrants," his interpretation of the problematics of the war are, "both predictable and paradoxical" (30). Alvarez's writing in Mariscal's *Aztlan* is represented in part by a passage in which Alvarez recounts the storytelling he utilized while in captivity as a distraction. Alvarez recounts that he had "...spun a yarn I

had developed over the previous six years to pass the time.” The story consisted of what Alvarez refers to as “...little more than an outline for a novel.” He recounts the story, which features the protagonist as an orphan raised by “an Indian” who travels the world under a range of mentors, returns to the “Wild Southwest”, marries twice, and lights out to California with his second wife “...to fulfill their dreams in the booming new frontier land” (132). Mariscal writes: “Alvarez never explicitly mentions his Mexican American ethnicity in this narrative. The story of the ‘young Hispanic boy’ contains elements found in countless Chicano novels of education: the boy is orphaned at an early age and travels to the East Coast, where he has contact with and “adopts” the dominant U.S. culture; after violent encounters with racism, he ‘returns’ to Mexico and searches for his origins, the utopian dream realized in California” (31).

Mariscal’s first evidence of Alvarez’s assimilative subjectivity is that he supposedly “never explicitly mentions his Mexican American ethnicity”; however, it is difficult to see why this criticism is inserted here, and to what end. Alvarez’s passage is excerpted from an entire book, one that throughout clearly identifies him as a Mexican American. Another curious facet of Mariscal’s interpretation is his comment about Alvarez’s imaginings as containing “elements of countless Chicano novels of education.” First, Mariscal seems unaware

of the irony of criticizing Alvarez as assimilative at the same time as he credits him with writing elements of a “Chicano novel of education.” While it is not quite clear to this reader what exactly a “Chicano novel of education” comprises, this very brief excerpt is open to alternative analysis when one is not adhering to a binary of assimilation vs. ethnic authenticity. I contend that Alvarez’s story can be seen as a re-inscribing of the traditional Bildungsroman wherein an orphaned boy participates in the seminal events of the nation, lighting out for the territories, fighting in wars, and finally comes of age in the “frontier land” of that nation, thus positioning himself as an integral part of the Nation’s past, present and future history. It is an imaginative use (distraction from the documented torture Alvarez suffered for eight years) in a traditional Chicana/o form (oral storytelling) that places an ethnic of color as a protagonist in a foundational “American” narrative at a time (1964-72) when there were not yet such protagonists on the U.S. mainstream cultural radar.

I have engaged with Mariscal’s work at length because it offers a clear illustration of my contention that the rhetoric of assimilation has and continues to inhibit our scholarly ability to provide accessible readings of complex texts such as *Joaquín Murieta* and for that matter Alvarez’s text. Whether or not Alvarez himself identifies as a Chicano, or can be considered a conservative, his text qualifies as a Chicano text.



Mariscal assigns an identity to Alvarez that elides the possibility of an ethnic subjectivity which resists structures of cultural dominance on any level at all. Implicit in his analysis is a devaluation of an authentic ethnic experience in Alvarez's "yarn," and asserts that Alvarez is an assimilated subject who is possessed of "patriotism and a desire for assimilation" based on Alvarez's failure to adhere to a contemporary notion of Chicanismo, much like Ridge's failure to adhere to a contemporary standard of pan-indianism in 1854.

Much of the critical work regards Ridge with variations on a theme which casts him uncomplicatedly as Jaimes' assimilationist "sellout" or as Owens' rage-filled shape-shifter. Their criticism has powerful precedent, as we consider that perhaps the earliest American Indian criticism of Ridge emerges in an article by scholar Angie Debo who regards Ridge as a tragic figure who failed to understand the spiritual consequences of his "misguided" politics. (66-67). However, the wealth of criticism of Ridge's work seems anachronistic because it seems unable to reconcile Ridge's conservative politics with his "Indian" subjectivity. Additionally, his enthusiastic support for U.S. expansionism is consistently assigned to his theoretical overriding desire to "assimilate to the dominant culture." The critical literature also consistently explains the subversion it finds in *Joaquín Murieta* by constructing Ridge as having a tortured relationship with his own

identity as a bi-racial/bi-cultural subject, and by presupposing that he had a deep seated hatred of white society for the strife and intertribal divisions that precipitated the murder of his father and grandfather by a rival faction of Cherokee elites. In what follows I hope to show that due to the critical tendency to adhere to the static paradigm, the traditional understanding of the processes of assimilation in the study of *Joaquín Murieta* and its author, the work has not been mined to its full potential as a foundational text in California and U.S. literature.

### Conclusion

Gramsci's formation of hegemonic common sense and Williams' of the 'dominant, residual, and emergent', and their function in structure of feeling together synthesize dynamic forces that manifest in Ridge's text, and render it an apt example of an artifact which reveals cultural processes in which socio-cultural residue in the form of tradition emerges. Through complex processes those remnant traditions transform, in this case, into the strand of U.S. literature that I am referring to as *the Unsung Stream*. Gramsci's concept of common sense is predicated on a dynamic of de facto consensus symbiotic with hegemony and virtually pervasive in a national social ethos of any given time. The values and thinking of national elites, the dominant segment of a culture, become the "common sense" values of all of that

culture's members. Not through legislation or duress, but through a consent that is constantly being negotiated and renegotiated. Ridge's *Joaquín* is a cultural space in which we can map the struggle for power that intermittently results in a counter-hegemonic victory. In this case, as we shall see, Ridge has had a hand in a victory of some magnitude, when we consider the reversal of trope that has occurred, influenced at least in part by the cultural work of *Joaquín*, in which the reviled ethnic has become the moral hero of many U.S. genre productions. "Common sense" and a highly unstable hegemony interact in the text to manifest a unique representation of a counter hegemonic work.

Williams' concept of the residual provides an optic of processes that have been "effectively formed in the past...but that are still active in the cultural process...as an element of the past, [and] as an effective element of the present. Certain experiences, meanings and values which cannot be ...verified in terms of the dominant culture are nevertheless lived and practiced on the basis of the residue – cultural as well as social - of some previous social formation" (122) Williams makes a distinction between aspects of the socio-cultural residue that might be alternative or counter-hegemonic and the active manifestation of the residue, which has been incorporated into the dominant culture. We can conceptualize Anglo/American superiority in the nineteenth century as the active manifestation of the residue of the archaic English notion of

a mythical past, commonsensical in the Gramscian sense in 1854. While Ridge conforms in many ways to the commonsensical knowledge of the time in his conservative politics, and to a certain extent in his conclusions regarding the taxonomy he constructs in his comparisons between different tribes of American Indians, crucial distinctions and nuances have been largely unexamined, such as his simultaneous repudiation of and his repeated inveigling against “prejudice of color” and sentiments such as those expressed in the U.S. congress by democrat William Wick of Indiana in 1846: “I do not want any mixed races in our union, nor men of any color except White, unless they be slaves, certainly not as voters or legislators” (qtd. in Horsman 238). In mainstream culture such sentiments were not as restrained. As Horseman writes, the editor of the Cincinnati Herald opined in that same year, “What should America do with 8 million Mexicans with their idol worship, heathen superstition and degraded mongrel races—a sickening mixture of Negroes, Rancheros, Mestizos and Indians?” (239). It is this very ideology that the *Joaquín Murieta* text challenges repeatedly, not only explicitly in the voice of the narrator, but implicitly in its formations of alternative economies of family, work and crime – a pervasive counter hegemony that functions in the text throughout the state of California – as a result of the tension

between idealized Americanism and the reality of “The social and moral condition of the country in which...” his protagonist lived.

## Chapter 2: Historical and Literary Foundations

### Introduction

In the preceding chapter I argue for a paradigm shift in the critical study of ethnic texts in general and of John Rollin Ridge's *Joaquín Murieta* in particular that speaks to a progressive concept of ethnic subjectivity marked by the notions of multiplicity, fluidity and simultaneity. I use the example of the outmoded yet persistent critical use of the concept of assimilation to illustrate in particular how readings of John Rollin Ridge as a subject and *Joaquín Murieta* have been performed without sufficient attention to changing paradigms of thought in regard to issues of identity and subjectivity. While assimilation theory has undergone an evolution as noted previously, in regard to Ridge criticism it continues to be defined as a conscious wish to lose one's cultural heritage in order to attain incorporation as "American" through adopting ideologies such as individualism specifically for the social and material benefits of aligning one's self with hegemonic power. The fact that Ridge and his family were "assimilated," with all that that implies in terms of mid 20<sup>th</sup> century notions of ethnic "selling out," has structured virtually every critical piece published on *Joaquín Murieta* since the 1930s at least.

Proceeding from the common sense definition above, critics have largely reconciled what they see as ideological contradictions in his

novel by reading it as replete with evidence that he uncomplicatedly adhered to “American” ideologies of materialism, individualism, and in some critical views, bigotry and racism at the expense of his Indian heritage. Such entrenched critical paradigms continue to be used in ethnic literature criticism, paradigms that are based largely on obsolescent sociological constructs of ethnic as “minority” identity, and are part of what continues to cement the position of ethnic literature as marginal to center in U.S. Literature; they mask the historically generative force of ethnic production in U.S. literary production and the reality that U.S. ethnic literature is, in fact, quintessentially U.S. American rather than adjunct to that literature, and has been so from the beginning of the nation.

In this chapter I propose that *Joaquín Murieta* can be considered as foundational in a strand of U.S. ethnic literature that simultaneously utilizes and subverts literary conventions and formulates new conventions that I will analyze in the final chapter as having become significantly manifest in certain 20th century “mainstream” texts. This strand, or the ethnic continuum, is a continuum that is seen here in terms of social change in process – process that contemporarily has effected a major inversion of media tropes – so that we see, in contemporary productions, a complete reversal of certain stereotypes in a great many cultural productions,

literary and filmic, ethnic and “mainstream.” I argue that Ridge’s novel embodies contemporarily progressive characterizations in terms of ethnicity and gender; innovative adaptations of largely European literary conventions such as the “Noble Outlaw”; and a use of regionalism not only in terms of its social/cultural context, but in a significantly geographical application; further, that the literary aspects of his writing, including his extensive and largely uncommented upon use of humor, satire and irony in *Joaquín Murieta* have gone largely unexamined due to the historical critical emphasis on the sociological aspects of his work, when his work has not been dismissed outright as decidedly inferior. Through the formations of new semantic figures that arose out of the tensions inherent in structures of feeling, *Joaquín Murieta* opposed the cultural system of injustice based on “color prejudice” and over time and in concert with social movements had at least a small hand in hegemonic, mainstream, change – change in common sense, consensual knowledge.

I begin this argument with specific critical analyses of Ridge’s work which repeatedly adopt the view of him as *paradoxically* politically conservative and “assimilationist,” and which read *Joaquín Murieta* as a text that “does the work of cultural normalization,” playing a part in the formation of dominant cultural values in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century (Rowe 98). I argue that noted critic John Carlos Rowe’s work



places Ridge's subjectivity and his *Joaquin Murieta* in a cultural space that attempts to align him at certain critical cost with hegemonic ideologies of "American" literature. To say "at certain cost," is to acknowledge that hegemonic definitions of "American" literature still do not equitably include "ethnic" literatures, and therefore limit critical standards to cultural views that adhere strictly to western European views. Thus the academic status quo is unable to view Ridge's subjectivity and consequently his novel on its own terms, but analyzes it from the starting point of a specific conception of "American" ideology, without the ability to include the ethnic complexity of civil ideology which *contains* innovations within U.S. Ideology. Critics have been unable to see Ridge as foundational because they still begin from an episteme that sees "American" literature as Anglo-authored, and then approach "marginalized" texts from the outside in, to be studied wholly in relation/reaction to the "dominant." In contradistinction to that inability scholar Betty Louise Bell states, "It is not enough to include native-white encounters in the revision of American history and culture or to question the monolith of history. It is not enough to find resistance and revision within narratives of colonial encounters. If we are truly to decolonize the representation of indigenous people *and not simply locate them in positions of reaction to Western history...we must discover their actual and original contributions to the telling of history*"

(411 italics added). In agreement with Bell, my study seeks to situate U.S. ethnic literature distinctly as a constituent element of what is commonly referred to as “American” literature, envisioning a time in the near future when U.S. ethnic texts will have equiponderant representation with, for example, the usual Anglo-authored texts which continue to dominate in U.S. literature course syllabi unless the curriculum is specifically deemed African American, Chicana/o, Asian, or American Indian. To view ethnic contributions such as Ridge’s as marginal is to agree that U.S. American literature and history are correspondingly homogenous: my contention here is that while writers such as Ridge and their texts have indeed been marginalized, they have never been marginal. As Gramsci writes, “If yesterday the subaltern element was a thing, today it is no longer a thing but a historical person, a protagonist; if yesterday it was not responsible because *‘resisting’ a will external to itself*, now it feels itself to be responsible because it is no longer resisting, but an agent, necessarily active and taking the initiative” (238). Where, however, is this “yesterday?” I contend that as far as most hegemonic Ridge criticism is concerned, “today” continues to be yesterday. Linear constructions that present an optic of ethnic literature, specifically ethnic popular genre, as “developing” follow a static model of material history, and suggest that ethnic literature is embryonic with respect to (Anglo) “American”

literature. I would intervene in Gramsci's formation by extending it backward, arguing that the "subaltern" has always been a historical person, responsible, an agent, necessarily active and taking the initiative. It is only from the institutional optic of "subaltern" production as marginal that it has historically appeared to have "emerged" only recently.

Most institutionalized writing on Ridge is predicated, the gestures toward nuance and inclusion notwithstanding, on an attempt to "make sense" of his ideological "contradictions" by focusing on his conservative views and activities as evidence for his posited yearning to belong, to construct for himself an identity socially, culturally and economically as "American." The posited contradiction in most cases of criticism is that he is American Indian and politically conservative. Many critical views intimate that Ridge used his Cherokee identity as a marketing tool, to gain him entrance to the literary world. However, as with the preceding discussion in chapter one concerning the complexities of the Ridge and Ross divide and heretofore unexamined facts that allow for a more balanced view of the position of the Ridge family, so too have Ridge's political views and activities been presented in surprisingly cursory ways. Repeatedly, the facts are mentioned that he advocated U.S. expansionism, slavery, cultural assimilation, and that his views on California Indians and Chinese

immigrants as manifested in *Joaquín Murieta* and other writings are concrete evidence for the critical interpellation of him as an uncomplicated champion of all things “American.” Indeed, we have seen that critically, more often than not, Ridge’s political identity is predicated mostly on the perception of his desire to participate to the fullest extent in the capitalistic aspect of “American” identity. Karl Kroeber is one critic who complicates this take on Ridge’s subjectivity. While Kroeber also adheres to the aforementioned views of Ridge as contradictory, he nevertheless frames Ridge’s contradictions with a much more nuanced optic as he sees “...a paradoxical capacity of Native Americans to make use of the encroaching culture they resist” and that Ridge’s idealism in advocating Cherokee political assimilation into the U.S. “...at whose hands they had suffered so unjustly,...is difficult for most of us to understand today, since the possibility of sincere belief in the United States as representing a permanent advance toward political liberty has been so successfully eroded... As Ridge, with a kind of spectacular simplicity, illustrates, *for some Indians at least, indigenous and European cultures could be complexly reinforcing rather than simply divisive. This interplay of conflictive reinforcements, rather than a merely divided consciousness, appears throughout Ridge's life and his written work*, which in several ways

anticipates much subsequent Indian writing in English. (Kroeber 9 italics added)”

We see in Ridge's writings then, the revelation of a dynamic and complexly powerful sense of identity that has been abridged by the critical habit of reducing his subjectivity and consequently his writings to binarial concepts such as have been discussed. The strength of that fluid identity permitted Ridge to confront challenges to his identity as a mixed blood Cherokee, as well as the challenges he attempted to work through as a member of the Ridge family and by extension a member of the Treaty Party – the association which has historically grounded much critical work concerning him. The opposition to the “American” ideologies he is uncomplicatedly seen to adhere to by critics lies in Ridge’s confrontation of these challenges – the complexity with which he responds to what he perceives first, as the perversion of the ideal of justice in regard to what he considers the murder of his family without justice and later, the perversion of U.S. ideals regarding the prejudice and bigotry that he encounters in California.

Kroeber’s assertion above concerning the erosion of a *sincere* belief in the U.S. representing an enduring equality and liberty cannot be stressed enough here, in regard to Ridge. As one who was raised in the 1950s, and who came of age in the 70s and 80s with all that that implies in terms of witnessing the erosion of which Kroeber writes, I

can still recall the youngster I was in the late 50s and early 60s who was educated with an innocently *sincere* belief in those ideals by family and a working class cultural ethos that held them unquestionable. In order to understand the complexity of this deeply layered artist, it is imperative that we as critics are vigilant against our tendency toward presentism and keep in mind the enormous evolvment in social, cultural, anthropological, and scientific knowledge since 1854, especially in addition to the tremendous vicissitudes related to the historical struggle for ethnic empowerment and equal justice. In the case of Ridge, we cannot accurately critique him based on contemporary understanding of pan-Indian constructions of ethnic pride and equal rights gains only won in the last forty or so years. As

Horsman reminds:

The transformation in scientific racial thinking was striking between 1815 and 1850, but equally striking was the manner in which the new ideas became a topic of popular discussion. By 1850 the natural inequality of the races was a scientific fact which was published widely. One did not have to read obscure books to know that Caucasians were innately superior...responsible for civilization in the world...that inferior races were to be overwhelmed...These ideas permeated the main American periodicals and in the second half of the century formed part of the accepted truth of America's schoolbooks" (156 -157).

It is my position that the reduction and constant conflation of the author's personal history with U.S. normative, "common sense" ideological constructs such as individualism and U.S. exceptionalism

posited to manifest in the novel has obscured aspects that have either been superficially examined or not mentioned at all in the critical work. I begin below with a critique of John Carlos Rowe's analysis of *Joaquín Murieta*, arguably the most important scholarly work to date on the text. Rowe makes a number of assumptions in his work, assumptions both cultural and in regard to Ridge's posited ideological constructs in his novel and in his journalistic writings. For instance, Rowe states, "...given the degraded status of the California Native Americans, Ridge and other Cherokee must have taken special pains to avoid identification with the demonized 'Diggers,'" (102). Ridge's written treatment of the California Indians has been commented on in virtually every critical piece about him, used as evidence to shore up the focus on him as "assimilated." It has been completely accepted and uncontested until now that Ridge demonized the indigenous California Indians from a bigoted and racially superior position. Ridge definitely drew distinctions between the "civilization" of the Eastern and Western Indian peoples, and much of the language in his journalistic writings is entirely offensive today. I stress here again, though, that Ridge was an intellectual of his time and place, and U.S. intellectuals who accepted such distinctions based on the sociological and scientific "knowledge" of the time were not in a minority. It is never mentioned in those critical pieces that his argument is not that the California Indians are

innately inferior, but that they have not had the “benefits” of education and so they remained “...poor and imbecile people” (Qtd in Farmer and Strickland 64). While the critical commentaries in question unfailingly make reference to such language as this and other terms such as “pitiful” that Ridge uses to describe the California Indians, they are never contextualized by the arguments Ridge poses in these works; David Farmer and Rennard Strickland, editors of the only extant collection of Ridge’s journalistic writings include the following in the note preceding the section on the California Indians: “The treatment of the “Diggers” shocked Ridge, so in the tradition of the news reporter he set out to record some of the atrocities committed against them. In addition, his observations produced a most sensitive portrait of a particular member of the tribe, “Si Bolla,” and show a keen understanding of the human values of Native American culture... [he closes]...his second piece, a letter published in 1851 in the New Orleans *True Delta* with an impassioned plea for the removal of the “Digger” to reservations as the best means of protection against cruelty and oppression” (Farmer, Strickland 54).

In the essay “A true Sketch of “Si Bolla,” a digger Indian,” Ridge describes a scene in which two parties are negotiating a hunting party: “The ‘bucks’ gathered around us with much interest, (A rather contemptuous term to apply to a human being, I must admit, but that



was the term used by the whites to distinguish the male gender among the Diggers)” (qtd. In Farmer, Strickland 56). Ridge’s insertion here seems to contradict his use, without such comment, or quotation marks, of the term “Digger” which is today considered to be derogatory; its etymology attributed both to the California Indian principal mode of food acquisition, “digging” for roots, and less frequently as derived from the term “nigger.” However, Ridge’s sensitivity to the term “buck” can also be applied to his use of “Digger” as later, in a description of an unruly group of “Americans” who are falsely accusing an Indian of theft, he refers to them ironically as “Gold-Diggers,” a subtle subtext here, in a characteristic move which can also be seen in his use of language in the famous scenes with the Tejon Indians in *Joaquín Murieta*, in which he subverts the whole notion of the Tejons as lesser beings. Ridge’s portrait of Si Bolla is appreciative, respectful, and affectionate, notwithstanding his references to and descriptions of Si Bolla’s “humorous” appearance and behavior at times. Ridge writes: “In regard to his mental qualities phrenology would not have spoken very highly of him, but he was unquestionably the most eloquent man in the whole Digger nation, and provided the world had been composed of Diggers entirely, he would have been the greatest orator that ever lived. So much for greatness, which is after all merely relative” (qtd. in Farmer, Strickland 57). The last sentence here

would seem to arbitrate again for Ridge's habit of inserting ironic or sarcastic comments that often subvert contemporary commonly held notions of human "worth." Those who have read Ridge's impassioned letters on the oppression of the "Diggers" might be hard pressed to hold to their characterizations of him as racist. In them he recounts stories of atrocity in bloody detail and his outrage is palpable:

In one of the massacres of a Digger rancheree, a woman was killed; which, Believe me, has been no very uncommon occurrence. After the slaughter she was found with a young child about 6 months old, still sucking at the breast, from which it could no longer derive sustenance. There arose a debate amongst the soulless ignoramuses with regard to what was to be done with it – as though it could be debated at all amongst men, what to do with a helpless and innocent infant! Some were in favor of taking it to the settlements, where it could be fed and taken care of, but the majority were opposed, and concluded to kill the child. This being decided upon, the next question was who would do it? All refused except one, who presented his gun and blew its brains out! I attribute this deed to a monstrosity, which I denominate civilized ignorance. It was nothing but a d- - d Digger and what was the difference! (Qtd in Farmer, Strickland 63)

Is Ridge's description of the California Indians as "...a poor, humble, degraded and cowardly race" offensive to today's sensibilities? It is, decidedly so. However, it is a long way from the use of the vernacular and contemporary sociological views to brand him a racist, by contemporary standards, yet.

The critical paradigm that has persisted in viewing Ridge and his work so reductively cannot have been drawn from consideration of the full context of his writings and the complexity of Cherokee politics;

such narrow focus has hindered or in some cases elided altogether critical analysis of the literary merit of his work. In the interest of ameliorating those oversights here, I examine below Rowe's claims in regard to the ideological constructs he finds to be manifest in *Joaquín Murieta*. I follow that to end the chapter with a consideration of Ridge's use of literary convention, especially in regard to his innovative use of character, satire, and irony, which he often employs to subvert nineteenth-century commonsensical ideological constructs such as male and female gender performance, administration of justice, and the practice of "color prejudice."

#### Individualism and Collectivity

*Ridge thoroughly condemns cooperative labor and cooperative ideals in his endorsement of the American myth of progressive individualism.*

– John Rowe

John Rowe theorizes Ridge as "Constructing a myth that adheres to the American myth of individualism" and finds ultimately that the text "does the work of cultural normalization" (98). Ironically, I find that Rowe's essay itself does the work of cultural normalization, by approaching the text from an assumed concept of "cultural normalization" as normative to California in 1850. I place Ridge's text firmly within a contestatory context, without finding that context as

irreconcilable with “American” civic subjectivity; that is, without positing that subjectivity as necessarily predicated on uncomplicated adherence to foundational U.S. American myths. A consequence of Rowe’s formation is that it pathologizes Ridge’s work from the outset:

[...]we should begin with specific cases of *ideological instability*...I argue in this chapter that Ridge’s novel resolves *the conflicting and traumatic experiences of his personal history as a Cherokee*, of the U.S conquest of California in the Mexican-American war, and of the social disorder in California during the gold rush in a narrative organized around the myth of progressive individualism, a crucial part of dominant cultural values in the United States in the 1850s...“Joaquin Murieta” fits most definitions of the category of mass culture in its resolution of social and political problems by recourse to established cultural conventions...we should be especially interested in the ways in which Ridge’s narrative does this work of cultural normalization...crucial to the formation of dominant cultural values. (98-99 italics added)

I understand Rowe’s positing of the instability of ideology in Ridge’s text as a product of Rowe’s own conceptualizing of U.S. ideology as normative and monolithic, particularly in 1850. I question the assertion that “mass culture” then or now, resolves social and political problems by recourse to its *established* cultural conventions – first, ethnic creations within the conventions of popular culture do not *require* recourse to particular norms. Rowe uses the word recourse easily, because he takes for granted that Ridge’s text seeks to tap an imagined monolithic mainstream for palliative acceptance as “American” and all that “American” implies to Rowe. Second, if

indeed there is any “resolution of social and political problems” in ethnic texts, it is by renovating conventions, innovating on established convention that a textual resolution occurs. For example, William Apes, in his texts *A Son of the Forest* and *Eulogy for King Phillip* controverts both the laws of Christianity and the European ideological complex employed in the imperial projects of American history by exposing not merely the failure of dominant society to abide by them in application to all “human beings,” but further, to pervert them in the service of subjugation and annihilation. In *Eulogy*, Apes uses the recorded imperial histories of England and the U.S. to indict the treatment of Native Americans in the colonial past as well as in his contemporary moment. He resituates and revises the imperial English accounts of the Puritan/Pequot war and places “King Phillip” in equal status not only with Washington but also with “Phillip of Greece and Alexander the Great” thereby including the Native American within the scope of American history as well as within the whole of recorded historical Western “civilization.” Apes uses European history to reconstruct and claim historical authority.

In the 1859 novel *Blake, or the Huts of America*, Martin Delany’s use of a hero of unmixed blood counters abolitionist literary stereotypes of his time that often portrayed mulatto rather than racially pure blacks as having the skills and characteristics needed for

leadership. In fact, rather than a response to general literary stereotypes, Delany's *Blake* has been viewed specifically as a response to the popularity and acceptance received by Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852). In *Blake*, Delany revises the representation of black manhood constructed by Stowe by allowing his fully black hero to participate in a violent response to the oppression of slavery. While Stowe avoids characterizations of revolution and violence, Delany, in *Blake*, recasts the most notable slave revolt in the United States, Nat Turner's bloody rebellion of 1831, and broadens the scope of the insurrection to suggest that the growing population of black slaves could construct a viable insurgency if organized and coalesced into a unified army. Delany, like Apes, also controverts the nature and complicity of Christianity in its role as an oppressive illusion that has kept the slaves complacent as they wait for "salvation" and freedom from oppression. Throughout the text he exhorts the slaves to ask God not for salvation, but to "turn your heads so that you may see your own oppression" (101), thus renovating the literary convention of "happy Negroes" singing gospel songs as they wait in passive acceptance for their "deliverance."

In keeping with his formation of the text as adhering to the myth of individualism, Rowe first figures Joaquín as desirous of an American identity: "It is neither as a Sonoran, nor as a *disguised*

*Cherokee* that Joaquín gains the reader’s sympathy, but as a man who has left Sonora in order to become an *American*” (106 italics added).

Rowe quotes from the text as evidence for this contention: “

At an early stage in his manhood he became tired of the uncertain state of affairs in his own country....and resolved to try his fortunes among the American people, of whom he had formed the most favorable opinion from an acquaintance with the few whom he had met in his own native land. The war with Mexico had been fought and California belonged to the United States. Disgusted with the conduct of his degenerate countrymen and fired with the enthusiastic admiration of the American character, the youthful Joaquin left his home with a buoyant heart and full of the exhilarating spirit of adventure”” (Qtd. in Rowe106).

Rowe surmises from this passage that “In this introduction of Joaquin, Ridge replays popular stereotypes of Mexican degeneracy, our military heroism in the war, and the consequent legitimacy of our colonization of California and implicitly the rest of the Southwest” (106). It seems to me that such a central part of Rowe’s larger reading of *Joaquín* is hardly warranted by such scant textual evidence which he takes from the two sentences in the above quote. Additionally, the term “degenerate countrymen” is taken by Rowe to mean *all* of Joaquín’s countrymen, as if when I say “My racist countrymen” now, I would necessarily mean that every one of my fellow “Americans” is racist. While the term is aligned with the racist Anglo rhetoric of the time, this passage when contextualized by including the elliptical sentence:

[...]he became tired of the uncertain state of affairs in his own country,

the usurpations and revolutions which were of such common occurrence [...] (8) affords the reader an alternative motivation for Joaquin's move, (an important omission) and does not at all justify an assumption of Joaquin's supposed indictment and rejection of his ethnicity or nationality solely in favor of "becoming American." An ostensibly minor omission in Rowe's quote, yes, but one that when included evinces a more a "going away from" than a "running to." This is one of many places in Rowe's chapter where the scholarship that proceeds from hegemonic academia can be found to be to a certain extent unable to think outside of its received knowledge and even to illustrate a remnant of "dominant common sense." According to Rowe, Ridge and Joaquín are in agreement about the superiority, heroism and legitimacy of conquest, not because Ridge writes Joaquin as emotionally fatigued by the chaotic political realities of Mexico in 1850 (which he does as seen in the elliptical sentence) but rather, from a simplistic hero worship of the American and a desire to associate with or assimilate to "American" ideals, namely individualism and its consequent chance for the accumulation of capital. In casting Joaquín's movement to California in this way, Rowe is figuring Joaquín through Ridge as traditionally immigrant, ascribing to Joaquín the ostensible motives of the Ellis Island immigrants, the popular myth having constructed those as largely economic refugees in search of the



“American Dream.” There is little textual evidence that Ridge wrote Joaquin as entering the U.S. on the model of the mythic European immigration ethos within which Rowe seems to incorporate him. In a similar vein, Timothy Powell writes that “The Life and Adventures of Joaquin Murieta opens with a familiar invocation of the American Dream” (59). Powell, while presenting a much more nuanced and complex cultural reading than Rowe’s, nevertheless ascribes an impetus to Joaquín’s movement that is applied wholly anachronistically, as does Rowe. The “familiar invocation” is only so as we read Powell because since it was first used as a cohesive term some 80 years after Ridge’s 1854, it has become pervasive as “common knowledge,” only being questioned as such as recently as the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century. In 1854, “The American dream, that dream of a land in which life should be better and richer and fuller for every man, with opportunity for each according to his ability or achievement” (Truslow 143) is not an established concept. As we have seen with a closer textual reading, a central motivation of Joaquín for leaving Mexico was the chaos and instability caused by the American War in Mexico as well as the “usurpations and revolutions” that marked the years of 1848 and 1849. Concurrently, in 1848 Europe saw a wave of revolutions affecting Germany, Italy, France, Switzerland, Poland and the Hapsburg Empire in what is referred to as The Year of Revolution during which there was

unprecedented immigration to the U.S. In addition, the Great Irish Famine, taking place between the years of 1845 and 1852 contributed to the waves of immigration, placing Joaquín within a global diaspora not predicated on an uncomplicated ambition to obtain the “American Dream.”

Rowe seeks to strengthen his appropriation of Joaquín as an emblem of the wish to assimilate to U.S. American identity by stating, “Ridge also gives Joaquín just the physical qualities necessary for him to be able to “pass” in Californian society as a Yankee, an ability he will use on the several occasions he disguises himself to spy and avoid capture: ‘He was then eighteen years of age, a little over the medium height, slenderly but gracefully built, and active as a young tiger. His complexion was neither very dark nor very light, but clear and brilliant, and his countenance is pronounced to have been at that time, exceedingly handsome and attractive’” (106). In fact, Ridge goes on to finish his physical description of Joaquín in the text by including the description of “His large black eyes...his well-shaped head from which the long, glossy, black hair hung down over his shoulders...” (9). I fail to see how Ridge’s full description would allow Joaquín to “pass as a Yankee,” which conjecture, incidentally, would seem to assume a fixed physical appearance for “Yankees.” I question how Rowe reads even his own abbreviation of the passage as functioning to allow

Joaquín to “pass” in this way in the text, for Rowe is assuming that Ridge is constructing Joaquín in such a way that allows him to “pass” for the traditional reason of abnegating his ethnicity, when in fact the episodes during which he “passes” are for wholly subversive reasons, his “passing” further empowering him in his role as a bandit. In the first instance of Joaquín’s foray into a town to gather surreptitious intelligence about possible enemy activity, he rides into town as “A fine looking man...having long, black hair hanging over his shoulders and a piercing black eye” and elicits comments from the townsfolk:

“What a splendid looking young fellow!” Said the ladies.

“He must be a young Mexican Grandee at the least, on a journey of pleasure,” said one.

“I think,” said another,

“It must be General Vallejo’s son”. (66)

Rowe goes on to assert that Ridge presents Joaquín as an elite Californio: “Joaquín is *mestizo* but has the physical characteristics and character of a Californio of the *ranchero* class” (106). He cites as evidence for this Ridge’s words, “The proud blood of the Castellians mounted to the cheek of a partial descendant of the Mexiques, showing that he had inherited the old chivalrous spirit of his Spanish ancestry” (qtd. in Rowe 106). By his analysis here, Rowe is illustrating an unconscious adherence to phenotyping and to essentialism. He is

assuming that Joaquin's Castilian blood overrides his "partial" descent from the "Mexiques" and therefore privileges the "Spanish Blood" in Ridge's mind. Rowe is, himself, ascribing "character" as a distinguishing aspect between the mestizo and the rancharo, as if he is assuming that "character" is not applicable to Mestizos commonsensically. He is adhering to a taxonomy based on color that besides being surprisingly anachronistic was by no means a physical reality in mid nineteenth century California – in fact, Californios included the descendants of agricultural settlers and escort soldiers from Mexico. Most were of mixed backgrounds, usually Mestizo and Mulatto, contrary to contemporary popular media representations in books and films in the United States, such as the "Zorro" franchise. Very few were actually of "pure" Spanish (Peninsular or Criollo) ancestry. Spanish, and later, Mexican officials encouraged people from the northern and western provinces of Mexico, as well as people from other parts of Latin America, most notably Peru and Chile, to settle in California, and welcomed them to become Mexican citizens (Pitti, Castaneda, Cortes). As Marta Menchaca points out in her discussion of northward migration from Mexico in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries in "Recovering History, Constructing Race: The Indian, white and Black roots of Mexican Americans,"

Blatant racial disparities became painfully intolerable to the non-white population [in Mexico] and generated the conditions for their movement toward the northern frontier, where the racial order was relaxed and people of color had the opportunity to own land and enter most occupations. In the period up to 1848 and the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, the sistema which was designed to ensure the maintenance of caste, quickly disintegrated on [Mexico's] northern frontier, allowing persons of African ancestry remarkable social fluidity... early African American Californians were uninterested in the complexities of the sistema de castas. It did not dictate daily life....Not only in California but across the southwest, "Afro-Mestizos were part of the population that founded Nacogdoches, San Antonio, Laredo, La Bahía, Albuquerque, Los Angeles, and Santa Barbara." Several of the pobladores recruited by the Spanish Crown to settle Los Angeles in 1781 were of African descent. (332-34)

So we see that Rowe appears to engage the received knowledge of the "Fantasy Heritage" of the Californios in his assumption that those of the "ranchero, Californio" (itself not an accurate designation) class were a racially homogenous group; he assumes that the Californios were homogeneously Spanish, and that Ridge was consciously privileging (Rowe's own mistaken concept of) that designation in the part of Ridge's physical description of Joaquín that Rowe quotes. Given Ridge's classical education and his many references to European literature in his writings it seems arguable that Ridge's imbuing of Joaquín with nobility of character was a consequence of those influences rather than out of a wish to identify him as more "Spanish" than not. In particular, Ridge makes reference to "Rinaldo Rinaldini" not only in the novel, but in several personal letters, and likens Joaquín

to the “noble” bandit in the text. (Parins) *Rinaldo Rinaldini, the Border Captain* was published by Christian August Vulpius in 1797 and by the mid-eighteenth century had been reprinted in eight editions and in over thirty languages. It tells the story of Rinadini, a noble-minded Corsican bandit, who leads a similarly-noble-minded and patriotic group of thieves in a rebellion against French control of Corsica. Rinadini is quite the reluctant outlaw, as evidenced by this exchange in the opening pages of the novel:

- Rinaldi: I am not now – an honest man.  
 Altaverde: but you have performed noble actions for which the most honorable of mankind might envy you.  
 Rinaldi: They are of no value, for they were done by a public robber.  
 Altaverde: That cannot subtract from the value of noble actions. The devil himself May act nobly, although he be a devil...your noble actions then have Gained you the blessings of mankind. (87)

This exchange frames Rinaldi as an ambivalent outlaw, and we learn later in the story that indeed, he only turns to banditry after being drafted into the army where he is treated inhumanely by a cruel officer. He kills the officer and by necessity embarks on his campaign of opposition to the regular army and the oppressors, the French. Upon noting several other aspects of Vulpius’ text, it would not seem a great leap to imagine Ridge as taking inspiration from that source. For

instance, when Rinaldi's lieutenants, Altaverde and Cinthio become too larcenous, or overly violent, Rinaldi punishes them, a conduct that the characterization of Joaquín might seem to echo, as he is posed in the story as the moral arbiter of the gang, and while he does not go so far as to punish Three Fingered Jack for his violence, we certainly are given reason to see that he does not approve, and that he himself does not engage in bloody violence unless "necessary." Two other small details in *Rinaldo Rinaldini* might arbitrate for the possibility of Ridge noting parallels between the newspaper accounts of the real-life "Joaquín(s)" and Rinaldini, and using them in the shaping of his protagonist. While Rinaldini, unlike Joaquín, is much the ladies' man, romancing countesses and other court women as well as their attendants, he also has female comrades who are part of the gang, namely Rosalia, who is even known to enter into the physical fights that occur, at one point, "suddenly [taking up] a musket...and springing forward, [attacking] the other soldier, who, astonished and confounded, let fall his tool." Rosalia then calls out to the soldier "lay down your arms you villain or I will shoot you dead!" (77). The character of Rosalia is perhaps echoed by the women in Joaquín's band, who take part in various ways in protecting the band. On a smaller note, Rosalia also brings to mind the character in *Joaquín Murieta* of Rosalie, who is possessed of the same strong minded and active personality. Lastly, Rinaldini is the son of a

Christian mother and a Muslim father – in essence a person of mixed heritage, as is the Mestizo Joaquín.

Rowe interprets the traumatic events that Joaquín experiences and his response to them as in keeping with his supposed drive and expectation of partaking in American individualism: “Although he is ‘twice broken up in his honest pursuit of fortune’ Joaquín’s ‘spirit was still unbroken’ a determination indicating that *his very soul is defined by the ‘honest pursuit of fortune’* a typical predicate of progressive individualism in 1850s America” (106 emphasis added). That Rowe interprets Joaquín’s determination to persevere in the face of multiple traumas, and attributes his subsequent actions to a thwarted goal of pursuit of fortune as the epitome of American individualism, and for that matter defines the word “fortune” as Ridge used it to mean material wealth exclusively, elides not only the textual evidence but does not take into consideration the ideological nuances that are set forth in the text – those which are revealing of a dynamic of structure of feeling, the tension between official consciousness and practical lived reality:

Social forms [here, banditry] become social consciousness only when they are lived, actively, in real relationships, relationships that are more than systematic exchanges between fixed units. And this practical consciousness is always more than a handling of fixed forms and units. There is a frequent tension between the received interpretation and practical experience. Where this tension can be made direct and explicit,



or where some alternative explanation is available, we are still within a dimension of relatively fixed forms. But the tension is as often an unease, a stress, a latency...practical consciousness is almost always different from official consciousness...practical consciousness is what is actually being lived, and not only what is thought is being lived. (Williams 131)

Rowe is assuming a fixed form of social/political consciousness for Joaquin as Ridge conceives him. However, I argue for Ridge constructing Joaquín out of Ridge's own subjective fluidity, manifesting in the text as tension, unease, and latency to use Williams' terms – all of which will erupt in Joaquín's campaign of violence as he becomes fully aware of the reality of the discrepancy between his official and practical consciousness. Williams goes on to state that semantic figures and social forms undergo change through "...a kind of feeling and thinking which is indeed social and material, but each in an embryonic phase before it can become fully articulate and defined exchange. Its relations with the already articulate and defined are then exceptionally complex" (131). I am positing here that the semantic figure, or the trope that Ridge creates in the narrative, can be seen to represent just such an "embryonic phase" in U.S. literature - that it is a starting point in ethnic fiction which revises the convention of barbarous others and provides justification for banditry and violent uprising in response to the pharisaism of those who pervert the "American" character and ideals. Williams provides the example that:

“Early Victorian ideology specified the exposure caused by poverty, by debt or by illegitimacy as social failure or deviation; the contemporary structure of feeling in the new semantic figures of Dickens, Emily Bronte and others, specified exposure and isolation as a *general* condition and poverty, debt, or illegitimacy as its connecting instances” (134). Similarly, U.S. ideology in the nineteenth century related the violence and banditry of Mexicans to their supposed innate and racially inferior characteristics. In the popular and political life of the nation, Mexicans were commonsensically known to be “Lazy, ignorant, and of course vicious and dishonest” (Thompson qtd. in Horsman, 212) and as Horsman asserts, “It was unusual by the late 1840s to profess a belief in innate human equality and to challenge the idea that a superior race was about to shape the fates of other races for the future good of the world. To assert this meant challenging not only popular opinion, but also the opinion of most American intellectuals” (250). Meanwhile, Ridge’s new semantic tropes specified the bandit’s depredations as a general condition consequent to one racial group’s violent oppression of another’s human rights. We see in the text then, a fuller explanation than the thwarting of capitalistic yearnings for Joaquín’s transformation. It is the shockingly meaningful realization that what he thinks he is living is not what is actually being lived, thus the playing out of the processes of the Williamsonian tension: “It was the first

injury he had received at the hands of the Americans, whom he had always hitherto respected, and it wrung him to the soul as a deeper and deadlier wrong from that very circumstance” (10). And so, we see injustice as a general condition in the story of *Joaquín Murieta*, with violent resistance – banditry – as its connecting instance.

The Williamsonian tension can be seen to frame interactions between the indigenous people and the European invaders from the time of the European arrival in North America. In fact, the disconnect between the official version of U.S. ideologies of equality and freedom and the practice of inequality that characterizes the tensile aspect of structure of feeling is pervasive in American Indian oral and written literature and the catalyst for responses that have historically been viewed as violent resistance or responses to particular events by individuals or particular groups or tribes, rather than as an historically collective response. Now we can theorize the space between private revenge and collective action that Rosaura Sánchez finds so interesting below by referring to Williams’ notion of history as ongoing social process, as the “exceptionally complex relations” between the “embryonic” U.S. ethnic literary trope, in this case Ridge’s Joaquín, and the “already articulate and defined” U.S. hegemonic system of oppression in place in the mid-nineteenth Century.

### Collectivity

*What is interesting about this 1854 'dime novel' is that what starts out as a quest for individual revenge becomes by the second year of murders and assaults a collective movement.*

– Rosaura

Sánchez

Ridge authors Joaquin as initially embarking on an individual quest for revenge, yes, but once that revenge is specifically satisfied; his mission is transformed into one of collective action. In fact, Ridge foreshadows the transformation to collectivity on the very first page of his novel. By throwing into question the identity of Joaquín – “There were two Joaquíns, bearing the various surnames of Murieta, O’Comorenia, Valenzuela, Botellier, and Carrillo so that it was supposed there were no less than five sanguinary devils ranging the country at one and the same time” – he figures Joaquín as a collective spirit (7). The crucial point in the text that initiates the personal quest for revenge serves a double purpose in regard to the transformational process from individual revenge to collective action. The point at which Joaquin’s soul “...swells beyond its former boundaries” drives him in the immediate to personal revenge, but also portends a morphing of individuality to organized systemic action, albeit an ill-fated war of maneuver. (Gramsci) : “His soul swelled beyond its former boundaries, and the barriers of honor, rocked into atoms by the strong passion

which shook his heart like an earthquake, crumbled around him” (12). We see here in the text, the crumbling of individualism and a transformation to collectivity as a solution. The moment that it becomes clear to Joaquín that the heretofore admiration with which he held the Americans is an illusion, he is atomized. His individuality is obliterated, “crumbled around him” followed by an interlude during which “Fearfully [does] he keep his promise” and kills the “mob” that beat and whipped him, raped his mistress and murdered his brother: “It was fearful and strange to see how swiftly and mysteriously these men disappeared” (13). While it is known that Joaquín is responsible for the deaths because those killed are the very ones who had brutalized him, his mode of operation in these first killings is quite different from how he will proceed after the band is formed. It is textually apparent that Joaquín consciously sets out to organize a group, a gang, a collective after he is finished with his private, individual course of revenge – Ridge uses the term “organized” in reference to Joaquín’s band three times in the course of one paragraph when he describes the new state of affairs after Joaquín has “contracted a hatred to the whole American race.” Moreover, Joaquín, in forming his band, “knew his advantages,” as he instills in his men an Anti-American creed by “appealing to the prejudice against the “Yankees” which the disastrous results of the Mexican war had not tended to lessen in their minds” and he

“assembles around him a powerful band of his countrymen who daily increased as he ran his career of almost magical success” (15-16).

Later in the narrative, Joaquín proclaims, “I am at the head of an organization...of two thousand men whose ramifications are in Sonora, Lower California and in this State...I intend to kill the Americans by ‘wholesale’ burn their ranchos and run off their property at one single swoop...when I do this I shall wind up my career. My brothers we will then be avenged for our wrongs, and some little, too, for the wrongs of our poor, bleeding country. (74-75)”

Significantly, this band is not merely a hodgepodge of stock ruffians; Ridge is careful to illustrate in great detail that each one has specific qualities and skills to offer in the service of the collective. In *Three Fingered Jack*, we have the enforcer, the sociopathic “hardened, experienced and detestable monster” (16). Jack can be seen as the progenitor of now conventional characters in present day crime novels – the one who “when it was necessary for the young chief to commit some peculiarly horrible and cold blooded murder, some deed of hellish ghastliness at which his soul revolted, he deputed” (17). In *Reyes Felíz*, we have the young idealist, well-read in international literature, “who had read the wild romantic lives of the chivalrous robbers of Spain and Mexico until his enthusiastic spirit had become imbued with the same sentiments which actuated them, and he could conceive of

nothing grander than to *throw himself back upon the strictly natural rights of man and hurl defiance at society and its laws*" (17). Claudio is the tactician, "a deep calculator, a wily schemer, cautious and cunning, springing upon his prey at an unexpected moment and executing his purposes with the greatest possible secrecy as well as precision" (17). Pedro Gonzalez functions as a political advisor of sorts, having a "thorough knowledge of the state of affairs" out in the community. Joaquin Valenzuela functions as a scout, Murieta entrusting him with important expeditions, requiring in their executions a great amount of skill and experience" (18). Valenzuela is well versed in guerrilla warfare, an indispensable skill. As noted in the novel, the bandits have a collective history of functioning in the manner of guerrillas, having participated in the past in the wartime campaigns under Padre Jurata, who, as Streeby notes, is a figure in the text based on the actual "fighting Priest" Jurauta, who had figured prominently in skirmishes against U.S. forces in the U.S. war in Mexico. That this type of warfare, most often used by indigenes historically in political, revolutionary, wars is constructed as a response to oppression in *Joaquín Murieta* speaks clearly to its historical formation as a collective response as we see in a U.S. tactical instruction manual:

In order to obtain the maximum results from the psychological operations in guerrilla warfare, every combatant should be as highly motivated to carry out propaganda face to face as he is a

combatant. This means that the individual political awareness of the guerrilla of the reason for the struggle will be as acute as his ability to fight. Such a political awareness and motivation is obtained through the dynamic of groups and self-criticism, as a standard method of instruction for the guerrilla training and operations. Group discussions raise the spirit and improve the unity of thought of the guerrilla training and operations, and exercise social pressure on the weak members to carry out a better role in combative action. Self-criticism is in terms of one's contribution or defects in his contribution to the cause, to the movement, the struggle; *and gives a positive individual commitment to the mission of the group.* (Psychological)

As we see in the text, the banditti frequently enter into group discussions, in which they plot their tactics, and also revel in the past glories of combat under Jurauta.

Rowe's reading of the poem "Mount Shasta," written by Ridge in 1852 and inserted in the text, concludes that Ridge holds "A view of the mountain as a sublime representation of . . . individualism" (107). He goes on to qualify that considering the racial prejudice and social violence of California's history, "Ridge argues that such history can be redeemed only by a rule of law that will allow each citizen to be judged as a free individual. . . . Ridge sounds much like law and order politicians of the late twentieth century" (108). Rowe allows that Ridge's narrative moves to solve "the failure of democratic idealism in post-war California," but claims that while the novel presents that failure as a social problem that it attempts to "analyze and solve," the



resolution is not achieved by “staging a well-justified rebellion” but by demonstrating “the anarchic consequences of this failure” (107).

According to Rowe, the poem fully signifies enlightenment notions of middle-class individualism in its evocation of what Rowe sees as “genius,” which Rowe finds is an idealization of human individuality.

Rowe extrapolates:

The personification of genius as a divine power, predictably masculine, is typical of romantic idealizations of human rationality as the ‘divine’ mind, and it is the utopian goal of realizing such genius that justifies Manifest Destiny and transposes colonial tyranny into a metaphysical (and thus less obviously politicized) “imperial” power...keeping before him the racial prejudice and social violence...Ridge argues that such history can be redeemed only by a rule of law that will allow each citizen to be judged as a free individual[...] (109)

In her analysis, Cheryl Walker interprets the poem as evoking a desire for sovereign law: “[...]The poem offers a reference point against which other conceptions of the law appear...by invoking the law of Mount Shasta, Ridge *universalizes* subjugation, as though pondering with Ishmael in Melville’s *Moby Dick*, ‘Who aint a slave?’ The context of universal subjugation makes individual experiences of subjugation transpositional, thus, perhaps, leveling the playing field (125).

Walker’s reading makes sense, as Ridge was perennially pre-occupied with the notion of sovereign statehood for the Cherokee nation, and considered the Cherokee to be subjugated to what he considered the tyranny of both John Ross and the U.S.

The poem’s insertion into the text has been regarded by some critics as a rather baffling inclusion, one critic surmising that

Ridge inserted it randomly in order to showcase his “bad” poetry. If, however, we consider both the history related to the Shasta area, and the cultural significance of Mount Shasta to the American Indians of the region, we see that clearly, “Mount Shasta, Seen from a Distance” appears in the text at a notable point in the plot. In the interval between Joaquín’s organization of his group and the band’s arrival at the base of Mount Shasta, they embark upon their campaign and range about “ravaging the state.” At one point, Joaquín settles in Marysville, in the northern county of Yuba, until a close call during a shootout with a vigilance committee and the sheriff of Yuba County again forces them to flee. It is at this point in the story that the band repairs for safety to a hideout at the base of Mount Shasta. Ridge’s language in describing the Mount Shasta hideout is indicative of the sense of sanctuary it is meant to give and the reverence with which Ridge treats it:

[...]a conspicuous landmark in the northern portion of the State, which rears its white shaft at all seasons of the year high above every other peak, and serves at a distance of two hundred miles to direct the course of the mountain traveler, being to him as the polar star to the mariner. Gazing at it from the Sacramento Valley at a distance of one hundred and fifty miles, it rises in its garments of snow like some mighty archangel, filling the heavens with his solemn presence”(23).

It seems clear that Ridge views the mountain as a symbol which in fact serves to guide or direct “the course of the mountain traveler” who is in fact one of a community, as opposed to a lone genius. Mount

Shasta is imbued here with an allegorical significance of a transcendent conception of law and justice while a community living out its life under the gaze of that law:

And well I ween, in after years, how,  
 In the middle of his furrowed track, the plowman,  
 In some sultry hour, will pause, and, wiping,  
 From his brow the dusty sweat, with reverence  
 Gaze upon that hoary peak. The herdsman  
 Oft will rein his charger in the plain, and drink  
 Into his inmost soul the calm sublimity;  
 And little children, playing on the green, shall  
 Cease their sport, and, turning to that mountain  
 Old, shall, of their mother ask, "Who made it?"  
 And she shall answer, "God!" (25)

This is a concept of justice that cannot be altered or debased by mere human passions, or more specifically, by the type of man-made destruction Ridge is exposing in his novel. The poem ends in a jeremiadical tone:

And well this golden State shall thrive, if, like  
 Its own Mount Shasta, sovereign law shall lift  
 Itself in purer atmosphere – so high

That human feeling, human passion, at its base  
 Shall lie subdued; e'en pity's tears shall on  
 Its summit freeze; to warm it, e'en the sunlight  
 Of deep sympathy shall fail –  
 Its pure administration shall be like  
 The snow, immaculate upon that mountain's brow! (25)

The mountain is not moved by human passions, even if they be “pity's tears,” or composed from deep sympathy. The myths held by the Indians in the Shasta area commonly centered on themes of cooperation and balance, which points again to collectivity and is something that Ridge can reasonably thought to be aware of, given his interest in the history and culture of North American Indians. But perhaps more germane to analysis of the text is the U.S. American war against the Modoc Indians, who inhabited what is now Shasta County.

Although many sources cite the Modoc War as officially taking place in 1872-1873, the conflict in other sources is said to have actually begun as early as 1843, when a group of Klamath Indians attacked the party of U.S. Marine Lieutenant Archibald Gillespie, who was bringing private messages from expansionist senator Thomas Benton to his son-in-law John Charles Frémont. One of the most thorough sources on

Modoc history, Keith A. Murray's *The Modocs and Their War*, traces the 30 years of conflict between U.S. settlers, miners and troops and the Northern California Indians as mainly between the whites and the Modocs, as the Modocs were the most active in Indian resistance to the incursion in their ancestral lands. Between 1847 and 1849, the Modocs were devastated by Smallpox; as Murray states,

[...] We do not know how many Modocs died, but...the heaviest mortality fell on the young, the sick and the old people. The elders of the village had always been the leaders and now they were dead. A catastrophe of this kind almost completely changed the culture patterns of the Modocs. Hereafter the young Indian men preyed upon the wagon trains about as any group of bandits might, since they lacked much of the capacity to survive in the old ways. (18)

The Modocs would, in fact, spend the next twenty-some years raiding wagon trains, attacking miners and engaging in combat with U.S. troops, in many cases frustrating the superior technology of the newcomers, as “the nature of the land where they lived, and their knowledge of its peculiar features made it possible for them to defend it very ably. (Murray 4) It is not unreasonable to suspect that Ridge had these events of indigenous resistance in mind as he wrote his story. In any event, a case can be made for a sub-textual connection between the Mexican bandits seeking refuge in the very place where other oppressed people were mounting active resistance to oppressive and invasive incursions by “Americans.”

### Literary Considerations

A seemingly agreed upon critical evaluation of Ridge's novel is that it is a "...work of little intrinsic aesthetic interest," whose "*value* resides primarily in the *history* it requires for its comprehension" (Rowe, 99, original emphases). Historically, the gaze of the critical eye has seemed, from at least 1955 when Henry Jackson wrote the introduction to the current edition of the text, to wink and even wince when examining Ridge's work, and the critical voice to range in tone from amusement to apology at its sensational writing – its bodice ripping style. While allowing that obviously, *Joaquín Murieta* is a work of popular fiction, written as such in the style of the time, I follow Critic Shelley Streeby in acknowledging that "Ridge develops his novel in ways that can be seen as prototypical in terms of genre and convention in regard to the late nineteenth century tradition in "American" popular culture - fiction and journalistic- to mythologize the outlaw," (252) and add that he does so in terms of at least one convention of the contemporary crime/detective novel and several that carried over to western film productions.

Ridge incorporates serious literary allusions, a bit of literary criticism, ethnography, poetry and travel writing and presents them in the framework of a popular work, written for mass consumption. As Streeby notes, Ridge was well aware of his intended audience and "...even if in *Joaquín Murieta* he cynically worked within the

conventions of the best-selling crime novel in hopes of making money, the novel still registers Ridge's concern with this 'literary credit'" (263), a prescient concern indeed, for he is referred to by Jackson as "not a very good writer" and by another critic as a "hack journalist and Poet" (Browder 78). However, I argue that while Ridge certainly cannot be accorded the status of a literary lion, there are numerous aspects of the text that merit consideration in terms of his use of literary convention, his blending of genre and in several instances in the text a clever sub-textual evocation of subversive satire. One of these is the much written about scene in the novel where the bandits have been captured by a group of "Tejon" Indians. This scene has caused much unease in the critical work. Cheryl Walker points to the treatment in the novel of the Tejons, and their Chief, Sapatarra: "[...] it may seem odd that John Rollin Ridge, an Indian himself, should make sport of Indians such as the Tejons and the Diggers" (134). However, when we look closely at this scene we see a more complex dynamic occurring than making sport or expressions of bigotry. First, Ridge's writing here, in a characteristic move (also often critically overlooked) is heavily laden with irony. There are two full pages of apparently disparaging, and what have been referred to as racist remarks about the Tejons in the text at this point, in which the narrator describes Sapatarra, "...seated upon his haunches in all the grandeur of "naked majesty," enjoying a very

luxurious repast of roasted acorns and dried angle-worms.” Ridge goes on to describe the scene: “His swarthy subjects were scattered in various directions...engaged in the most part in the very arduous task of doing nothing” Ridge refers here to “The little smoky children...like a black species of water fowl...” and there to the “...caution ... which, by the way, is a quality that particularly distinguishes the California Indians, amounting to so extreme a degree that it might safely be called cowardice” (37). What we miss here, by adhering to fixed notions of Ridge’s subjectivity (here is an “Indian” disparaging Indians) is Ridge’s sheer skill in setting the reader up, just as Joaquín and his party are set up by the Tejons. The clue I see here that this is a set up for the reader is the inclusion of quotation marks around the term “naked majesty” and the coded language Ridge might be seen to be using in the rest of the passage, particularly in his use of the simile of the children and their likeness to “water fowl.” The quotation marks clearly denote that the narrator is not, himself, using the term “naked majesty,” but employing it to evoke an already received image. Ridge uses quotation marks similarly when he narrates the response of the ““Great Captain,” the county judge of Los Angeles,” when Sapatarra sends a message to the judge requesting advice on what to do with the “party of Mexicans” in his custody: “The judge, supposing that the capture was the result of a little feud between some “greasers” and the Tejons, advised them to



release them” (39). The entire description of the Tejons can be seen as evocation of already received images, those by primarily white readers whom Ridge is aware comprise the majority of his audience; it certainly parallels the by then established, stereotypical views of “Indians.” The likening of the children to waterfowl might be seen then, as coded language playing upon the mid-nineteenth century predilection for seeing “Indians” as parallel to aspects of nature, or, more specifically, to animals. The evidence that this scene might not be read “straight,” that is, as if Ridge (or his narrator) is simply describing scenes in a straightforward manner, representing what he himself sees, can be found in his comment on the Tejons when they succeed in capturing Joaquín and his group: “Had the least resistance been made, a single pistol cocked, or a knife drawn, they would have left the ground on the wings of the wind – so largely developed is the bump of caution on the head of a California Indian! *But cunning is equally developed, and serves their purposes quite as well sometimes as downright courage*” (38, emphasis added). Here we can see the aforementioned use of subversive subtext as Ridge first invokes a white science (phrenology) which had been used to “study” supposed traits of American Indians, to again refer to the supposed “caution” of the Tejons, and in the next sentence turns that very same view of them on its head, by asserting, in the seemingly innocuous comment italicized

above, that cunning serves the Tejons well enough so that they may as well be thought to have “downright courage.” The reader has underestimated the Tejons then, just as Joaquín and his band has. As other critics have noted, it is the Tejons after all, who despite their caricatured treatment in the text, hand Joaquín and his band their most humiliating and for that matter only defeat in the entire novel, except of course for their ultimate defeat at the hands of Harry Love and company. Even the judge, representing the hegemonic system, is treated ironically here; due to his already received images of both the “greasers” and the Tejons, he lets slip away the notorious band that is wanted throughout the entire state.

Ridge uses irony and satire throughout the text, at times to make subtle and more overt sarcastic and sardonic comments in the narrator’s voice. We have seen the example of irony in the above scene with the Tejons, and there are many others throughout the narrative, as where the narrator is discussing the death of Mountain Jim: “Well fitted was he to grace a gallows, for his merits certainly entitled him to a certain elevation” (61) and this description of the lawyer who accompanies Captain Ellas in chasing Joaquín: “[...] who had practiced at squirrels and turkies (sic) in the woods as much as he had practiced at the bar, and was as skillful in drawing a ‘bead’ as in drawing a brief” (116); or this narrative of an episode in which Captain Ellas is interrogating a

“rough-looking Mexican:” “The ill-looking fellow denied all knowledge of any mounted men having been to his house. A lariat was speedily attached to his neck and he was sent up into a tree to see if he could not obtain the desired information. Having been sent up twice, he ascertained the important fact that Joaquín had passed his house the night before with two other men” (126). More subversively, when Joaquín’s evil and “sanguinary” double, Three-fingered Jack “declared that he would dig the hearts out” of some victims, the narrator informs us that “Joaquín, however, interfered and prevented him from executing his threat, remarking that it was better to let them live as he might wish to collect taxes off them for ‘Foreign Miners’ Licenses’ at some other time,” a sardonic reference to the oppressive Foreign Miners Tax enacted in 1851 mainly to discourage Latinos from working the mines (130).

The following ironic event in the novel establishes what would become a stock phrase in Western films a century or so later, a variation of “Lets give him a trial before we hang him.”<sup>11</sup> Having apprehended Vulvia, the “...people *en masse* severely guarded him

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<sup>11</sup> A number of sources examined set the earliest recorded use of the concept of a trial as a mere formality prior to the hanging of a “criminal” to Judge Roy Bean in 1872. It is possible, even likely then, that Ridge was the first to use this trope, called by some a “California Hanging.”

during the night...intending to hang him without a trial on the morrow, but were dissuaded by Justice Brown...who being a man of influence and a good speaker withal, convinced them that it was better to proceed with him legally, as there was but little doubt of his being found guilty as one of the murderers, in which case he would deliver him over to their just vengeance.” (93) And in a clever inversion, Ridge comments acerbically when describing the hanging of one of Joaquín’s men: “The time-honored custom of choking a man to death was soon put into practice, and the robber stood on nothing, kicking at an empty space. Bah! it is a sight that I never like to see, *although I have been civilized for a good many years,*” sarcastically exposing the hypocrisy of those who claim so righteously their “civilization” while flocking to witness the spectacle of hanging men in the street (138, emphasis added).

Many of Ridge’s pieces during his journalism career were written in a highly satirical style, and James Parins relates one that Ridge wrote in response to his critics, in answer to the fear that had been stirred up in regard to the organization of The Knights of the Golden Circle, a secret anti-abolitionist society for which Ridge had supposedly been recruiting as he traveled Nevada County, soliciting subscriptions for the *Democratic Press* : His response begins by ridiculing the alarm: ‘To arms! To arms! ye dauntless Leaguers! your firesides, your families, your government pap is in danger!’ He then

goes on to relay a rumor about Democrats arming in the county...and ends by writing, ‘We fear that it must be said of the *Gazette*’s rumor, in the language of Artemus Ward, “’too troo’”(210). Ridge published a tongue-in-cheek description of initiation into the ‘Knights of Golden Opportunity’ where the initiate is led into a saltpeter cave, and ‘after expressing the desire to feed on Abolitionists in the form of a stew, a boil, a roast, a broil’ he must be ‘questioned as to his ability to annex California and Canada to the Confederacy’(210). In an aside during the scene in Joaquín Murieta, in which Joaquín takes out his pencil and writes on a posted notice, Ridge satirically references the illiteracy of the populace: “... an auctioneer’s notice: ‘Honor before the 25 da of Dec I will offur...’ The narrator (Ridge) then remarks, “I have a notion to publish the name signed to this rare advertisement, especially as the auctioneer seems to have been something of a wag as well as an ignoramous” (67). Thus, Ridge uses satire to point out Joaquín’s and his own literacy above that of the “Americans.”

### Gender in *Joaquín Murieta*

Most critical work has neglected to mine the subject of the female characters in *Joaquín Murieta*. Only Laura Browder writes about any female character other than Rosita, and is the only critic to address the characterizations of women in the novel in any depth. In

reference to Margarita, a female character who is notable in her proto-feminist shadings, Browder writes:

When one female criminal dispatches her brutal husband by dropping hot lead into his ear, the narrator quotes Lord Byron: “Woman’s tears, produced at will, / Deceive in life, unman in death.” “And the truth of this bitter assertion was partially illustrated when the inconsolable widow wept so long over the husband whom she like a second, nay, the thousandth jezebel, had made a corpse. It is barely possible, however, that her tears were those of remorse” (81). What is Margarita’s punishment for this crime? She marries a younger, handsome man “who loved her much more tenderly than did the brutal Guerra, whom she so skillfully put out of the way” and stays young and beautiful herself” (77).

Browder is referring to what she sees as Ridge’s refusal to endorse sentimentality, positing that Ridge is responding “sarcastically” to Harriet Beecher Stowe’s *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*: “Under capitalism, where American racism can be used to disenfranchise any group no matter what its moral claims on the land it occupies, sentiment is often pretty but never effective. Thus *Joaquin Murieta* functions as a sarcastic critique of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*. It undermines the moral authority of suffering and exposes the limits of sentimentality” (87). Browder illustrates her point with a quote from the scene where Rosita is weeping over the death of her brother:

When Murieta’s mistress is weeping at the death of her brother, a member of the bandit group, the narrator asks, “Why should I describe it? It is well that woman should, like a weeping angel, sanctify our dark and suffering world with her tears. Let them flow. The blood which stains the fair face of our mother Earth may not be washed out with an ocean of tears”

(53). Tears cannot accomplish anything. How different this sentiment is from the assumption of the editors of slave narratives, who surmise in their introductions that the ocean of readers' tears will wash away slavery" (89).

Along with this refusal to endorse romantic sentimentality is the subversion of at least two nineteenth century literary conventions: the stereotyping of Mexicans and the "tainted" woman.

Mexican women as well as men suffered from racial stereotyping. Anglos drew distinctions between Mexican women on the basis of class and race. As Carragin and Webb reveal, the earliest Anglo settlers to the Southwest sought to increase their access to political control and possession of natural resources through intermarriage with the native ruling class. In order to encourage social acceptance of those marriages, white men claimed that elite Mexican women were the racially pure descendants of Spanish conquistadores. This emphasis upon a shared European cultural and biological heritage allowed the men to claim the social privileges of whiteness for their Mexican spouses (421). Popular literature romanticized elite Mexican women as uncommonly beautiful, graceful, and sophisticated. As Alfred Robinson, who married into an elite Californio family, affirmed: "perhaps there are few places in the world where, in proportion to the number of inhabitants, can be found more chastity, industrious habits, and correct deportment, than among the women of this place" (84).

Mexican women of the lower classes did not fare as well; as Carrigan and Webb find, in the California of 1848,

Mexican women of the lower classes were less immune to pejorative racial stereotypes. Anglo attitudes toward the mass of Mexican women were conditioned by their own ethnocentric notions of proper female behavior. The "cult of domesticity" delineated the appropriate social role of women as that of home maker. Women were perceived as the personification of moral propriety and entrusted with the responsibility to impart that virtue to their husbands and children. Anglos judged lower class Mexican women by this culturally specific standard, and found them wanting. The racial discourse of the nineteenth century portrayed Mexican women as the inverse reflection of their idealized Anglo counterparts. While Anglo women were considered pious and chaste, Mexican females were seen as depraved and sexually promiscuous. The popular stereotype of the Mexican prostitute gained powerful cultural currency during the California Gold Rush. Anglos asserted that Mexican women in the mines turned to prostitution as a result less of their marginalized economic status than of their innate moral degeneracy. According to the authors of a contemporary history of California, 'The lewdness of fallen white females is shocking enough to witness, but it is by far exceeded by the disgusting practices of these tawny visaged creatures'. (441)

The dependence on Mexican stereotypes in the literature and popular culture of California was in full force by 1854, the process of such bigotry having been initiated especially by early "adventurers" such as Henry Dana and Thomas Jefferson Farnham who published their best-selling "travel" narratives which prolifically disparaged Mexican men and women. Farnham wrote: "The Californios are an imbecile pusillanimous race of men, unfit to control the destinies of that beautiful country...The ladies, dear creatures, I wish they were whiter" (363). David Gutierrez notes, "Building on the so called Black



Legend, in which European rivals portrayed Spaniards as bloodthirsty, sexually depraved tyrants, Americans tended to transfer many of these negative stereotypes to the descendants of the first Spanish Explorers of South America, arguing that their mixed-blood offspring combined the absolute worst traits of both the conquistadors and the local Indians” (68). Given the charged, murderously racist atmosphere in California in 1854, the fact that anyone, let alone a “mixed-blood” Indian, would write a novel whose protagonist was a Mexican, and that that Mexican would be treated in a consistently complex manner in the novel, a manner that rebukes many of the above stereotypes, must be considered as unusual in itself. The fact that the women he represents are characters who invert stereotype in several ways is also worth noting. The character of Margarita for instance, murders her second husband, Guerra, after he abuses her. She commits this act after Joaquín has caught her previously attempting to kill him: “She was about to cut his throat when Joaquín, who was lying in the same tent, fiercely told her to behave herself and assured her with an emphasis that he would hold her responsible if Guerra was ever found dead about the camp” (76). When the band is left in Guerra’s command, in Joaquín’s absence, he and his “affectionate wife,” Margarita, engage in a quarrel, which “end[s] in his giving her a wholesome thrashing” (81). She behaves the next morning with the utmost humility, and the banditti find Guerra

dead in his tent, “with no sign of violence on his body” (81). The men do not know what to make of Guerra’s death, and ultimately attribute it to his heavy drinking. Ridge, however, makes clear that this was no accident: “That unconscious sleeper had received...one drop of hot lead into his ear, tipped from a ladle by a small and skillful hand” (81). Notably, while the bandits are characterized as cold blooded murderers, the lone female who functions as an assassin in the text is not depicted as heartless or as committing irrational violence, as many of Joaquín’s men do. Instead, Margarita is characterized mainly in a sympathetic tone, who is “an affectionate wife” to the brutal Guerra, even having been essentially forced into the marriage with him after losing her first husband. Her killing of Guerra is executed perfectly, leaving no trace of her culpability – her “small and skillful hand” a match for even one of Joaquín’s most violent bandits. The death of Guerra – Spanish for “war” – is a compelling allegory for the abilities of women and the danger of underestimation of those abilities. While the women in *Joaquín Murieta* are exposed to severe and constant violent threats, they are fully capable of responding in kind when they are personally threatened.

Adding to Browder’s above interpretation of the Lord Byron quotation, “Women’s tears, produced at will/deceive in life, unman in death...” I contend that the cynical reference reflects the duality of the

female character construction in the text. After the episode with the Tejons, having been stripped naked by the Indians, the group is morosely trudging out of the Tejon Pass when Mountain Jim, a confederate, comes upon them and is seized with laughter at their disheveled and naked appearance. The women immediately “hid themselves in the brush, and were like Mother Eve when she sinned – conscious of their nakedness without being told of it” (41). These are the same shy and chaste souls who “perhaps prefer” men’s clothes “to any other” having previously saved the banditti from Captain Harry Love by appearing to be merely a group of women “dressed in their proper garments” in a tent when love bursts in expecting to capture the men. As soon as the coast is clear, they “...quickly doff their female attire and [ride] off with their companions into the hills from which they had just come” (35)

The reader is encouraged to be impressed by the abused Margarita’s adept commission of murder; however, her tears are regarded with cynicism by the narrator as she “wept so long and well over the husband whom she, like a second, nay, the thousandth jezebel, had made a corpse” (81). The reference to Jezebel can be seen as an allusion to the biblical queen who leads the Hebrews into idolatry and rules through controlling her ignorant sons. In his quotations of Byron and his biblical allusion, Ridge imparts a vindictive quality to female

power in his work; a complex female duality rather than stereotypical fixity emerges when juxtaposed with Margarita's affection and beauty. The vindictive deviance is parallel to the cunning deviance of the men, whose criminal endeavors are portrayed by turns as noble and sickening. In this respect, Ridge is according his female characters potency equal to his male characters, a remarkably progressive commentary in 1854 California.

Margarita suffers no consequence as a result of her act. Indeed, she not only "stays young" as Browder notes; in fact the act seems to rejuvenate her, seeming to afford her the effects of a fountain of youth: "There are some women who never seem to grow old. As each successive spring renews the plumage of the birds, so with them the passing years add fresh beauty to their forms. Margarita was one of those women" (82). Isadora Conejo, who Margarita "accepts for her third husband," though accorded only ten words of description, also crosses a stereotype, gestured toward in not only the feminine slant of his name, but in that he is a musician, opposing, in the characterization of an artist, the "macho" stereotype of Guerra with whom Isadora is juxtaposed: he "loves her more tenderly than did the brutal Guerra" (82). Another convention that Ridge revises in regard to the women can be seen in his treatment of Rosita. The convention of "punishment" in regard to women who are the victims of rape is

practically universal in literature, especially in the context of the period's romantic literature. As has been mentioned before in critical work, Rosita not only doesn't die, she remains with Joaquín and in fact survives him; Ridge ends the story with her, leaving open the trajectory of her future, as he places the onus for her "slow task of a life forever blighted" not upon her, but on the fact that "man never learned (not) to wrong his fellow man" (158). The Mexican women in the text might be seen to reflect the characterizations of the women of the Mexican Revolution – Las Adelitas – women who are not merely "camp followers" but who participate fully in life outside their society's established, oppressive order. These are women who cross the conventional performance of gender when it suits them to do so.

The Mexican women in *Joaquín Murieta* as well as the one Anglo woman, Rosalie, are active, even though they do not figure prominently in the plot. While the character of Rosalie seems to embody the stereotype of the shrinking violet, and her insertion into the plot resonates with an appeal to titillation, with her "... ringlets showered down upon her neck and shoulders and her bosom heaving as if it would burst its gauzy covering and strike the gazer blind with its unspeakable loveliness" (99), we cannot readily dismiss her as mere window dressing. In keeping with his complex characterizations and inverting of stereotypes, Ridge presents even the very minor Rosalie in

a more complex light than we see at first glance. For instance, as mentioned above, his descriptions of her seem to relegate her to a passive role of the victim – and not a very bright one at that – as he writes of her, “It was a bad time to swoon, but how could so delicate an organization, *fit only to be played upon by the subtlest flashes of thought, sporting in rainbow-fancies*, sustain so rude a shock?”

(103). Yet, as the story progresses, Rosalie shows strength of character: She “resolved to help herself” and holds her own within the robber’s cave. She recognizes the superior character of Joaquín, telling him that “...she respected him from the bottom of her heart, robber as he was” (106). And she is thereafter in a position of power in the relationship with Edward, as she admonishes him, “Fie, fie, Edward, you forget yourself...I care not if he were a robber a thousand times, he is a noble man – shake hands with him,” and joins Edward’s hand to Joaquín’s “with a gentle force” (108). The episode in which Rosalie figures can, in fact, be examined as a renovation on the captivity narrative, with the female captive not only willingly returned to her family, but the family reconciled with the abductor at the insistence of the captive herself.

The established order in regard to the women in *Joaquín* is abrogated also in regard to legal/social recognition of and alternative definitions of family and marriage and within that, performativity of gender roles, as noted above. Bruce Thornton, prior to commenting on Susan

Johnson's work, writes the following in his critique of critical work surrounding the Murieta myth:

Scholars influenced by postmodernist and multiculturalist approaches to history have also discovered a fertile field in the Murieta legend. Postmodernist history, as defined by historian Gertrude Himmelfarb, is 'a denial of the fixity of the past, of the reality of the past apart from what the historian chooses to make of it, and thus any objective truth about the past.' We have seen this approach ...in the work of Chicano historians who are willing to set aside or fudge the question of objectivity. The issues of historical truth are side stepped, since multiculturalist history serves a greater liberationist goal. (14)

Having thus set up his objections to a multicultural approach in Murieta criticism, Thornton introduces Johnson:

Susan Lee Johnson takes this approach in study of social conditions during the gold rush...Johnson is frank about the liberationist aims that inform her *presumably* scholarly history...(she) starts her book with Murieta's story, as it is representative of (a) whole exclusionary process; whether or not it is true is beside the point. Johnson's indifference to historicity leads to statements patently false, as when she says, regarding Murieta's pursuit by the Rangers, that a 'Mexican family [*sic!*] fled from a well-armed, state-sponsored band of Anglo Rangers. (146, first emphasis added)

We can see by the tone of Thornton's writing that the violation of societal boundaries in the myth of Murieta and in *Joaquín Murieta* is still enflaming conservative passions more than one hundred years later. The insertion of the italicized notation above indicates that some historians are not able to imagine that the bandit and his "gang" comprise a familial unit in the novel. Joaquín's company is inclusive

of the wives of Reyes Feliz and Pedro Gonzalez as well as Joaquín's mistress. There are frequent scenes of domesticity that resonate as familial, usually between the times the men go out to "work." Joaquín and Rosita function as the parental influence here, and it is a significant point that their relationship is not State sanctioned by legal process, in juxtaposition with the other men and their wives. We see Joaquín making all the decisions, and meting out discipline, as well as guiding the group according to his own code of behavior. Rosita is free to offer her opinions on crucial courses of action as is apparent in the following scene when Joaquín is deliberating on the fate of "American" hunters who have happened upon his camp at Cantúa Creek: "Spare them, Joaquín," She tremulously whispered...and retired softly to her seat again" (79). And spare the hunters Joaquín does.

### Conclusion

Chapter two was meant to evidence my claim in chapter one that *Joaquín Murieta* occupies a space on a continuum of a U.S. popular genre that was prototypical in the development of literary themes that were, in 1854, innovative and progressive. Mexicans were a reviled people whose supposed social, cultural and moral deviance was common knowledge to the point of pervading popular, intellectual and scientific thought in the U.S. in 1854, yet Ridge created a Mexican protagonist who embodied the characteristics of nobility of spirit,



bravery, industry and an admirable sense of justice – one who anticipated and was generative of the sea change in representations of ethnics in popular genre that was to take place over the next century. As has been argued before, the trope in question is the binary opposition which has the ethnic in effect trading places with the white-Anglo lawman, so that the equation has completely reversed in the 21<sup>st</sup> century to become: honest, noble and sympathetic ethnic Vs corrupt, savage, often degraded white lawman/hegemonic system of “justice.” Toward the conclusion of the next chapter, we examine a film in regard to the characterization of the lawman, among other aspects. At the time Ridge wrote *Joaquín Murieta*, the conventional paradigm, when the story included ethnics, held the corrupt and brutal villain as the ethnic of color. As stated by Cawalti, “the heroic lawman of the Hollywood myth has traditionally been white in more than his hat” (2). There were of course white outlaws, however, there apparently was not any number of white lawmen/villains. In 2011, of course, the corrupt white lawman is a stock character. Ridge, while not explicitly characterizing Harry Love as corrupt, does, in certain emphases on his actions, imply that Love is not completely above board, does not live up to the picture of the heroic lawman. His characterization of Love hints at the convention transformation to come. As Mark Rifkin observes about Love,

While in some ways celebrating Love as an admirable agent of order, the novel situates him quite firmly within the systemic pattern of post-war imperial aggression that it more broadly describes as “lawless”-ness,...Love’s murder of Murieta is part of an unprovoked “attack” motivated simply by the fact that the victims are “Mexicans” – their identity as such making them inherently “suspicious” ...this moment suggest[s] the absence of any meaningful distinction between state law and routine forms of Anglo vigilante lawlessness... (34)”

In what follows, we examine the figure of the lawman as corrupt in the film *One-Eyed Jacks*, apparently still as new a concept as in Ridge’s time as it is in the late 50s early 60s judging from a contemporary reviewer: “First, a bank robber is the hero. Second, the villain is the sheriff, the personification of law and order. Third, the Mexicans in this story are noble and the Americans are stinkers... *all* the moral values which make human society possible are flouted” (Hart 233).

As has been argued in this chapter, a case can be made for *Joaquin Murieta* being, to a certain extent, instrumental in this long and complex change, by virtue of Ridge’s characterizations and innovative revision of literary conventions of the popular crime/western genre. The next chapter will examine the progression of conventions that Ridge’s text founded, and show how these tropes, by the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century had become commonplace, effecting a virtual reversal in the representation of the ethnic in popular culture from the barbarous other

to the heroic protagonist, widely accepted as such by mainstream U.S. Anglo audiences, to the point that Anglo characters in many cultural productions have become themselves stereotypical in their characterizations as stock evil characters.

## Chapter 3: The Continuum as Reconfigured Space: *One-Eyed Jacks* and *Lone Star*

### Introduction

*The Unsung Stream* moves toward a re-conceptualization of cultural-academic space in its argument for emplacement of ethnic and certain non-ethnic productions inside a central space in the continuum of U.S. literature and of critical space in its argument for the depathologizing of paralyzing constructs such as identity-dystonic, sociologically based analyses of ethnic subjectivity, and adherence to inter-ethnically polarizing theories of assimilation. It is indebted in part to Edward W. Soja's highly influential work in his landmark *Postmodern Geographies* which is centered on the analysis of geo-cultural space in terms of the intersections of class, race, gender, and sexuality. Soja examines and builds upon the pioneering work of Henri Lefebvre and others to argue for a radical rethinking of the dynamics of time, space, and social being. He calls for the "radical reformation of critical social theory as a whole, of Western Marxism in particular, and of the many different ways we look at, conceptualize, and interpret not only space itself, but the whole range of fundamental relationships between space, time and social being at every level of abstraction" (44).

Soja sees that capitalism has succeeded by “...occupying and producing space,” and that the capitalist system as a whole is able to extend its existence by maintaining its defining structures. As Soja states, “Reconstituted critical human geography” is required “for exploited workers, tyrannized people and dominated women. *It must be particularly attuned to contemporary restructuring processes if it is to contribute to a radical postmodernism of resistance*” (199 italics added). I argue that such a restructuring process has been underway since at least the nineteenth century with the works of Ridge, Apes, Delaney, Ruiz de Burton and others.

An important aspect of reorganization of social-cultural space is what can be viewed as the “ethnicizing” of U.S. popular culture, after Michael Denning’s formulation of the “laboring of American culture.”<sup>12</sup> This shift in popular culture is a corollary to the emergent U.S. ethnic co-operative labor and human rights processes delineated in Denning’s important work, *The Cultural Front: The Laboring of American Culture in the Twentieth Century*. I argue that it is during the popular front era that the ethnic continuum begins to intersect and merge with “mainstream” U.S. ethos; ethnic identity coalesces with

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<sup>12</sup> Denning, Michael. *The Cultural Front: the Laboring of American Culture in the Twentieth Century*. London: Verso, 1998.

“American” identity, becoming visible in the industries of popular culture and thus evincing a slow turning toward the reversal of the trope of the barbarous other/virtuous “American.”

### The 1930s

Michael Denning’s examination of the Popular Front delineates a reconfiguration of U.S. cultural space when he writes of the “laboring” of American culture:

What is the laboring of American culture? It refers to the ‘proletarianization’ of American culture, the increased influence on and participation of working class Americans in the world of culture and the arts. There was a laboring of American culture as children from working class families grew up to become the artists in the culture industries, and American workers became the primary audience for those industries...it was a social democratic culture, a culture of ‘industrial democracy’. (xvii)

Denning views the cultural productions of the 1930s and 40s as much more complex than merely the collaborative efforts of communist activists as they have commonly been viewed. He examines the national labor movement of the 30s, mass culture production, regional migration patterns, politics, and other socio/cultural phenomena to argue in part that most left-wing cultural productions of the 1930s and 40s were an attempt to create a counter-hegemonic culture:

The Popular Front had been built around a politics of antiracism and anti-imperialism the infrastructure was made up of ethnic fraternal associations, foreign language newspapers, and arts clubs that supported a kind of ‘cultural nationalism’ emphasizing the distinctive histories of the peoples

of the United States....The CIO unions had actively worked to organize African-American, Asian-American and Latino workers and fought against the hate strikes and Zoot-suit riots...The Hollywood studios were without a doubt the central cultural apparatus on the West Coast. Chicana activist Josefina Fierro de Bright was married to the radical screenwriter John Bright, and the Hollywood left including Orson Welles and the Mexican-American actors Rita Hayworth and Anthony Quinn was active in the Sleepy Lagoon defense committee...The romance of revolution was manifested...in the popularity of the Soviet films...but also in the romance of the Mexican revolution, embodied in the grand murals of Diego Rivera and José Clemente Orozco, and the films “Juarez” and “Viva Zapata.” (13-19,34)

In the 1930s we begin to see the self-conscious identification of ethnic U.S. Americans as simultaneously ethnic and “American” as opposed to the commonsensical, consensual imagination of “American” as exclusively white, Anglo Saxon Protestant:

If the Anglo middle-classes watched a celebration of an ethnically unmarked middle-class American people in which the attenuated ethnicity of figures like Arte Shaw, Lena Horne or Rita Hayworth fit effortlessly beside the Mr. Smiths and John Does of Jimmy Stewart, the young ethnic workers of the CIO recognized Shaw, Horne and Hayworth as their own. They were working class ethnic stars precisely *because* they were ‘American.’ The metamorphosis of Arthur Arshawski into Artie Shaw was less a “passing” from the foreign language working class to an English-language middle class than a forging of a “New American” people, in Louis Adamic’s phrase. (Denning 153)”

A case can be made then, for an emergence of ethnic identity at this juncture of U.S. history in terms of alignment of ethnics in the U.S. over human and labor rights activism. Also, the new ethnic composition of actors in film, music, and the rise of sports became a

point of identification for ethnic audiences who thought of themselves as “American.” Such movements, especially for second-generation ethnics-of-color resulted in the internalization of a new subject identity. As Denning states: “There emerged a paradoxical synthesis of competing nationalisms – pride in ethnic heritage and identity combined with an assertive Americanism – that might be called “ethnic-Americanism” (9). Thus, an ethnicization of U.S. culture in the era of the popular front was part of the “laboring” that Denning conceptualizes. It accounts in part for the crystallization of the ethnic facet of the prismatic continuum described above. To concretize the way the ethnic and “mainstream” interact and share space as outlined above, I examine here a poetic text by Phillip Levine, a Pulitzer Prize-winning poet considered by many as a leading member of the “white,” male tradition of “American” poetry.<sup>13</sup> Levine is frequently anthologized alongside such poets as Robert Pinsky and Richard Hugo; the stalwart dean of the white male stronghold of hegemonic “American” literature, Harold Bloom, has ordained his work.

...Out of burlap sacks, out of bearing butter,  
 Out of black bean and wet slate bread,  
 Out of the acids of rage, the candor of tar,  
 Out of creosote, gasoline, drive shafts, wooden dollies,  
 They Lion grow.

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<sup>13</sup> Levine was named U.S. Poet Laureate August 10, 2011.



Out of the gray hills  
 Of industrial barns, out of rain, out of bus ride,  
 West Virginia to Kiss My Ass, out of buried aunties,  
 Out of the bones' need to sharpen and the muscles' to stretch,  
 They Lion grow. ..

...From the sweet glues of the trotters  
 Come the sweet kinks of the fist...  
 From "Bow Down" come "Rise Up,"  
 Come they Lion from the reeds of shovels,  
 The grained arm that pulls the hands,  
 They Lion grow.

From my five arms and all my hands,  
 From all my white sins forgiven, they feed,  
 They Lion, from my children inherit,  
 From the oak turned to a wall, they Lion,  
 From they sack and they belly opened  
 And all that was hidden burning on the oil-stained earth  
 They feed they Lion and he comes. (1972)

Though obviously not a popular genre text, "They Feed They Lion" is useful to this project in that it embodies a sense of the cultural simultaneity posited in chapter one. It evokes images of the labor aspect of the Popular Front movement of the 1930s and the civil rights/ethnic empowerment social movements of the 1960s. The images of the working masses, juxtaposed with the images of strength are striking in their simultaneous evocation of both movements, thus affording an optic of social movement as an ongoing process, as opposed to the "formed wholes" that Williams writes of - the barriers to the "human cultural activity" that have been challenged in this study.

(28)

“They Feed They Lion” has frequently been critically explicated in terms of an impending threat, of “[...]pressure building at a threatening rate” (Jackson 3). However, rather than a prophecy of doom that foretells a “rising up” of the masses, there is in this poem an acknowledgement of the ethnic subject as a given force in the nation, not only in the immediate implication of the images and the historical context in which it is written, but more importantly in its linguistic and literary implications. Here, a “white” poetic voice does not employ the vernacular to characterize the Other in terms of negative opposition, or to signal class or ethnic value distinctions, but speaks itself in dialect, unselfconsciously acknowledging the vernacular as a natural pattern of “American” speech. As critic David St. John writes: “In Levine’s search for an authentic American voice, we see the influence of daily speech as well as the echo of black speech. It’s not simply Levine’s empathy with the oppressed and victimized that gives rise to a poem like this. It is also his desire to unleash the full power that he sees latent in American speech, in *all* of America’s voices. We can hear it crashing forward in this poem with echoes of Whitman...(5).” St. John further observes that “...one hears the driving rhythms of Whitman’s “Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking” in Levine’s poem (6). St. John’s reading reveals a (sub)consciousness of privilege in his assumed distinction between “daily” and “black speech”, and his reference to

Levine's supposed "empathy with the oppressed and victimized" effects a somewhat patronizing tone. He does not take into account the fact that Levine himself was not yet an elite poet, and given the labor issues of the time, might also have been operating under the oppression of the capitalist system despite his identity as "white." Yet, he does acknowledge the power in Levine's use of the vernacular, and his comparison of Levine to Whitman is only slightly off. For much of Whitman's work was idealizing of "America," a United States that was seen as homogenous. The ethnic, most obviously the "Indian," was being ennobled and sentimentalized in his work precisely because they were being systematically destined for extinction by U.S. government policy and consensual hegemonic design. Levine's work here actually turns that Whitman on its head; his use of Whitman's rhythm in this poem counters the ideology of "American" (white) exclusivity.

The reader will recall that Williams' structure of feeling arises partly from a tension between practical and official consciousness: a tension between what is thought is being lived and what is actually being lived. That tension is noted here as we compare St. John's largely progressive reading of "They Feed They Lion" with one by Joe Jackson. St. John's reading is one that signifies what is actually being lived, which is the recognition of the ethnic as autochthonic to U.S. social and cultural life. Jackson's criticism on the other hand, signifies

the official consciousness, the taking for granted of the perennial “outside” status of the ethnic. From Jackson’s visceral optic the ethnic, in this case black people, are interchangeable with “the poor” and both are “panic” inducing, possessed of an anger that “*grows without purpose*”:

The source seems to be ...the anger and frustration of the poor lying in wait...frustration and anger that grow without purpose, building to some breaking point... an ominous and impending doom...the clash of white and black informs the narrative’s line...black and white imagery get reversed --- i.e. *black is good, white is bad*... Thus, the poor here are specifically blacks, oppressed by whites. Paradoxically, the speaker is white (“*my white sins*”), yet he has assumed the voice and message of the black revivalist at the end. Being one of the oppressors, this only intensifies the panicked, threatened feeling that much more. (Jackson 3 italics added)

In this passage, we can see that Jackson’s analysis begins from his assumption that commonsensically, black is “bad” and white is “good.” he notes what for him is apparently an aberrant cultural juxtaposition: “Black and white imagery get reversed. White is bad, black is good.” Apparently, the reversal of trope is not yet commonplace in 1983, as Jackson’s remarks indicate. Jackson’s reading arises from received knowledge of the ethnic as always already outside of the U.S. mainstream – and in doing so he identifies the ethnic U.S. American as disassociated from what is considered “American” in terms of subjectivity, literature and voice. Levine’s own comments on the impetus for the poem are telling:

I was working alongside a guy in Detroit -- a black guy named Eugene -- when I was probably about twenty-four. He was a somewhat older guy, and we were sorting universal joints... we spread them out on the concrete floor, we had two sacks that we were putting them in -- burlap sacks -- and at one point Eugene held up a sack, and on it were the words "Detroit Municipal Zoo." And he laughed, and said, "They feed they lion they meal in they sacks." That's exactly what he said! And I thought, *This guy's a genius with language*. He laughed when he said it, because he knew that he was speaking an English that I didn't speak, but that I would understand, of course. He was almost parodying it, even though he appreciated the loveliness of it. It stuck in my mind [...] somehow I thought of that line. .. It struck me that it was a long line, and that it could be out of the poet Christopher Smart[...] He's an eighteenth-century mystical poet, a great poet, and his greatest poem was written in a madhouse. We only have a fragment of it. It's a sort of call-and-response poem [-- -]very incantatory. I said, "That's the rhythm I'm going to try and use." It's the only time I've ever tried to utilize that rhythm. (Atlantic)

Levine's poem emerges from "practical consciousness," from his lived experience as a laborer in Detroit, and also from his lived experience as a scholar; out of those experiences and his own specific consciousness comes a poem that simultaneously incorporates influences from both a nineteenth century white poet and quintessentially African rhythms of call and response. Official consciousness would consider these influences as culturally disparate; practical consciousness regards them as quintessentially "American" by virtue of those very disparities.

The 1950s: With His Pistol in His Hand

Cultural simultaneity informs even more clearly continuities that flow between the mid nineteenth century and the 1950s when we juxtapose the work of Ridge with that of Americo Paredes in Paredes' 1958 text *With His Pistol in His Hand*. There are similarities in the works and in how the two authors' work has seen a wide range of categorization. There are parallels in the intervals between their work and the acknowledgment of their place within U.S. literary culture; there are interesting parallels in the manner in which their works are foundational in the Chicana/o movement of the seventies, and how they continue to enable contemporary critics to mine their creative streams finding ever-new deposits of value.

In Shelley Streeby's important cultural study of sensational literature, *American Sensations: Class, Empire, and the Production of Popular Culture*, she reviews the numerous versions of the Murieta story, analyzing particularly *The California Police Gazette* version. *The Police Gazette* was a weekly publication that in Streeby's words was emblematic of

[...]a good deal of popular U.S. sensational literature... [that labored]... to redefine and restrict a white national identity by identifying a community of people of Mexican origin and other Spanish-speakers with a "foreign" criminality. Postwar sensational crime literature, especially, continues the work of wartime representations by racializing this community as essentially alien... to racialize Mexicans by identifying them both as essentially foreign and as similar to so-called savage Indians. In this way, people of Mexican origin are represented as natural criminals, as part of what one contemporaneous

writer called “the semi-barbarous hordes of Spanish America, whose whole history is that of revolution and disorder. (256)”

Streeby argues that the *corrido* is partly a discursive response to such constructions, one which recuperates Mexican subjectivity not only as heroic but as non-alien, “native” to the former Mexican territories: “Spanish-language *corridos* produced in the first half of the twentieth century...challenge this ideal as well as the attribution of a natural, racialized criminality to people of Mexican origin... *corridos* attack the legitimacy of the new forms of power and law that *The Police Gazette* ends up defending” (255). Luis Leal’s introduction to the Ireneo Paz version of the Murieta tale, *The Life and Adventures of the Celebrated Bandit Joaquín Murrieta: His Exploits in the State of California* is perhaps the most informative text to date relative to discussion of the various forms the Murieta saga has taken, and their international dissemination. His section on the *corrido* and Murieta is a combination of scholarly research and the anecdotal evidence so endemic to the study of folkloric forms. Leal states: “As the greatest popular hero of the Chicano in California, Joaquín Murrieta could not go unnoticed in the *corrido*. Given the reputation he has always enjoyed, however, the dearth of versions of the *corrido de Joaquín Murrieta* is surprising as is the absence of a single study of this *corrido*. By contrast, Gregorio Cortez, the popular Texan hero has been immortalized by Américo Paredes in his well-known book, *With His Pistol in His Hand*. (1xxvii)”

Just as Leal is surprised by the scarcity of study on the Murieta corrido, so I am at the apparent absence of mention in critical work on the intersections between the two mytho-historical figures of Murieta and Cortez; there is a definite lack in the folklore literature of the similarities between Murieta and Cortez in terms of the mythological constructions around them. Cortez and Murieta and their respective *corridos* are often mentioned in the same breath in regard to myth, outlawry and in studies of the corrido, but I have seen virtually no mention of the curious fact that the two stories share several points of commonality in the events and details of the stories themselves, and even more in the legendary constructions that arose around the two figures. More is known about the actual history of Cortez, while much about Murieta remains undocumented and some historians and scholars even refer to Murieta as a gold rush invention. For my purposes, I have considered Murieta as an actual historical person.<sup>14</sup> Both Murieta and Cortez immigrate to the U.S., crossing the border in search of economic relief. In both stories, the unjust treatment of their brothers, resulting in

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<sup>14</sup> For an authoritative history of Murieta and the Murieta family see: Susan Johnson's *Roaring Camp: the Social history of the California Gold Rush*. Johnson attributes much of her research to the "exhaustive" work of Frank F. Latta, in his *Joaquín Murieta and his Horse Gangs* (Santa Cruz, Calif.: Bear State Books, 1980) which she acknowledges as "exasperatingly lacking the scholarly apparatus of footnotes and bibliography" (n346).



death in Murieta's brother's case and critical injury in Cortez', serves as partial impetus to their eventual outlaw status; both men become folk heroes while being pursued by the law in their states; the physical descriptions of each vary widely and both are almost supernaturally peripatetic.

These continuities may seem to be given, since both are immortalized in folklore and in such constructions as the *corridos*, the processes which render such cultural forms are found to be conventional, variant, and formulaic and so would have been applied to both figures. However, there arises somewhat of a mystery here, as Ridge's novel was published in 1854, at least 15 years before the date that *corrido* experts designate for the earliest known border *corrido*, *El Corrido de Kiansis*, first known to be sung in 1867. Furthermore, Paredes distinguishes the border outlaw *corrido* in its specific formation as emerging out of the Texas border conflict and separate from the *corridos* that were forming in greater Mexico and being sung on the border: "Many of the Greater Mexican outlaw *corridos* were sung on the Border, and some of their commonplaces were borrowed for the heroic Border *corrido*. What was not borrowed was the concept of the *corrido* hero. The Border *corridos* make a very definite distinction between the hero of border conflict and the mere outlaw. Border robbers are not Robin Hoods. Neither do they repent on the

scaffold in moralizing verses. They are quite frankly rogues — realistic, selfish, and usually unrepentant. (143)”

Ridge’s *Joaquín Murieta* conforms in somewhat startling ways to Paredes’ formation of the Border hero of the *corrido*. There has been controversy since Paredes’ landmark study over the origin of the *corrido*, especially in regard to its origins. Paredes and other scholars agree, however, on a set of conventions that are specific to the Border Hero *corridos* of the 1870s. Interestingly, these conventions are clearly used throughout Ridge’s 1854 novel.

#### Formulaic Conventions in the Border Hero *Corrido*

Almost fifty years ago, there arose a scholarly discourse between Americo Paredes and Merle E. Simmons as to the origin of the *corrido*. Simmons argued that the form had emerged directly from the Spanish *Romance*, while Paredes argued that rather than representing a “moribund *romance* tradition” the *corrido* embodied a living tradition. Almost 50 years later, scholar Guillermo E. Hernandez took up the almost-forgotten argument, and in doing so, finds evidence for both sides of the debate. Hernandez isolates several conventions that are of interest here. The first of these is known as the “Yo Soy” or “I Am” formula:

Epic ballads invariably portray a protagonist representing ideal qualities...self-assertion in the midst of tension portrays a model of behavior most admired by the audience. In claiming: *I Am (Yo Soy)*, characters affirm an undisputed place within

their social contexts. The formula *I Am* appears in the northern ballad of the legendary hero of the 1880s, Herencio Bernal, whose exploits precede the 1901 events surrounding the border *corrido* of Gregorio Cortez. Paredes has suggested that this formula in Bernal's ballad may have been influential to the Mexican-Texas *corrido* of Gregorio Cortez. The formula, however, is traditional in the *romance* and appears in epic, lyric as well as religious Spanish ballads. (Hernandez 68)

The "Yo Soy" formula is found throughout Ridge's text, and is one of the most remarked upon of his utterances, immortalized, for one, in the iconic Chicano Poem "Yo Soy Joaquín" (I am Joaquín) by Rodolfo "Corky" Gonzales. In Ridge's novel, Joaquín is given to venturing out into the various towns where he is billeted between his criminal excursions, taking delight in hearing gossip amongst the townspeople about his own exploits. During one such foray, Joaquín,

sauntered out into the streets" and winds up in a bar, sitting at a monte table where, "Looking up, he observed three or four Americans engaged in conversation in relation to his Identical self...one of them remarked that he 'would just like, once in his life to come across Joaquín and that he would kill him as quick as he would a snake.' The daring bandit, upon Hearing this speech, jumped up on the monte table in view of the whole house, and, drawing His six-shooter, shouted out 'I am Joaquín! If there is any shooting to do, I am in!' (31)"

This incident actually incorporates the second convention, known as "With His Pistol in the Hand" (*Con la Pistola en la Mano*) (Hernandez 68)." As Hernandez states:

For Paredes, such defiance is a most distinctive portrait of the border hero, and the figure of Cortez, with the pistol in the hand, serves as a model to what will be the evolution of border heroic figures. This image, however, is present throughout the

*romancero* as a formula that may involve the brandishing of either a sword or a lance. (68)

There are numerous other scenes in the Ridge text in which Joaquín utters “I am Joaquín,” (five in all in which the phrase is uttered verbatim) and in which he brandishes pistols and sometimes knives.

The third convention set out by Hernandez, is the “Honey colored, or Sorrel horse (caballo melado)” formula, and while somewhat less specific in Ridge’s text, its use would seem to apply there as well, as Hernandez tells us, “Paredes has also pointed out that a horse rider on a honey colored (melado) or sorrel (alazán) Horse is the distinctive mount of the heroic protagonist of the border. This formula also appears in Spanish *Romances* since early times. The protagonist may simply *ride on his Horse*, or else *on a mare*. There may also be an indication to the specific color of the horse. The adjective may describe the kind of horse: *rocino* (work horse), *ligero* or *corridor* (fast) or by its name. (70)” Joaquín uses many horses during the course of the Ridge text, and often the horses are described by color and or type and conform to the formulaic convention as per Hernandez: “The presence of the hero on his horse may be linked to other formulas, such as the armor of the rider...several formulas may be grouped together. In addition to riding on a horse, the protagonist is holding a *lanza* (lance)” (70). Ridge’s text is full with scenes that combine the formula of the horse and the brandishing of both guns and knives. In the following

scene, all three of the above conventions are combined: Joaquín rides up to a party of miners who invite him to dismount and join them to eat, but he “politely decline(s).” As he sits on his horse, comfortably conversing with the men, one of their company returns from gathering water from a spring and exclaims, “ Boys, that fellow is Joaquín; d – n it, shoot him!” (85) He shouts. Joaquín dashes away on his horse, with the company of miners pursuing, finding himself in a precarious area on the side of a huge mountain:

It was a fearful gauntlet for any man to run. Not only was there the danger of falling a hundred feet from the rocks, but he must run in a parallel line with his enemies, and in pistol range, for a hundred yards. In fair view of him stood the whole company, with their revolvers drawn. He dashed along that fearful trail as if mounted upon a spirit steed, shouting as he passed, ‘I Am Joaquín! Kill me if you can!’ Shot after shot came clanging around his head...he had no time to use his own pistol, and knowing that his only chance lay in the swiftness of his sure-footed animal, he drew his keenly polished bowie knife in proud defiance of the danger and waved it in scorn as he rode on. (87)

The fourth formula that Hernandez isolates is “On the Verge of Tears (como queriendo llorar).” Paredes claims that this formula first appears in “Gregorio Cortez” later to be borrowed by other twentieth century *corridos*. In Paredes’ view, the convention is applied in portrayal of the traitor, or the cowardly enemy. However, Hernandez informs us, “As with other motifs...the image of a man or woman crying or on the verge of crying appears throughout Spanish language

balladry” (71). While Paredes defines the formula of crying by specifying the phrase “como queriendo” as conveying a sense of ridicule, apparently the formula as found in earlier Spanish balladry is used in a wider sense, and ascribed to both protagonists and peripheral characters. Hernandez writes, “Such portrayals customarily highlight extreme pain, affliction, sadness or defeat” (71). Joaquín sheds a tear when he meets his friend, Joe Lake, who will ultimately betray him: “‘Joe’ said he, as he brushed a tear from his eye...” and cries when he tells Rosita about the death of her brother, Reyes Feliz: “He shook his head for a moment, and the tears gushed from his eyes – aye, robber that he was – as he exclaimed with quivering lips: ‘Rosita you will never see your brother again...’” (51-53). Rosita also weeps; her grief “pour(s) itself forth in burning drops which fall like molten lead upon her lover’s heart” (53). At a frequently quoted plot point, the character of Margarita weeps, “so long and well over the husband that she...like...Jezebel...has made a corpse” (81).

That the novel Ridge wrote utilizes the conventions of the Border Hero *corrido* as defined by Paredes and others is not in question, but presents the problem that if the Border Hero *corrido* does not emerge as a specific form of the ballad until approximately 1870, how is it that we find its conventions being used as early as 1853 and by a Cherokee-Scot, who had lived in California for less than 5 years?

One obvious answer is that the Border hero *corrido* indeed emerged in part from classical European romances, and that Ridge was conversant with these epic ballads. This would not be surprising, given Ridge's classical education and the references to classical European heroes such as Rinaldo Rinaldini in his letters and text. In any case, the use of these conventions is further evidence of the foundational nature of Ridge's text in the continuum of U.S. ethnic cultural production. It places him solidly within the context of a legitimately important contributor to the corpus of the counter-hegemonic literary tradition of the Southwest – as opposed to the critical view of him that claims, “The *value* of *Joaquin Murieta* resides primarily in the history it requires for its comprehension. A new category of literary value is required, I think, to account for works *of little intrinsic aesthetic interest* that nevertheless bring into sharp relief historical and ideological issues *crucial to the formation of dominant cultural values*” (Rowe, 99 2<sup>nd</sup> italics added). That Ridge's novel for so long has been critically denigrated in terms of its “literary value” is a clear example of what is lost when critics limit their focus to notions of “minority” productions as valuable mainly for their sociological and marginal implications – as peripheral to the main body of U.S. literary production.

The Residual: the Present Past and Dynamic Hegemony

Raymond William's concept of the residual attaches doubly and in concert with his structure of feeling as we consider the continuities between Ridge's novel and Paredes' *With His Pistol in His Hand*. That is, "The residual, by definition, has been effectively formed in the past, but is still active in the cultural process, often not only as an element of the past, but as an effective element of the present. Thus certain experiences, meanings and values which cannot be expressed or substantially verified in terms of the dominant culture, are nevertheless lived and practiced on the basis of the residue – cultural as well as social – of some previous social and cultural institution or formation. (122)" We see the residual in action as Ridge and Paredes respond in their work to the U.S. social formation of iniquitous treatment of non-white people which Paredes conceptualizes as the "Texas Legend" and Ridge describes as "The prejudice of color, the antipathy of the races... a convenient excuse for unmanly cruelty and oppression" (10). At the same time, the ethnic continuum is also residually active as a U.S. social formation. While the "certain experiences, meanings and values" of which they write cannot "be expressed or substantially verified in terms of the dominant culture" they are "nevertheless lived" (by Murieta and Cortez) and the meanings and values of those experiences are "practiced" by Ridge and Paredes in the act of their writing about them. Therefore, these experiences are expressed in terms



of the dominant culture much earlier than has been noted before, and thus begin to become verified in many different ways over time, i.e., the outflow of productions both ethnic and mainstream that is founded on the Murieta story over more than a century. Ridge's *Joaquín Murieta* is but one example of the locus of the ethnic continuum within the U.S. literary body, not merely or mainly a response nor marginal to, not recently emergent, but organic to the formation of U.S. literature. In what follows, we shall see how certain of Ridge's influences work in the progressive altering of hegemonic space as evident in the films *One-Eyed Jacks* and *Lone Star*.

#### Stages of Verification

In order to make sense of the transition here to the analyses of the films which I argue illustrate intermediate and later manifestations of the transformative ethnic tropes, it is necessary to recall the discussion at the conclusion of chapter one of *The Unsung Stream* of Williams' concept of the interaction of the dominant, residual and emergent. For as Williams states, "It is primarily to emergent formations (though often in the form of modification or disturbance in older forms) that the structure of feeling, *as a solution*, arises" (134). According to Williams, "What matters, finally, in understanding emergent culture, as distinct from both the dominant and the residual, is that it is never only a matter of immediate practice; indeed, it depends

crucially on finding new forms or *adaptations of forms*” (126 emphasis added). The “emergent formation” at issue here is the ethnic continuum – the body of literature by non-white ethnics from the earliest ethnic productions – from oratory works to novels. However, I intervene here a bit in Williams’ concept by viewing the emergent to mean *visibly* emergent, that is, while the culture at hand has existed and operated since the beginning of the nation, it is only recently emergent (or verified) in the dominant culture. This emergence occurs incrementally, through representations of structure of feeling in countless cultural forms across the decades since the nineteenth century at least.

Adaptation of form has frequently been critically read as a one-way proposition with the ethnic producers adapting to the dominant in acts of resistance or cultural appropriation, as in the early critical concept of “using the master’s tools.” However, in the interplay between the ethnic and the mainstream in the twentieth century some hegemonic cultural producers, i.e., directors and actors, have adapted the ethnic convention of the virtuous Other/corrupt white. This adaptation has been crucial in the consequent process of “verification” in the dominant. The reader should note my use of verification “*in*” the dominant,” as opposed to verification “*by*” the dominant. For at the current point in social progress, ethnic production does not require verification by the dominant, which resonates with the paternalistic,

benevolent sense inherent in such terms as “tolerance” and as when critics write that particular productions are “sympathetic” to ethnic sensibilities in film productions. Verification in the dominant has occurred not by benign dispensation of the dominant, nor has the ethnic trope of racist injustice been co-opted by hegemony – it has occurred through ethnic counter and alternative hegemonic forces, and by the socially progressive movements stimulated by and as a result of those forces. As José Limón so aptly states: “We can detect openings and breaks within Anglo-American popular culture that suggest that “the Anglo” is no longer a unitary and all-encompassing category of domination – if indeed it ever was” (103).

I am indebted in this work to Limón inasmuch as very early in my process his *American Encounters: Greater Mexico, the United States and the Erotics of Culture* was one of very few texts I encountered that intervened in the critical status quo of the dominant U.S. academy and its relationship to its “marginal” sectors. His work encouraged my long-held conviction that re-spatialization with regard to the perennial marginality of ethnic work was crucial to disrupt what I viewed as a static moment in the continuing movement toward ethnic equality and empowerment. As Limón writes, “My general line of interpretation departs significantly, I think, from the general tendency within cultural studies to continue to posit a binary and unproblematic

model of “domination and resistance,” with the United States...clearly the dominant figure” (4). The following struck further at the heart of my critical concerns:

The movement’s nationalism led us to imagine both the dominant society and our culture in monolithic and mythic terms, a worldview from which many have still not recovered. Its militancy, while often necessary, was sometimes keyed on a scale of oppression symbolized by the plight of farmworkers but belied, for example, by the steady expansion of the Mexican-American working, lower middle and middle classes...none of this is to belittle the Chicano movement, or to say that the struggle for social justice is at an end for Mexicans in the United States, but *this continuing struggle must now be waged with an understanding of the complicated intersection of gender, sexuality and class, as well as of the endless fluidity of the dominant society.* (133 italics added)

I have taken on Limón’s suggestion above by focusing on the fluidity of the dominant and of ethnic subjectivity in this study; his work inspired me to apply the concept of structure of feeling by viewing it as a more cyclical and diffuse formation. Limón focuses his application of structure of feeling as “occur[ing] for Mexican Americans in the period 1945 through the mid-1960s, a 1950s structure of feeling, a cultural formation to which *High Noon*, *Giant*, and *El Paso* made their contributions both within the community and within the dominant cultural consciousness” (129). The 1961 film *One-Eyed Jacks* is another such example, one that I argue continues, transforms and builds upon certain aspects of Ridge’s innovations. The film exemplifies how the ethnic tropes established by Ridge and others are used and

progressively transformed in a mainstream “Anglo” production, showing the liminality of the ethnic stream at the point of the late 50s in relation to the process of verification in the dominant.

*One-Eyed Jacks*

As the film opens, bank robbers Dad Longworth (Karl Malden) and Rio (Marlon Brando) are trapped in the Sonora desert, pursued by Mexican rurales with only one horse between the two outlaws. They devise a plan that Dad is to ride to obtain fresh horses, while Rio holds off the rurales. Instead, Dad absconds with their loot for the northern border, leaving Rio to the fates. After his capture, Rio suffers five years of imprisonment in a Sonora prison. He escapes with his compadre Chico Modesto, and they embark on a search for Dad. Rio learns that Dad is now married and the sheriff of Monterey, California. When Rio and Dad reunite, Dad receives Rio with ostensible joy, lying profusely to absolve himself from the betrayal in the desert. Rio pretends to accept the story; he meets Dad’s wife Maria (Katy Jurado) and stepdaughter, Luisa (Pina Pellicer) who does not mask her interest in Rio at dinner with Dad’s family. During a town celebration the same night, Rio and Luisa leave the fiesta, winding up alone together at the beach. When morning breaks, Rio reveals that he is a professional bandit. Upset at the lies he has told her Luisa leaves him on the beach. Back in town, Rio intervenes in a domestic scuffle to protect a

woman's honor in a saloon, and ends up shooting the woman's abuser. Longworth arrives; he is friendly in manner toward Rio, but once outside the saloon Rio is surrounded by Dad's armed deputies. Dad publicly whips Rio, and then smashes Rio's gun hand with the butt of a shotgun. Rio and Modesto repair to a fishing village down the coast where Rio convalesces. Rio decides to leave Monterey and take Luisa away, vowing to forego his revenge on Dad. Because Dad still believes Rio will exact his revenge, he jails Rio, intending to hang him for the killing. Rio breaks out and kills Dad in the street. Luisa and Rio meet on the beach, where they make a plan to reunite in five or six months in the north.

*One-Eyed Jacks* continues and builds upon certain of Ridge's tropes and conventions that Ridge's work itself had transformed and complicated when he drew on classical European and traditional U.S. forms in writing *Joaquín Murieta*. The juxtaposition here of *Joaquín Murieta* and *One-Eyed Jacks* reveals *One-Eyed Jacks* as an early mainstream film manifestation of a central dynamic of structure of feeling – a recognition of ethnic social experience as problematized in works by Ridge and other nineteenth century ethnic writers already mentioned. As explained previously, a central aspect of structure of feeling is that it is “Social experience that is still in process... not yet recognized as social but taken to be private, idiosyncratic...” (Williams

132). Williams argues that the hegemonic dominant marginalizes the ethnic stream in part through deeming it private and idiosyncratic as has been done by critics in the case of Ridge and his novel. The nineteenth century ethnic structure of feeling we have been discussing is becoming recognizable in 1961, in Brando's film, for one. The ethnic social experience of injustice and oppression that Ridge presents in *Joaquín Murieta* is now reaching verification in the dominant by virtue of its presentation in a Hollywood production by a global star. That this is Brando's project moves the issue of state-sanctioned oppression resulting from color prejudice from the realm of the private and idiosyncratic into the public consciousness through the mechanism of Brando's direction of the film, the interpretation that drives character and plot development, and through the medium of film itself.

Much as critical regard for Ridge's work has evolved over time, so has critical thought about the 1961 film – Brando's sole directorial effort. From the first reviews in 1961 to retrospectives of Brando's body of work after his death in 2004, critics have described the film as everything from a muddled mess to a masterpiece. The film has achieved international cult status in the last decade or so (IMDB). Retrospective reviews have been much more positive than those contemporary to the film's release. This is partly due to the legendary back-story and the controversy surrounding Brando's nearly obsessive

attention to detail in his overseeing of virtually every aspect of the film. An oft-repeated anecdote has him holding up an entire day of shooting while he waited for just the right wave to break in the background of a scene on the set at the Monterey coast.

Brando's deep involvement with the project has been widely documented: his purchase of the rights to the novel, his firing of several writers including Sam Peckinpah and Rod Serling, and his replacing Stanley Kubrick as the director of the film mentioned in most if not all of the reviews and criticism of *One-Eyed Jacks*. He intervened often in what many considered unimportant details, arguing for progressive if somewhat anachronistic representations of Mexican characters and historically authentic detail in the portrayal of the Mexican character of the town of Monterey (Herrick Library). Charles Neider relates an anecdote that seems to reveal Brando's concerns. In the following exchange, Brando had dispatched his executive producer to a lunch with Neider, the author of the 1956 novel on which the film is based: "The producer said, 'In the book the Kid's girl isn't a virgin. That's bothering Marlon. He wants her to be a virgin... Marlon's all out for Mexicans because they're underdogs. In the book the deputy sheriff is a Mexican. Marlon wants to make him a full sheriff. Can we do that?' (xi)

Brando has been quoted as stating that he had long wanted to film a western and was motivated by a desire to "make a frontal assault



on the temple of clichés” in this project (qtd. in Feinstein). While his interest in the virginity of his female lead might seem to engage in those very clichés, to denote typical western conventions of “pure” women as metaphors for the land as virgin, in fact it foreshadows his use of counter-stereotypes and inversions of convention in directing the film. Brando counters the typical derogatory version of the Mexican man by his construction of Rio, as perceived in the nineteenth century and simultaneously in the California of 1958. The intervening century notwithstanding, the perception of Mexican men as sinister, uncivilized, and criminal was still as virulently pervasive. The character of Modesto is perhaps a singular portrayal in the late 50s of a Mexican male as an honorable, caring, and wise friend. Further, Modesto represents a transformative continuity between *One-Eyed Jacks* and “Joaquin Murieta” when we compare the role of the sidekick in the two texts. For while Three-fingered Jack functions as a dark double for Joaquin, one who performs the id-driven, monstrous deeds that cannot be performed by the honorable Joaquin, Modesto instead influences Rio to find his better self. Brando’s film shares and extends the progressive portrayal of Mexican women that is just as innovative in 1958 (when the filming began) as it was in Ridge’s 1854. Brando’s film intervenes in historically entrenched attitudes about ethnic men and women in its challenge to the relationship between the genders,

establishing deep bonds between them in their unified refusal of long standing socially and sexually subordinate positions.

We first note the continuities between the film and *Joaquín Murieta* in the author's introduction as Charles Neider states, "When I wrote... [The novel]...I felt challenged by the possibility of using western American materials in a mythical way. I had Billy the Kid in mind as the chief model for my protagonist...my title is a play on *The Authentic Life of Billy the Kid*, by Pat Garret, the New Mexico sheriff who killed Billy" (iii). Neider remarks upon the Monterey-Carmel California coastal setting which he states added another dimension to his inspiration: "In addition to Billy the Kid, I now had two models, both badmen who had operated in the eighties (sic) in the last century along that stretch of California coast: Joaquín Murieta and Turbúrcio Vasquez" (iii).<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Neider is perhaps closer to the truth than he realizes in his musings about using Murieta and Billy the kid as models for Jones; in fact, there is evidence that Ridge and Murieta were models for the Pat Garrett/Ash Upson definitive version of Billy the Kid's life. See Steckmesser, Kent L. "Joaquin Murieta and Billy the Kid." *Western Folklore* 21.2 (1962): 77-82

The narrator's authoritative voice in Neider's novel as one who possesses the "true facts" of the death of Hendry Jones, or "The Kid," is reminiscent of the narrator's voice in "Joaquín Murieta." Jones is a notorious bandit about whom, as in Murieta story, there is much speculative dissent concerning both his life and death. As the narrator informs us, "Nowadays, I understand, the tourists come for miles to see Hendry Jones' grave out on the Punta Del Diablo, and to debate whether his bones are there or not; and some of them claim his trigger finger is not there, and others his skull; and some insist the spot is no grave, that it's just a little mound of abalone shells" (1). A tourist approaches the narrator: "Now look, Mr. Baker," he said, 'I saw a trigger finger in a bottle of alcohol back in Phoenix and there was a label on it and it said it was the Kid's finger. What do you say to that?' (1). Historically, there has been the same public ambivalence regarding Murieta's ultimate fate, and the same morbid attendance to the artifacts of his "death."

The most significant change Brando made to Neider's story was in the character "the Kid," whose name is changed to Rio in the film. It's a significant change. For one, it implies the Mexican ethnicity of Brando's character in binary opposition to the "American" characters in the plot. Rio's lack of a surname also signifies his lack of

legitimacy in the hegemonic system, and as we shall see, bonds him in a subversion of the system with the women in the film.

Neider states, “Essentially the film sentimentalizes the novel...a sadistic whipping scene is an important episode in the film. It doesn’t exist in the book” (xiii). The scene that Neider refers to occurs after Longworth has lured Rio outside the saloon where Rio has just shot and killed an abusive man. The whipping recalls the lashing that Joaquín takes when the “Americans” accuse him of stealing a horse that was in fact lent to him by his brother. Although in the book we are told that Joaquín is “publicly disgraced with the lash,” the medium of film itself allows a more viscerally public experience for its audience than for the reader of “Joaquín Murieta.”

Films in 1961 were viewed exclusively in public, while reading is a uniquely private experience. Thus, we can see the whipping scene as a transformation of the act from private to the public square. That the whipping of Rio is public is emphasized by the *mise en scène* Brando uses. Lon, Longworth’s deputy, ties Rio by his wrists to a horse stand, Rio’s arms extended to each side. Longworth stands behind Rio off to the side; the crowd, which has gathered in the town plaza, has a direct sight line to Brando’s now kneeling figure. Longworth delivers 7 slow but brutal lashes to Rio’s back. When Longworth is finished whipping Rio, he viciously smashes Rio’s bound hand with the butt of a rifle,

eliciting an audible gasp from the townspeople. The whipping in the film, as in Ridge's novel, is not carried out as a legitimate consequence of the so-called criminality of Joaquín or Rio. In the film, it is understood to be done for the sheriff's personal reasons, not the least being his wish to disguise his own corrupt nature. We see no evidence that "Dad" Longworth is corrupt in the public administration of his office, but we know that he has deeply betrayed Rio, a much more egregious indication of his basic corruption. The name "Dad," Freudian implications aside, can be seen to represent the corrupt California/U.S. patriarchal system, under whose hand Rio, representing the California ethnic population, is suffering deep injury in terms of human dignity and physical well-being. The hand that Longworth crushes is Rio's "gun-hand," a detail that figures meaningfully as a metaphor for the disempowerment of Mexican Californians by the brutal system of "justice."

Brando's interest in adapting the novel in the first place may have been due to his identification with oppressed ethnic groups that would become clear to the public later in the 60s and 70s with his activism in civil rights. Probably his most controversial act was his famous rejection of the best actor Academy Award by sending an American Indian woman to read a statement condemning the treatment of that group at the 1971 ceremony. Brando may have found *The*

*Authentic Death of Hendry Jones* an apt vehicle for his social concerns in that the struggle between Longworth and Jones in the novel plays out in the context of the rise of the Anglo in California after the U.S. takeover; a social environment of anti-ethnic sentiment is a subtext in the novel. We see clearly that Dad's transformation from outlaw to sheriff is based on his perception of where his bread is better buttered; he throws in with those who claim and exert the dominant power, while the Kid is "a folk hero to greasers and Indians" (Neider 164).

The trope of the barbarous white sheriff/honorable ethnic Other so common in 2012 is still a novelty in 1961, as we see in critic Henry Hart's 1961 review: "First, a bank robber is the hero. Second, the villain is the sheriff, the personification of law and order. Third, the Mexicans in this story are noble and the Americans are stinkers... *all* the moral values which make human society possible are flouted" (233). Hart's umbrage has obvious implications; he would be much more comfortable if, at least, the Mexicans in the story had retained their historical role in popular culture as "stinkers"; he seems alarmingly oblivious to the fact that his statement equates the portrayal of Mexicans as noble with the decline of a moral human society. Nevertheless, the "nobility" of the Mexican characters is what partly marks the film as an example of the 19<sup>th</sup> century structure of feeling moving toward solution.

In regard to the complexity of Rio, his ethnicity is rendered through subtle but persuasive markers. As critics Petch and Jolly observe: Rio may be Mexican himself, his origins are unknown...but he is certainly Mexican identified, as is evident in his dress...although Hendry Jones, in Neider's novel is definitely of Anglo-Celtic origin, he is also Mexican identified: 'he looked like a greaser sitting there, with his black tight trousers, black high-heeled boots, black sombrero tilted over his face, and the brown blanket covering his shoulders like a serape.' (59, 63) While the "Mexican identified" Jones in Neider's novel adopts the outward markers of Mexicanness, in his case his dress as described above verges on the parodic. This is not so with Rio. He is an example of a fluid subject in terms of his ethnicity. He dresses in the style of an ordinary, working, Mexican cowboy: silver studded charro pants, a short wasted chaqueta, and at various times a black leather cowboy hat, or a small sombrero. He is also seen in a poncho in several scenes. His attire throughout though, is not at all obtrusive, for instance, the sombrero he wears is not at all the caricatured version we see in many westerns, and which is described above by Neider in regard to the Kid's attire. Rio speaks unaccented Spanish in some conversations with Modesto, his steadfast friend, as well as with others. Critic Chon Noriega states that un-translated Spanish in mainstream film shows that such dialogue "...is not supposed to function as a speech act that

signifies within or has an impact on the narrative but exists instead as an empty code for ethnicity. There is no need for subtitles because nothing is being said” (96). I argue for the contrary supposition that Rio’s fluid use of Spanish is not only an identity marker, but represents the language as natural to the character without the subtitles.

Rio’s nobility is complexly constructed, as is Joaquín’s in Ridge’s novel. Notwithstanding his choice of vocation, we are meant to understand Rio as deeply concerned with justice and fairness. In the opening scene of the movie for example, Rio sits on a bank counter eating a banana. The camera shifts to a set of scales beside him. He tosses the banana peel onto one scale, and onto the other a glove, watching as the scales level; a rather inelegant foreshadowing of the theme of justice and of Rio as its primary arbiter. The concern for uprightness, however, does not extend to Rio’s romantic relations with women early in the story. After the bank robbery, we see Rio “courting” a Mexican woman of obvious high station in her well-appointed home. He gives her a ring that he has taken from a woman in the bank, telling her that it belonged to his sainted dead mother. He uses the same lie as he gives Luisa a necklace which he has obtained moments before from a flower vendor at the town fiesta. Even so, this failing is complicated by Rio’s consistently honorable and protective attitude toward women in the film who are being exploited, abused, or



simply treated rudely by men. Not incidentally, in each such scene, the women are Mexican and the abusive men are “American.”

A major connection between Ridge’s novel and Brando’s film in the interest of structure of feeling toward solution is the progressive representation of both Mexican men and women. As examined in chapter two, Joaquín and his band are counter-stereotypes of the contemporary nineteenth century view of Mexican men as ignorant savages. Ridge inverts that conventional view by describing the men individually as complex characters, some of whom are well-read and all of whom possess qualities not associated with Mexicans in general and bandidos in particular in the California of 1854. Even the frighteningly despicable Three-Fingered Jack possesses an “unflinching bravery” (Ridge 16) and an abiding loyalty to Joaquín, qualities foreign to Mexican men in the common sense knowledge of the era. Brando’s portrayal of Rio is likewise a counter to racist images of Mexican men pervasive in the U.S. in 1958 when “One Eyed Jacks” is being filmed. One specific image he challenges is the view of Mexican men as woman-beating animals, who treat women as sexual and domestic slaves.

Rio is fiercely protective of the Mexican women in the film. In an early scene he stops a white man from sexually pestering an old acquaintance of Rio’s, a brief but notable portrayal of a strong woman,

who owns the saloon where Rio has stopped. In a notably complex challenge to stereotype, there are several issues at work even in the minor character of the woman whom Rio is protecting when he shoots the Anglo who is abusing her. We have seen this particular couple in previous scenes from the fiesta. The man, called Howard, is shown staggering drunk around the celebration. The woman, unnamed, dressed in an off the shoulder, form fitting, red dress in the flamenco style is dancing on a small stage, amidst a crowd of cheering, rowdy men. At first glance, she appears as the embodiment of the conventional stereotype of the Harlot, as codified by Charles Ramirez-Berg.<sup>16</sup> Her movements are sexually suggestive, and as she accepts bills from the men watching the dance, she tucks them between her breasts as the men cheer more loudly. The drunken Howard joins her onstage and paws at her as she dances. The next morning as Rio and Modesto are breakfasting at the saloon, we see a still-drunk Howard and the dancing woman at the bar. She is obviously tired, and resists Howard's rough attempts to force her to drink more whiskey, pleading with him, "Please, the night is over!" Howard becomes more aggressive, finally

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<sup>16</sup> Berg, Charles Ramirez. *Latino Images in Film: Stereotypes, Subversion, Resistance*. Austin, TX: University of Texas, 2002. Print.

taking her by the hair and forcing her face into a bowl of chili. It is at this point that Rio attacks Howard, who draws on Rio before Rio shoots him dead, an event which will shortly place Rio under the authority of Dad (*One-Eyed Jacks*). A close reading of this scene suggests that the woman, dressed as she is in pre-U.S. Spanish-Mexican attire and being paid to dance for the sexual enjoyment of men, represents the historical treatment of Mexican women by white men from the time white “Americans” begin to appear in Mexican California. We see then that rather than a representation of the Harlot, the scene is a metaphor for the historical exploitation and objectification of Mexican women in California; the lack of a name for the female character implies her metaphorical status as an everywoman.

Brando’s counter of the Harlot in the character of the Mexican dancing woman is extended fully in the complex character constructions of Maria and Luisa. When Luisa admits to having slept with Rio and later to being pregnant with his baby, we learn that Maria had also borne Luisa out of wedlock. In a notably progressive inversion of convention, while the women have abrogated the patriarchal requirement of virginity until marriage and even more subversively Maria has borne an “illegitimate” child, and Luisa plans to do so, neither woman is portrayed as the Harlot or as sexually promiscuous. Instead, they function as the moral center of the film. Rio’s lack of a

surname serves in part to bond him with the women as unified figures who are subverting the normative mores of a system whose values are in fact corrupt.

Unfortunately, by 1958, the passage of 110 years had not done much in the way of changing dominant portrayals of ethnic Mexican females. Luis Reyes states, “The image of the Hispanic woman has been usually relegated to the overweight *mamacita*, the spitfire or señorita, and the suffering mother or gang member’s girlfriend (qtd. in Subervi-Veléz 10). Katy Jurado plays Maria against Jurado’s own stereotypical niche, as is noted by Clara Rodriguez: “...in American films (Jurado) almost always played a sultry Mexican beauty, Indian Squaw, or suffering mother” (119). Jurado’s Maria is a wife and mother in *One-Eyed Jacks*, but she is neither an “overweight *mamacita*” nor “long-suffering” – indeed, we soon see that the lie that Longworth has been living is not his past as a bandit, for his ostensible conversion is common knowledge. It is the revelation of his deep betrayal of a lifelong friend that allows Maria to see Dad’s true nature. By the time she questions Dad about the truth of Rio’s accusation of betrayal, Maria has already aligned herself with Luisa and Rio. As Petch and Jolly observe:

From the time Rio appeared in her house, Maria acquired a new perspective on her husband, a window on his fear and weakness...defense of her daughter’s needs drives Maria to defy her husband; she has no personal commitment to Rio, but

speaks on his behalf, she explains, ‘because I don’t want my daughter to suffer as I did.’ The patriarchal society in which they live demands that female sexuality be contained and stamped with the name of the father” (57).

The warm and loving bond Maria shares with her daughter comprises some of the strongest scenes in the film. When Luisa returns home surreptitiously after spending the night with Rio on the beach, Lon, Dad’s deputy (played by the appropriately slovenly and salacious Slim Pickens) is waiting for her, and when she recoils at his sexual innuendos, he tells Dad that she has been out all night with Rio. Dad is outraged, and together he and Maria confront Luisa. Maria speaks to Luisa in Spanish, thereby effectively excluding Dad from the family unit. In a later scene, Luisa admits to her mother that she is pregnant by Rio, and again, the two women converse in un-translated Spanish. Here, the use of Spanish underlines the solidarity between a mother and daughter who must contend not only with the patriarchal system in general, but the racial contempt that lurks just beneath the surface of Dad’s ostensible love of them. That contempt shows itself when Maria confronts Dad about the story of his betrayal of Rio: “Is that the thanks I get for taking you out of the bean fields?” He shouts. “I gave your daughter my name – mine – when she had none of her own!” (*One-Eyed jacks*).

Maria lies to Dad to protect her daughter, at the risk of her material and social security as the wife of a respected man in the

community, and in doing so frees herself from the oppressive control of the corrupt system in which she has been participating through her marriage to Longworth. Luisa confronts Rio about his lies to her since he arrived in town, and dissuades him from his obsessive quest for revenge. Rio is contrite about his misrepresentations of himself, telling Luisa “I shamed you” after their night on the beach. In keeping with her insightful and mature character, Luisa responds, “You shamed yourself.” It is because of Luisa’s steadfast adherence to what is right that Rio abandons his plan to murder Dad.

The consistent abuse of Mexican women and other ethnic characters by white men in the film and Rio’s response structure what Petch and Jolly find to be a central opposition in the film:

[...]the characters arrange themselves into two distinct sets, according to their allegiance to or affinity with either Longworth or Rio. One set consists of Longworth, his deputy Lon, and two of the bandits, Bob Amory and Harvey Johnson. The other consists of Rio, his partner Modesto, and the two women, Luisa and Maria. Some of these alliances have been constant throughout the film (Lon and Longworth, Rio and Modesto). But there are also radical reconfigurations: the robbers' gang is split, as is Longworth's family. The new alignments cut across the law/outlaw distinction, but they show a clear ethnic patterning: we might call them "the Americans" and "the Mexicans." These groupings are the key to understanding the social values and political vision of *One-Eyed Jacks*. (50)

Rio’s “set” is representative of the social and legal position of Mexicans in California, not only in the 1880s in which the film is set, but also in Ridge’s California of 1854 and in the California of 1958.

Petch and Jolly cite Robert Cover's concept of law as a system of dual meaning – “world-creating potential (vision)” Vs “world-maintaining power” (reality) that partly structures the film. Cover finds that “a society's normative world, or *nomos*, is constituted by a system of tension between reality and vision” (qtd. in Petch and Jolly 50). This view parallels Williams' concept of the tension in structure of feeling between practical and official consciousness, another point of connection between the two texts. Murieta is operating in a society where his lived experience is invalidated by official consciousness, and Rio has a vision of justice which is belied not only by Dad's betrayal of him, but also by the veneer of respectability accorded Dad by his badge and his family.

### *Lone Star*

Badge and family also figure heavily in the 1996 film *Lone Star* directed by John Sayles. *Lone Star* represents a phase in which the ethnic structure of feeling will reach resolution in certain aspects, if not solution. As Williams states, “Structures of feeling can be described as social experience in *solution*” (134). As I have argued, *One-Eyed Jacks* contains liminal verification of ethnic practical experience in 1958-1961, the period of its filming and release. The progressive continuities I have discussed represent a verification of the ethnic social reality and therefore contain a structure of feeling moving toward solution that will

reach the limits of its possibility in *Lone Star* insofar as is contemporarily culturally possible in 1996.

Sam Deeds and Pilár Cruz had been childhood sweethearts, broken up by their parents ostensibly because Sam's father did not want him to date a Mexican. They are reacquainted when Sam, as the sheriff of the tiny Texas border town of Frontera, is charged to investigate a skeleton that has been found partially buried in a field near town. Sam's tenure as sheriff is nearing its end and it is obvious that the next sheriff will be his deputy, Ray, a Mexican American. Sam appears ambivalent toward his job, perhaps feeling that he did not obtain his office on his own merit, but due to nepotism to a certain extent, his father, Buddy Deeds, having held the office for decades and whose memory is beloved in Frontera. The skeleton in the desert is found to be that of Charlie Wade, sheriff prior to Buddy, and who in the 1950s administered Frontera with a paternalistic and violently racist oppression. Sam investigates with the uneasy feeling that he will find his father to have been the murderer of Charlie Wade. The real killer however, is found to have been Hollis, now the mayor of Frontera. By the end of the movie, Sam and Pilár find that they are in fact, half-siblings being that Buddy and Mercedes, Pilár's mother, had had a long-standing affair resulting in Pilár's birth, and this was the principal reason for Buddy's vehement censure of Sam's relationship with Pilár.



Sam decides not to officially expose Hollis as the murderer of Charlie Wade, and he and Pilár decide to remain together as a couple, agreeing that “Blood only means what you let it” (*Lone Star*).

*The Unsung Stream*, composed of the ethnic and “white” creative currents together, logically takes into account cultural producers who have transcended in their work the hard boundaries between “white” and ethnic or “minority” in terms of U.S. American subjectivity. Fluid subjectivity cannot be limited to non-white ethnics, especially when we take into consideration complexities of white ethnic and/or Anglo historical material-cultural realities and issues of class relative to subject construction and interpellation in the hierarchy of hegemonic processes. These are productions which have been referred to as “sympathetic.” However rather than allowing that these authors are in some way practicing magnanimity in realistic representation of ethnic ethos, I posit that such representations are organic to their own fluid subjectivities. In an interview with the film journal “Cineaste,” for example, John Sayles is asked how he “would explain [his] continuing interest in Latinos and Hispanic-American cultures. His response captures succinctly that which I have been laboring to express in this study:

My feeling, basically, is that I've made a lot of movies about American culture and, as far as I'm concerned, it is not revisionism to include Mexican-American culture or African-American Culture or any of the many other different groups. If

you're talking about the history of the United States, you're always talking about those things, from the get-go. As Sam Deeds says, "They were here first." And then the other guy reminds him, "Yeah, but the Native Americans were there before." So I don't see those as specialties. As far as I'm concerned, they're just part of the picture, just part of the composition. Where I'm coming from, in fact, is pretty much the opposite of [the] idea of this monoculture which is being invaded. English-speaking culture is just one of many cultures. It has become the dominant culture or subculture in certain areas, but it's a subculture just like all the others. American culture is not monolingual or monoracial. It's always been a mix. As one character says, "We got this whole damn menudo down here. (Sayles)

In Lone Star's brief, but metaphorically dense opening scene, two Anglo men are scavenging in the brush, one with a metal detector, the other with a field guide he is using to identify the flora of the area. The two men stumble upon some half-buried artifacts: a full human skeleton, a rusted tin star, and a Mason's ring. Within an archaic formation of law and order, as evident in the culturally imperial manner in which Wade administers the environs of Frontera and Buddy Deeds' many acts of what amounts to patronage, are residual functions imbued with racism in the geo-specific region in the film. In the space of the film, Sam and Pilár's reaction to performance of the residual functions as practiced by Wade and Buddy will result in a transformative, practical oppositionality from within. For instance, we will see as the narrative unfolds that the skeleton, ring, and star are the remains of Wade, thus explaining the importance of the Mason's ring being associated with the sheriff's badge in the opening scene. Freemasonry

has long been associated with codified systems of law and order, and archaic systems of moral proscriptions for centuries dating back to the twelfth century (freemason). The past is literally embedded in the present in the form of the artifacts recovered by the men in the scene. The skull, the Masonic ring, and the sheriff's star interact in pointing to the complex layering of these formations in the historical and contemporary reality of the Texas/Mexican border.

The skull in particular speaks to the present voice of the past, its mouth gaping open, ready to speak to the present, to belie the “conversion of experience into...[a finished product]...” (Williams 128). The past will devour the present unless Sam, together with Pilár, can integrate the past with the present – not to “restore order” but to make sense of it, to untangle and reconfigure it within the context of contemporary and ongoing social formation. The found skull can also be juxtaposed meaningfully with Murieta's decapitated head. Murieta's head has been seen in critical work as a metaphor for the end of Mexican power in California; the finding of Charlie Wade's skull represents the unearthing of a tool for truth which will ultimately bode a restorative transfer of power to the Chicana/o-Mexican American population of Frontera.

The geographical area where the remains of Wade are found is an interstice between past and present, a former rifle range on a section

of a now-closed military base. Here again we may see an archaic formation, the military, that had occupied the region which will now be industrialized; in the film the abandoned base is being considered for redevelopment into either a mall or a prison. The framing objects have been discovered on a transformative site, another indicator of time as transitory and of the merging of past and present.

The fact that the two men are studying the ecosystem of the area is significant when we consider the biodiversity there in terms of the effects of deep time and evolution, of evolution and extinction, for the remains of Charlie Wade are indeed a foreshadowing of a way of life that is imminently extinct. We see this pointedly in the character of Sam's ex-wife, Bunny, whose chaotic and medicated existence is centered on the frivolous decadence of Texas football culture. When we consider Bunny in opposition to Pilár, as Sam's past and present loves, we see that Pilár is representative of the transition to the re-vision of the area, as illustrated by a scene where Pilár, a high school history teacher, is confronted by Anglo parents, one of whom is indignant that Pilár is determined to teach the true story of the Alamo.

In *Joaquín Murieta*, the law is represented as largely vigilante in nature, with various crimes being punished by a "California Trial," a term coined by Ridge to describe the trial as a formality before the hanging took place as planned in the first place. Harry Love's less than

honorable behavior is gestured to in Ridge's plotting, where he has Love and company virtually stumbling upon Joaquín and his band and shooting them not because they had identified them as Joaquín and company, but only because they are Mexicans and therefore suspicious (Rifkin 33). In *One-Eyed Jacks* we have a sheriff who is an ostensibly reformed outlaw, but who the audience knows is corrupt at heart, having built his new life on dirty money, the loot from a bank robbery he steals when leaving Rio to the hands of the Mexican law. In a progressive continuity that in addition to proceeding from *Joaquín Murieta* to *One-Eyed Jacks* takes place within the space of the film in *Lone Star*, the characterization of the lawman evolves; Charlie Wade is corrupt and brutal. Buddy Deeds is much more benevolent, so much more so that years later the townspeople honor his memory with a large bronze statue, and some of the Chicana/o-Mexican American citizens recall his benevolence as kindness rather than patronage. However, he operates in a way that is at base corrupt, such as using county inmates to work on his property, and being instrumental in an episode of eminent domain which displaced Chicana/o residents in order to build a lake for the moneyed class of the town. His long-standing affair with Mercedes is indicative of his nature, as is the fact that he sets her up in business with questionable funding. While Sam is the most honorable in this progression of sheriffs, he too can be considered tainted, in that

to a certain extent he has obtained the office of sheriff as a result of nepotism rather than through a righteous democratic process. Even so, the structure of feeling meets resolution in the character of Sam Deeds, who will leave the office of Sheriff which the audience knows will be filled by the Mexican American deputy, Ray. The emergent, or the practical consciousness of the ethnic social experience has become in Frontera a structure of feeling in solution, with the impending shift of political and cultural power to its Mexican community. As Ray states, “we’re in charge now” (*Lone Star*).

### Conclusion

*The unsung stream* begins by challenging conventional critical views of ethnic of color subjectivity in U.S. genre literature, challenging understandings of ethnic subjectivity which have become normative through social/cultural/historical processes over the last hundred plus years. John Rollin Ridge and his novel, *Joaquín Murieta* have proven to be invaluable examples of how these dynamics interact to produce a subject who is largely determined by critical work whose veracity depends on theories, such as assimilation, that are accepted for decades by literary critics, even though those theories have been challenged with much success in other disciplines. Once the basic interpellation of the Ridges had been accepted by the literary critics as assimilationist, elite, and in at least one case, as racist, there appears to

have not been much, if any, deep research into the events that they have based these conclusions upon. In chapter two, we see how scholars can become entrenched by accepting rigid theories of subjectivity and miss extremely important and telling aspects of works of literature. Chapter three shows us how the dynamics of Williams' structure of feeling can be applied in its insistence on not adhering to rigid concepts of social progress by viewing history in blocs of finished time, and how Gramsci's notion of a fluid hegemony allows us to view the interaction of fluid subjects who at times operate within the "mainstream."

The example of *One Eyed Jacks* and *Lone Star*, both mainstream films, shows us that the partial solution to the problem of ethnic social experience as practical consciousness operating under the power of official consciousness, the social change as a result of the dynamics of structure of feeling, is that the ethnic now has progressed from the outlaw to the lawman, and what's more, the corruption has been purged from the system. The corrupt system has played itself out, with the end of the Deeds' tenure. Of course there is no assurance that Ray, who will become the new Sheriff in Frontera, will not prove to be corrupt in some way, however, he is portrayed in the film as an upstanding, earnest man, who is conscious of town politics but not participatory in the complicated history through which his town has evolved; his character is imbued with a certain naiveté which signifies

innocence, purity. We see this in a scene where Sam tells Ray that he is “Going over to the other side,” using the local vernacular where the other side means “across the border.” Ray responds, “The Republicans?” (*Lone Star*).

*Joaquín Murieta* and *Lone Star* are thus viewed here as representing linked cultural spaces in the processes of structures of feeling, mediated in the interregnum by the continuities we see linking *Joaquín Murieta* and *One-Eyed Jacks*. I argue for all three cultural texts as distinct points on the ethnic continuum which inverts dominant conventions and uses them to reorder multiple social spaces, including those of received knowledge, historical memory, power and oppression, and the transformation of ethnic groups in the social/political hierarchy.



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