POLICING THE WORLD: AMERICAN MYTHOLOGIES AND HOLLYWOOD'S ROGUE COP CHARACTER

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ABSTRACT

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This dissertation deploys the frontier myth as "performed" by cowboy-like presidents and their Hollywood brethren: rogue cops still battling the Savage Other on behalf of a nation now policing a borderless global frontier. A rogue, here, is defined as an "outsider" and "reluctant" hero acting at his discretion and breaking the law only to enforce a higher moral order.

The central argument engages three interrelated ideas. First, the frontier myth masks and advances American hegemony—its offense disguised as defense or to advance (Western) civilization; second, as an archetype, the rogue embodies the myth’s justifications and violent methods; third, that "he" is comprised of normative identity factors—being white (or light), heterosexually male, and supposedly classless.

The archetype is born with "Dirty Harry" following the 1960s social ruptures and the city’s perception as an untamed wilderness. Through tracking like enforcers before and after Harry (""G" Men," "The Searchers," "Lethal Weapon," "Die Hard," "Dark Blue"), a pattern of evidence emerges that attests to the myth’s persistent renewal. Also becoming clear is how the archetype, as hegemonic, continually defends his dominion by appropriating features of the Other’s challenge. However, when the Other portrays a cop, his/her "difference" must be effaced in order to perform police "blue," as revealed in analyses of "Blue Steel" and cops of color, including Denzel Washington in "Training Day," which merely reiterates black criminality.
Also tracked are American "globocops," increasingly crossing the border, as in "XXX," to vanquish America’s (and the world’s) enemies. Vin Diesel’s character also confirms the fluidity inherent to the archetype, being able to absorb "color" across the U.S. border. In times of acute crisis, though, as in 9/11, the white knight returns to the mean streets, including the 2004 version of "Traffic," which stands in stark contrast to previous productions. Finally, an end game for America’s last man standing is discussed—if his mythical cover wears thin and renders him ideologically bankrupt. A working model is also outlined as a template against future roles and to assess Hollywood influence in cops in other societies’ cinemas.
To my father, Sylvester Anthony Lingeman, Jr., the cop I most admire (and love).
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INTRODUCTION: TAMING THE FRONTIER
AND PERFORMING THE NATION

The Master Narrative of the US has not (cannot be) changed. It has been broadened. It has been broadcast. This narrative is only superficially concerned with ‘taming the wilderness’ and ‘crossing new frontiers’ … The Master Narrative of the US proclaims that there were no ‘Indians’ in the country, simply wilderness. Then, that the ‘Indians’ were savages in need of the US. Then, that the ‘Indians’ all died, unfortunately.

Artist and essayist Jimmie Durham

A hundred years after its invention, cinema has established itself as one of the most powerful and effective means of communication with which to … express ourselves. We continue to refer to Hollywood as ‘Tinseltown’ as if somehow it didn’t matter … that films and television are a business just like any other. They are not. Films and television shape attitudes, create conventions of style and behaviour, and in doing so reinforce or undermine the wider values of society… Cinema has become part of our sense of identity, as individuals and as nations.

Lord Puttnam, British movie producer

[Cinema] is the very highest medium for the dissemination of public intelligence … since it speaks a universal language, it lends itself importantly to the presentation of America’s plans and America’s purposes.

President Woodrow Wilson

When President Ronald Reagan wanted to thwart Congress’ resistance to his plan to drastically cut taxes in the 1980s, he invoked a shorthand he knew most Americans could relate to: he quoted “Dirty” Harry Callahan’s famous taunt to “make my day” and invite his nemesis to a showdown. Rather than rely on Constitutional measures to referee executive-level disputes with America’s two other branches of government, Reagan preferred a cultural weapon that leveraged public pressure on Congress to submit to his will; he effectively equated his tough stance with that of the popular cinematic enforcer intent on street justice. Reagan’s invocation not only testifies to the off-screen clout of such a character, but also lends the character wider resonance and political credibility. In this manner, the character is performative. As Judith Butler notes of gender, but which remains true of any performance of identity, it is both the cause and the effect—the performance having the “reiterative power … to produce the phenomena that it [also] regulates and constrains.”

1 Judith Butler, Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex" (New York: Routledge, 1993), 236.
As the above example suggests, a “dance” often occurs between rogue American figures—on and off screen—who mutually support and constitute each other by incorporating key American mythologies into their performances of power. In this way, they also influence those myths and support the hegemonic process that the myths exist to reflect.

Besides the critical tool of performativity, the concept of hegemony is also essential to analyses in this dissertation. In Antonio Gramsci’s view, to retain power an entity must continually identify and mitigate most challenges, renegotiating an equilibrium that maintains its dominion. Rather than a *fait accompli*, though, the processes of hegemony helps to explain how power and domination are derived and actively maintained.²

Louis Althusser further delineates two interrelated realms that operate in tandem (or “dance,” as in the above metaphor) to effect and maintain hegemony. The Repressive State Apparatus (RSA), consisting of the state’s coercive measures, that cooperate and/or collude with the Ideological State Apparatus (ISA), in which ideology is encoded in cultural products and practices that often depicting the more fluid and user-friendly concept of the *nation*. However, since the ISA avoids advertising its agenda (and inviting scrutiny), it is the more nuanced and potent tool of domination, argues Althusser. Hollywood films, so often assumed to be “just entertainment,” fall into this rubric. Or as Dorothy was warned in *The Wizard of Oz*: pay no attention to that man behind the curtain.

Althusser also posits that one way in which we can understand the process of being “interpellated” into the dominant order as a willing (or unsuspecting) subject is how we respond when a cop hails us, as he represents the state at the individual level. Considering the function of a cop when made into a cinematic character, he performs double duty, becoming the bridge

between the twin aspects of the hegemonic process. As a cop, he is able to serve as the symbol of
the state’s explicit authority. At the same time, as a cultural construct—able to embody myths
and ideological significations—he represents an individuated portrait of the “imagined
community,” that is, the nation. The police uniform in Althusser’s lesson is what signals his
allegiance to the state, which for Americans remains a faceless and intrusive government that
runs counter to their much cherished concept of individual agency. At the movies, though, the
rogue cop archetype rarely wears a uniform, which thereby cloaks his service to the state and
makes him the more acceptable American “everyman.”

Keeping these two constructs in mind, this dissertation’s central argument involves three
interrelated suppositions. The first is that the frontier myth masks and advances American
hegemony. Second, that the rogue cop character, as an archetype, embodies the ideology and
methodology of the frontier myth. Third, that the archetype is comprised of identity factors,
which are themselves a reflection of a normative subject in America, as well as helping to
constitute the nation’s hegemony.

The frontier myth and American hegemony

As the opening example offered, American presidents and popular culture characters
have been embodying the frontier myth, as well as mimicking the codes and behaviors of the
frontier’s celebrated, lone heroes. Other presidents before and since Reagan have also used the
frontier mythos to advertise their suitability to lead the nation. Andrew Jackson, America’s first
non-aristocratic and populist president, used his battles with Indians to earn his status as a
frontier hero. In his wake, the frontier increasingly became the proving ground for waging battles
against non-whites as a successful formula for nation-building. These violent showdowns—first
with America’s native peoples, then with a steady stream of Others threatening the nation’s
racialized identity—created a vainglorious self-portrait of an armed white “everyman” who alone advances the nation, and by pregnant assumption, Western civilization. This nationalistic project eventually overpowered all other creation myths that could explain America’s “exceptionalism.”

(Such a story, however, also discounts the crucial contributions of black slaves and non- or contingently-white immigrants who did the lion’s share of the backbreaking labor necessary to transform the fabled New Eden into an industrial giant. Having such a violent white character as the nation’s poster boy—rather than the farmer, the immigrant laborer, or the slave—also meant continually reinventing the battlefield on which he proves his worth.) Hence, the “frontier” became ever elastic, more mythic than real, and always out there or “over there.” Such a mindset also enabled (and still does) nearly all confrontations to be framed as defensive, but which also justifies almost any aggressive behavior masquerading as necessary to preserve the nation. In addition to acting out of self-defense, America frequently dispatches its cowboy warriors to frontiers—at home and abroad—under the guise of advancing civilization, which also constitutes another way of disguising aggression. This pattern is being replicated by President George W. Bush, whose recurring mantra is claiming national security interests as the basis for a preemptive war in Iraq and an all-encompassing “war” against the tactic of “terror” itself.

But seeing itself and the rest of the world through such a distorted (and duplicitous) lens has left America besot with fear, with devastating consequences for Americans along with the world’s other peoples. As Ziauddun Sardar and Merryl Wyn Davies argue, “The American Dream makes America a stranger to much of its own self and history, just as it renders it

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3 The term “myth” here is understood not as contrary to reality, but capable of revealing, or as Joseph Campbell once defined myths: “public dreams.”
incredible of distinguishing reality from phantasms in the wider world.” Secretary of State Condeleeza Rice in recent years described America’s response to the attacks of September 11, 2001, as a matter of “circling the wagons.” This expression, familiar to most Americans, or to anyone who has ever watched a Hollywood Western, envisions frightened white settlers fighting for their lives from within a confined space configured only by placing their wagons in a defensive circle, and with savages attacking (presumably unprovoked) from the wide open spaces of the ever-expanding and perennially lawless frontier.

As the world’s policeman, America has often created the very order it claims to be invested only in enforcing or defending. Part of its frontier mentality requires that American warriors and “enforcers” be framed as freedom fighters and liberators, while opponents are described as “evil” and/or “uncivilized.” As the nation has expanded, so have the consequences of that operating philosophy. As Sardar and Davies also point out, since Americans and their defenders are inculcated in the myths and end-justifies-means approach, they often fail to grasp “how intimidating this accumulation of power appears to other people” around the world. Moreover, it is “not anti-American to suggest that this hubris is a danger to American lives as much as the lives of people everywhere.” In fact, although not the mainstream view, many Americans (average and influential) are critical of their nation’s track record, or consider the term “rogue” an apt description of America’s frequent overreach (especially in light of Webster’s description of a rogue as “not controllable or answerable”).

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6 Sardar and Davies, 250.

7 Ibid., 252-3.
Clyde Prescowitz, author of *Rogue Nation: American Unilateralism and the Failure of Good Intentions*, although still defending America as the world’s leader, charges that the nation has progressively demonstrated enough rogue tendencies to put that leadership role in peril. He cites a 2003 *Washington Post* article about world opinion that found Bush, as the nation’s current and principal representative, “a greater threat to world peace” than former Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein—and that was before the war in Iraq became the quagmire it is at present. Prescowitz also finds evidence that the nation continues to undermine its image as the global “good guy” by engaging in “irritating” behaviors, which have their roots in “our mythology and the dominance of our culture,” as well as in America’s “peculiar … brand of ‘soft imperialism.’”

He urges a closer inspection of America’s overarching mythology and its role in blinding America to the consequences of its own aggressive history.

In light of the above discussion regarding the frontier and its role in American ambitions, several key research queries emerge, which specifically address the *first* component of this dissertation’s central argument. They include:

- How does the frontier myth help frame specific acts of American aggression as defensive—or *offense* disguised as *defense*?
- How has deploying the frontier myth also benefited the related myth of America as the vanguard of Western civilization—as aggressive a stance as the above “defensive” posture, but advertised as being for the benefit of humankind as a whole?
- How do American mythologies help to justify almost all means of aggression in “the national interest” in order to attain the nation’s goals, so long as they are noble or aspire to a higher order? (*Ends justify means.*)

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Tracking performances of the frontier myth

The frontier myth is also at the heart of the rogue cop archetype, who similarly camouflages the true nature of American aggression by appearing as a benign fiction that is only about *mere* entertainment. A closer look reveals how the archetype may also represent a blending of the Althusserian categories (RSA and ISA). As such, the archetype is doubly performative: the *literal* performance on-screen and the *figurative* personification of American “policing,” or the nation’s *offense* disguised as *defense*.

A rogue, by definition, breaks the rules to achieve a goal, defying not only the rule of law but also the systemic checks designed to hold other individuals accountable for their transgressions. Despite literally being one of the system’s enforcers, the rogue archetype in this dissertation, like the nation he personifies, is usually convinced that his actions are on behalf of a “higher” moral order that benefits that same community whose existing rules he is violating.

The end of the 19th century set the stage for this “dance” of American rogues—fictional and real—and their personification of the frontier myth. At this historical juncture, several trajectories crossed paths: the continental frontier was thought to have vanished; movies were invented (soon reframing and embellishing the frontier along with its heroes and villains); and another ambitious president, Theodore Roosevelt, used frontier mythology not only to reinvent himself (to supplant his privileged pedigree), but as ideological cover for the nation’s goals, which even his predecessor, George Washington, once characterized as those of a “rising empire.” A fact that adds further relevance to this confluence of events is Roosevelt’s prior service as the commissioner of the New York City police, which through cinema will become the most mythologized police force in screen history.

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While the Hollywood Western is largely celebratory of the nation’s myths, and the crime film offers a “darker” perspective, both narratives show the conflicts that accompany the pursuit of an American dream. Most of these films also attempt to differentiate crimefighter from criminal, which is not always a straightforward task in an American context, where the thin blue line separating law from lawlessness is often blurred. In the end, though, most mainstream Hollywood movies—even those that wallow in uncomfortable conflicts and exaggerated violence—usually showcase a satisfying resolution. As Sardar and Davies note, after having depicted the American condition as one in which the “wolf has always been at the door,” Hollywood endings often provide some relief, enabling the characters to “ride off into the sunset or snuggle into a warm embrace that reassures us they will live happily ever after” (and by extension, so, too, will the nation). These writers argue that such a contrived sense of closure is the only way to soothe an America “propelled by fear and anxiety” and subjected to “the inherited condition of a fragile existence,” which is forever locked in a cycle of uneasy preservation.\footnote{Sardar and Davies, 21.} Ironically, such feelings of vulnerability deepened after America emerged as a global superpower following World War II. Westerns, then crime films, reflected a more anxious nation: one that, despite its dominion, and perhaps because of it, increasingly deployed a “rogue” to police America’s empire. Although the underdog had now become the overlord, given an operating myth of persistent peril, the hero—no matter how formidable—was (and remains) barely able to defend what Frederick Jackson Turner called “the meeting point between savagery and civilization.”\footnote{Frederick Jackson Turner, \textit{The Significance of the Frontier in American History}, ed. Harold P. Simonson (New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing, 1973), 28.}
Although most of history’s storytelling has dealt with the resolution of conflicts, American tales—particularly those underwriting mainstream Hollywood films—appear to resolve this conflict by reiterating clear definitions of good and evil, but only after having showcased the terrifying moment when these forces battle over the same soul. It is what makes the rogue hero’s job so “dirty” and which leaves him (and the nation) battered by enduring such a recurring struggle. In the end, however, if only by a hair, the rogue embodies goodness, or at least demonstrates good intentions, no matter how reprehensible his means proved to be. It is a well-worn American story within both Hollywood and political narratives: the same tense moment when America’s soldiers, warriors, cops, and other armed enforcers prosecute the nation’s mission on Western main streets, urban mean streets, or in uncivilized locales around the world. In such scenarios, justice is swift, severe (if not savage), and, in theory, satisfying.

The rogue archetype in this dissertation is born with Dirty Harry, following the sociocultural and political ruptures of the 1960s. At the time, there was a dramatic shift in Hollywood storytelling from romanticized portraits that celebrated the nation’s becoming to those that grapple with acute challenges to what it had become. Harry also tapped into the nation’s frontier myth to justify his violent and extra-legal—or rogue—methods for handling contemporary savages now roaming the untamed urban wilderness of the modern city. However, rather than an ephemeral character belonging only to the era that gave him life, Harry had ancestors deep in America’s cultural imagination and political past, as well as offspring that continue to engage contemporary conflicts related to the ever elastic conception of the nation’s frontier. While 18th century writers once envisioned the frontier’s yeoman farmer as the New Adam for America as the New World’s Eden, a frontier-bred hero (from whom the rogue descends) arguably has become the most ubiquitous personification of the nation. Moreover, just
as his predecessors came in a variety of guises but embodied a similar mythology, Harry’s cinematic kin also include various types of enforcement characters and national defenders, as long as they perform the same functions for the nation as Harry (and his ancestors) did.

From this discussion, several key research queries emerge, which address the second component of this dissertation’s central argument. They include:

- How does the cop character’s actions specifically exemplify the nation’s struggle to aim high—to pursue what Roosevelt called American “ideals”—but which often means deploying violence usually justified as appropriate in the pursuit of “noble” ends?

- Since the character acts as an individuated or “lone” conscience, behaving only at his discretion, what specific parallels emerge that can provide evidence of his personification of the nation and its professed values?

- Given the duplicity and inherent contradictions of myths underwriting the character, does deploying such a conflicted “rogue” hero also risk exposing paradoxes in America’s mythologies as well?

**Face of the nation: the rogue cop character in close-up**

In Althusser’s example of the cop hailing us, once the blue uniform is removed (as occurs in most rogue cop roles), what is exposed is the human face, which upon closer inspection, is configured by specific factors of identity that individually and collectively constitute who in American society is normative and deemed appropriate as the nation’s surrogate. Broadly defined, the essential factors of his identity include: gender/sexuality—the idealization of a ritualized performance of masculinity and heterosexuality, one particularly defined by toughness and violent expressions; race/ethnicity—a visibly demonstrative “whiteness” (or relative racial lightness); and class—a denial, ambiguity, or hostility toward class. Although many of these
categories represent discrete units of analysis, they frequently perform as interrelated phenomena in American society (and cinema), and, thus, will be clustered as co-constitutive factors where appropriate in this study.

In terms of masculinity and normative sexuality, where the desire to compromise, seek agreement, or play by the rules is usually interpreted as feminine behavior, the character’s penchant for acting alone or without consensus helps define his version of masculinity. In addition, his masculinity requires the affirmation of heterosexuality along with the rejection of homosexuality. Not only must the cop character police his own body (guarding against “deviant” behaviors), but also patrol the borders of the prevailing sex-gender system, which includes crimes of bodily harm to others but also transgressions that harm the body politic.

With respect to race and ethnicity, the former is as biologically slippery and socially charged as distinctions related to sex and gender. It similarly continues to function as reality, or at least what Émile Durkheim would call a “social fact.” Considering one of the chief functions of the rogue cop is to police the urban wilderness, the milieu itself is often racialized, frequently represented as an uncivilized environment with people of color serving as the new savages threatening white America.

The character is also defined by his lack of class-consciousness, purposely constructing his mission as possessing little or no material reward, but which is in contrast to the reality of police work as paid (and working class) labor. Historically, and remaining true today, the ranks of police are largely filled by those who regard employment with police departments as a way to ascend to the middle class. Yet, the onscreen rogue cop is rarely shown being interested in a fair wage or other union struggles of real police, as if the sacrifice of material concerns is necessary to complete his “mission.” The rogue character’s denial of class also may reflect America’s myth
about the non-existence of a class hierarchy and the associative privileges and inequalities, which, in effect, helps ensure it remains unchallenged. Moreover, as a cop, he is effectively commissioned to work against his own class interests, existing as the system’s enforcer who defends a social hierarchy that exploits his labor. His representation, then, of a classless individual with agency and autonomy, while appearing progressive, actually helps perpetuate the mythology that makes him both the system’s subject as well as its agent. The framing of his struggle as an intensely personal ordeal also helps to perpetuate the myths that help blind Americans to the consequences of unaccountable rogues who supposedly act on their behalf.

Despite these identifiable and interdependent traits, the familiar white male cop at the center of many Hollywood movies too often evades being seen as a hegemonic configuration of gender/sexuality, race/ethnicity, and class. Instead, seemingly “unmarked,” he embodies the innocuous American everyman, the average Joe, but, in essence, is purposefully constructed not to reflect the average José or Josephine. His identity factors, once exposed, can reveal just who is empowered in American society and how those in power exercise their authority. One of the principal aims of this dissertation, then, is to make visible what seems invisibly woven into his identity, and whose power in part stems from the ability of his construction to go unnoticed, or to hide in plain site.

In addition, the appropriateness as a hero of the white male rogue is dependent on being manufactured in opposition to the Other’s “deviance.” In this manner, the Other’s gender/sexuality, race/ethnicity, and class associations exist to define his normativity, as well as to perpetuate his/her own marginalization. As a hegemonic figure, though, who is not essentially or naturally superior, his domination is ceaselessly vulnerable to challenges, as Gramsci argues. By tracking and identifying how he mitigates Others’ challenge by appropriating some of their
characteristics (i.e., to display greater sensitivity as a strategy for containing a key feature of the feminist challenge), we may be able to see more clearly how his adaptability aids his survivability as a hegemonic construct.

Such a process may also chart the “progress” made by women, people of color, and “foreigners,” as changes to his characterization often reflect aspects of the Other that have infiltrated or affected what is normative in American society. Shifts in the character’s performance attest to the Other’s ability to force a reaction—however measured and contained—to what is hegemonic. Thus, what changes about him may be evidence of his adaptability, it also testifies to the traits of Others that have been absorbed into the American story. This dissertation, by tracking attempts by Others to embody cop characters along with the nation’s other enforcers/defenders, also may reveal why their performances appear especially awkward and/or illegitimate when they attempt to perform the rogue variant, in particular. The rogue’s “deviance” or arguable criminality is usually framed as temporary and defensive, not an inherent flaw or essential quality. In contrast, these Others’ “deviance” is considered innate and fixed by Nature, helping to explain why their attempts to be “rogue” are interpreted differently—merely compounding other traits that already mark them as unsuitable. In other words, just as the rogue cop character is performative for co-constructing the supremacy of the identity factors he also exists to reflect, these Others similarly perform and reiterate the very traits that help to marginalize them.

From these identity factors, several key research queries emerge, which address the third component of this dissertation’s central argument. They include:

- How do the factors of identity work together to create a hierarchy of privilege as well as to delineate a hegemonic subject?
• How does the process work in which the rogue archetype appropriates features of the Other as a strategy for containing their challenge while facilitating his own renewal?

• What details can be discerned about the process of hegemony (and the rogue’s personification of it) as he polices the nation’s “borders”?

**What is at stake here?**

Given the global reach of Hollywood films and the character’s metaphorical deployment for nation, the rogue cop personifies the professed beneficence and export of American ideology, which confers legitimacy on policies that routinely defy international law and public consensus, and that claim a moral authority to which only he (and the America he represents) has access. America’s myth-based destiny of defending and advancing itself while policing the world has been mapped onto the character, who not only represents enduring ideological threads that run through American history, but also attest to the flexibility required of such an identity to enable him to adapt in order to subdue challenges to his dominion (as well as to the nation’s).

However, just as real events concerning the nation’s ascendancy and its 19th century West are routinely at odds with American myths—often performing as the reality—real police in American society are quite different from their screen counterparts.\(^{12}\) Not only do they wear uniforms, but rather than exaggerated lone figures who live by their own codes, most cops are team players who must work with partners, bosses, and a hefty compendium of legal codes they are expected to enforce (with some but not an open-ended degree of discretion). Having a character and cultural icon stand in such stark contrast to this reality has fallout. While the movie cop showcases the dream of individual agency—already problematically shown to be only the domain of the rogue—myths buttressing the system are what are celebrated, helping to mask

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their failure to provide similar access and opportunity to the wider collective. Moreover, since systemic ills are more likely resolved through the collective effort being effaced by the focus on individualism, they too remain intact; this is especially the case if these “ills” involve inequities or social arrangements that support those already in power. As a result, the myths about police as individuals, like those pertaining to the nation at large, provide cover for those benefiting most from their propagation. As Sardar and Davies pointed out above, if the dark side of the nation’s mythology is a perpetual state of fear demanding rogue solutions, moviegoers are further nudged to think real cops are failures when compared to the efficiency of movie cops. This impression may only serve to worsen their anxiety, not to mention putting real cops, already under duress, at risk of being further disconnected from the populace they are sworn to protect. In such an antagonistic scenario, both the public most vulnerable to police power, as well as cops at the bottom of the state’s enforcement hierarchy, pay the price; meanwhile, the myths that protect the most powerful endure and circulate.

Although few moviegoers swallow whole the idea that Dirty Harry or other rogue cops are like the cop down the street, there is evidence that the discrepancy between movie cops and real cops has social consequences. As one law journal reports, the rash of popular TV shows of late showcasing crime investigations involving the collection of forensic evidence is perhaps changing public perceptions about what it takes to solve a case.13 Whereas TV agents focus on single cases, solving them swiftly and definitely within a one-hour program, by comparison, real criminal cases look chaotic, yield a lower rate of success, and cost more to accomplish. Such raised expectations of a higher performance level may lead to exacerbated feelings about real

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police falling short; this may also lead to investments in crime-fighting measures that feed off popular misconceptions rather than actual tested outcomes.

NYPD Detective Edward Conlon describes another consequence stemming from discrepancies between the complicated outcome of the real Frank Serpico’s fate and what is presented in the box office hit *Serpico* (1973). Conlon speaks to the impression the film renders that Serpico was set up to be shot for exposing fellow officers implicated in graft. “You can see why someone would make that choice in a movie because it does work better … the last honest man against everybody rotten in the world. But, as a cop … you could take exception to that, especially if I was one of those cops at the scene.”

Conlon identifies a flaw in the Hollywood approach to creating a hero by having to manufacture evil intent in his foes; in this case, to unfairly paint the cops who accompanied Serpico on that fateful night as murderous (the evidence known to Conlon apparently telling a different story). His remarks, though, also reveal his endorsement of key myths that customarily underwrite the American movie hero, who makes sense to Conlon cinematically, but who can only be constructed by darkening the reputations of the cops who do not share Serpico’s good intentions—the very outcome Conlon finds harmful. Like the nation’s operating mythos, Serpico’s goodness has been manufactured in counterpoint to their evil, which leaves little room for the complicated reality Conlon believes would better serve the truth. More importantly, *Serpico* left the lasting impression with American moviegoers that NYPD cops (often serving as surrogates for cops everywhere else in America) were willing to sacrifice an honest cop who only wanted to expose police corruption. Such an impression is one from which the NYPD is still struggling to recover, and which denies its laudable record, by all accounts, to enact serious measures since the 1970s to curb the practice of taking bribes. Such

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discrepancies—when compounded by hundreds of cinematic examples of distorted reality—have only served to widen existing antagonisms between cops and citizens. For a nation already gripped by anxiety over just how thin its blue line of defense against crime and evil is (along with the hysterical pitch for maintaining a defensive readiness), such cinematic myths run the risk of worsening public angst.

At the international level, the effects of such a distorted picture disseminated by Hollywood, itself hegemonic in the global marketplace of cinema, is especially acute in the absence of direct experiences that could counter these media messages. As a recent TV documentary about the impressions Middle Eastern peoples have about America demonstrates, so many of those interviewed not only cited the singular figure of the president but also many rogue cop characters as the most readily available portraits of nation available to them, which can foster troublesome consequences.

Hollywood movies are by no means mirrors held up to American society, nor are they expected to approximate an undisputed reality. However, they often reveal what mainstream America wishes could be framed in such a mirror (as well as helping to shape what becomes reflected). Although Hollywood filmmaking is hardly monolithic or always in tune with mainstream temperament, American moviegoers signal their approval of narratives through their box office dollars and responding favorably to presidents who cite such characters as inspirational, as Reagan did with Dirty Harry. Rather than view Hollywood as a monolithic and hyperactive agent who colludes with those in power to maintain American hegemony, it is more likely that American mythologies (i.e., the frontier’s regeneration through violence, supremacy of whiteness) blind both American filmmakers and their audiences to processes to which they

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lend their implicit support. The enthusiasm for the measurable repetition of key American myths embedded in the character communicates to the world that the rogue—whatever his faults—is a fitting billboard for America’s hopes and fears.¹⁶

It is also vital to clarify what I mean by a “mainstream” Hollywood film, as well as to explain why other films—deemed “niche” or “independent”—have been excluded in this dissertation. It is true that the studio system of classical Hollywood ended by the early 1970s, rendering nearly all film production thereafter, in some manner, “independent” in terms of getting financed and/or produced.¹⁷ To make films in that “new” and more fragmented Hollywood required considerable entrepreneurial effort, especially if the goal was to make offbeat or socially challenging films. It also involved mega investments by financial institutions to create “blockbuster” films that are able to saturate exhibition venues and can cost up to 50 percent of production expenses to market in order to minimize “creative” risk and maximize profitability.¹⁸ For productions small and large, though, Hollywood remains the industry’s epicenter, and as a whole, has furthered the practice of favoring, bankrolling, and marketing films whose aim is to appeal to normative values and themes. It is those films that this study largely targets, as they best incorporate the mindset of the wider American collective, garnering further attention from newsprint and political discourse. They also foster “performative”


characters like Dirty Harry and Rambo who resonate in American discourses off screen, which echo rather than contradict the nation’s enduring mythologies.

This also accounts for why I have included the views of popular and “mainstream” reviewers along with scholarly ones. Their commentary often reveals a film’s “fit” with the historical moment, chastising those films that seem out of step with “mainstream” America or that help to explain why other films have hit a national nerve. In this way and together they paint a more complete portrait of a film’s meaningfulness and role in American society.

**Organization of dissertation**

This dissertation is organized by chapters, with each addressing specific concerns and the research questions noted above. If substantiated through my analyses, together they would constitute a working model as well as a template for studying how cultural forms of hegemony are practiced in other (especially Western) societies.

**Chapter 1** reviews the theories and scholarly literature related to the factors that comprise identity, which specifically and most critically comprise the composition of the rogue cop archetype. Although distinctive, these factors operate in concert, mutually supporting each other’s construction, and contributing to the individual and collective consequences of their complex interaction. I employ a historical/contextual approach to how these concepts are represented, detailing their evolution and deployment in the fields of gender/sexuality, race/ethnicity/whiteness, class, and nation, reflecting scholars’ interventions in the wake of the 1960s social movements, in which prevailing assumptions about identity were challenged.

**Chapter 2** unpacks the key myths underwriting American cultural (and historical) narratives, which buttress the character’s hegemony along with the nation-state he embodies. I review the historical settings and manifestations of the character’s ancestry, including his
transformation from the American Adam of the New Eden to an armed frontier hero, first appearing in Hollywood Westerns and followed by the archetypal Dirty Harry (1971), operating in the crime film’s urban wilderness (and becoming among the most popular vehicle for embodying American conflicts following the 1960s). This chapter, through detailed textual analyses of several films, tracks the shifts in the character over time by examining the trajectories of his progeny, including in-depth analyses of the Lethal Weapon (1987) and Die Hard (1988) franchises, among others, charting the character’s reflection of changing social relations and shifting national concerns. The chapter concludes with a case study of Dark Blue (2003), which features a rogue cop whose exaggerated performance of the archetype risks exposing the dangers of its construction and myth-based duplicity.

Chapter 3 tracks, first, female cop characters (including the doubly marginalized female of color), and, second, males of color (and those who are contingently white) whose problematic representations engage both the potential and the limitations of their incarnations of the white male rogue cop archetype. Through a historical review of key films featuring the Other as cop, I also hope to make clear how they are in perpetual conversation with those representations—historical and recurring—that define as “natural” the Other as deviant or criminal. This chapter includes case studies of the androgynous female cop in Blue Steel (1990); the several Latino cop characters portrayed by Jennifer Lopez and Andy Garcia; and Training Day (2001), featuring a black cop who first misleadingly resembles the redemptive rogue, but actually is a reiteration of black criminality.

Chapter 4 tracks the archetype as he crosses the nation’s borders to vanquish America’s perceived enemies in a wider world increasingly viewed as within American jurisdiction. I revisit

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key films that depict America’s ever-escalating interest in global policing, including *Touch of Evil* (1958) and *The Border* (1982). A case study of *XXX* (2002) explores a multiracial “globocop,” who suggests a “safe” space (beyond America’s physical borders) for modification of the archetype’s racial composition, and in doing so, substantiates America’s professed multicultural utopia. Finally, demonstrating the profound shift in the nation’s narratives in the wake of 9/11, the chapter concludes with a comparative portrait of two American productions of *Traffic* (a 2000 feature film, a 2004 TV miniseries) and the British TV miniseries *Traffik* (1989), offering differences in national perspectives along with the effects of historical crises.

The **Conclusion** reiterates the central thesis and delineates the results of my research analyses and aggregate profiles of the key characteristics of my working model. These seek to find evidence of how hegemony is derived and maintained through the rogue’s repeated performances of American mythologies and their role in American hegemony. I also discuss and speculate about the model’s possible application to future research involving cop characters in other societies’ cinemas, which may reflect Hollywood’s influence or contest its depiction of the individual and its corresponding assumptions about gender/sexuality, race/ethnicity, class that collectively constitute the nation.
CHAPTER 1: CONSTRUCTING AND MAPPING HEGEMONIC IDENTITIES

The structure at the bottom of the male psyche is still as firm as it was twenty thousand years ago.

At some future period, not very distant as measured by centuries, the civilized races of man will almost certainly exterminate, and replace the savage races throughout the world.
Charles Darwin

There are three social classes in America: upper middle class, middle class, and lower middle-class.
Judith Martin, “Miss Manners”

To understand a man, you must know his memories. The same is true of a nation.
British Actor Anthony Quayle

This chapter reviews the literature on sex/gender/sexuality, race/ethnicity, and class that together constitute a hegemonic construct and signify the nation in America. Although a few of these categories are accessible to scrutiny, others—once normalized—are difficult to discern and analyze. This chapter’s goal is to make visible how dominant identities are constructed, along with how they are constituted by historical and cultural specificity. By reviewing the literature related to these categories, I hope to illuminate how they shift over time in response to new frames of analysis sparked by social movements begun in the 1960s (i.e., feminist theory). Thus, this chapter will demonstrate not only how normative factors (as hegemonic) adapt, but also how they operate in concert, mutually supporting the other’s construction, and together facilitating the reiteration of a dominant subject. Such a review is also designed to delineate the contours of a template of normativity to be deployed in the chapters that follow and serve as a basis of comparison against which features of the rogue cop can be discerned over time.

I. SEX, GENDER, AND MASCULINITY

A study of “maleness” as dominant begins with what seems most visible: his biological composition or body, onto which, literally, normative human sexuality has been mapped.
Physical criteria, though, is not as self-explanatory, or for some contemporary scholars, as fixed and reliable a criteria as once assumed. The criteria that still endure began with Sigmund Freud, who wedded together physiological and psychological functioning, and outlined sexual differences between males and females, which impacted their development and adjustment to normative standards. Moreover, he advanced the view “that there is only one libido, his text clearly indicating that he conceives of it as masculine in nature. The function of the signifier here touches on its most profound relation,” notes Jacques Lacan, who disputed Freud’s conflation of the physical penis with the symbolic power of the phallus—a concept that is not exclusively male, but which Lacan stressed as distinctive. Yet, the assumed male control or right to the phallus is further buttressed when guns and other weaponry are added to the significations of maleness. This is of particular importance in this dissertation, since one of the key significations of the police is their sanctioned access to and use of weaponry. Guns, missiles, and other weapons have become, in the modern imagination, the most omnipresent and prevalent symbol of the phallus in contemporary society. Thus, the male’s exclusivity to the phallus has become entrenched, given history’s record of men’s participation in war and other forms of militarism (including policing). In relation to the character, then, his maleness serves to justify his identification with the phallus, and the presence of a gun enforces and connects his maleness with hegemonic masculinity.

1 Paul Smith uses the term “vas” to describe male genitalia in general, combining the penis (site of power) with the testicles (site of vulnerability), which disrupts the penis-phallus conflation; see “Vas” in *Feminisms: An Anthology of Literary Theory and Criticism*, eds. Robyn R. Warhol and Diane Price Herndle (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1992), 1011-29. Judith Halberstam also points to the dearth of research on male-to-female transsexual operations, positing that this is an “unconscious unwillingness within the medical establishment to explore the option … [a]fter all, the construction of a functional penis … could alter inestimably the most cherished fictions of gender in the Western world,” in “F2M: the Making of Female Masculinity,” in *Feminist Theory and the Body: A Reader*, eds. Janet Price and Margrit Shildrick (New York: Routledge, 1999), 129.


In terms of sex and sexuality, one of the primary lessons of Michel Foucault’s study of related discourses has been that “there is no simple sense in which ‘sex is sex’,” and that our ideas and beliefs about sexuality have been revolutionized over the last hundred years—indeed they are still changing. “Indeed, if external genitalia were sufficient as a criterion by which to determine or assign sex, then the experimental research into the master gene would hardly be necessary at all,” notes Butler.  

4 “These regulatory schemas are not timeless structures, but historically revisable criteria of intelligibility which produce and vanquish bodies that matter.”

5 In that way, male (white and heterosexual) bodies matter most, particularly with respect to how power is derived and deployed. In other words, an individual’s “sex” is only understood in its normative contours—the materiality of his body unthinkable apart from the manifestation of regulatory norms that define it as male.

6 Rather than dispute the physiological or psychological “truth” of maleness, my task here is to make clear that physical descriptions of maleness are in some ways as contingent as sociocultural factors, which are more readily accepted as variable. Rather, they are both subject to dynamism as well as being critically interrelated: physical criteria help underwrite what is sociocultural, with the latter depending on the supposed fixity of the former. The net result is the material authority of maleness, however insecure, which functions in most narratives (including those relating to the rogue cop character under study) as if it were a stable truth.


5 Judith Butler, Bodies That Matter, 242

6 Butler and other queer theorists’ prescription for challenging the sex-gender bind is to perform all variations of gender, including gay, bisexual, and other “trans” categories of sexual orientation in order to radically disturb the connections and disconnections between gender, body, discourse, and politics. But Butler warns against assuming that gender is only style or simply electable, and to disregard the regulatory restraints and punishments still in play.
The sociocultural criteria of maleness principally centers on the concept of gender. Unlike the physical (albeit debatable) features that more readily mark the male body, what is male in a gendered sense must be socially and culturally contextualized—or be performed—to be noticed. Gender involves concepts of femininity and masculinity, which are normatively linked to women and men, respectively. Gender translates into behaviors, attitudes, language, courtship rituals, divisions of labor, and, more important, matters of power and authority. The features of normative gender definitions, however, vary throughout history and cultures. Moreover, “[t]he task of distinguishing sex from gender becomes all the more difficult once we understand that gendered meanings frame the hypothesis and the reasoning of those biomedical inquiries that seek to establish ‘sex’ for us as it is prior to the cultural meanings that it acquires.”

Part of the problem of distinguishing between “sex” and “gender” is that for most of modern history they have been treated as one and the same (like the penis and the phallus). Once the Western world began privileging scientific method as the optimistic force behind human progress, Freud was joined by other scientists who also advanced theories about sex-gender systems and social norms.

Invisible masculinity: the universal human agent

A further difficulty in making gender’s construction visible (including its representation in cinema) is that what has been masculinized has also been universalized, which makes it difficult to see the “he” in texts and symbols. “He” has been institutionalized and for most of history allowed to embody all of humankind (even how we envision God), making it seem

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7 Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 139. Hence, the criticism of Freud that he did not subject his theories to the criterion of falsifiability that governs scientific inquiry. Because of his own orientation, Freud made the boy his referent, the active agent, and the girl (who was different but not necessarily inferior) match the inferiority and passivity that he observed in the society in which he lived; he found in his hypotheses the effects he observed in the material world and incorporated them into his explanations of “cause” of the biological “sex” differences among men and women.
unnecessary to isolate the slippery properties underpinning “his” construction. As Homi K. Bhabha notes, the “he” is “the masculinist signature writ large—the pronoun of the invisible man; the subject of the surveillant, sexual order; the object of humanity personified. It must be our aim not to deny or disavow masculinity, but to disturb its manifest destiny—to draw attention to it as a prosthetic reality.”

Michael Kimmel retells the story of working with his students on the issue of identity when he was asked what he saw when he looked in the mirror. He told them he saw a “human being,” further concluding, “I’m universally generalizable. As a middle-class white man, I have no class, no race, no gender. I’m the generic person!” Once articulated, he noted, “it was on that day that I became a middle-class white man. Sure, I had been a member of all those groups before, but they had not meant much to me. That was, itself, a form of privilege.” Yet, as Kimmel notes, “We continue to treat our male military, political, scientific, or literary figures as if their gender, their masculinity, had nothing to do with their military exploits, policy decisions, scientific experiments, or writing styles and subjects.” In this way, the masculinity permeating and dominating scholarship, historical accounts, politics, media, literature, science—nearly all institutional products and practices to date—remains largely invisible.

No better evidence exists as to the power and lasting legacy of gender’s invisibility and complexity when researchers who make gender their principal focus also continue to assume a permanency between maleness and masculinity, not to mention between sex and gender. Too often when they scrutinize “maleness,” their application of dynamism is reserved only for social

8 Homi Bhabha, “Are You a Man or a Mouse?” Constructing Masculinity, in eds. Maurice Berger, Brian Wallis, and Simon (New York: Routledge, 1995), 57.


10 Ibid., 3.
and cultural phenomena, as if only these mechanisms were capable of mutability (and volatility with respect to cause and effect). In this way, many researchers fail to account for the fluidity and interaction of all of the concepts involved, or understand that it is maleness plus masculinity that comprises social legitimacy. This tendency to conflate, and the failure to expose what is arbitrarily connected, is what underwrite the authority of normative masculinity. In this manner, masculinized maleness as the authority permeates all levels of a society—from the father figure at the head of a nation-state to the family patriarch; power circulates throughout. As Foucault noted, power is capable of infiltrating the most intimate of spaces.

Before the sociocultural and political ruptures of the 1960s, scholars working in the social sciences first analyzed gender from a social control standpoint, applying standards of deviance to understand the difficulties of maintaining normative standards. Many studies focused specifically on gender-related “roles” as key indicators of normative identities. “By midcentury, functionalist sex-role theory dominated the Western sociological discourse on women” and men. Yet, it was obvious that such approaches, too, “lacked a stable theoretical object.” Rather than analyze the causal factors that established normativity, they looked for the causes of deviance through social pressures and historical ruptures that acted upon boys and men—rather than how socialized and gendered males also acted upon institutions and history. A few studies looked at the ways masculinity had been changed by urbanization and industrialization, with fathers working away from home and leaving mothers primarily in charge of childrearing (such women increasingly demanding rights for themselves in the era’s women’s movement). Many researchers had


13 Ibid., 103
concluded well into the 1960s that it was not the definition of normative masculinity that was the problem, it was the sum of social changes that threatened maleness. It was found that “[h]egemonic masculinity is the true nature of men, and social harmony arises from promoting this idea, not impeding it.”

In the wake of the 1960s women’s movement, other challenges to accepted wisdom included research that foregrounded (white) masculinity as a variable of history and within institutional practices and processes. A foundational essay by Gayle Rubin in 1975 contested Freud as well as Claude Lévi-Strauss, who focused on gender’s variation from society to society, but largely accepted Freud’s “sex” differences as fixed, however complicated by cultural specificity. Freud, according to Rubin, accurately described how social arrangements existed at the turn of the century and how male power circulates within patriarchy, but he assumed the processes were universal. Rubin suggests that men’s innate natures are not necessarily responsible for patriarchy or its forms of oppression; rather, the cause is to be found in the systems that foster gendered differences and their resulting inequities.

Robyn Wiegman suggests that Rubin is among early feminists who worked to unleash masculinity from its assumed normativity.

Once gender itself became a focus of research, many feminist scholars focused on the distinctive experiences of women within society and their negotiation of normative femininity that could contest Freud’s anatomy-is-destiny framework. Early feminism was criticized, though,

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14 Ibid., 106.


16 Ibid.

for its own essentializing tendencies within its declarations and prescriptions for change, as well as its blindness to its white and Western orientations. As Wiegman notes, “some men are, in fact, oppressed by women of the prevailing race and class—assumptions about power as uniformly based on sexual difference (men as oppressor, women as oppressed) have long been under pressure to give way.” I posit that a similar tendency has occurred within masculinity and men’s studies, often ignoring race and class to focus nearly solely on gender as determinative, rather than keep in mind their co-constitutive role in creating a dominant subject. Some masculinity scholars initially investigated “men’s contradictory experiences of power,” to better understand how men individually experience gender norms and participate in patriarchy. This is vital research and helps expand the parameters of the conversation, but often largely examines the effects of patriarchy’s practices, rather than the concept of masculinity behind patriarchy. The notion that masculinity is merely about men endures, as media scholar Steve Craig reductively notes, “Masculinity is what a culture expects of its men.” Through the specific analyses in the chapters that follow, I hope to show that although many of the above foundational assumptions about hegemonic masculinity endure, it is a social construct that both men and women attempt to perform, with varying degrees of success. But as the dominant idealization of

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18 Gyatri Chakravorty Spivak and others charged that what had been labeled feminism did not account for crosscutting and cross-cultural factors (such as race/ethnicity and class) experienced not only by people in Third World or subaltern contexts, but also within the West. See The Spivak Reader: Selected Works of Gyatri Chakravorty Spivak, ed. Donna Landry and Gerald MacLean (New York: Routledge, 1996).

19 Wiegman, 35.


manhood in America, the consequences of its expectations not only help to underwrite the rogue cop character but explain some of the volatility that also results from its constructed nature.\textsuperscript{22}

**Performing Masculinity**

One significant intervention in the study of masculinity has been the application of performativity as a conceptual tool. It is also a fundamental mode of analysis in this dissertation, not only in relation to gender, but also in terms of how race, class, and the nation are similarly perceived. Like Foucault’s unmasking of the performativity of discursive formations, Butler uses the approach to challenge enduring assumptions about gender, noting, “Gender ought not to be construed as a stable identity or locus of agency from which various acts follow; rather, gender is an identity tenuously constituted in time, instituted in an exterior space through a *stylized repetition of acts*” [emphasis hers].\textsuperscript{23} This stylized repetition, or performance, is both the cause and the effect of a gendered identity. Belinda Johnston writes, “These are performative in the sense that the nature or selfhood they claim to assert is produced and sustained through physical gestures and other discursive methods—it is not a manifestation of soul or essence.”\textsuperscript{24}

Thus, as this dissertation attempts to expose, when a male performs hegemonic masculinity onscreen—a literal and figurative performance—he also helps to re-create and advance what is being performed. When women perform what is assumed to be masculine work, including policing, the tropes customarily linking masculinity to maleness become all the more

\textsuperscript{22} Just as some feminists reinvested in forms of essentialism, finding innate and superior qualities in women to celebrate, some male scholars by the 1980s, along with males in other realms of the public sphere, sought to reinvigorate several essentialisms linked to “manhood.” In the popular realm, the rise of a so-called “men’s movement” often seemed regressive—given its dedication to recuperating the “manliness” supposedly eroded by contemporary pressures rather than contribute to the dismantling of the most harmful effects of that same model of masculinity on both men and women. In America, the most prominent and popular text associated with this men’s movement was Robert Bly’s *Iron John: A Book About Men*.

\textsuperscript{23} Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 179

\textsuperscript{24} Belinda Johnston, “Renaissance Body Matters: Judith Butler and the Sex That is One,” *International Journal of Sexuality and Gender Studies*, vol. 6, nos. 1-2 (2001), 81
pronounced, keeping her from being able to convincingly perform the nation, which is similarly rooted in the same masculinist orientation as the normatively male rogue cop character. Queer theorists maintain that such “alternative” performances can serve to challenge hegemonic masculinity by exposing its manufactured character. On the other hand, it can also expose just how awkward a fit the role is for a female, in particular, since she cannot “authentically” perform masculinity because of its firm links, however contrived, to maleness. This clumsy mimesis is further compounded if she is pictured pointing a gun, which can appear as the unnatural possession of the phallus or a disturbing display of feminine aggression.

Other than for those interdisciplinary theorists (born of the 1960s academic ruptures) focusing specifically on the body or the terrain of sex-gender systems, awareness of masculinity’s pervasiveness (however invisible) has been slower to emerge in more traditional disciplines. For example, Gail Bederman warns that too often historians work with a fixed concept of manhood, reduced to a “list of adjectives” such as “self-reliant, strong, resolute, courageous, honest,” and merely track how these traits “change from period to period or class to class.” This gives credence to the idea that history is a series of crises for masculinity, rather than within masculinity as a construction.

Kimmel charges that feminists too often define masculinity “by the drive for power, for domination, for control.” In contrast, he argues that “the historical record has revealed a somewhat different picture”; that manhood has been “less about the drive for domination and more about the fear of others dominating us.” He mines history looking for ruptures

27 Kimmel, Manhood, 6
responsible for triggering crises and erosions of male subjectivities. Yet, this approach itself seems biased and gendered. Kimmel, like many others, sees in recorded history crises in masculinity rather than a crisis within the concept itself—and as a hegemonic construct, must remain in crisis. This “crisis” approach also begs the question: was there a time when masculinity was in sync with itself as the norm? Is there a moment of equilibrium between the crises? No doubt the difficulty in locating such an oasis exposes its functioning (in absentia) as a gendered utopia, where threats to hegemonic masculinity are neutered or at least successfully subdued. While some scholars are newly focused on asking if “it [is] more taxing to dominate than be dominated” (with straight, white men as victims of hegemony masculinity too), Judith A. Allen asks if this could be “merely a stale reassertion of hearing once again from those historically holding the pen?”

In this dissertation I attempt to historicize the concept of masculinity in relation to how its performance is understood by contemporary audiences of particular films that feature male and female enforcers. One intervention is to help debunk the notion that history should not be measured by tracking periodic “crises” for men; but rather, a greater focus should be on the continual tension ensconced in any performance of masculinity, which has its roots in the unstable criteria outlined above. Despite being biologically suspect and culturally malleable, the hegemonic male’s masculinity remains politically viable and reflective of an ideological process that continually repositions this model of maleness at the top of several interlocking systems of power. His embodiment of power (and challenges to it), however, is not without contradiction or immune to contestation. In fact, I hope to demonstrate through tracking specific shifts in his

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performance of masculinity over time how the conflict is at war with itself, making it necessary for him, as hegemonic, to struggle to continually renegotiate the factors of his dominance.

II. CONSTRUCTING RACE: WHITENESS AND THE COLOR LINE

Race is nearly as prevalent as sex-gender systems in constructing hierarchies, along with being a co-dependent factor in constituting identity. As such, the normative male’s whiteness (like his masculinity) has been “naturalized” as superior in Western societies, including America. Moreover, similar to the literature regarding sex and gender, much research about race also engages the nature-versus-nurture debate. Biological explanations are pitted against environmental and/or sociocultural and historical explanations to explain supposed racial “differences.” Even more recently, we have come to acknowledge that race categories involve “an intensely political process.” In the wake of the Enlightenment, Western elites perceived race differences and applied scientific methods to codify them, including the measuring of skulls and recording of other physical features that facilitated judgments about differentiated rates of development between racialized groups. The most recent scientific data relates to the Human Genome project, which determined that there is no biological basis for distinctive race categories. Rather, they concluded that the environmental theory, dating back to the ancient Greeks, remains a plausible explanation for differences among people, although no longer translating into distinctive racial categories, since researchers found more genetic differences within so-called race groups than between them.

Thus, race, along with many race-like ethnicities, has all but disappeared in regard to biological or scientific criteria. However, given the effects of perceived racial and ethnic


30 An ancient (and now rehabilitated) environmental theory about race categories stressed how proximity to the equator preserved the presence of melanin in the skin (leaving the pigment darker) as protection against intense UV rays. All peoples’ ancestry is traceable to a specific region in Africa, with subsequent migrations into less sun-drenched regions accounting for variation in skin tone.
differences in play for the past several hundred years, researchers continue to interrogate such concepts as Durkheimian “social facts,” with enduring political and material relevance. Prior to the completion of the Genome project, researchers had already begun dismantling widely held assumptions about racial categories, concluding that they had largely involved subjective (and racist) criteria during the collection and interpretation of “biological” evidence. Increasingly, researchers understood that initial racial hierarchies owed more to sociocultural criteria than to objective science—often with the former directing the latter—a logic that intensified in the last half of the 19th century after large migrations of people and mass immigration to the New World threatened to undermine the prevailing order of many societies.

Robert Miles posits that a “dominant theory” of race emerged that connected race to a “biologically determined capacity for cultural development,” with some races deemed less capable than others. Many anthropologists, who studied supposedly primitive peoples, continued to rely on a hierarchical ordering of race based on different rates of civilizational development: Western whites at the top, followed by descending levels of racial groups and their related “traits.” As Foucault suspected of the knowledge discourses pertaining to sexuality, scholars examined the discursive formations related to race, particularly in the wake of the sociocultural ruptures of the 1960s, including the Civil Rights movement in the U.S. They observed that racism had been invented concomitantly with the concept of race, and whole fields of understanding about Western history, philosophy, and science (and the West’s subjugation of the rest of the world) had been racialized (as well as masculinized). Entrenched thinking about differences and essentialisms (whether deployed for supremacist goals or to serve as a progressive strategy to eliminate racism) have their roots in the formational discourses of

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Western thought, which, in effect, make it difficult to perceive of any other way to think about race. Thus, to merely speak of race’s demise, biologically speaking, is to miss its retention in our knowledge discourses—not to mention its ubiquity in law, census data, constitutions, medical records, and so on. The racist assumptions first encoded into systems and institutions live on, finding echoes in the explicit directives of political projects along with the implicit narratives of popular culture.

**Charting racism’s course**

Winthrop Jordan, among others, proposes that racism was devised by Europeans after they found prevailing environmental explanations to be lacking; thereafter scientific explanations were sought to “discover” alternative views.\(^{32}\) In other words, there was a political need to biologize racial difference. Even the conservative writer, Dinesh D’Souza, who believes racism has been mitigated by contemporary efforts, asserts that racism was invented by Europeans who found “it difficult to give an explanation for why, over the same period, one society seemed to have accomplished so much and other societies so little,” at least from their perspective. Given their long tradition of regarding noble and base qualities to be hereditary, they concluded, “with increasing frequency and confidence, that the attributes of race, color, and human achievement are intrinsic. Some people are simply superior to others by nature.”\(^{33}\) However, D’Souza notes that what remains puzzling (with devastating consequences) is why the European colonizers and conquerors distinguished between Indians (or the indigenous peoples of the New World) and blacks (the peoples of Africa), “regarding the former as backward but the latter as not really

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\(^{33}\) Dinesh D’Souza, “Ignoble Savages,” in *Critical White Studies*, eds. Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1997), 58-59. Although D’Souza wrote this essay about the West’s racist past, he is among contemporary writers who believes that it is no longer in play.
D’Souza, like Jordan, speculates that for the colonizers, the New World seemed like Eden and its inhabitants undeveloped (but civilizable), whereas Africa seemed uninhabitable or even hell-like, and thus only fit for sub-humans, who could never truly evolve. Political philosopher Charles W. Mills writes about the impact of white supremacist thinking on political theory to this day; a “profoundly misleading picture persists,” which focuses on European experiences, “those we call ‘whites’ … as representative, as the raw material from which to construct theoretical generalizations … either not recognizing race as an emergent structure in its own right or biologizing it.”

Complicating matters is that the concept of race developed in conjunction with the articulation of class- and nation-based identity formations, but it is race that has been “a fundamental axis of social organization [emphasis by authors].” The most pernicious strains of Western thought that survive in some form today include Orientalism, which invented or “discovered” the Oriental as an exotic, intelligent but insidious being who once attained great civilizational heights but then faced arrested development. Orientalism expresses “a certain will or intention to understand, in some cases to control, manipulate, even to incorporate, what is manifestly different [emphasis by author].” The exercise of creating the discourse and amassing the knowledge, notes Edward Said, was less about understanding other cultures and more about enabling the European to define himself in contrast to this perceived Other. This, in

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34 Ibid., 59


36 Omi and Winant, 13. Although Omi and Winant focus on an American context, many Western societies used the “fact” of white superiority as a formational concept. Moreover, given U.S. hegemony in the world, and the dominance of its popular culture representations, it is reasonable to assume that American uses of race continue to complicate, exacerbate, and perhaps even supplant other geopolitical understandings.

turn, paved the way for the European (the Occident) to control the Oriental. Other races were similarly categorized: Native American/Indian as uncivilized savage (later rehabilitated as or upgraded to “noble” since his closeness to Nature is admirable but also what inhibits his further advancement); and finally, at the bottom of the hierarchy, the black as beast-like, sexually primitive and basically instinctual, intellectually hampered, and arguably incapable of development. Related historical discourses have been replicated, reiterated, and remodeled since their initial formulations, but cannot be completely cleansed of their race-based logic simply because race has finally (and only recently) been discredited. Moreover, given the dominance of Western discourses, alternative discourse to envision or speak about race differently failed to emerge, and in many ways, this failure endures.

White America—whatever its particular configuration of its normative racial identity at key junctures in its history—has usually defined black America, equally as fluid a concept, as everything it rejects for itself. That process first had its roots in slavery, then the colonial laws that codified racial hierarchies, which extended through 20th century law enforcement practices aimed at maintaining separate (but unequal) realms of white and (or over) black. Laws and social taboos from the Republic’s early beginnings discouraged the sexual coupling of blacks and whites, with anti-miscegenation statutes remaining in play in largely Southern states until 1967. Yet, during the era of slavery, white men regularly practiced it, exploiting black female slaves and producing mixed race children that confounded the idea of racial separatism, even within a

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38 Laws prohibiting miscegenation in the United States date back as early as 1661 and were common in many states until 1967, when the Supreme Court ruled on the issue in *Loving v. Commonwealth of Virginia*, declaring Virginia’s miscegenation laws unconstitutional, thereby vacating similar laws in other states as well. They included: Alabama, Arkansas, Delaware, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, Missouri, North Carolina, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, and West Virginia. See Derrick A. Bell, *Race, Racism, and American Law* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1980).

single household. Also, poor immigrants (most notably the Irish) also cohabitated with blacks in Northern cities to produce a generation of mixed-race Americans. The nation, though, finally adopted the “one-drop rule,” which was as difficult to police as it was to verify. It also did little to abate the hysteria over biological criteria, leaving the naked eye to effectively judge physical factors as determinative. Given the race mixing that has occurred, coupled with waves of immigrants—first commingling with blacks then battling to separate as whites—the nation, in actuality, is as much mixed race as it is the much-touted ethnic “melting pot.”

For the official 2010 census count of the U.S. population, race categories will remain strictly defined, reflecting the persistence of the color line in American thinking as well as the legacy of race as a social fact. The government’s use of four basic categories to determine race membership—white, black, Asian, American Indian/Alaska Native—will continue to have an enormous effect on how Americans self-identify. Thus far, the government has rejected requests to allow two distinctive categories for black: to incorporate those who claim African American (to reflect roots dating back to slavery) and for naturalized Americans from “black” nations such as Nigeria or Jamaica. However, Latinos will continue to define themselves using a two-step process: first, as Hispanics (the government’s term, which remains controversial for its colonial taint and connections to Spanish origins); second, as members of a particular race. Multiraciality continues to be rejected as an official option, even though a sizable number of Latinos often select “some other race” on other forms to reflect their mixed heritage, which can include white, black, and/or Indian ancestry. The government’s decision to ignore the multiracial aspect of

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Moreover, just as there is policing of who is white, variances in physical appearance, class standing, educational level, and/or family lineage complicate relations among blacks, although intraracial conflicts do not reflect the same exclusionary zeal used to police the borders of whiteness; conflicts among blacks are often rooted in disputes over the privileges accorded light-skinned and more assimilated blacks—a system invented by whites but now protected, albeit for different reasons, by both sides of the racial divide.
Latinos has left critics charging that the decision not only misrepresents the racial complexity of more than 41 million Americans—now the single largest “minority” group in America—but also skews statistics vital for policy and spending practices for years to come.\textsuperscript{42} It also defines and reduces peoples of vastly different cultural backgrounds, class affiliation, and historical experiences to America’s overdetermined obsession with racial clarity. In this dissertation, I assume the proposition that a viable color line remains in play in America, and that its features vary in response to historical pressures and social phenomena.

**Policing the intersection of race and sexuality**

Arguably one of the most effective ways in which racial borders are policed is by controlling sexuality. When sexuality is associated with race, the degradation of certain population groups (most notably, black males) is increased. Since white Europeans formed their impressions of black Africans as “furnaces of libidinal passion,” they have persistently viewed the black male as oversexed and threatening to white control.\textsuperscript{43} Added to the normativity of the male libido was whiteness, which then dictated that white male sexuality was the standard by which others were judged. Hence, normative masculinity is not only heterosexual, it is also white. Black sexuality was deemed less evolved, more primitive, and thus in need of arresting (serving as the justification for institutional regulations and punishments—along with non-official methods such as lynching and social segregation—to curb the black man’s supposed lust

\textsuperscript{41}In the 2000 Census, 48 percent of Hispanics identified themselves as white, but 43 percent checked off “some other race,” which had been added as a category and now will be dropped from the 2010 census language. A reluctance to check off black is rooted in reluctance to capitulate to a category that fails to represent one’s identity but also to align oneself with a racial category that still carried the stigma of second-class citizenship in the U.S.

\textsuperscript{42}The U.S. Census Bureau announced that in the summer of 2004, the nation’s Hispanic population reached 41.3 million and accounted for one-half of the national population growth of 2.9 percent. Blacks now comprise 39.2 percent of the nation’s population. 9 June 2005.

\textsuperscript{43}D’Souza, “Ignoble Savages,” 61
for white women). Similarly, “Oriental” masculinity was viewed as underdeveloped, feminized, and disturbingly exotic, while “red” was correspondingly declared “savage.”

Moreover, as Winant notes, most racial classification systems show an “insufficient appreciation of the performative aspect of race [italics his],” which speaks to how race is individualized by both people and systems, and which can affirm and challenge racist assumptions. For instance, one can posit that American rap artist Eminem performs masculinity, or what is understood to be more specifically black masculinity—either as a postmodern embrace of difference, a case of cultural theft, or the trivialization or dilution of “black” as a site of identity politics. In contrast, another could argue that Eminem still performs white masculinity but one informed by black culture (making him a “wigger,” as some have termed it). All of these views speak to the fluidity of race.

The role of popular culture, cinema in particular, is integral in disseminating such beliefs, having come to dominate how knowledge discourses travel (including those disguised as entertainment), and far outstripping the previous market saturation enjoyed by literature. Given cinema’s meta-focus on narratives involving matters of crime and sexuality, the supposed links between race and deviance are even more pronounced—and further advertised. Moreover, when we consider who is in charge of patrolling the borders of constructed norms (and deviances), we find the police—as real people and onscreen characters. The role of police is crucial to the

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maintenance of racial hierarchies and racist norms, since as agents of the system, they are deployed to maintain hierarchical differences and cultural norms. As such, this study will analyze how white masculinity—as fluid and contingent—has been able is to revamp itself within specific cop characterizations in cinema by similarly appropriating that which most challenges him, as Elvis and Eminem did with blackness to reinvent the white musician.

Whiteness: a strategy and methodology

Just as gender is understood by scholars as performative, a similar (and no less controversial) conclusion has emerged among many theorists regarding race. More recent scholarship deploys a theoretical approach that attempts to isolate the constant in racialized processes constructing the racial Other: the whiteness—usually unremarked—of the norm against which the Other is compared. Similar to the idea of masculinity’s universality, whiteness is invisibly accepted as the standard by which “color” is determined. Far more than merely determining social borders, however, as many Enlightenment discourses further imply, reason itself is white, and whiteness itself is equated with rationality. As Richard Dyer notes, “As long as race is something only applied to non-white people … [and] white people are not racially seen and named, they/we function as a human norm.” This privilege confers certain advantages on white people as a whole (however mitigated by an individual’s class and/or gender difference), and which cannot be discounted so long as there is system-wide privilege accorded whiteness. W.E.B. Du Bois once asserted that a “wage of whiteness” was bestowed on white Americans, which gave them a degree of advantage over people of color, even when whites were

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47 The widespread practice of racial profiling—whether a tool to combat terrorism or to detain people for “driving while black”—testifies to the vital role race still plays in policing.

disadvantaged by material circumstances. David Roediger further demonstrated how this “wage” was used in the 19th century as a wedge to effectively undermine the formation of a class-consciousness and solidarity among blacks and whites at the bottom of the nation’s social strata. Thus, not only did marking the black as the Other inhibit the possibility of a class-based alliance, but by making whiteness a “shared” trait, both class and whiteness become invisible levers of control, leaving only what is explicitly racialized (and visibly colored) as the touchstone for American divisiveness.

A closer look, though, reveals that whiteness remains an active factor influencing American outcomes—despite and because of its ability to hide in plain sight. For instance, there seems no need to “out” George Washington as white, no more than we need to identify him as male. Yet, that level of “naturalness” ignores that his identity was in part constructed by what he was not: black. Washington’s whiteness (and his land- and slave-owning privilege) allowed him to be acceptable as a local leader, a revolutionary general, and finally a president of a newly formed nation. His whiteness may seem irrelevant, but change his race, and history changes; as such, his whiteness is of no small consequence. Whiteness, then, implies a relationship. While non-white is marked as unsuitable, even dangerous, what is white—without having to explicitly say so—becomes a powerful normative factor of American identity and remains so to this day. Whiteness studies, then, as an approach, seeks to understand how whiteness “can be understood as a performance which works to constitute and continually reconstitute itself through everyday


embodiments and practices." In other words, even without drinking fountains to openly declare its supremacy, whiteness remains normative and privileged in America. As such, it is one of the major tasks of this study to make whiteness visible as a defining feature of the cop characterizations under review.

Although it performs as a constant and a supposed fact of Nature, a review of the history of racializing processes in many Western societies reveals that determining what is white is also highly contested terrain. Omi and Winant assert that contending forces in American political culture at some point produced “a racial order that drew a color line around rather than within Europe.” Concurring, Matthew Frye Jacobson also notes that between the 1840s and the 1920s it was not clear “just where that line ultimately would be drawn [emphasis his] … so it is crucial to reckon seriously with the racial othering that overlaid that whiteness … [and] examine the relationship among competing, colliding, mutually complicating ideas,” about whiteness, including Caucasian, Nordic, Anglo-Saxon, Celt, Slav, Alpine, Hebrew, Mediterranean, Iberic, Latin, and so on. This study attempts to understand race not only in discursive, but also in historical/sociocultural contexts, especially in regard to how whiteness initially defines the rogue cop archetype (a configuration of Scotch Irishness). At the same time, given the above criteria and conflation of gender and race that create hegemonic white masculinity in America, cop characters who cannot “pass” as white may find it difficult to replicate the archetype’s authority.

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53 Ibid., 88.

54 Ibid., 92. He also cautions, an “American eye sees a certain person as black whom Haitian or Brazilian eyes might see as white,” which indicates that racial categories—and whiteness—are not experienced uniformly across peoples and national borders.
Whiteness, like normative masculinity, is an illusionary concept. First, white is constructed in counterpoint to what it is not; second, whiteness continually absorbs non-white or “other” influences. For example, American culture is not only “white over black,” as Jordan phrases it, but as James Baldwin notes, a construction that already reflects black elements. “If you don’t know my name, you don’t know your own,” he cautions, referring to American cultural assumptions about its supposed “white” contributions. Baldwin, like bell hooks and Toni Morrison, argue that black contributions have been largely mitigated through denial, theft, or assimilation (or whitewashing). Michael Eric Dyson too argues that within an American context, whites and blacks have frequently come together to produce cultural alternatives to “dominant whiteness,” including the invention of jazz and other hybridized cultural products.\(^5^5\) In this study, I hope to expose the hidden whiteness within the normative rogue cop archetype, and his appropriation of black culture as a way to counter black challenges to his dominion, and, by extension, to the nation.

I also acknowledge the criticism of whiteness as a theoretical approach. By definition, whiteness studies forces attention back to the center just when other voices are being offered. However, as with sex-gender systems, it is nearly impossible to reference history or prevailing thought without having to reiterate these widely used (albeit racist) terms and categories—like the masculinization of language—it is further proof of the thoroughness of racialized thinking. As Jacobson notes, “the history of whiteness and its fluidity is very much a history of power and its disposition.”\(^5^6\) That is why whiteness, as an interrogative tool of analysis, is vital to this study,


as it attempts to understand but also to intervene in the critical role that “investments” in whiteness (to use George Lipsitz’s term) continue to play in maintaining racial inequalities—on and off screen.

III. CLASS, STATUS, AND ELITE PRIVILEGE

Adding another layer to the dominant white male’s identity in America is class. Although as much a determining category in America as elsewhere, class is often obscured in order to foreground the myth of the American dream, which while promising social mobility to anyone with initiative, cloaks the real existence of a class hierarchy. To understand how class works in America, or more accurately, how it works hard to stay unnoticed and, therefore, uncontested, it is helpful to re-trace how class evolved as a function of Western social orders from which the nation evolved (and its rejection, in theory, of the idea of class as a fixed category). There is a general belief in America that social stratification occurs, but is presumed to be determined, not by heredity (or caste), but through hard work and opportunity. Its counter corollary is the belief in the high degree of social mobility built into the system, allowing one to move up (or down) through individual effort.

All societies throughout history have been stratified, with elites positioned at the top of a hierarchical system. Max Weber describes this influential collective as a “group of men who by virtue of their peculiarity have special access to certain achievements considered to be ‘cultural values,’ and who therefore usurp the leadership of a ‘culture community’” [emphasis mine].57 His speculation about the linkages between cultural and political influence underscores the formational role played by those privileged by sociocultural, political, and/or material advantage.

For Marx, the capitalist class or bourgeoisie constitute those persons who own the means of production, while the working class has only its labor to exchange in the productive process.\(^{58}\) There is also a middle class, or petit bourgeoisie, which consists of small business owners and tradespeople, among others, who would “sink gradually into the proletariat partly because their diminutive capital” leaves them open to “being swamped in the competition with the large capitalists.”\(^{59}\) In Marxist theory, the proletariat eventually realizes its class-consciousness (class for itself), and mobilizes to overthrow the capitalist class. In the process, the state dissolves as the enforcement entity, and with it, the ideological notion of belonging that is the nation as well. The Marxist model of development is not without fault, which has been well established in literature that faults its reliance on material conditions as the sole determinant of historical change, while underestimating other factors such as gender, race, and national allegiance.

If one defines a capitalist as simply “owning the means of production,” then few obvious contemporary examples come to mind. However, the term has come to encompass those with control in corporate institutions: “rich people who control far more than their personal wealth,” but also “control the wealth of the nation, concentrated as it is in the largest few thousand corporations.”\(^{60}\) These include senior executives who direct and control corporations employing the private-sector working class, “the ‘captains of industry’ … whose decisions dominate the


workplace and the economy, and whose economic power often translates into dominant power in the realms of politics, culture, the media, and even religion.”

Class as a historic category has also mutated since Marx first examined it, especially the middle class category—a label liberally used by or applied to persons wishing to avoid the stigma of working class disadvantage or the antagonism against bourgeoisie privilege. It often encompasses elastic guidelines related to income but also reflects other factors that Marx ignored, including educational level, occupation, living space, and cultural group membership.

The American context poses a vexing problem to the study of class because of the way in which class, at least in the popular imagination and much political rhetoric, is thought to be a lesser if not a disappearing factor. “The modern idea of class was born in Europe, became an obsession in Britain and was denied in the United States.” Although the nation began by supposedly eschewing categories of aristocracy, slavery represented a social hierarchy that also factored in race, which continues to complicate class membership in America.

What helps to “erase” class in America is the emphasis on individualism, which although prevalent throughout Western societies in varying degrees, is especially pronounced in American society. The concept of individualism compounds the idea that failure to advance is a failure of individual will rather than serving as an indictment of social systems and policies. Hence, systemically derived ills are difficult to ferret out, let alone remedy. Alexis de Tocqueville coined the term individualism, describing an American understanding of the related concepts of

61 Ibid., 4-5. This description applies to most Western or industrialized nations, but in America, this group accounts for roughly two percent of the total labor force; for less “wealthy” nations, the ratio of haves to have-nots is even more severe.

62 Zweig delineates three groups comprising the middle class—professionals, supervisors, and small business owners—but concedes that they share “fuzzy borders” with the working and capitalist classes; yet, “the differences in power, independence and life circumstances among these classes support the idea of a separate middle class,” 7.

freedom and equality, warned about the danger to democracy if such individualism became acutely personalized.\textsuperscript{64} He also outlined the degree of civic commitment and dedication to community necessary in a democracy, which runs counter to the American ideal of individual freedom so often interpreted as the right to be left alone by the community—even to live outside it. As Ralph Barton Perry explains, Americans tend to organize as collectives only to meet intermittent emergencies, nurturing a pattern of organizational belonging “in which the same individuals join many and surrender themselves to none.”\textsuperscript{65} This frame of the individual versus the community rather than the individual as part of the community has stressed American thinking, which for most of the nation’s history has devalued the skills a diverse and democratic society needs most. Starting in the 19\textsuperscript{th} century, the “old standard rooted in the life of the community … gave way to a new standard based on individual achievement,” reflecting a shift away from the doctrine of community service to a “preoccupation with the ‘self’” that came to define white American manhood, in particular, as a self-fulfilling proposition.\textsuperscript{66}

The rogue cop character archetype serves as an apt advertisement for America’s class-less ideal, although I hope to demonstrate his roots in the working class (as a cop), his ascension to the middle-class (as a plainclothes enforcer), but, ultimately, his service for the state. Although the rogue cop archetype often transgresses the laws that maintain the social order, they seem a small price to pay for his more important mission to secure a higher moral order. However, as his mission and its outcome are the result of individual initiative, his mission serves to reinforce the mythology of a class-less society. The spectacle of the rogue cop’s personal ordeal personifies

\textsuperscript{64} See Michael A. Ledeen, \textit{Tocqueville on American Character} (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2000), 54-60.


\textsuperscript{66} Kimmel, \textit{Manhood}, 18.
the nation, and like his masculinity and whiteness, this class-less American dream seems beyond the petty concerns of material gain, but which accrue such gains for America all the same.

Ironically, in reality, although the police are largely associated with maintaining the status quo, as individuals, they are rarely derived from the ranks of the most privileged in society, but rather from among those struggling to gain acceptance in a society, and who use civil service work as a means for social advancement, benefits, pension funds, and perhaps a measure of authority. Police departments and the job of police officer have only existed for roughly 150 years in most Western societies, which have consistently filled their ranks by drawing from the lower strata of society, as determined by gender, racial/ethnic, and class disadvantage. The most recent police academy class for the NYPD—the largest (at 37,000) and highest profile police force in the U.S.—is comprised for the first time of roughly 55 percent non-white recruits. Although the 2005 class marks an official turning point, the trend has not gone unnoticed in recent years. As NYPD Detective Edward Conlon notes: “officers named Gonzales will become the kind of cultural cliché in the next century that patrolmen named Murphy were for the last two.”

Impact of class on race and gender

The complexity posed by class is further compounded when it intersects with other factors; as Oliver C. Cox suggests, race “prejudice,” at its root, is “essentially political-class conflict,” in which race is exploited to justify the degrading treatment of some people. Without

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67 In some cases, many hires who would qualify as white today were not considered white by the standards of their day. In the U.S. for example, the Irish who began filling the ranks of the police in the major Eastern cities during the late 19th century were struggling with concepts of themselves as non-whites or “white niggers.”

68 Breakdown: 18.3 percent black, 28.2 percent Latino, and 8 percent Asian American.


70 Oliver C. Cox, “Race Relations,” in Back and Solomos, Theories, 73.
this racial component, such degradation might otherwise excite class-consciousness and solidarity among oppressed peoples. In contrast, Stuart Hall makes a finer distinction: that race becomes an ideological representation through which whites within a class come to “live” their relations to others. “Capital reproduces the class, including its internal contradictions as a whole—structured by race.”

Just as multifaceted as the interplay between race and class is the intersection of gender and class—and their fusion into nation. “Gender should be understood not as a ‘real’ social difference between men and women, but as a mode of discourse which relates to groups of subjects whose social roles are defined by their sexual/biological difference as opposed to their economic positions [read: class] or their memberships in ethnic and racial collectives.” That is not to say that there cannot be a consequential relationship between gender and class in terms of deteriorating material conditions, as rates of poverty differentially impact women more than men, especially on a global scale, as a United Nations report declared an alarming worldwide “feminization of poverty.” Thus, class affiliation is not determined but complicated by gender and racial affiliations, becoming another key factor in determining identity, and providing both privileges and obstacles to social belonging at the individual, group, and national levels.

71 Stuart Hall, “Race, Articulation and Societies Structured in Dominance,” in Sociological Theories: Race and Colonialism (UNESCO, 1980), 341. Traditional Marxists, notes Hall, reject slavery and its legacy of racism as related to formal capitalist effects and argue that slavery might be exploitative but it is not capitalist. He too acknowledges that racism legitimates the positions of some systems of domination, including those based on class, but insists that racism is not present in all capitalist formations. Thus, it needs to be shown why and how racism has been articulated in certain capitalisms; and to further examine how it continues to function as a fractious force that impedes the development of a class consciousness.


As race and gender are not experienced in monolithic ways, neither is class. However, whereas internal divisions work collectively to impede class-consciousness among disadvantaged people (preventing alliances and the deployment of their cumulative strength as a whole), potentially divisive factors do not tend to interfere with the system-wide advantage of elites because of how they are constituted as a whole. It is similar to the construction of a pyramid, where each factor (gender, race, class, and various types of “capital” accumulation) serve as building blocks, which when combined, produce a small subset of people able to ascend to the top of the structure. Despite the passing of centuries and the sweeping changes wrought by industrialization, modernization, and globalization, this group consists of the same privileged few: largely white, Western, and Christian men of sociopolitical and material means.

Marx may have overestimated class identification and cohesiveness, but to ignore class—even in America, where it is vigorously denied—is to omit a crucial and dynamic factor in analyses of how systems of hierarchies are constructed and mediated by mass media, including cinema. Similar to the ability of hegemonic masculinity and whiteness to hide in plain sight, America’s classless ideal is often even more difficult to distinguish (on and off-screen). Yet, it remains a vital category for understanding how power is constructed and maintained. In my analyses of rogue cop characters, it remains challenging to identify class markers, yet it remains a vital exercise nonetheless, as the denial of class comprises another component of identity for the archetype, who derives power from hiding amid the amorphous “middle” that helps to define and maintain a normative America.

IV. PERFORMING THE NATION

Gender, race, and class not only function at the individual and group level of identity formation, they also perform at the national level, helping to construct and reflect a national
character. The *nation* is a collective identity involving gendered, racialized and/or ethnic variables, and for many theorists, is not a fixed entity but a conceptual understanding. Ernest Renan once characterized the nation as consisting of “a soul, a spiritual principle.” The material manifestation of that concept is the *state*, which delineates the actual borders (that may or may not correlate to a “homeland”), as well as to create the formal doctrines and legalisms related to sovereignty, including physical enforcement. The nation’s character is also rooted in a collective understanding, manifest in a political project expressed through *nationalism*. Without such a consensus or fundamental expression of shared identity, governing is made more difficult, as the state must rely on coercion to police the nation’s borders (real and imagined).

Few researchers, though, account for the nation’s most foundational feature: its *gendering*. The history of nationalisms is rife with the influence and privilege accorded to what is masculine, yet it remains unremarked in most scholarship, and consequently, woefully unexamined. Gender is usually only discussed when women are utilized as national symbols—as biological reproducers, participants in the ideological mission of the nation, transmitters of culture, signifiers of national difference, and reproducers of boundaries between national groups, as well as participants in nationalist struggles themselves. Even authors who mention gender do so only to discuss women bearing “the burden of symbolic representation,” but failing to account for (most) nationalisms in which men or masculinity has been formational. As with whiteness, the invisibility of the masculine component stems from its overwhelming ubiquity; what is masculine has been so intimately interwoven into nearly every nationalist movement in history.

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75 Ibid., 52-53.

76 The ongoing Middle East conflicts often get justified by the West, in the name of modernity, on behalf of women; President George H. W. Bush argued that one pressing reason to expel Saddam Hussein from Kuwait was the supposed rape of Kuwaiti women by Iraq’s invading army. Making war on behalf of imperiled women has long been an excuse to justify masculinized and/or nationalized forms of violence. Moreover, most feminist theorists see little emancipatory potential in nationalisms, since a gendered identity is not restricted to national boundaries, much like class.
Philip Spencer and Howard Wollman briefly include gender in their text on nationalism, in which they review several feminist approaches that spotlight the role of women. They add, though, with little sense of irony, “Alternatively, the nation may be constructed as masculine in opposition to a feminized other” [emphasis mine]. They point to the work of Ronit Lentin as a rare example of a scholar who traces the roots of one nationalism to an expressed masculinity. Lentin notes that Israel is based on the Zionists’ re-imagining the national collectivity in opposition to a despised Jewish Diaspora, which was unable to resist the endemic anti-Semitism that had culminated in the Shoah. “Where the builders of the new Israel saw themselves as heroic, male and active, the survivors of the Shoah were stigmatized as feminine, cowardly, weak and passive.” I would ask, though, what modern nation-state has not incorporated such a masculinist sentiment into its nationalist thinking? Regardless of the pathway delineated below to explain past and present nation-state formations, it is clear that hegemonic masculinity is intrinsic among the agents of power and legitimacy, translating socioculturally and politically into the practices of patriarchy. Bhabha is among the few scholars who explicitly mentions the intrinsic role of gender in nation; he points to the assumptions about a “naturalist, phallic identification” at the root of hegemonic masculinity, which is then imagined as being in “service of the nation.” Such service is often literal with men conscripted for war or enlisted to perform other state-sponsored violence (including policing), which in turn lends credence to the idea that a “toughminded masculinity” is essential to a nation’s defense. In contrast, diplomacy, détente,
coalition-building (multilateralism), and state-controlled bureaucracies are seen as effeminate and “often associated with neutered men, numbing statistics and operational paralysis.”

Although both men and women can perform masculinity, links to hegemonic masculinity have reinforced the idea that state matters are chiefly the domain of men.

Moreover, many theorists agree that nationalism is a process that largely (and fundamentally) involves the elites of a society. As prevalently as nation theorists ignore the role of hegemonic masculinity, they similarly sidestep how class has influenced elite accounts of nationalism. Anthony Smith posits, however, that the invented “nation,” in order to take root, must eventually resonate with large numbers of designated “co-nationals.” To garner widespread support, elites must find ways to encourage and indoctrinate the majority of the people into a nationalist mindset (while at the same time being careful to maintain, if not strengthen, the existing sociopolitical arrangements that underwrites their privilege). The task of explaining how this occurs is the aim of many conflict theorists, including Tom Nairn, who argues that in order to mobilize interclass support, elites must package nationalism in ways that take advantage of the peculiarities of a given society’s traditions; these also must tap rhetorical strategies that work through familiar communication systems (including cinema) that represent “a sentimental culture sufficiently accessible to the lower strata,” and which thereby invites “the masses into history.”

(The next chapter charts the path of America’s nationalism and the means through which a sense of national identity or character has been communicated, including men and women. See review of his book, “‘From Chivalry to Terrorism’: War, an Equal Opportunity Employer,” The New York Times, 9 November 2003.

Ibid.

See Anthony D. Smith, Myths and Memories of the Nation (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999).

See Tom Nairn, The Break-up of Britain: Crisis and Neo-Nationalism (London: NLB, 1981). Nairn also describes the nation as Janus-faced, referencing the two-faced Roman god, and describing the nation’s ability to borrow from the past while holding out the promise of a forward-looking project.
mapping the evolution of a particular white male archetype who has consistently embodied and performed the nation’s traditions.)

**Role of race and ethnicity**

Rather than focus on nationalism as a political or economic construct, many scholars also see its links to sociocultural phenomena—whether predating or becoming fragmented and/or reconfigured by the forces of modernity. Anthropologist Clifford Geertz distinguishes between civic and ethnic nationalism, separating the specificities of political organizing from those of ethnicity as a basis for grouping and/or empowering people. Adrian Hastings argues that England emerged long before modernity but only after its people embraced a sense of Englishness, assisted by language and literacies associated with the Bible. Modernists argue that this conflation of ethnicity and nationalism, though, only occurs in nations where there is ethnic homogeneity (ethnicity in this instance frequently described in racial or biological terms, emphasizing blood ties or describing “stocks” of people). This fails, however, to account for the development of a national identity in countries like the U.S., where heterogeneity is mitigated by assimilation (the so-called melting pot), extermination, or subjugation. Thus, as Richard Jenkins remind us, Weber suggests that “the sense of belief in common ancestry is a consequence of political action not a cause of it.” As such, rather than merely trace whether these concepts are linked organically to a historical past or exploitatively in the service of the modern nation-state (or a likely combination of the two), a more useful exercise is to consider how these concepts, once linked, function as reified truths.

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Smith is among those who argue that “ethnic cores” existed before and after modernity, but stresses that they not only do so in re-articulated ways but for what may be entirely different purposes. Members of an ethnic core, he posits, possess a collective proper name, share a myth of common ancestry, have one or more differentiating elements of a common culture, share historical memories, associate themselves with a specific homeland, and have a sense of solidarity among significant sections of the population. However, nation-builders are compelled to create “novel recombinations of existing elements and motifs” and tap into existing racial and ethnic memberships. Although such memberships have historically been presented as relatable to the idea of extended family—often representing a collection of blood brothers—to further connect these emotionally charged and deeply rooted concepts to a national identity enables the nation to move from a floating principle to an intensely personal proposition.

Such intimate connections assist in imagining distinctions between who is included and who is viewed as a stranger. Such borders have to be “patrolled” to determine who belongs, with claims of national identity grounded and giving rise “not only to distinctions of identity between but differential treatment of fellow-nationals and foreigners, citizens and aliens.” This national identity not only accommodates (or exploits) other identity variables, but also constructs itself using the same essentializing tendencies, resulting in similarly noxious hierarchies now amplified on a mass scale. As such, a racial/ethnic basis for nationalism, rather than seem like “othering,” can be presented as more akin to the inclusionary process that occurs when family or group membership is extended through marriage or other legitimizing rituals. And, as Spencer and Wollman suggest, the “inequalities and intolerance” that may result from the construction of

87 Spencer and Wollman, Nationalism, 63
88 Ibid., 64.
a national identity “may be hard to justify without some prior (and circular) sense that they are rooted in deeper, more profound, unchangeable and fixed differences.”

Many writers, though, assert that the national identity must be able to trump all other affiliations in order to effectively service the state’s political and sociocultural imperatives. For those whose identity factors have been interwoven into the national character, a privilege results, which translates into a sense of belonging, a lack of othering or marginalization, and an assumption about the naturalness of the parts and the whole. For example, French identity is unproblematic for (white) Catholics who were envisioned as the ideal embodiment of Frenchness; but this stands in contrast to Muslims who remain linked (voluntarily or through “othering”) to competing religious, national, and/or ethnic identities rooted in North Africa. The fact that both can claim ties to French soil—either by being born in France or within its former colonial possessions—fails to ameliorate the problems of identity for those who are non-white (and non-Catholic). For these French nationals, there remains an identity conflict, even though there is nothing in contemporary descriptions of French nationality that explicitly excludes them. Any sense of a psychological or material problem resulting from this identity conflict, then, is treated as a personal rather than a systemic problem, leaving them to grapple as a private matter with the consequences of marginalization and a sense of “double consciousness.”

As I mentioned in an earlier section, some researchers make sharp distinctions between race and ethnicity, and the process grows even more complex when these concepts are intertwined with nationalism. Smith contends that an ethnic community “must be sharply differentiated from a race in the sense of a social group that is held to possess unique hereditary biological traits that allegedly determine the mental attributes of the group” [emphasis his].

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89 Ibid., 64.
One could argue, though, that a race-like biologism has been applied to some ethnicities, and that Smith is making discrete what is culturally overlapping and semantically intertwined.\textsuperscript{91} For much of the 19\textsuperscript{th} and 20\textsuperscript{th} centuries, the two constructs were intertwined more often than not. However, when it comes to defining race or ethnicity’s relationship to nationalism, Walker Connor draws the line, reaffirming Weber’s contention that an ethnic group may be other-defined, whereas a nation must be self-defined.\textsuperscript{92} Anderson makes a similar argument, only this time reiterating the uniqueness of race, positing that “the fact of the matter is that nationalism thinks in terms of historical destinies, while racism dreams of eternal contaminations.”\textsuperscript{93} I question such strict separation of racism and nationalism, let alone the distinctiveness of race from ethnicity, in light of the historical record as well as recent theoretical understandings of diasporic or hybridized forms of identity. As Spencer and Wollman note, “given how central racial categorization and racist discourses have been to the development of nationalism,” such distinctions seem to raise more questions than they answer. These scholars particularly highlight the accelerated growth of nationalism in the 19\textsuperscript{th} century, which took place amid the circulation of “scientific racism” informing many nationalist movements, particularly those with “imperialist pretensions and ambitious,” and frequently constructing outsiders “on a racialized basis.”\textsuperscript{94}

Racism and nationalism are not necessary identical, just as ethnicity can be distinctive from race. Yet, their frequent interaction, no matter how invisible or difficult to trace, has been


\textsuperscript{91} Also see pg. 330 in Hutchinson and Smith, who cite Charles Winick’s \textit{Dictionary of Anthropology} (New York: Philosophical Library, 1956), which describes an “ethnos” as a group of people linked by nationality \textit{and} race.

\textsuperscript{92} Discussed in Hutchinson and Smith, \textit{Nationalism}, 16.


\textsuperscript{94} Spencer and Wollman, \textit{Nationalism}, 64-5.
vital to the functioning of many national identities. Furthermore, ethnicity theory is a fairly recent phenomenon, emerging “as a challenge to the prevailing biologistic and Social Darwinist conceptions of race.”\(^95\) At its most basic, ethnicity revolves around a set of shared beliefs and the invocation of an “ancestral bridge” that forms “a bond of a common history”;\(^96\) at its most complex, it takes on race-like associations that include blood-based or kinship ties. Moreover, attempts to delineate fixed boundaries between what distinguishes race from ethnicity seems beside the point. Nearly all ethnic identities can be said to involve a race-like component at some point in their history, as well as to encompass both inclusionary and exclusionary processes; the same can be said for nationalism, identity writ large.\(^97\) More importantly, race as a signifier of the nation and in service of the state, or as incorporated into an internationally integrated socioeconomic system, has had devastating effects in terms of exclusion on a global basis.

Considering the legacies of imperial nation-states, their identities and inherent assumptions about sex/gender, race/ethnicity, and class have traveled around the globe. One could argue that what is masculine held sway long before the “discovery” of these non-Western societies—being the most ancient and widespread form of privileging one half of the human race over the other.

However, a dissemination of Western ideas about race- and ethnic-based hierarchies, specifically the supremacy of whiteness, increasingly came to complicate if not trump local understandings of inter-racial/ethnic relations. Few would disagree with the assertion that blackness has served as the basis—at a supranational level—for the most systematic and widespread degradation of any “race” of people in history. One could also argue that the plight of the Jews and the

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\(^{95}\) Omi and Winant, 12.


\(^{97}\) In his 1908 study, Alfred Schultz notes that, like biological theories of race, for instance, that “[t]he modern Sicilian who is known the world over is the product of … race confusion. The mongrel is worthless everywhere” (in Jacobson, “Becoming Caucasian,” 87).
colonization of native peoples in the Americas owe as much to religious and/or cultural criteria as they do racial in tracing the causes of their suffering.

**Elites and cultural production**

Even after piecing together the past, the present, and the imagined to create a nation, how do elites maintain the nation and police challenges to it. Paul Brass points out, though, that elites do not have a completely free hand, being somewhat constrained by the beliefs and values existing within the group and limiting the kinds of appeals that can be made; at the same time, the process by which elites mobilize ethnic identities “simplifies those beliefs and values, distorts them, and selects those which are politically useful.”

Since many modern nation-states, including the U.S., were formed in the wake of revolutions and dramatic democratizations, Eric Hobsbawm also links nationalism to recurring cycles of violence that often accompany nation-building—especially if the nation used exclusionary policies and practices with respect to race and ethnicity, as discussed above.

Anthony Giddens further instructs that nationalism is used by states for internal pacification: to garner consensus, to create an imagined mass community, and to *enforce* a nation’s guiding principles. When consensus or populist yearning for a nation is lacking or threatened, asserts Giddens, coercion is then required, and the state, sanctified and naturalized as the extension of the nation, is entrusted with the job. Nationalism, in this view, is as much about equipping the state to guard against what is threatening, which ensures that elites “not only claim but also possess a monopoly over the means of violence.”

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Naked displays of political will, however, are fraught with danger. The tenets of hegemony instruct that coercion alone is not only a perilous approach but insufficient to foster a nationalist mindset. A more efficient method is to capitalize on prevailing hierarchies and existing social narratives, which, with some retooling, encourage a willingness to embrace the extended identity that is the nation. Anderson, expanding on his oft-quoted approach to the nation as an “imagined political community,” stresses that mass communication systems, which often parallel the rise of the modern nation-state, are key to transmitting such collective visions.\textsuperscript{101} This imaginative element is expressed through a nationalist rhetoric, including a foundational myth that explains the nation’s beginnings, but while not completely explaining any specific event, helps to constitute each through cultural framing.\textsuperscript{102} How a nationalist rhetoric becomes embedded in ordinary communication and woven into the practice of everyday life is captured by Michael Billig’s study of “banal nationalism,” in which he describes how the imagined nation is flagged daily in ways that often become so routine that they fail to even be noticed.\textsuperscript{103} Harking back to what hides in plain sight, the nation—like being male or white or middle-class—is rendered invisible by becoming commonplace. This is not to suggest that there is a monolithic or totalizing embrace of specific symbols of nationalism or that they are uniformly perceived in intended ways. There can be appropriations and alternate uses for flags and other national symbols within a society, but there is a perceptible mainstream and preferred manner, which when breached is discouraged and often punished.

Despite Ernest Gellner’s use of the word “high” to describe a national culture, which mistakenly summons images of \textit{salon}-style arts once prevalent in Europe and restricted to elites,

\textsuperscript{101} Anderson, \textit{Imagined}, 48.

\textsuperscript{102} See Craig Calhoun, \textit{Nationalism} (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997).

his description more readily fits what can be described as mainstream or popular culture systems presently operating in most contemporary Western societies, and which include cinema. My project, in part, argues that the rogue cop archetype frequently embodies America’s nationalist “rhetoric,” having been enriched by its cherished traditions and seemingly reared on so many homegrown values. As such, these seemingly “banal” cinematic representations may be among the more effective forms of popular culture in which to encode and normalize nationalist sentiments, as well as helping to reflect and maintain America’s social order and hegemony.

Of late, some theorists are suggesting that the nation is waning as a marker of identity because of globalization. Many point to the emergence of “post-nationalisms,” which include diasporic and other “new” or globally linked identities, including those resulting from hybridity or creolization processes.\textsuperscript{104} Other scholars assert that, despite the mutability of existing boundaries—real and imagined—the nation remains a reified marker of identity, much like race and gender (and equally as vulnerable to challenge). Contemporary events in world affairs appear to substantiate this. The consequences of a more integrated global system have not eliminated the vital functions performed by nations, but they may have provided more opportunities for reconfigurations of national identities. Smith suggests that those who mark the demise of the nation-state underestimate the importance of memory and myths and their ability to adapt to time and place.\textsuperscript{105} With citizens still willing to die for their country, identifying with the nation remains an incredibly strong tie and factor of identity deployed to sustain or to introduce political opportunities. Yet, as the debates over postmodernism and postcolonialism make clear, a “post” phase may merely introduce a modification to the original rather than


obliterate the concept being referenced. Nation remains a vital construction and historical fact, despite globalization, and perhaps because of the volatility of a more interdependent world. The degree of variation among nationalisms testifies to its elasticity as a concept. Despite issues of sovereignty, legitimacy, and power no longer being neatly traceable to the nation-state (increasingly linked to transnational or international conglomerates), the nation is still invoked, especially in times of acute threat. Indeed, the fact that people are still willing to die for their country attests to the tenacity of a national allegiance.

It is my task in this study, then, when analyzing the rogue cop roles under review, to tease out the uniqueness and particular meaningfulness of his performance of a single or combination of identity factors that perform the nation within a specific cultural and historical context. I also hope to connect what is local to what is global, as American understandings of these factors of identity are intertwined with global discourses, and which are complicated when what is American comes to dominate what is global. This is where my study’s archetype is especially useful—as a cinematic figure whose gaze is privileged, but also as the state’s agent granted the power to be society’s eyes and ears—the human embodiment of surveillance and enforcement. His view is ideal, his vantage point privileged in several ways: as a male, as a white subject with class affiliation (even if denied), and as the police—at home and abroad.

The next chapter investigates, in particular, how American identity was initially invented, narrated, and then communicated, in part, through representations of the rogue cop archetype—who has come to embody America’s mythical past as well as to perform its global ambitions.
CHAPTER 2: AMERICAN EXCEPTIONALISM
AND HOLLYWOOD’S ROGUE

We [Americans] have it in our power to begin the world all over.
Thomas Paine

I don't feel we did wrong in taking this great country away from them. There were great numbers of people who needed new land, and the Indians were selfishly trying to keep it for themselves.
John Wayne

[Mayor said] high priority was run these hoods out of San Francisco—“Dirty” Harry Callahan
I didn’t expect you to use violence!—Capt. McKay
What did you expect me to do—yell trick or treat at them?—“Dirty” Harry Callahan

Building on the previous chapter’s objective to make visible what is invisibly woven into privileged identities, this chapter unpacks key myths underwriting American cultural (and historical) narratives that buttress such privilege. More importantly, these myths and identity factors are encoded into the contemporary rogue cop character, whose links to mainstream ideology and political fallout are at the center of this dissertation. I first review the concept of national character, which initially translates into an emblematic figure called the American Adam; second, reveal how American popular culture showcases this mythic figure’s embodiment of conflicts inherent in the nation-building project to “tame” the frontier; third, trace this allegory’s transfer to the crime genre and its urban frontier (following the sociopolitical upheavals of the 1960s); fourth, track the allegorical changes in cop films of the late 20th century that culminate in the invention of the rogue cop character (and his many offspring); and, finally, analyze the film Dark Blue for the character’s persistence, as well as the consequences of this particular rogue’s exaggerated features, which more readily expose the inherent flaws in both the rogue’s construction and the mythologies he performs and personifies on behalf of the nation.
I. AMERICAN STUDIES AND MYTHOLOGIES

American ascendancy was attained through many historically familiar strategies—aided by the unprecedented investment in mass culture—whose rise paralleled the country’s assumption of global dominion in the wake of two world wars and the collapse of Europe’s colonial empires. Its further elevation to “superpower” status accompanied its deployment of nuclear weaponry—soon matched by the Soviet Union’s similar capability in the aftermath of World War II. For the next half century, conflict and competition between the two states rested on the concept of mutually assured destruction, but ultimately produced a more complex and prolonged Cold War—so called for its lack of traditional firefights—and with ideology used as a readily available weapon of war (including cinema as a means of disseminating ideology).

The field of American Studies emerged shortly after mid-century in part to analyze the political, social, and cultural explanations for the country’s rapid rise, and to pinpoint a working narrative that explains American “exceptionalism.” Some scholars trace the nation’s progressive impulses to the Pilgrims’ pioneering spirit that adapted Enlightenment ideas to the “undeveloped” New World.¹ Others analyze the Puritans, whose “errand in the wilderness” to establish a biblically inspired “city upon a hill” evolved into a radical democratization of ideas to produce a new society.² Another approach cites the vast environmental riches (America as the New Eden) to explain the rise of American power—especially after the 19th century expansion of sovereign borders and the mass influx of immigrants that aided the nation’s growth as an industrialized power.³ Finally, there is the frontier thesis, which explores the myths and symbols

embedded in popular and political discourses, which narrate (and re-imagine) the post-revolutionary push westward that transformed a nation and its people. I especially utilize the frontier myth, understanding *myth* to mean “the process of both personal and social ‘remembering’” with the ability to disarm “critical analysis,” and which identifies with “venerable tradition” that makes these myths appear to be “the products of ‘nature,’” and not the purposeful construction of a modernizing society.\(^4\) Since Richard Slotkin and others have chronicled the effects of the frontier myth in many historical and cinematic turns, I tap here only those insights that help lay out the ancestry and precursor of the 1970s rogue cop character as a continuation of that mythology.

The influence of the frontier myth was ensured the moment Turner dramatically announced that the frontier had in effect disappeared. At the 1893 Chicago World’s Fair, he detailed a frontier edge, a meeting point between “savagery” and civilization, as having been eclipsed through settlement and abuse of wilderness resources. Lost with the frontier was its profound ability to provide Americans with the confidence to “scorn” older societies to create a new one rooted in “individualism, democracy, and nationalism.”\(^5\) Although first thought canonical, later scholars criticized Turner’s singular explanation for American development, in part, because it required “the observer stand in the East and look to the West.”\(^6\) His thesis also ignored other watershed moments and influences, including the South’s complex history and slave-based system that had no place in his model, but which was arguably as significant to the


nation’s formation. Patricia Limerick interrogates Turner’s conclusions while also re-mapping the West as a place encompassing diverse environments, cultural histories, and peoples “who considered their homelands to be the center, not the edge” of civilization. Moreover, her approach enables Western American history to be viewed “as one chapter in the global story of Europe’s expansion” and the ever-changing frontier as a project of Western white patriarchy.  

“Conquest forms the historical bedrock of the whole nation … the American West is a preeminent case study in conquest and its consequences,” she asserts.  

Despite revisions to Turner’s thesis, the frontier as a site of renewal and symbol of opportunity endures. Viewed in this light, the frontier is both a physical terrain and an allegorical space on which to chart disparate American ambitions and endeavors, and to imagine new vistas in industry, sports, space—even “of the mind.” Turner prophetically notes, “He would be a rash prophet who should assert that the expansive character of American life has now entirely ceased” with the frontier’s close; “[m]ovement has been its dominant fact, and, unless this training has no effect upon a people, the American energy will continually demand a wider field for its exercise.”

American rhetoric continues to deploy variations of the frontier myth to frame the nation’s actions as similarly liberating, and justifying almost any means necessary for achieving its goals.

**National character and the American Adam**

Not only does the frontier myth supposedly contribute to a national character, it also produces a figure like the one described by J. Hector St. John de Crèvecoeur, whose 1782 text

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7 Ibid., 26. Limerick belongs to the 1960s academic ruptures that challenge consensus approaches and critique grand theories as monocausal, uncritical, and blind to alternatives. In light of my interdisciplinary training, I see these approaches not as mutually exclusive nor singularly reliable as models, but which collectively contribute insights worth revisiting.

8 Ibid., 27-28.


points to the frontier-bred American as a New Man who leaves “behind all the ancient prejudices and manners, [and] receives new ones from the new mode of life he has embraced.”\textsuperscript{11} Many writers since Crèvecoeur have celebrated this American Adam, who discarded his European roots to be reborn in the Eden of the New World.\textsuperscript{12} Rather than review the breadth of this character’s evolution, I focus here only on the myths and traits that link him first to the figure of the Western cowboy then to the rogue cop character, who must tame the uncivilized state of America’s contemporary urban milieu.

Evidence of how much the frontier myth (and the American Adam) endures in contemporary narratives can be found in a recent book by political pundit Chris Matthews.\textsuperscript{13} Matthews is a former member of the Carter administration and current host of the popular news show \textit{Hardball}, featuring prominent policymakers and journalists discussing current affairs, with Matthews serving as the surrogate for “regular Americans.” His approach, then, represents an accessible portrait of mainstream attitudes. His book elaborates the traits of the American “everyman” as \textit{rebellious, self-made, action-oriented, pioneering, and optimistic}; and the people at large celebrating \textit{underdogs, lone heroes, and reluctant warriors}. The chapter “American Exceptionalism” reiterates how the nation is “endowed with a special destiny”; he also explains, “The American frontier may be gone but its spirit lives on. From Daniel Boone in the Kentucky wilderness to Charles Lindbergh soaring high and alone above the choppy Atlantic to John F.

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\textsuperscript{11} J. Hector St. John de Crèvecoeur, \textit{Letters from an American Farmer}, \url{http://xroads.virginia.edu/~hyper/CREV/home.html} (15 February 2006).

\textsuperscript{12} For a description of the American Adam as described by Whitman, Thoreau, Emerson, and others, see R.W.B. Lewis, \textit{The American Adam: Innocence, Tragedy, and Tradition in the Nineteenth Century} (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1955)

\textsuperscript{13} Chris Matthews, \textit{American: Beyond our Grandest Notions} (New York: The Free Press, 2002). Matthews falls into the latter of two categories of writers invested in exceptionalism mythology: those who take the label literally and write of the nation’s glories, and those who are critical of American society but hope to redirect it back toward its original noble path.
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Kennedy and his daring call to shoot for the moon.” Not only does Matthews’ text echo Crèvecoeur and others who describe the American as an archetype, it is performative in that it reflects and replicates what it also helps to reconstruct and perpetuate. As Daniel Boorstin asserts, key myths have been woven into American history from the start, as the “new nation sprang into being almost before it had time to acquire a history.” Almost immediately it began “to envisage a national past,” revamping the life stories of men like Davy Crockett until their legacies resembled the portrait the nation was inventing for itself. Once such a narrative circulates, observers like Matthews mine history for evidence of a thesis that is legitimated by the discovery of such “proof”—the circular logic eventually comprising a cast of characters who serve as evidence that what the nation imagined eventually became self-evident.

Although many American symbols often feature feminized images (i.e., Columbia), most foundational narratives usually spotlight a limited cast of white males, whose physical presence and intellectual endeavors are credited not only with creating the nation, but also embodying the traits most coveted in a hero. The term hero in the American context already conjures a particular performance of masculinity—one that is usually deemed illegitimate for women, racially marginalized males, and those with non-Christian backgrounds or ethnic roots outside Northern and Western Europe. In this manner, the link between maleness and whiteness is not incidental to the construction of the American hero, but fundamental to it. Early writers rarely found it necessary to mention their subjects’ whiteness; and if race is identified, it is in reference

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14 Ibid., 6.


16 Many historical narratives often reduce the nation’s heroes to a “few good men,” whose biographies, speeches, and accomplishments get reiterated, but which omits the contributions by whole communities of people. Often these men are positioned in leadership roles that enable them to affect change to a greater degree; at the same time, as no monocausal explanation exists to explain a nation’s formation, few lone individuals are rarely responsible for executing mass change without others’ participation—even if accomplished through these men’s coercion of others.
to the “others” encountered by white men. When Alexis de Tocqueville met Sam Houston and Davy Crockett on a riverboat, he asked Houston about the Indian’s “natural” intelligence, which Houston conceded revealed a “degree of development and a sharpness that are often admirable,” but he implied further that it is linked and limited to the wilderness, and hardly equivalent to the white man’s.\textsuperscript{17} Tocqueville eventually concluded that he had found a “nation of conquerors who submit themselves to the savage life without ever allowing themselves to be seduced by it.”\textsuperscript{18} This recalls the sentiments of Rudyard Kipling, who once framed the task of colonizers as “a white man’s burden.”

While the next chapter examines the difficulty for women, immigrants, and people of color to embody the role of American hero, the frontier narrative is largely confined to white characters from a Northeastern perspective, with Indians targeted as the collective obstacle to the nation’s destiny. In such a frame, Indians are depicted either as ignoble savages who represent the devil’s fortitude or noble savages that symbolize an unspoiled wilderness, which, however virtuous, is wasteful if not made more productive (and profitable). The frontier’s white folk hero is contrasted with (and constructed in opposition to) the Indian (or Red Man)—first encountered by New England settlers, then by frontiersmen and pioneers pushing West. Roy Harvey Pearce explains that white America had “hoped to bring [the Indian] to civilization but saw that civilization would kill him,” or at least destroy his natural “gifts”; however troubled the American conscience was at the death of the individual, “it could make sense of his death only when it understood it as the death of a symbol.”\textsuperscript{19} This process of dehumanizing the Other also

\textsuperscript{17} Quoted in Ledeen, \textit{Tocqueville}, 22.


effectively effaces the “crime” associated with his/her killing at the hands of American warriors; such thinking will find echoes in rhetoric linked to America’s later “frontier” conflicts of the next century—at home and abroad.

By the late 19th century, whiteness had evolved from the uncomplicated description ensconced in the 1790 naturalization law (limiting citizenship to “free white persons,” which at the time meant only white men) to the more complex view that was in part a reaction to the large influx of non-WASP immigrants coming to America.20 More than any other, a Scotch-Irishness emerged as the proper pedigree for the American everyman, standing in stark contrast to the Englishman—given his role as the former colonial master—and as Kimmel notes, the image of an “aristocratic gentleman of privilege, often conflated with feminine attributes.”21 The Scotch-Irish category, though, only emerged after the mid 19th century to differentiate from the Irish Catholic who was viewed as a problematical conflation of race, class, and religion.22 Upon his arrival, the Irish Catholic was “outcast,” relegated to sharing living and working space with blacks and other marginalized peoples, resulting in a degree of intermingling, which was enough to prompt the 1850 census to include the new category of “mulattoes,” or mixed raced people, who comprised up to a quarter of many states’ “colored” population.23 Initially, the poor Irish Catholics were frequently referred to as “niggers turned inside out,” and “the Negroes, for their part, were sometimes called ‘smoked Irish,’ an appellation they must have found no more flattering than it was intended to be.”24 Irish identity is significant to this study in several ways:

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21 Kimmel, Manhood, 19.
24 Ibid., 41.
first, because the Irish Catholic finally becomes white; second, because the Irish in part climb into the middle class via the newly formed police departments of the late 19th century; and, third, because an Irishness endures in Hollywood’s cop characters to this day.

**Class, individualism, and the self-made man**

An aspect of Turner’s thesis that specifically embraces whiteness is the idea of the frontier as a “safety valve”—a place for easing the strain on the rapidly developing Eastern and Southern cities, teeming with immigrants and the “dangerous classes.” Turner warned that the loss of the frontier also meant the loss of a “safeguard of democracy,” as socialist impulses show “noteworthy gains as elections continue,” threatening to destabilize market capitalism and the existing social order.25 In theory, the free white man as a settler or yeoman farmer could transcend class barriers, finding autonomy and opportunity on the frontier. In actuality, most white (let alone non-white) settlers who moved westward ended up “tenants” or “unpatented squatters.”26 Class, rather than becoming less salient was merely eclipsed by race as the more determinative factor. Although denied social mobility on the East Coast, the would-be planters moved to the frontier with a “white-skin privilege” that enabled them to not only escape their non-white competition for labor, but also enabled them to take the land “from the Indians in the name of ‘a white man’s country.’”27 About the same time Turner framed the frontier’s closing as a crisis for white America, Du Bois warned that the nation was merely compounding the problem of “the color line,” which he (prophetically) asserted would constitute the central problem in


27 Ibid.
American society for the next century.\textsuperscript{28} Again, the Irish figure prominently in the racial divide developing among the nation’s lower classes, as they went from being black people’s brethren in misery to becoming some of their most aggressive tormentors, virulently using their sliver of racial advantage in part to help propel themselves into the middle class.\textsuperscript{29}

The idea of the frontier as a place for reinvention further obscures Americans’ understanding of class by fostering the legend of the “self-made” man. In such a scenario, a Scotch-Irish “everyman” is able to rise from humble beginnings, “fired by a passionate will to succeed,” exploiting ingenuity and hard word to realize riches and other rewards linked to the American Dream.\textsuperscript{30} Economic historian William Miller studied 190 of America’s top business leaders of the late 1800s and found that, on the contrary, those born poor made up only three percent, negating much of the veracity of the rags-to-riches (Horatio Alger) story that circulates in American culture.\textsuperscript{31} The ability to reinvent oneself, especially on the frontier, was a privilege accorded the very few, as issues of self-actualization were largely available to whites who seemed unmarked (as the norm), as opposed to the Other still grappling with more basic material matters. Matthews reiterates this myth about the American penchant for self-invention, noting, “Such indifference to family and background leaves doors open here in socially mobile America that would be sealed shut in other, older, more regimented societies.”\textsuperscript{32} The statement—although true for some—ignores how many doors remain shut due to prejudice, and which continue to


\textsuperscript{29} See David Roediger, \textit{Wages of Whiteness}.

\textsuperscript{30} Jim Cullen, \textit{The American Dream: a Short History of an Idea that Shaped a Nation}, (New York: Oxford, 2003), 7. Although there is no single version of the American Dream, Cullen identifies common elements such as home ownership and claims it is the dream’s ambiguity that gives it its “mythic power.”


\textsuperscript{32} Matthews, \textit{American}, 28.
have the power to negate an individual’s will to succeed or intent to replicate a “boot straps model” of uplift that worked for many poor but “whitened” immigrant groups. Thus, this ability to reinvent the white self is implicit in the concept of being self-made—so often used to describe the Alger-like miracle of upward mobility, but which, in large measure, camouflages class privilege.\(^3^3\) Again, while whiteness helps empower individual autonomy, the actual underdogs of American history have frequently had to band together to find refuge from the majority’s tyranny or as the primary means to push for reforms.\(^3^4\) This American penchant for individualism is patently evident in the mythic American hero, whose masculinity—with the closing of the continental frontier—is restored by a new militarism that enables the nation and its warriors to envision a frontier on a global scale.

**American Adam as imperialist warrior**

Many writers suggest the late 19\(^{th}\) century as the moment of an acute crisis for American identities, including masculinity, with industrialization blamed for fomenting an “unmanly” urban subculture, including the demands of middle class white women for suffrage.\(^3^5\) The centers of the urbanized East also experienced more immediately the effects of recurring cycles of economic boom and bust, which further agitated social conditions among the have-nots becoming more desperate with deplorable living and working conditions. Such a crisis in masculinity, as mentioned in the previous chapter, was as much related to a strain on existing power relations as it was about evolving gender constructions. The supposed closing of the

\(^{3^3}\) In actually, it is more like “rags-to-respectable-working class,” which still undermines the possibility for widespread class resentment that so troubled European societies. See Reeve Vanneman and Lynn Weber Cannon, *The American Perception of Class* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1987), 226.

\(^{3^4}\) The track record of the women’s movement, civil rights campaigns, and union organizing attest to the power of the collective and the need for alliances as the means to gain representation in American institutions.

frontier exacerbated the feeling of insecurity among the nation’s most privileged white males, prompting a search for new frontiers to conquer rather than to risk “fixing” the conditions at home that provided much of their basis for power. The frontier, in reality, was far from closed at this juncture, as those already flush with capital continued buying Western lands and developing them for a variety of industries. As a result, their wealth was substantially increased, positioning America’s capitalist class for even greater participation in the unfolding and complex international marketplace of the next century. Toward that end, the mythic frontier was deployed anew and served as the cover story for this development strategy.

The myth, then, effectively blurs the present and future with the past by stressing the concept of destiny and the moral clarity of the “civilizing” process; this enabled a generation of investors to claim to be pioneers steering the nation to a greater glory rather than engaging in an unprecedented accumulation of wealth at the expense of the vast majority of Americans, as well as other peoples affected by American expansion. Teddy Roosevelt, in particular, urged men of his class to recover a “vigorous manliness” by indulging in the rigors of frontier life—or at least by participating in activities that emulated the frontier’s rugged physicality. While many scholars seize on Roosevelt’s obsession with manhood, Christopher Lasch contends that Roosevelt was as alarmed by the “declining influence” of his class of well-bred men now being “shoved aside by unscrupulous spoilsmen and self-made tycoons,” but, who, as nouveau riche, possessed little respect for the social institutions that maintain the barriers between classes, and which go well beyond money as the measure of a man. The more recognizable threat to the patrician class, however, was from below, in the form of a “large and alien-born proletariat,” which included the immigrant Irish, the “Oriental,” and the South’s “former Africans.”

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In this way, whiteness was just as vital to Roosevelt’s concept of manhood, and here again, frontier mythology proved useful, as the Indian wars had enabled several generations of white males to master the art of “wilderness” skills, which would prove useful in more ambitious ventures ahead. Adopting the Red Man’s gifts, though, did not mean mixing blood lines with Indians or black slaves (whom Roosevelt describes as members of “a perfectly stupid race”). In his view, this would constitute “race suicide” for whites. Rather, the ultimate goal of a frontier makeover for upper class white males was its usefulness in preparing the nation for the next phase of growth, and effectively expanding its political and economic worth by fulfilling the duty of “the American race” to advance Western civilization.\(^{38}\) Like the Rough Riders who accompanied Roosevelt up San Juan Hill, he envisioned a band of white, re-masculinized warriors who could restore and fulfill America’s promise through specific military campaigns. The growing tension in late 1890s Cuba provided one such opportunity, and the “thrill of unleashing manly American chivalry on behalf of Cuban women, reportedly suffering rape and atrocities at the hands of the effete and cowardly Spanish,” was palpable in the nation’s rhetoric, on whose pulse Roosevelt had his finger.\(^{39}\) In his writings, Roosevelt foresees a transnational white brotherhood engaged in a global war with racial inferiors, which would no doubt be violent but essential for preserving the supremacy of Western civilization. “The most righteous of all wars is a war with savages,” he notes, and although “apt to be also the most terrible and inhuman,” is necessary for the survival of the fittest.\(^{40}\) He writes of the “Red Indian” and the


\(^{38}\) See Bederman, Chapter 5, “Theodore Roosevelt: manhood, Nation, and ‘Civilization.’”

\(^{39}\) Allen, “Men Interminably in Crisis?” 197.

\(^{40}\) Quoted in Robert Jewett and John Shelton Lawrence, *The Myth of the Superhero* (Grand Rapids, MI: W. B. Eerdmans, 2002), 58.
American, “the Afghan on the border of British India, or the Turkoman who confronts the Siberian Cossack, the result is the same … without force, fair dealing usually amounts to nothing.” These match-ups required horrific violence but remained necessary showdowns for Western civilization to prosper—once these inferiors are vanquished. Americans, in Roosevelt’s view, were the vanguard of this global struggle, having out-savaged the savage on the frontier, earning the stewardship of Western civilization in the name of a new master race. (This logic of how (and why) to defeat savages will become an essential ingredient in the rationale and actions of the rogue cop character.)

Roosevelt’s thorough understanding of the power of media is also evident, as he channeled his ideas through books, journalism, policy statements (once president), as well as borrowing from popular culture. One example involves the term “Rough Rider,” which was already a well-known description from frontier literature. Although Turner’s characterization of the frontier may be famous, notes Slotkin, it is Roosevelt’s deployment of it as the ideological frame to undergird American imperialism (as well as to justify the nation’s expansion and forays into global policing) that has had the most far-reaching consequences. (It is also the model many 20th century presidents will emulate, including the current president and his mission to “spread freedom” around the world.)

The new century soon positioned the U.S. for its rise to global behemoth, but the tensions accompanying its aggression also escalated. During Roosevelt’s era, the age of American imperialism was unleashed, and the American Adam was dispatched like a type of global Rough

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41 Quoted in Slotkin, Gunfighter Nation, 52.

42 As characterized by Jewett and Lawrence, Myth, 58.

43 Slotkin, Gunfighter Nation, 79-87 and 101-6.

44 Ibid., 30-32; see also 54-62.
Rider, wrapped in the American flag and re-mythologized as an updated version of an early pioneer or a later frontiersman sacrificing himself to move civilization forward. This new, transnational version of the frontier myth continued to rest its credibility on a missionary’s sense of higher purpose rather than as a design to covet land or money—benefits, though, which accrued nonetheless, however cloaked behind righteousness. The nation eventually completed its divinely inspired Manifest Destiny, absorbing territories stretching from the Atlantic to the Pacific coasts, as well as gaining lands as a result of the Mexican and Spanish-American wars. It also seized control over other territories for a variety of strategic reasons: among them, Puerto Rico, Guam, American Samoa, and the U.S. Virgin Islands, and considerable influence over Cuba and the Philippines. Arguably, American-style imperialism once underway was boundless, continuing to rely on the imaginary and elastic rhetoric of the frontier and the further cover of “entertainment” being disseminated by American popular culture products.

Although Roosevelt did not invent the blending of fact with fiction, he made clear the benefits of doing so. Just as the histories of the nation’s founding “fathers” have been laced with fiction to align them with heroic mythology, writers continue to cite as many fictional characters as historical figures to complete their portraits of America. “When factual accuracy comes to seem inconsequential, novels emerge to do the narrative work that history refuses.”

45 The nation’s fictional narratives are laden with the same cultural codes as a society’s journalism and its recorded history, featuring a similarly limited cast of characters as representative of a people at large. 46 Matthews is not atypical when he describes models of American heroism that include George Washington in the same breath as the Western character Shane, the literary American

45 Lee Clark Mitchell, Westerns: Making the Man in Fiction and Film (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1966), 6

46 Narratives labeled fiction advertise a constructed nature, whereas “history” announces its intent to serve as truth. See Rosenstone, “History in Images.”
Adam Jay Gatsby, and Humphrey Bogart’s character in Casablanca—the epitome of the American as reluctant warrior, in his view, eventually sacrificing love to do his patriotic duty. Matthews merely conflates the real and the imaginary in the same way foundational myths do, until they form a “common sense” understanding about what it means to be an American—then and now. As Jean Baudrillard warns, however, once the “real” has been intertwined with fantasy, the “hyperreal” emerges, effacing most contradictions between what is real and what is imaginary. “Unreality no longer resides in the dream or fantasy … but in the real's hallucinatory resemblance to itself.” The 20th century called to duty, not only all the president’s men, but all the nation’s cultural weapons—preeminent among them cinema.

II. HOLLYWOOD’S NEW ADAM AS WESTERN COWBOY

Similar to other realms of popular culture, the concept of genre as an organizing tool—however increasingly fluid and dynamic in a postmodern world—is still used by Hollywood to select, produce, and market films; it also continues to be used by viewers to frame expectations. In theory, a cluster of features define one genre from another or offer a “horizon of expectations” (i.e., action films feature action, mysteries solve a puzzle, romances invest in relationships, and so on). Although most scholars agree that, in general, film genres are “systems of orientations, expectations and conventions that circulate between industry, text and subject,” most films also straddle more than one genre. As Steve Neale explains, the difference between genres is not a “question of particular and exclusive elements, however defined, but of particular combinations

47 Matthews, American, 57-8.
50 Stephen Neale, Genre (London: British Film Institute, 1980), 19
and *articulations* of elements … and particular weight given in any one genre to elements which in fact it shares with other genres” [italics his].\(^{51}\) Another consideration is how genres are interpreted differently by filmmakers and studios, as well as to be more meaningful in connection with particular historical moments. From its inception, Hollywood borrowed from other popular culture (with a proven track record) and a developed star system to maximize potential box office while minimizing risk.\(^{52}\) To identify why and how films cluster together is a useful exercise, but equally as vital is to consider why a film transgresses a genre’s borders or finds meaningfulness in the liminal space between and across the borders of recognizable genres.\(^{53}\)

The functions and characteristics that define the Western as a genre, at first glance, include its links to the 19\(^{th}\) century frontier. The Western also features conflicts that, for the most part, focus on straddling the line between law and lawlessness, order and chaos, and civilization and Nature. More often than not it represents the positive resolution of these conflicts, affirming the idea of American optimism and the progression of the West, and by extension, Western civilization. The Western espouses “no less than a national world-view … [the] celebration of America, of the contrasting images of Garden and Desert, as national myth.”\(^{54}\) As noted in the last section, this myth centers on a particular performance of masculinity—one specifically defined by toughness and epitomized by the figure of a gunfighter, a professionally violent man prized for his frontier battles and unchecked autonomy, with the ability to deploy his special skills when he deems it necessary. It is difficult to define *toughness*—whether a performance or

\(^{51}\) Ibid., 22-23.

\(^{52}\) Janet Staiger in Allen and Gomery, *Film History*, 12.

\(^{53}\) Also see Stuart M. Kaminsky, *American Film Genres* (Chicago: Nelson-Hall, 1985), 8.

an internalized quality—although Rupert Wilkinson finds that most tough guys in popular culture celebrate action and are not afraid to “face down rivals and aggressors,” imagining nearly everyone as “a potential adversary.” Toughness as a virtue and violence as one of its expressions is largely reserved, however, for white men in Westerns; violence by Indians is viewed as proof of their savagery rather than a defensive response. Such ideas were already omnipresent in 19th century frontier literature, Wild West shows, tabloid journalism, and political rhetoric, which Hollywood tapped and reworked for the classical Western. The novels of James Fennimore Cooper, for example, showcase the white man’s superiority, noting that although “God made us all,” he gave “each race its gifts,” and the “white man’s gifts are Christianized, while a redskin’s are more for the wilderness.”

In Hollywood, the Production Code was in place to control the depiction of violence, but excused most Western violence because of its links to “evil usages of a bygone age,” and “not subject to the same critical examination as modern ways and customs … [as] historic and older classical subjects possess a certain quality of distance and unreality.” Violence as a methodology (or as spectacle) is not restricted to American society and its cultural products. However, what is distinctively American, notes Slotkin, is the “mythic significance” Americans have given in amount and variance, along with “forms of symbolic violence we imagine or invent, and the political uses to which we put that symbolism.” Thus, as a mythical and highly stylized realm, the Western—and its code of violence—is performative in its ability to supplant

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56 See Pearce, *Savagism*, 206.

57 Joseph Breen, referring to distinctions being incorporated into the Code, quoted in Raymond Moley, *The Hays Office* (New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1945), 100.

history as well as to influence what constitutes the West in the American imagination, along with its related heroes and villains. The disconnect with historical reality is well-documented, as the cinematic West is rarely an accurate geographical location and “instead an ideological terrain reinvented with each generation of fears and hopes.” It is also logical to assume that Indians, as the frontier’s Other, would figure prominently in the Western, yet there are few Indian characters as “individuals with a personal history and a point of view.” Adding insult to injury, if a speaking role for an Indian did exist in a traditional Western, it was often played by a white actor in “redface.” Moreover, it was not until 1881 that the term cowboy was anything but an epithet outside the West, where a cowboy culture had long been celebrated. Thus, the cowboy as a white Western hero only emerged on a national scale in the wake of Buffalo Bill and his traveling Wild West shows. Shortly after, an emerging Hollywood whitened this version of the cowboy (even adding a white hat), erased his class connections, and presented him as a suitable emblem for the developing nation.

Although the landscape of the Western is vital to its appeal, taking place at Turner’s “frontier line,” it is the story about the individual cowboy’s transformation within such an environment that makes it an allegory for nation. The individual’s fate (rather than the community’s) is on display, with the hero riding off into the sunset—ceaselessly heading West—but with urban life, capitalist development, and domesticity following close behind. Given the fixed nature of 19th century life, though, as depicted in Westerns for most of their 40 years of peak popularity, Will Wright suggests the marked changes to the hero over time say more about his changing relevancy to an evolving nation over the course of the 20th century. The hero of the

59 Mitchell, Westerns, 6.

“classical” Western of the 1930s and 1940s is largely a “lone stranger who rides into a troubled town and cleans it up, winning the respect of the townsfolk and the love of the schoolmarm,” with variations from film to film.\(^{61}\) There are also basic “oppositions” or binaries in play in such Westerns: among them, “good versus bad” and “inside versus outside,” contrasting an unsettled existence with a domesticated life; another is “weak versus strong,” with the gunfighter viewed as the strongest member of the society as compared to those who “seldom carry guns and have no fighting skill” or ability to form a group to defend themselves.\(^{62}\) Finally, there is the opposition between wilderness and civilization, with the East largely “associated with weakness, cowardice, selfishness, or arrogance.”\(^{63}\) Most important in the classical plot is the need for the hero to isolate himself as an autonomous individual as a way to achieve respect (Wright concludes that this trait mimics the skills needed to succeed in a market economy). Given the post-war disillusionment about manhood in an increasingly corporatized society (the image of men in gray flannel suits), the 1950s Western hero begins to define himself in opposition to society. In such a “transitional” Western as *High Noon* (1952), the cowboy hero even throws his badge in the dirt “to let the town know he has won, they haven’t.”\(^{64}\) More tellingly, the town is not shown to be particularly corrupt, but typical, implying the system itself is flawed, which represents a much more stinging critique than found in most traditional Westerns. It also hints of a dangerous conflict that will be encoded into the later rogue cop character: the hero’s sense of purpose (like that of the nation he personifies) is to maintain the system, yet, it is shown to be inept or corrupt, leaving only this lone conscience—this outsider or rogue—to know what is best.


\(^{62}\) Ibid., 40-59.

\(^{63}\) Ibid., 57.

\(^{64}\) Ibid., 77.
for everyone else. By celebrating the isolated wisdom of a lone enforcer, as in *High Noon* and the plethora of later cop films under review, the focus on the individual, though, helps masks the system’s flaws and duplicity, which dispatches a benevolent stranger who becomes the lone figure to both embrace *and* blame.

Another much studied example of a similarly conflicted and telling Western is *The Searchers* (1956), whose central character, Ethan Edwards (John Wayne), battles to fit into a changing society. His hatred of Indians, even assimilated “half breeds,” is so nakedly racial as to render him a symbol of intense moral confusion, serving as the nation’s protector of whiteness, while also representing the chief obstacle to the racial healing necessary for the nation to move forward. In the end, he “does the right thing,” choosing not to kill his niece, whom he has rescued, even though he has spent most of the story doggedly pursuing her and her captors, vowing to exterminate her for the sake of her honor—and for failing to no longer be white after living with savages. Manifest here is the “better dead than red” analogy that suits the nation’s 1950s obsession with communist infiltrators, but as Julia L. Eyda argues, the film also addresses the era’s domestic angst over dismantling the previous system of racial segregation. Considering both tensions in tandem provides a more complete picture of the film’s meaningfulness and its cultural relevancy, especially for a society still relying on men like Edwards—the “warrior patrolling the periphery”—as a way to preserve white hegemony, while at the same time, begrudgingly extending the American dream to the Other.  

Scholars disagree over the film’s politics, but I contend that its ideological subtext is a result of its heavy investment in existing frontier mythology that is already laden with politicized codes, and which move well beyond simply advocating a racist or anti-racist view, or, in general, being so consciously linked to as

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contemporary an issue as black Americans’ civil rights. Thus, it is the myth’s flexibility and longevity that enables such films to utilize it and espouse at once both progressive and conservative impulses. In this manner, such narratives are able to transcend historical specificity while also linking select historical moments to a larger continuum, which has been constructed and is maintained by this overarching frontier mythology. In this way, while symbolizing “progress,” *The Searchers* is also conservative, as it remains invested in key aspects of the old order, including the gendered and racialized factors that comprise its hero. The story’s interest center remains a conflicted white male reacting to new challenges, but who is shown adapting, however painfully, as well as remaining in control of the larger picture.

*The Searchers* ends with Edwards no longer at ease in a “civilized” and integrated frontier, but which could not have prospered without a gunfighter like him; and by extension, without an “uncivilized” frontier to tame, neither can he. Like the hero in *High Noon*, Edwards remains an outsider. The final scene shows him unable to join the family indoors, remaining just outside the doorway, captured in silhouette and backlit by the Western vista, where as a rogue he is doomed to roam—being both out of place on the frontier and disturbingly at home. As a director and an actor who helped define the genre, John Ford and John Wayne were well versed in the Western’s mythological embrace, especially its ability to transcend the politics of the moment. Rather than consciously attempt to celebrate (or disturb) the frontier myth, they merely deployed it, including its inherent duplicity: that to perform the savage to defeat savagery also runs the risk of becoming the savage. It is a conflict intrinsic to the myth—and the nation that hides behind it—and which comes to haunt the rogue cop character so invested in it.

For a post-war America, the Hollywood Western was “well-suited to convey important ideological rationales … including the inevitability of American expansion and the strategies for
hegemony.”

As times continued to change, however, the Western became overstressed trying to accommodate increasingly troubled heroes. By the 1960s, the 19th century West lost its ability to speak to contemporary concerns—or to keep justifying the slaughter of frontier Indians, now that their decimation was complete and deep in the past. As urban disorder grew more acute, Hollywood had to realign its focus as well to account for more recent threats to the nation, which would not only involve a new cast of Others to fear, but also a crimefighting hero who could match their potential for mayhem.

III. LAWLESSNESS AND THE CRIME FILM

The crime film is as old as the Western and equally as revelatory about American myths, although often from a much darker perspective. While the Western focuses on the hero and how America ought to be, the crime film more often portrays the dark side of American life and what it fears it might be. Rather than a picture of optimism that affirms American identity, the crime film frequently captures the nightmare that disturbs the collective psyche. Although most scholars consider “crime” too broad a description to qualify as a genre, being more of an umbrella term that encompasses several genres or subgenres (i.e., heist films, gangster films, cop films, prison films), Thomas Leitch argues for crime to be considered a suitable category for analysis if one looks at what such films have in common: “the continual breakdown and reestablishment of the borders among criminals, crime solvers, and victims.” He suggests that what matters is the ability of any tool of analysis to prompt novel inquiries, and to move beyond whether a film belongs to a given genre to consider what patterns emerge across films that tackle—however broadly—a central focus on law and order.

Building on Leitch’s thesis, I

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consider crime a useful enough rubric for analysis, and delineate two intimately related but differentiated groups of films: those that showcase the criminal as the main protagonist, and the others that focus on the crimefighter and his perspective. The plots of each are strikingly similar, as they investigate the same thin blue line that separates law from lawlessness, but supposedly from only one side of the line. Those stories richest in cultural clues, though, are those in which the characters crisscross the line, whether to pursue the uplift necessary for redemption, or to descend from a knight of the mean streets to another of society’s predators. Here again, the display of violence is an integral part of the mode of expression, but functions in more complex ways than in most Westerns, as it is capable of representing both the criminal’s pathos and pathology, as well as the crimefighter’s sense of restorative justice—and, on occasion, provocatively depicting the dire consequences when the two are dangerously intertwined.

Regardless of who is intended to be the main character in crime films prior to the ruptures of the 1960s, the criminal nearly always dominated in appeal, perhaps better representing the most familiar American traits as related to individualism, ingenuity, and impatience. The criminal’s draw also may rest on his ability to represent rebellion, as well as to serve as a compelling site of resistance, especially in light of outlaws being as integral to the nation’s founding mythologies and whose traits are often encoded into many hero figures. Considering the business profile of Hollywood, however, coupled with its closely watched role as a social agent with considerable influence, there is usually a check on the criminal’s ability to be oppositional. As Joseph Mankiewicz told Scarface writer Ben Hecht in the 1930s, “The villain can lay anybody he wants, have as much fun as he wants cheating and stealing … But you have to shoot him in the end.”68 Despite being advertised as socially relevant stories “ripped from the headlines,” crime films also traffic in more timeless elements of criminality that borrow from

classical Greek tragedy, especially if the character is redeemable—and talented—to account for the rise before the inevitable fall. His potential for human frailty indicates the existence of a moral compass even within a criminal universe, which in part explains why his inevitable destruction is so tragic. Crime stories, on the whole, however, are usually understood as purposefully mired in the contemporary world, and especially proliferate during times of intense social strain. The Depression had provided such a setting and produced a rash of folk heroes who, despite their criminality, captured the nation’s attention and garnered a degree of respect. Historical echoes that linked such Depression era bankrobbers as “Pretty Boy” Floyd, Bonnie and Clyde, and John Dillinger to 19th century frontier outlaws had permeated journalism accounts of their exploits. *The New York Times* specifically described Dillinger as being “true to the old frontier types” such as Jesse James. 69 For those who watched as banks repossessed their homesteads, such outlaw bankrobbers may have appeared as daring “avengers of injustice” at the time. 70 Press stories from the era even noted their thoughtfulness in burning mortgages while fleeing bank robberies, 71 in keeping with mythology that links them to Western civilization’s most celebrated outlaw: Robin Hood. Stories and films about gangsters, in particular, though, insinuate the taint of foreignness by accentuating the gangster’s ethnicity or contingent whiteness, as well as his focusing on his unsavory membership in gangs, mobs, and organized crime syndicates. The most popular movie gangsters overcome these “collective” handicaps by demonstrating their individual ambition and pursuit of the American dream, even if through criminal means. While such outlaws and gangsters often embody the same self-reliance


70 Ibid., 156.

necessary in a hero, unfortunately, for most of Hollywood history, cop characters too often appeared one-dimensional and ineffectual by comparison.72

Most crimefighters, no matter in what guise, are largely hampered by having to represent the state’s interests. Rather than resembling the self-reliant American Adam, their allegiance is as government functionaries, which undermines their ability to embody lone heroes. Even if configured as the more educated character, the traditional crimefighter often stood in opposition to the criminal’s street smarts, which in American narratives is much more prized than book learning or a formal education. Moreover, if a film’s crimefighter is presented as a district attorney, he carries a briefcase rather than a gun, with the action too often ending up in a courtroom and forfeiting the appeal of a High Noon-style showdown so ingrained in the American imagination as the righteous action of a threatened hero. His occupation also reeks of class privilege, as a college-educated professional, perhaps one with political ambitions, merely further distances him from representing an everyman type of hero. Finally, the movie crimefighter works in the urban milieu, which usually better suits the criminal’s survival skills, since they are born of an environment in which law and order are deteriorating. This stands in stark contrast to the realm of the Western hero, who is in charge of creating law and order in a new land not yet sullied or compromised by the realities of 20th century life. This urban quality, until well past mid century, also ran counter to the idealized image of America as a spacious place rooted in rural landscapes and small town ideals; even during the post-World War II period, the newly emerging suburbs fed off the image of open land, where reinvention was possible and plenty of space existed to reenact a revamped version of the frontier myth. The imagery of the American city is often inextricably linked to poverty and deterioration, as well as

to serve as a rude reminder that the nation also includes the non-white, the non-privileged, the
non-native born, even the unpatriotic who wish to challenge the status quo. In other words,
cities are full of dark people and dark stories, which is rarely the portrait the nation wants
presented to the world—onscreen or off.

Moreover, unlike the defeat of disorder and/or criminality that lies at the heart of the
Western, a crime film exploits their potential for actually unraveling a society. By 1934, the
decade-long effort of Will Hays to work from inside Hollywood to curb what was deemed the
crime film’s potential harm was deemed a failure, as the industry faced the threat of boycotts and
possible government interference, prompting the invention and vigorous enforcement of the
Motion Picture Production Code. Among its key attacks on the crime film, in particular, was
the warning that “revenge in modern times shall not be justified,” as mentioned earlier, leaving
Westerns unscathed because of their historical context. The Code’s principle author, Catholic
activist Joseph Breen, also noted, “The police must not be presented as incompetent, corrupt,
cruel or ridiculous.”

Within two years of Breen’s edict to stop denigrating law enforcement officers,
Hollywood made the crimefighter more dynamic by casting James Cagney in the role of a
government agent in “G” Men (1935). The move, ironically, meant relying on Cagney’s persona
and box office appeal earned playing some of Hollywood’s most memorable gangsters. In effect,

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73 For example, New York City’s population in 1915 is comprised of two thirds foreign born. By 1924, the
government passed legislation to set limits on immigration from specific countries. A quota was set at 2 percent of
the total from a country already represented in the United States as of 1890. This policy favored immigration from
northern Europe and restricted it from other parts of the world. (It was not abolished until 1968.)

74 Moley, Hays Office, 71. The Code was based on the Ten Commandments, and written by magazine
editor and Jesuit priest, Daniel Lord, along with the Catholic publisher of the Motion Picture Herald, Martin
Quigley. Joseph Breen instituted a fine of $25,000 to any picture that was produced, distributed, or exhibited without
a certificate of approval.

75 Ibid., 103.
Cagney’s lawman Brick Davis is “fairly indistinguishable from Tom Powers,” the pugnacious gangster in *Public Enemy* (1931), which first made Cagney a star. In “*G* Men, Davis is an underutilized attorney who joins the FBI after gangsters kill his friend, also an agent. Having been born to the streets, Davis uses his urban skills to hunt down his friend’s killers (many of whom he knows from his old life, including a mob boss who paid for his law school education)—his “street” smarts becoming an essential feature of the later rogue cop character, along with his ability to face down the very community that first socializes him.

The film also includes the FBI’s appeals to Washington of the early 1930s to carry guns like the criminals the Bureau was fighting. One character’s rousing speech to a Congressional committee is worth repeating here, revealing a logic that becomes innate in the later rogue cop:

> Arm your agents … give your special agents machine guns, shotguns, tear gas, everything else. This is war! … Understand, I don’t want to make them a group of quick trigger men, but I do want the Underworld to know that when a federal agent draws his gun, he is ready and equipped to shoot to kill with the least possible waste of bullets.  

The film finds closure using two plot devices—the latter endemic to narratives involving the rogue cop archetype. The first is Davis’ impending marriage to a colleague’s sister, signaling his full incorporation into society and his switch from conspiring with compromised women like his former moll, but which implies a domestication that will be rejected by the later rogue cop. The other plot device infuses the story with the necessary degree of violent spectacle, which provided a justification that satisfied the censors at the time but also taps an essential ingredient of the frontier myth: to end the criminals’ reign of terror Davis must behave violently, out-savaging the urban savages in order to restore law and order. The badge serves as a moral shield that empowers Davis to use a greater degree of ferocity than his previous gangster characters.

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76 “*G*” *Men*, DVD, directed by William Keighley (Turner Home Entertainment, 2000). Following the Lindbergh baby kidnapping in 1932, the FBI was given sweeping powers by Congress, with czar-like autonomy given to Hoover, who lobbied and won the right to arm his agents.
were even permitted. “G” Men’s ending features one of the most protracted shoot-outs to that point in film history; yet, it not only received the seal of approval from the Hays Office, but also “the semiofficial blessing of Hoover in a prologue” for its 1949 re-release.77

Many similarly violent pro-police films followed in the mid 1930s, in which Hollywood rewrites history—again. Real lawmen’s culpability during Prohibition had included being paid partners in the burgeoning bootlegging industry. As Ben Hecht summarizes the era’s police, “the forces of law and order did not advance on the villains with drawn guns but with their palms out like bellboys.”78 Meanwhile, the FBI, having gunned down the rural outlaws and public enemies of the era, became increasingly impotent against the rising crime syndicates that emerged in the post-Prohibition period, with bootlegging profits being invested in more complex criminal operations, which would control the American underworld for decades to come. With the syndicates, “Hoover kept an uneasy truce. Even his power was unequal ... and to attack them would be to invite a costly battle.”79 By the early 1950s, still denying organized crime existed, Hoover focused on suspected communists as the most dangerous threat to American society.

Another disconnect with reality was the complete whitewashing of screen cops, despite, as discussed earlier, the ranks of police being routinely filled by a disproportionate number of people from contingently white backgrounds. In the late 19th century, when police departments first formed, their ranks included a sizable portion of Irish Catholics, who left their cultural stamp on police culture, especially in the cities of the East; funerals for New York City cops—Irish or not—still include the mournful sound of bagpipes as an homage to the department’s foundational practices. Yet, in cinema, a cop character’s Irishness usually mirrors the 19th

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77 Leitch, Crime Films, 27.
79 Ibid., 11.
century split in Irish identity, delineating key difference between the normative Scotch-Irishman and the marginalized Irish Catholic. The latter type of Irishman has been cast as a criminal almost as frequently as the Italian; he has also served as the identity of most uniformed cops. As previously discussed, though, uniforms make these Irishmen seem unsuitable as heroes, given their connection to blue collar work. In early movies, a uniformed cop character may even have included a leftover brogue, further marking him as an unassimilated “foreigner,” and justifying his confinement to supporting roles (even to serve as comic relief as in the bumbling Keystone Kops of the silent era). In contrast, the plainclothes detective—the self-made American Adam of the crime genre—is frequently given a Scotch Irish heritage to signal his appropriateness as a hero figure.

The pessimism and critical promise of film noir

For much of his career, the Irish Catholic Cagney served as the archetype for the film gangster, and offered one last portrait in the Cold War-era crime film, *White Heat* (1949). This time, his nemesis is an undercover cop, who pales in comparison, especially after Cagney’s Cody Jarrett chooses to blow himself up rather than be arrested—castrating much of the cop’s potency and functionality.

Films like *White Heat* are later identified as *film noir*—or dark cinema—by French film scholars who note the haunting realism of many 1940s American crime films, which were thriving on the very elements that Hoover and others were trying to chill. Noir is important to discuss in brief for this study because of its frequent inclusion of a complex detective figure and another key ancestor to the rogue cop archetype. Film noir’s stylistic features, now easily recognizable, arguably describe a mood or attitude in filmmaking rather than a genre. At the very least, noir describes a particular *mise en scene* (oblique angles, stark and meaningful lighting,
irregular characters), lending “a sense of people trapped … in webs of paranoia and fear, unable to tell guilt from innocence, true identity from false … and the survival of good remains troubled and ambiguous.”

What is pertinent to this study is how noir—and its frequent and morally conflicted detective—challenge the codes embedded in most conventional Hollywood narratives, which opens up space for the rogue cop archetype to later inhabit and further exploit.

Like the Western, noir stories rely on popular literature for inspiration, transforming the “hard-boiled” detective heroes in novels by Raymond Chandler and Dashiell Hammett into screen heroes. Frank Krutnik contends that the cinematic versions replace the “power of deductive reasoning” with an emphasis on action (however controlled by the Code). I concur, but disagree with his assessment that the noir hero embodies a unique existential dilemma. Rather, I see his similarity with the Western hero’s need for individual reckoning and sense of duty, involving what Krutnik calls noir’s “battered concept of integrity and professionalism.”

Also echoing the frontier struggle of the Western hero, the noir detective “seeks to prove his masculine professionalism by outwitting his criminal adversaries.”

There are numerous scholars who investigate noir’s presentation of masculine crises; however, as Alain Silver notes, noir just as ably engages other social tensions such as “the crisis

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83 Ibid., 85-87.

84 Ibid., 42.
in Judeo-Christian patriarchal structures” at mid century. Others further suggest that the noir hero is as much racialized as he is gendered. Eric Lott describes noir’s “moral and visual passage into ‘shadiness’” as mirroring the racializing norm of the larger American society. Lott points to Richard Dyer’s suggestion about the lighting of white icons (such as Lillian Gish), giving their ethical purity a particularly racialized form; Dyer notes how the white female star “is so much lit, she also appears to the source of light” and the basis of aesthetic and moral superiority. Lott concludes that noir’s “relentless cinematography of chiaroscuro and moral focus on the rotten souls of white folks … invoke the racial dimension of this play of light against … the ‘dark’ side of the white Western self.”

Noir’s codes about class are noted by even fewer scholars. Yet, the white noir hero demands a “paradoxical” combination of rights: “to be completely detached from society and … be allowed total access to every part of it … He holds himself external to and above specific class, domestic and institutional relations in order not to be marked by any specificity … [and] affirms the right of the Democratic Everyman to go anywhere as a matter of principle.” The noir detective is a portrait of a self-directed man who enjoys considerable autonomy, which however jeopardized, is his to lose.

A combination of factors explain noir’s short life amid the chilly climate of a Cold War America, which lacks the tolerance for noir’s obscuring the difference between good and evil

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85 Alain Silver, “Introduction,” in Film Noir Reader, eds. Alain Silver and James Ursini (New York: Limelight, 1999), 5.


88 Lott, Whiteness, 83-4.

and that enables its cops, criminals, and victims to share the same pliable morality. Nor did American audiences flock to see these films at the time of their release, perhaps sharing Life magazine’s dismay at “Hollywood’s profound postwar affection for morbid drama.” As B movies, they were also relegated to a lower exhibition profile, only becoming the focus of critique and praise after scholarly attention prompted their “secondary commercialization” in the decades that follow. Thus, the stylistic features that gave noir its uniqueness also undermined its ability to resonate within the larger culture. At the same time, its frequent abstraction of violence, preferring “compositional tension” over “physical action,” disqualifies its use of violence as a form of regeneration—so vital to the frontier myth. Moreover, the noir detective is usually privately employed, which makes his use of deadly force an intimate act and incongruous as a manner of public catharsis. Most of all, it is noir’s negative view of American society and its “fear of the future” that perhaps limited its appeal and constricted its reach as a national allegory. For a nation that thrives on looking forward—even at the expense of learning from an interrogated past—noir proved far too pessimistic during its original run. Still, as much as the Western cowboy, the noir detective produced a legacy of self-reliance, obsession, moral pliability, and a taste for violence that complicated Hollywood’s portrait of an American hero—much of which the rogue cop archetype will inherit and redeploy.

IV. INVENTING THE ROGUE COP CHARACTER

As the 1950s lumbered along, the embrace of a counterculture gathered momentum. On one front were the “Beats” of the post-war period: intellectuals, artists, and the “swinging group

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92 Paul Schrader, “Notes on Film Noir,” in Film Noir Reader, eds. Alain Silver and James Ursini (New York: Limelight, 1999), 55.
93 Ibid., 58.
of new American men intent on joy,” to use Jack Kerouac’s description. On another front was
the Civil Rights movement in the wake of the Supreme Court’s 1954 order to desegregate and
the push to end Jim Crow in the South. Like other crossroads in history, a combination of forces
changed American society, although the consequences did not seem irreversible until the late
1960s. By then an array of social and cultural ruptures accompanied growing opposition to the
Vietnam War, helping to galvanize disparate groups toward a fateful choice: to merely question
authority or to advocate counterrevolution. Intense struggles were underway concerning Black
Power, gay and lesbian rights, the women’s movement, the plight of Native Americans, the battle
to save the environment, experiments in Eastern religions, and the Left’s reinvestment in
Marxism as a means to envision radical changes to the system—or its overthrow. At the same
time, President Richard Nixon moved to check the reach of such movements, describing a “silent
majority” being terrorized by potent challengers to “establishment” America. In actuality, much
(but not all) of these groups’ oppositional potential was neutralized during the course of his
presidency, following intense government harassment, imprisonment of key members, vicious
infighting, and simple fatigue. Even Americans sympathetic to the anti-war crusade or other
social movements grew increasingly concerned about the escalating violence. Nixon also had
promised to end the war in a strategic and “honorable” way, although his secret bombing of
Cambodia launched a renewed interest in covert tactics that future presidents would emulate.
Under the guise of curbing the spread of communist in the world, the stage, then, was set for
America to “correct” such movements through sustained political intervention and aggressive
military action.

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Beginning in the supposed “summer of love” — the same summer the urban ghettos were in flames — several films were released that signaled a crisis was brewing in Hollywood as well. In particular, the crime film *Bonnie and Clyde* (1967) touched off a cultural brawl, using the crime story’s best conventions and a tale from the 1930s to comment on the growing tumult, portraying the infamous couple as much folk heroes as bankrobbers. The film also featured Texas ranger Frank Hamer, who far from heroic, was presented as their unrelenting tormenter; and who eventually ordered his agents to ambush the couple, their massacre serving as the film’s ultra-violent finale. Hamer also resembled real G-man Melvin Purvis, who had pursued such Depression era outlaws as Dillinger and Pretty Boy Floyd, and whose methods prompted even fellow lawmen to accuse him of shooting first and asking questions later.95 Critics at the time argued over whether *Bonnie and Clyde* was a landmark piece of contemporary art or an abomination of Hollywood excess. One critic, Charles Thomas Samuels, building on Siegfried Kracauer’s view that cinema often engages a “national fever chart,” notes, “In the thirties in Germany, the disease was authoritarianism; in the sixties in America, it is anarchy.” Samuels accused *Bonnie and Clyde* of further encouraging that outcome, especially the finale, adding, “Those who riot against conditions in the Negro ghetto or the war in Vietnam can claim precisely the moral validation for their acts which the Barrow Gang so conspicuously lacks.”96

Hollywood’s old guard was both alarmed and encouraged by the overall critical and box office success of *Bonnie and Clyde* (1967). The film’s director, Arthur Penn, had predicted that Hollywood was undergoing acute changes as early as 1963 (the same year President Kennedy was assassinated). Penn’s film, having a lead actor as producer, a script by unknowns, and edited

95 Michael Wallis, *Pretty Boy* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1992), 345. Perhaps evidence of his moral dilemma is his suicide in 1960 using the same gun with which he had killed Floyd.

outside the studio’s control, suitably represented the dawn of a new cinematic era to match the changing times. Like the former all-powerful studio, the Production Code was similarly dismantled during this period, replaced with a ratings system that is still with us today.

Within a year of Bonnie and Clyde, real life violence overshadowed the Hollywood version. Often referred to as the “apocalyptic year of a momentous decade,” 1968 was the year the Vietnam conflict and the anti-war movement reached a theatrical pitch; it also included the assassinations of Bobby Kennedy and Martin Luther King, as well as the melee outside the Democratic Convention in Chicago, which the government’s Walker report later concluded amounted to a “police riot.” As Newsweek reviewer Joseph Morgenstern finally conceded, movies like Bonnie and Clyde “are the inevitable consequence of violent life. They may also transmit the violence virus, but they do not breed it any more than the Los Angeles television stations caused Watts to riot.”

While the rejuvenated crime film and its penchant for social criticism took center stage, the Western no longer seemed able to paint a flattering portrait of a nation under such duress. The Wild Bunch (1969), which Steve Neale labels a “Vietnam Western,” no longer focused on the promise of the frontier, but the wounded environment that lay in its aftermath. Leonard Quart and Albert Auster note that director Sam Peckinpah’s “orgiastic massacre,” however controversial, reflected the mood of many films of the era, which used the liberal license of the post-Code period to evoke “a portrait of a world gone awry.” The film remains a valuable and

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97 From Cahiers du Cinema 140, February 1963, reprinted in Cawelti, 8-9. Also evident in the film is the influence of French “New Wave,” the collective of French films that poured into American “art” theaters of the early 1960s, which pioneers a visual style of cinéma vérité of jump cuts, hand-held cameras, irregular tracking shots, experimental editing, and improvisational dialogue — all contributing to a feel of captured spontaneity and realism.


99 Leonard Quart and Albert Auster, American Film and Society Since 1945 (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2002), 95.
disturbing portrait of gunfighters severed from the myths that once sanctioned their actions, presenting their participation in the Mexican Revolution, if not a justifiable excuse, then an explanation for their violent behavior. The film aptly captures the era’s conflict over the Vietnam War, which increasingly forced the nation to configure political justifications for continuing to dispatch warriors to the Southeast Asian frontier. As a relevant mode of expression, the Western did not entirely fade away after the 1960s, but never again matched its former prominence. Meanwhile, Penn’s resurrection of the complex criminal was soon joined by the crime films of Martin Scorsese and Francis Ford Coppola, who similarly presented complicated portraits of characters who reflect existing social tensions. At this critical juncture, then, only the crimefighter awaited a contemporary update.

Dirty Harry: the Wild West show of urban America

Like its usefulness during previous epochs of social and cultural realignment, the frontier myth adapted again, this time to the vagaries of city life—where a seemingly uncivilized urban world awaited its allegorical strength; and where a gunfighter with wilderness skills could vanquish the unruly Others standing in the way of the nation’s destiny. As Richard Schickel explains, “There was a need … to find a contemporary place for hard loners—traditional males … to live plausibly. And the most readily available wilderness, the concrete wilderness, suddenly seemed more interesting and dangerous than ever.” At the center of this Hollywood makeover was a police detective, a new urban cowboy, who could now be dispatched to clean up the streets

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100 One reason may be more recent Westerns, which explore alternative experiences that involve women and people of color, along with Clint Eastwood’s Unforgiven (1992), featuring aging gunfighters whose utility and moral codes are rendered more transparent and risk further exposing the manufacture nature and duplicity of such protagonists.

of San Francisco—ground zero for the era’s counterculture—where he would out-savage the savage to restore law and order, and echo this long-standing feature of American thinking.

*Dirty Harry* (1971) features homicide detective Harry Callahan (Clint Eastwood) and his rogue approach to pursuing criminals, specifically, the sociopathic sniper, Scorpio (Andy Robinson), who makes clear he intends to continue killing innocent people until the city meets his ransom demands. Harry must work around a spineless mayor’s office and a hamstrung police department obliged to follow the law, but after being suspended for, among other things, torturing Scorpio, ends Scorpio’s reign of terror by acting alone, matching the criminal’s intensity and creating his own rules to see justice served. The film sets the tone for Harry’s behavior, which endures through four more films that span the next 17 years. In general, Harry faces two types of abstracted enemies: the first includes criminals symbolizing an array of radical types befitting the era (Scorpio wears a peace sign as a belt buckle, but far from being a peace-loving hippie, is as dangerous as the Charles Manson figure he resembles); Harry’s other nemesis is the amalgam of social and political pressures embattling the system, which seems strained trying to accommodate such aggressive demands for change.

Perhaps reacting to some critics’ complaints that *Dirty Harry* had fascist overtones, the next film *Magnum Force* (1973) “cleans up Harry’s own act.” In this film, Harry ultimately ends the killing spree of four rookie traffic cops who—with the help of a corrupt police official—wage a war on society’s undesirables, whom the system has failed to prosecute. Stumping both the rookie cops (and viewers who awaited Harry’s usual disdain for the law), Harry explains how he may hate the weakened system, “but until someone comes along with some changes that make sense, I’ll stick with it.” Here, faced with anarchy, Harry makes clear

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the only choice left is an imperfect but enduring American justice system. He also insinuates that these cops’ tactics are un-American, resembling more the Brazilian “death squads” operating in the 1970s as auxiliaries to the legal police. Then in *The Enforcer* (1976), Harry stops a terrorist organization comprised of disgruntled Vietnam veterans and their accomplices, whose reasons for attacking the government are left unexplored—as are the objectives of black militants, whom the police harass for crimes committed by the white radicals. In *Sudden Impact* (1983), which Eastwood directs, Harry is banished to a small California town for his most recent excesses, but becomes involved in the hunt for a serial killer: a rape victim exacting her revenge. Finally, in *The Dead Pool* (1988), Harry solves a mystery related to several murder victims, whose names appeared on a list meant to be a game; it also adds an insatiable media to Harry’s enemies list.

Much has been written about how these films reflect key social and political clashes, many of which remain unsettled. One conflict relates to procedures that grew out of the Supreme Court’s 1966 ruling of the Miranda case, which has altered the way police make arrests. According to the rules, police are required to read arrested persons their rights, among them, to be represented by an attorney and to keep silent to avoid self-incrimination. Their intent is to reduce individual discretion and to ensure that the process of determining guilt is performed by the courts, as dictated by the American justice system. Although viewed at the time as an assault on police authority, the consensus among police is that the rules have helped to streamline the prosecution process and reduce the emotional variable cops often experience at the moment of arrest. Controversy over the Miranda rules has been included in numerous cop films since the 1960s, often depicted as shortchanging the goal of restorative justice, even though such rules honor the letter of the law. In *Dirty Harry*, Scorpio is savvy enough to exploit the new
technicalities of arrest, smugly informing Harry, “I want a lawyer.” After Harry violates Scorpio’s rights, Scorpio is released to kill again, prompting Harry to complain that “the law is crazy” for being able to trump the rights of a victim, who was “raped and left to die.” However, as Chief Justice William Rehnquist noted in the U.S. Supreme Court’s 2004 decision concerning one challenge to Miranda, “the warnings have become part of our national culture.”

Harry not only serves as the “warrior patrolling the periphery” for a nation under siege, but also reflects identity factors that define him as an American hero. Harry represents a changing portrait of white hegemonic masculinity, battling to respond to challenges, which by 1971 reach a level of another perceived crisis. One obvious marker of Harry’s particular performance of masculinity—or more specifically, the phallic power behind his gendered authority—is Harry’s not-so-subtle 44 Magnum, with its especially long barrel and reputation as “the most powerful handgun in the world.” Dennis Bingham cites Luce Irigaray’s discussion of the phallus to make a point about its representation in Dirty Harry, noting: “Veneration of the phallus … doesn’t give a fig about issues of legitimacy in men’s conflicts. All it cares about is keeping the phallic emblem out of the dirt … [p]reserving it from derision, insignificance, and devaluation.” Although Bingham explains that Irigary is describing a woman’s patriarchal role as keeper of the order, he notes, “I can’t imagine a better characterization of the project of Siegel’s

103 Dirty Harry, DVD, directed by Don Siegel (Warner Home Video, 1997).
104 Ibid.
106 By the 1970s cops were permitted to carry any weapon with which they could qualify (able to shoot accurately). Once the film makes Harry’s Magnum famous, many cops attempted to qualify with Magnums but failed, since the gun proved too cumbersome in terms of weight, accuracy, and convenience. From interview with Michael Lingeman, former Detroit police officer, 13 October 2005.
Dirty Harry. By 1971 the Hollywood cinema, finding the male without a credible helpmate and supporter, takes upon itself the role of protector of the embattled phallus.”107 Harry’s mastery of his phallic symbol, though, is contested in Magnum Force, pitting Harry against four rookies, who learned their shooting skills in the military’s Special Forces.

Harry’s masculinity is also constructed in opposition to the Other, including what is deemed feminine. In keeping with the ancestry of loner heroes, Harry is introduced as a widower with no further need for intimacy, even close male friends; like knights of old, he is focused only on his mission. As a symbol of normative masculine sexuality, though, Harry only has sex twice in the course of the five films. His first occurs in Magnum Force, after a young, Asian American neighbor approaches him, asking, “What’s a girl have to do to go to bed with you?” to which Harry responds, “Try knocking on the door.” His second coupling occurs in Sudden Impact with the rape victim-turned-vigilante killer, Jennifer Spencer (Sondra Locke). The film also includes a vicious portrait of a “dyke” named Ray (Audrie J. Neenan), who helps deliver the female victims to her male friends and watches (and laughs) while the rapes occur. By making the criminal accomplice a female, and more specifically, a lesbian, the film attempts to de-emphasize the gendered and heterosexual nature of the rapes, in this instance. And by implication, the film signals its disapproval of such “deviant” sexuality, which stands in stark contrast to Harry’s normative standard of heterosexuality, and by extension, the nation’s. Despite the show of female aggression, the story is about Harry’s control, in particular, over Jennifer, whom he eventually sets free (overturning his earlier oath to remain loyal to the system, right or wrong). She expresses her gratitude, telling Harry he is “an endangered species,” as a traditional

American male who follows his own instincts, and whose approach brought her “justice,” while the overtaxed system of the 1970s failed her.\textsuperscript{108}

Harry’s masculinity is further tested when assigned a female partner, Kate Moore (Tyne Daly), in \textit{The Enforcer}. This reflects another of the era’s conflicts: the push to integrate women into the ranks of police, a battle that remains ongoing and is discussed further in the next chapter. After an altercation with a school-marmish figure from the mayor’s office (whom Harry refuses to call “Ms” as she requests), Harry is introduced to candidate Moore, whom he aggressively rebukes for lacking street experience, which will jeopardize the lives of her male partners (although, by that logic, male rookies pose the same threat). “That’s a hell of a price to pay for being stylish,”\textsuperscript{109} he remarks, intimating that hiring women is about keeping up appearances rather than responding to changing gender roles. Harry eventually comes to admire Moore’s knowledge of the criminal code as well as her pluck—within the limits of the era’s understanding of gender relations. This constrains her range of behaviors to a few tired stereotypes, including becoming ill after seeing a dead body in the morgue. For her part, Moore comes to support Harry, especially after being shot, urging him to pursue her killer, which Harry does, blasting him off the edge of Alcatraz with a bazooka.

\textit{Dirty Harry} is not a presentation of unchanging masculinity, however, as each film reveals a subtle shift in his performance of gender. Rather than a \textit{fait accompli}, hegemonic masculinity requires maintenance and continual adjustment; like his enemies and storylines, Harry is continually refreshed, learning to adjust to each new “challenger.” Besides Moore, they include an array of male partners of color, which mirrors another of the era’s conflicts, also ongoing: minority recruitment within police departments as one way to alleviate tensions.

\textsuperscript{108} \textit{Sudden Impact}, DVD, directed by Clint Eastwood (Warner Home Video, 2001).

\textsuperscript{109} \textit{The Enforcer}, DVD, directed by James Fargo (Warner Home Video, 2001).
between predominately white departments and largely minority populations in urban areas (especially after “white flight” transfers attention and resources to the burgeoning suburbs). Still, as Bingham notes, the treatment of race is “surprisingly complex” in the *Dirty Harry* films. Like Harry’s ever-evolving gender construction, rather than seem patently racist, Harry is shown negotiating with each person of color on a one-to-one basis. This approach, in keeping with the nation’s penchant for individuated responses, manages to overpower most system-wide views that would reveal enduring, large-scale inequities based on race. Having Harry direct his politically incorrect labels at anyone who is not a WASP gives the impression that he is not so much a racist as an individual taking care to avoid singling out anyone in particular for prejudicial treatment. It also seems socially defensible for refusing to cave in to the demands for more sensitive cops who may be unable to perform the more dangerous aspects of Harry’s “dirty” job. Given this spin, Harry is not the problem, these thin-skinned “others” are, being so easily wounded by mere words. Harry, as the Scotch-Irish everyman—and the norm—is inoculated against similarly abusive epithets (outside of being called a “pig” as a cop), which accounts for his inability to relate to this type of injury. Thus, Harry’s disdain for minorities’ “special” requests to adjust the American system, including its language, is seen *not* in defense of whiteness, but in defense of a system that is assumed to be color-blind. The only characters, then, who seem conscious of color are those demanding “affirmative action” (to reverse the centuries of unacknowledged affirmative action accorded most whites). Meanwhile, as one character notes, Harry appropriately bleeds “PD-blue.”

To complicate the race card being played, multiple versions of blackness are included as well. In the original film’s most famous scene, Harry hovers over a wounded black man lying on
the street, asking “do you feel lucky, punk?” chasing the man to grab for the gun near him on the street. The criminal declines to gamble on how many bullets have been fired; but when Harry starts to walk away, the man calls out, “I gots to know.” Harry turns around, points the gun in the man’s face and pulls the trigger, revealing that no bullets are left. Harry grins knowingly while the black “punk” looks alarmed. In the course of Dirty Harry, another black presence attempts to offset this earlier and more stereotypical version, as a black doctor patches up Harry’s gunshot wound, revealing a congeniality with Harry that suggests he is indifferent to color even when the film is not. Race, among other prejudices, is also used as a frequent plotting device, including having the film’s villain vow to include “a priest or a nigger” among his next victims; he later targets a gay man as well.

Albert Popwell, who portrays the original film’s “punk,” appears again in The Enforcer, this time as the compromised black militant, Big Ed Mustapha, whom Harry blackmails into becoming an informant. In Sudden Impact, Popwell makes his third appearance, portraying Harry’s sympathetic and friendly colleague, Horace King, who like previous Others attached to Harry, winds up dead. Moreover, the film offers two expressions that speak directly to whiteness, further establishing it as the mark of superiority. After one of the black militants offers to keep Moore distracted, Harry nods in appreciation, adding, “That’s mighty white of you.” The other occurs when Mustapha describes the vet-turned-revolutionary as a “stone waste of white.” It also goes unremarked that the black militants are falsely arrested as “terrorists,” which outrages Harry only as it ruins his deal with Mustapha; Harry’s mission to protect victims’ rights apparently does not extend to the black militants. Finally, the remaining black characters throughout the

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108 Dirty Harry, DVD.
110 Ibid.
111 The Enforcer, DVD.
series are the stereotypical array of pimps, prostitutes, and deviants, reflecting the long-standing Hollywood practice of depicting blacks as sexually base and violent by nature, rather than by purposeful design, like Harry.

Harry and his multicultural partners also help to introduce the loosely defined, interracial “buddy” film. What has now become a cliché was viewed at the time as novel, if not progressive, by some observers. In the original film, Harry’s partner is a college-educated Latino named Chico Gonzales (Reni Santoni), whom Harry initially calls “spic” and “college boy,” but whose sociology degree, warns Harry, will not keep him from being killed on the street. After being shot, Gonzales admits he lacks the mettle to be a cop (like Moore, he becomes ill at the sight of dead or wounded bodies). He ultimately resigns to become a college instructor, which further emasculates him, betraying Hollywood’s code about masculinity being defined in terms of action. In Magnum Force, Harry is paired with a black male, “Early” Smith (Felton Perry), whose best quality is loyalty but who lacks the smarts to avoid being blown up by a mailbox bomb. Again, Smith cannot handle the uglier aspects of the job, unable to eat after seeing a dead body, compared to Harry who chews on a hotdog while thwarting a bank robbery and shooting suspects on a crowded city street. In Sudden Impact, Harry is more or less alone (to allow space for his romance with the serial killer). By the final film in the series, The Dead Pool, Harry is assigned the Asian American Al Quan (Evan Kim), who is skilled in the martial arts but still no match for Harry, who continues to vanquish his enemies with little physical effort, outside of pulling the trigger.

The Dirty Harry franchise, rather than present a portrait of stable white masculinity, is illuminating for how he adjusts in reaction to these Others, demonstrating how the norm is able to adjust and absorb challenges. Others are allowed space in the story, but key myths about
normative gender and race are largely reiterated and reinforced, while their demands are investigated and ultimately mitigated, failing to alter Harry’s superior status. Like hegemony itself, Harry is not the simple reflection of a fixed system of domination, but the continual renegotiation of the parameters of power. By enabling women and people of color to participate, Harry, and the power structure he represents, also dictate the extent of their participation.

Although class is not usually covered in analyses about Harry—or his offspring that follow—his class consciousness, or more accurately, his denial of class, is also vital to his identity construction. As Peter Lehman and William Luhr note, “mainstream movies tend to presume an invisible norm of middle-class life and values,” including working hard (not simply for the money) as a reflection of moral strength. Moreover, “[u]pper-class people are often portrayed as exotic, crazy, corrupt, immoral, selfish, and unhappy; lower-class people as desperate, dangerous, and also immoral.”113 Although Harry clashes with superiors, the conflict is based on their complicity with the corrupted system and not their class position above him. Yet, several symbols of their bourgeois status distinguish them from Harry, including their three-piece suits and political ambition. As a detective, as discussed earlier, Harry’s class position is ambiguous. At one point he gripes about how a raise would be helpful, but which says more about his autonomy to complain than an interest in money as the reward for his labor. Harry’s home is as nondescript as it needs to be to suggest his class—or classless—status. Moreover, although Harry is a city employee with bosses to endure and union dues to pay, he seems an autonomous being, even contemptuous of authority, making him a fitting example of a suitable “anti-authority” authority figure for the times, as well as a self-made man who transcends the historical moment to link him to this venerable American ideal.

One predecessor of Harry’s, Steve McQueen’s hip detective Clancy in *Bullitt* (1968), arguably not the rogue Harry becomes, similarly demonstrates many of the same ambiguous class markers. As Leitch notes, in contrast to the upper class politician Chalmers, Clancy represents “a uniquely pansocial figure who alone can mediate between the untrustworthy world of political power Chalmers represents and the equally treacherous lowlife world” of the criminals both men are pursuing.\(^{114}\) Clancy, though, displays just enough “proletarian markers to establish him as a working stiff doing his job”; more importantly, he is “both emphatically middle-class and essentially classless,” like cop heroes before and since.\(^{115}\)

*Dirty Harry* and the New Frontier

Much like the national crisis Turner and Roosevelt linked to the 19\(^{th}\) century frontier, Kennedy saw a similar crisis in American identity by the early 1960s, which he proposed could be solved by finding a new frontier to conquer. In his speech, Kennedy counters those who argued that “all the horizons have been won, that there is no longer an American frontier … But the New Frontier of which I speak … is a set of challenges… uncharted areas of science and space, unsolved problems of peace and war, unconquered pockets of poverty and prejudice.”\(^ {116}\) Much of his vision to fix the existing conditions in the existing frontier has been largely forgotten, however, in favor of the mythic frontier he evoked—the one that persistently seduces an American imagination steeped in visions of “individualism, single-mindedness, selflessness, [and] masculine virtue.”\(^ {117}\) After Kennedy’s assassination, which many describe as another moment of innocence lost, the American landscape was viewed as a frontier spoiled, with ugly

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\(^{114}\) Leitch, *Crime Films*, 235.

\(^{115}\) Ibid., 239-40.


\(^{117}\) Ibid., 235.
and corruptive forces at work. Rather than finding fault with the recurring metaphor of an 
untamed frontier, mainstream America blamed the Other, starting with the Soviets who despoiled 
the frontier of outer space by getting there first with Sputnik; to poor, urban minorities largely 
held responsible for destroying America’s cities. Rather than heed Kennedy’s plea to curb the 
poverty that helps fuel urban decay, by the time of Dirty Harry, America was blaming the 
victims of poverty for their own failure to realize the American Dream. In other words, the myths 
are not flawed, only those criticizing the existing social order.

This deep relationship with the frontier myth—whether in its original form or its more 
contemporary expressions—makes Dirty Harry the next step on a continuum, which links its 
underlying mythology to a long-running symbiosis between American culture and politics. The 
longevity and toll of Harry’s struggle, already waged by so many screen heroes before him, may 
help explain why Harry seems so war weary even in his first screen appearance. In what Robert 
B. Ray dubs a “disguised Western,” Harry reprises the Western sheriff’s disgust in the renowned 
Western, High Noon (1952), by similarly throwing his badge away at the end. Harry is also an 
updated Ethan Edwards, acting out of a personal sense of duty rather than consciously reflecting 
a national agenda. When the wife of one of Harry’s partners asks him why he stays on the job, 
Harry answers, “I don’t know. I really don’t.”¹¹⁸ His numerous resignations and his department’s 
frequent attempts to suspend him fail because he represents something bigger than one man: he 
embodies the nation’s ambitions as well as its fears about what it imagines and realizes. Harry 
serves as the system’s agent of containment—and its convenient fall guy—his gender, race, and 
class all called into the service of the nation to progress at any cost. Dirty Harry, while affirming 
the myth that gives him life, also glimpses the inherent conflicts that accompany deploying such 
a troubling figure.

¹¹⁸ Dirty Harry, DVD.
Dirty Harry was no doubt controversial when released, but rather than merely reflect a specific political agenda of the day, more importantly, embodied long-standing cinematic traditions, which are already steeped in myths about American exceptionalism and its accompanying ideology. Like Eastwood himself, Harry reflects a deceivingly complex set of social and political sensibilities that are not so easy to label. Although the film at times makes a particular argument, as Bingham notes, “it needs to do what Hollywood narratives have always done: make the political personal and hence disavow it.” Eastwood explains that Harry adheres to a “higher morality,” and, in part, is a response to the “big sixties concern with the rights of the accused,” but cautions that “Harry is a fantasy character,” and more telling about the process of making entertaining movies. Eastwood, at this stage of his career, knew well the rewards of the cowboy’s enduring mystique, having become a Western icon after appearing in the “spaghetti” Westerns of Italian filmmaker Sergio Leone. Moreover, an earlier collaboration with director Don Siegel, Coogan’s Bluff (1968), had already transitioned the cowboy from the mythic West to the modern cityscape, positioning Eastwood as the appropriate bridge between a 19th century cowboy and his 20th century urban counterpart. As Nicole Rafter notes, part of Dirty Harry’s success is Eastwood’s existing persona as a “gunslinger”; and “[w]ithout missing a beat, the Siegel-Eastwood team rescued the superannuated but still compelling hero of Westerns

119 Bingham, Acting Male, 182.

120 Clarens, Crime Movies, 302-5; Eastwood has moved from the Left’s criticism to the Right’s recent attacks for the supposed right-to-die subtext of Million Dollar Baby, which earned Eastwood his second Academy Award in 2005 as director.

121 Coogan’s Bluff (1968), also starring Eastwood with Siegel directing, is an apt forerunner to Dirty Harry—a story of a Western lawman who travels East (from Arizona to New York City) to catch a thief. Once in the city, Coogan confronts characters similar to the vilified hippies and wayward radicals that inhabit Harry’s San Francisco.
from genre decay by transferring him laterally, character intact, into the cop flick.”

Even one of Harry’s bosses tells him his approach is more like a “wild west show.”

Dirty Harry kicked off what Stuart M. Kaminsky dubs the era of “white-hot violence,” as well as launched a new subgenre of vigilante films. Yet, vigilante films (such as Death Wish with Charles Bronson’s architect on a rampage after his family is brutalized) lack the legal authority that Harry so deftly exploits. The French Connection, also released in 1971, although featuring what seems like another rogue, differs in key ways as well. Unlike the fantastic circumstances that pepper Harry’s typical work day, Detective “Popeye” Doyle (Gene Hackman) endures a daily grind of routine tasks, including the tedious paperwork necessary for warrants followed by hours of lonely surveillance. There is also Popeye’s reliance on his partner, who doubles as his friend—this sense of male bonding becoming an essential ingredient in cop films that follow. Popeye and his partner also track a major drug deal inspired by a real case, with some Hollywood embellishment, which also plays up the rivalry between local and federal authorities (another staple of future cop films as well as expanding Bullitt’s muscle car speeding through the urban landscape, and finally supplanting Hollywood’s previous use of cowboys chasing Indians across the Western frontier on horseback).

What prevents Popeye from matching the mythical status of Harry as a hero of the urban frontier is, first, that Popeye’s enemies are mere criminals focused on greed, while Harry’s foes threaten more profound social mayhem and political unrest. As another Scotch Irish everyman, though, Popeye is similarly constructed in contrast to criminal Others—Italian and Jewish mobsters, black street punks, and foreign traffickers—whom he only wants to arrest as individuals rather than to eradicate as collective threats. Another limitation on Popeye’s worth as

122 Rafter, Shots, 75.

123 The Enforcer, DVD.
an emblematic enforcer is that his goals are shown to be intensely personal rather than in pursuit of a larger sense of restorative justice. Third, Popeye lacks Harry’s moral high ground; rather than a knight on a mission, he remains a foot soldier in the street war. Fourth, Popeye’s battle ends in tragedy: when he thinks his French “connection” has escaped, he kills a federal agent in his zealously to capture his target. Moreover, it is an act about which he seems indifferent, even scornful. Such an “error” not only diminishes Popeye’s performance of an American hero, but also disqualifies him as a figure of national efficiency.

**The Reagan era and the frontier of the (global) West**

The mid 1970s marked the end of the Vietnam War, but framed as a “loss,” compounded its already debilitating effects; this sense of defeat also gave rise to a neoconservatism that attempted to reinvest in American exceptionalism and reestablish “traditional” values. As Wilkinson characterizes the period, and Ronald Reagan’s election to the presidency:

…”[it] came at a postimperial moment, when Americans were not at all sure what role they wanted or could obtain either for their presidents or for their country in world affairs. In crises affecting sensitive national honor, many Americans wanted their president to get tough yet realized the past costs and current limits of such toughness."

Reagan has been credited with fostering a recuperative image of a bolder America at a key juncture in the nation’s history, most importantly, restoring an image of toughness. Many observers considered President Jimmy Carter a portrait of a “softer” male, who was “not ‘man enough’ to run a superpower,” and creating a “crisis that only a return of the … father could

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124 Although a controversial, complex term, it generally refers to a conservatism formed in response to 1960s upheavals, and which re-invests in faith- or moral-based solutions to domestic woes, and deployment of specific foreign policy initiatives supportive of American aggression in world affairs and to trump multilateralist approaches.

Reagan, who turned 70 shortly after his inauguration, fit the paternal role, embodying “both national and individual images of manliness” reminiscent of Roosevelt’s “rough-rider image.” Reagan recouped the nation’s swagger, in large measure, by applying the frontier mythology to foreign policy initiatives, which testified to America’s renewed interest in global policing. Moreover, as a successful film star before entering politics, Reagan understood the communicative power of cinema (for performers as well as texts), and, in particular, the value of impersonating a Western cowboy. Besides often dressing like one, Reagan’s speeches frequently referenced such cowboy-like characters as Dirty Harry and Rambo—the controversial character introduced in First Blood (1982), appearing again in two sequels in the 1980s. Susan Jeffords considers films such as Rambo one way 1980s cinema “re-masculinizes” America and rehabilitates its warrior heroes by re-imagining the Vietnam conflict. Reagan borrowed the cultural and political capital of such macho characters, applying them to both domestic and foreign contexts, and reflecting his own crossover appeal. Before becoming president, Reagan had been governor of California, where he had tried to blunt the anti-war movement and dampen the state’s perceived “permissive” environment, one that mainstream America still considers a breeding ground for its culture wars.

Another way is to re-direct the Vietnam memory is to have veterans become cop characters, now turning their military training loose on the urban jungles. By doing so, ongoing challenges to patriarchy, although unable to be completely negated, could be renegotiated, altering its “base for relations to a site from which somewhat different but no less forceful


127 Ibid., 11.

relations of dominance could be worked out.”  

Within films focused on war (either at home or abroad), and largely absent of women, American white masculinity must contrast itself with masculine Others. Vietnam had reinvigorated the enduring disdain for “Oriental” males, which now added drug traffickers and gangsters to existing stereotypes that highlight Asian cruelty and duplicity. An example of a veteran-turned-cop who takes his learned hatred of Asians back home is in *Year of the Dragon* (1985), which prompted protests by Chinese Americans for the film’s use of such stereotypes. In contrast to earlier Hollywood depictions of Asian males as cunning but passive, they have become movie criminals, along with Latino and Middle Eastern males, (whose ability to portray cops and other hero figures is discussed in the next chapter).  

Given the history of domestic race relations, however, the persistent Other in the American imagination remains whatever (and whoever) is black. During what Donald Bogle calls the “era of tan,” integrated casts expanded many cop films’ box office appeal, increasing the visibility of black males, who were “promoted” from screen criminals to the partners, sidekicks, and “buddies” of the revisioned white cop character. Many of these match-ups, though, were constructed through the lens of comedy and its ability to sidestep serious challenges to narrative formulas. One example includes the set of *48 Hours* films, with Nick Nolte as a disgruntled white cop paired with Eddie Murphy, his prisoner-turned-buddy.  

The era also featured a new and distinctive mode of filmmaking known as action cinema, which, like noir, applies new elements to established genres. One of action cinema’s chief features is to emphasize a “hard,” muscular body (usually male), which “redefines already

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129 Ibid., xii.

130 The current president’s declaration of North Korea as part of his “axis of evil,” coupled with America’s Cold War enemy—communist China—extends the image of Asians as political and cinematic enemies.

existing cinematic and cultural discourses of race, class and sexuality.”

More importantly, action cinema features “spectacle as narrative,” further complicating the messages such films convey. The motives and identities of characters—although now conveyed in spectacularly visual and visceral terms—are still constructed within a mythological framework. Ironically, with more time and space to showcase the “action,” such films must increasingly tap existing stereotypes and representational shortcuts, emphasizing what is already familiar, including well-established myths about American heroes, particularly the revamped muscular warrior fresh from war. It was also no accident that a legion of cop characters accompanied the advent of action cinema, following Dirty Harry retooling of the role’s relevancy and sense of urgency. This new beefed-up masculinity prompted some critics to also note such films’ stepped-up violence. Yet, as Yvonne Tasker points out, the new muscleman’s violent behavior was tempered by “the values of self-control … and the practices of training and discipline.”

He also combined traditionally masculine qualities with new “feminine” tendencies, or at least how their new emotionalism was interpreted at the time. The new sensitive screen male also made clear the hegemonic process still in play: by “eating the other,” to use bell hooks’ oft-quoted phrase, the white male could devour the features most associated with challengers of the “unified national body,” which then could remain masculine and white.

White heroes as lethal weapons

*Lethal Weapon* and *Die Hard*, along with their many sequels spanning the 1980s and 1990s, remain among the most notable entries on the continuum of rogue cop characters after

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133 Ibid., 6.

134 Ibid., 9.

Harry. First, because their success as franchises attest to the public’s endorsement of their representations; second, because they offer insights into identity formations of the era, including those linked to the nation. Like Dirty Harry, much has been written about these films, but included here are only those elements that are most relevant and meaningful to the rogue cop archetype’s evolution.

Besides harking back to the Western, these action films feature the intense male camaraderie of a war film, with Los Angeles as the new battleground. Like other cities, it is the site of a nationwide, if not global, “war on drugs.” These films also move beyond Harry’s short-lived multicultural partners to demonstrate the lasting bonds that are possible between white heroes and their “buddies.” This provides more space for black males in such narratives, but delimits their progress at the same time.

Lethal Weapon (1987) features the travails of white cop, Martin Riggs (Mel Gibson) and his new black partner, Roger Murtaugh (Danny Glover), a senior detective and steady family man. Riggs is the lethal weapon, though, not only for his Special Forces training, but also for his suicidal grief over the death of his young wife. His state of mind prompts the match-up with Murtaugh, also a veteran, and a stabilizing figure on the verge of retirement. In the course of their first homicide case, they embark on a war with former mercenaries (trained like Riggs) now trafficking heroin; by the end of their ordeal, Murtaugh and his family have helped Riggs regain his stability. Lethal Weapon 2 (1989) puts Riggs and Murtaugh at war with a white South African diplomat smuggling drugs into the country, and who was responsible for the “accidental” death of Riggs’ wife. Lethal Weapon 3 (1992) has the duo face-off with a renegade cop selling drugs and weaponry; in this version Riggs also finds love with a tough Internal Affairs investigator, Lorna (Rene Russo). Finally, Lethal Weapon 4 (1998) has the biracial pair battling
Asian gangsters smuggling Chinese laborers into the country, with subplots involving the pregnancies of Lorna and Murtaugh’s daughter.

While Eastwood’s acting style lent Harry a stony silence—his body, “a metaphor for the psychological and moral struggle to be an upright man”\(^\text{136}\)—Gibson’s Riggs suffers noticeably, acting out his torment, and perhaps demonstrating masculinity’s absorption of both the era’s women’s and men’s movements. Perhaps to compensate for a “softer” side, Riggs’ hard body and military training are also on display, enduring beatings Harry never could. Even his love interest, Lorna, is a “new” woman: a fellow cop, and one as skilled in the martial arts; her ability to match his actions, though, is arrested after she is shot in the third film and pregnant by the fourth.

Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick explains that having such close male partners also prompts the need to differentiate between camaraderie and homosexuality, stressing instead a “homosocial” relationship dependent on intense emotional bonds, as well as those that might imitate a father-son connection.\(^\text{137}\) Riggs and Murtaugh are often put in compromising positions that suggest intimacy, as in one instance, when a bomb explodes, forcing Riggs to collapse into Murtaugh’s arms, and then teasingly asking his partner for a kiss before help arrives, perhaps containing the threat of miscegenation and homoeroticism through such “joke structures.”\(^\text{138}\) While Murtaugh is a more multifaceted character than most black co-stars at the time, he is still in the “protective custody” of the white hero.\(^\text{139}\) Riggs is not only front and center in the film’s advertisements, but


the main attraction for his willingness to take risks and put himself in harm’s way. Each man’s body (and its links to virility) purposefully advantages Riggs, starting with both men’s appearance in the nude. The original film opens with Murtaugh in the bath, and his children in the room wishing him a happy 50th birthday. His lack of sexual threat is compounded further when he later shows a reluctance to shoot to kill with his gun, undermining the codes of potency that are the measure of a man in an action film. In contrast, after Riggs’ bare ass and well-toned body are introduced, so is his loaded Beretta and his willingness to use it.

The film also notices race, even though the two principal characters fail to address it directly. When Murtaugh questions a black boy about what he has witnessed, the boy stumps Murtaugh, asking, “My mama says police shoot black people—is that true?” 140 It is Murtaugh who is asked the question, suggesting the black boy is able to see beyond Murtaugh’s race to the cop underneath, whereas in other cases, Murtaugh’s race is his most salient feature. Riggs is afforded the privilege of color blindness, and like Harry, able to negotiate race on an individual basis, erasing all connections between his racial makeup and whiteness at large. By contrast, Murtaugh reflects the collective, unable to realize the American preference for an individuated point of view, and as such is the one who gives race a voice in the narrative. It is Murtaugh who espouses an anti-apartheid rhetoric, wishing he could go to South Africa to stop the horror, which implies that only blacks can be outraged over apartheid. Moreover, by having Murtaugh, a black American, utter such sentiments, America’s racialized harm seems deep in the nation’s past, rather than a festering issue that remains as vital as the film’s tagline suggests. In another scene, Murtaugh asks a gang member if he knows what the word “genocide” means, in this case, referring to black-on-black crime in America. Again, this distances whites from the problems of the racialized inner city or “ghetto,” which white America facilitated in part to help keep the

140 Lethal Weapon, DVD, directed by Richard Donner (Warner Home Video, 1997).
races segregated. In this way, “Murtaugh carries the banner of civil rights for blacks and other minorities … sees Asian refugees as being like black slaves on board a slave ship.”\textsuperscript{141} The sight of Chinese stowaways even prompts Murtaugh to take a family home with him, noting, “It’s my chance to do something about slavery. I’m freeing slaves like no one did for my ancestors.”\textsuperscript{142} The later sequels are even more vocal about racism, but their blatant comic set-ups undercut any intended critique of the racial order.

In terms of class, although the two men have the same rank, Murtaugh’s lifestyle is comfortably middle class, with a handsome colonial in a well-groomed neighborhood. In contrast, Riggs lives in a small, sparse trailer parked on the beach. In this reversal of customary racial representations, however, Murtaugh’s “Cosby-like clan” is isolated from the larger black community, and “contained within the white work and community environment,” also suggesting that the nation’s racial and class differences can be resolved in “terms set by the white (and black) middle class, and its family and law and order agenda.”\textsuperscript{143} This not only mitigates white culpability, but also confines race and racism to America’s ghettos, where poorer blacks are depicted as victims but also perpetrators of crime, deceivingly leaving the racism of the suburbs (and the country at large) out of the picture. The film, then, argues that “the police must do what the family cannot do … stop this scourge of violence in the black public (and private) spaces,” requiring “the state mediate race in the hood,”\textsuperscript{144} but do little to address its fallout.


\textsuperscript{142} \textit{Lethal Weapon 2}, DVD, directed by Richard Donner (Warner Home Video, 1997). Open racial discourse is left to a secondary set of biracial characters in \textit{Lethal Weapon 4}: the Jewish Leo (Joe Pesce) and the black Butters (Chris Rock), as in one scene, Leo tells Butters, “we got a history together,” referencing their ancestors’ supposed shared sense of marginalization.

\textsuperscript{143} Denzin, \textit{Reading Race}, 91.

\textsuperscript{144} Ibid., 96.
elsewhere, notes Norman K. Denzin. Moreover, to use South African apartheid as a more flagrant example of racism forces the two American cops to unite as Bogle’s “tan” to fight an outside enemy, but which neatly eclipses homegrown racial differences. In this manner, *Lethal Weapon* has ambitions as a war film, with the pair foiling “international evil, acting more as global policemen, or agents of American foreign policy, than as LAPD cops.” In other words, it is now non-Americans who are interfering with the nation’s promise. (This mindset helps justify dispatching American enforcers around the world to battle such “foreigners” and/or other perceived threats to national security, which will be discussed further in Chapter Four.)

In the second *Lethal Weapon* film, foreign threats are represented by an “Oriental” torture specialist who works for the corrupt military commander, and practices his specialty on Riggs, which reminds Riggs (and viewers) of the suffering of soldiers in Vietnam, while also presenting a “stereotypical Asian who inflicts pain on good white people.” The wayward commander also presents a portrait of a Vietnam veteran as a villain, although that approach already appeared in the third *Dirty Harry* film, which outlined the veteran as damaged goods and a traitor with designs on overthrowing his government (Rambo followed with his tormented but redeemable veteran, who suffers nearly as much from his country’s disrespect as from wounds inflicted during the war). In addition to the film’s villain, *Lethal Weapon* offers Murtaugh as another portrait of a veteran—one who successfully reintegrated into civilian life; in contrast, Riggs is haunted by his past, perhaps for sharing the same murky résumé as the ex-soldiers he is hounding as a cop. This difficult position also renders him an underdog, which then enlists another long-standing trope in American narratives, and once again underwrites his privilege—not only for his new found sensitivity, color-blindness, and indifference to class, but also for deploying his military skills for good rather than evil. Like Harry, Riggs also plays by his own

145 Ibid., 88.
rules; as “long as the ‘larger good’ is served,” though, his “smaller violations of law are excusable.” This familiar “ends justifies means” approach provides much of Riggs’ appeal and cements his appropriateness as a metaphor for nation.

**Die Hard cowboys**

In the original *Die Hard* (1988), Los Angeles again serves as the site of conflict, but in a vertical space within the urban frontier, which, by being owned by a Japanese company, also serves as a symbol of intrusive foreignness on American soil. This time the rogue hero is an off-duty cop from New York, John McClane (Bruce Willis), another Scotch Irishman who comes to LA to spend Christmas with his estranged wife, Holly (Bonnie Bedelia), now an executive for the Nakatomi Corporation. Their testy reunion is interrupted when she, her boss, and an office party full of employees are taken hostage by a crew of foreign thieves led by Hans Gruber (Alan Rickman). They pretend to be terrorists to draw in the FBI, which obligingly cuts off power to the building, enabling the group to disarm the company’s vault and steal its convertible bonds. The thieves, however, are defeated by McClane, who destroys them and their plans in the manner of a one-man guerrilla force. His only helpmate is a pudgy black police sergeant, Al Powell (Reginald Veljohnson), who keeps in contact with McClane through radio communication. Also reminiscent of the final *Dirty Harry* film, a subplot tracks a smarmy TV reporter who exploits a dangerous situation to advance his own career.

*Die Hard 2: Die Harder* (1990) puts McClane in the nation’s capital for another Christmas reunion with Holly, but whose plane is low on fuel and circling an airport seized by commandos loyal to a Latin American general. He was once a recipient of American support when he fought communists, but now is vilified as a dangerous drug lord. In this installment, McClane is a lone hero steeped in “an all-out war” (as the DVD cover promises), battling inept...
police and military commanders. His loner status, though, is modified in *Die Hard: With a Vengeance* (1995), when McClane, after his Harry-like suspension is revoked, is buddied with an unlikely partner: a black civilian from Harlem named Zeus (Samuel L. Jackson). Zeus distrusts whites but comes to befriend McClane after they team up to defeat Hans’ brother, Simon (Jeremy Irons). Again, using terrorism as a cover, Simon actually is out to steal the gold housed at the Federal Reserve in lower Manhattan.

Turning to the identity factors that comprise the rogue hero in the *Die Hard* films, first, McClane represents another “hard body” of the era, whether as “the individual warrior or the nation itself.” Unlike Riggs, though, McClane’s masculinity is not derived from military training or wartime experience—even though he is engaged in a pitched battle over changing gender roles; after all, as Jeffords notes, it is feminism that puts McClane in harm’s way in the first place. He has come to LA to get his family back after his wife moves there with their children to pursue a career, using her maiden name to avoid what she charges is a cultural bias among Japanese men toward married women in the workplace. After her husband defeats the band of thieves and introduces her by her professional name, she corrects him, reiterating her married name. While his gesture suggests his learned sensitivity (and absorption of the era’s feminist lessons), hers restores tradition.

In terms of whiteness, McClane is first contrasted with Powell, whom Bogle describes as the “black-buddy-as-mammy-nurturer.” Powell even refers to himself as a uniformed “desk jockey,” relegated to doing paperwork after accidentally shooting a young boy, leaving him unable to fire his gun—again, an emasculating handicap for a cop in an action film. Powell

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147 Ibid., 62.
148 Ibid., 61.
149 Bogle, *Toms*, 276.
eventually shoots and kills McClane’s remaining foe, saving McClane’s life and restoring Powell’s phallic power. However, coming at the end of the film, the act does little to supplant the impression of him as the likeable lightweight that he has represented for most of the film. Two other characters also dredge up race: the black and white FBI agents both named Johnson. After introducing each other by the same name, one amusingly confirms, “no relation.” But, as Sharon Willis notes, this can also serve as an “uncomfortable” reminder of the “repressed racial proximity” in American history that initially gave the black Johnsons their WASP surname.

The most intensive use of racial contrast, though, occurs in the third film, with Zeus, whom McClane meets after Simon orders McClane to stand on a Harlem street corner, wearing a sandwich board that reads: “I hate niggers.” Zeus intervenes, not necessarily to save McClane, but as he explains it, to stop “a white cop from getting killed in Harlem. One white cop gets killed today, tomorrow we got a thousand white cops, all of them with itchy trigger fingers,” confirming a history of strained relations between the police and the black community. Yet, his is an isolated voice—he is the one obsessed with race (not the society)—even prompting McClane in one exchange to accuse Zeus of being racist, noting, “You don’t like me because I’m white!” Making race even more of a personal issue, and helping systemic patterns fade from view, McClane presses Zeus, “Have I oppressed you? Have I oppressed your people somehow?” In this manner, the film “asks us to consider if Zeus suffers from the mythical racial paranoia, or ‘reverse racism,’ so commonly evoked in dominant discussions of race

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150 Die Hard, DVD, directed by John McTiernan (20th Century Fox, 2004).
151 Willis, High Contrast, 39.
152 Die Hard with a Vengeance, DVD, directed by John McTiernan (20th Century Fox, 2005).
153 Ibid.
154 Ibid.
prejudice.” McClane shames Zeus into participating in the wild goose chase Simon has in store for them (much like the folly Scorpio put Harry through), scolding Zeus with: “he [the terrorist] doesn’t care about skin color, even if you do.” Zeus, though, is a much “shrewder analyst of the thoroughly racial coding of urban geography,” where “the mere sight of him” prompts reaction. One incident involves a businessman who questions Zeus’s reluctance to drive away after hopping into the cab Zeus and McClane have commandeered: the man, getting surly, asks of Zeus, “What … you don’t like white people?” In another example, after McClane hands over a gun, Zeus fumbles with it then asks how it works. After noting McClane’s reaction, Zeus shouts back, “Look, all brothers don’t know how to shoot guns!” Similar to Harry’s partners, Zeus is skittish about dead bodies, which, as happened with Harry’s partners, sets up McClane as the more dependable enforcer.

In regard to class, McClane is presented as a working stiff in an era that urged a devotion to upward mobility and a worship of conspicuous consumption. This yuppy persona is embodied by Holly’s oily, coke-snorting colleague, who is not only condescending to McClane the cop, but foolishly arrogant about being able to outsmart Hans and his men, who eventually kill him. McClane—the American Adam in a torn T-shirt—is also contrasted with Hans’s tailored “Eurostyle” clothes. As one major reviewer puts it, McClane is “an ‘everyday’ sort of guy who gets caught up in circumstances that force him to play the reluctant hero,” referring to the

155 Willis, High Contrast, 31.
156 Die Hard with a Vengeance, DVD.
157 Willis, High Contrast, 52.
158 Die Hard with a Vengeance, DVD.
159 Ibid.
long-standing criterion in American narratives that heroes not look for trouble, but once duty
calls, act swiftly and decisively. Hans also demonstrates a degree of Old World snobbery,
including a disdain for American popular culture, nearly hissing his disapproval at McClane’s
resemblance to a movie cowboy after McClane identifies himself as Roy Rogers in their radio
exchanges. In another exchange, calling McClane “Mr. Cowboy,” Hans chides him as “just
another American who saw too many movies as a child … another orphan of a bankrupt culture
who thinks he’s John Wayne, Rambo, and Marshal Dillon.” In their final confrontation, Hans,
convinced he has triumphed, warns McClane that this time “John Wayne doesn’t walk off into
the sunset with Grace Kelly.” After correcting Hans’s mistakes about the cast of High Noon,
noting, “It was Gary Cooper, asshole,” he helps Hans fall to his death from the building’s upper
floors, adding a cowboy’s whoop of “yippee-ki-yay, motherfucker.”

More than Hans and his fellow European thieves, Japan is the film’s more targeted
representation of foreign threat, depicted as a type of economic terrorism. After McClane meets
Holly’s boss, Takata, he offers, “I didn’t know the Japanese celebrated Christmas.” Takata
answers: “Hey, we’re flexible. Pearl Harbor didn’t work out, so we conquered you with
electronics.” (Japan as an economic invader is also included in one Lethal Weapon film, as
Riggs sarcastically speculates about the Japanese-made police radio, quipping, “maybe they
bought the LA police force as well,” with Murtaugh adding, “Yeah, they own everything

reviews.colossus.net/movies/d/die_hard.html> (10 March 2005).

161 Die Hard, DVD.

162 Ibid.

163 Ibid.

164 Ibid.
This us-versus-them approach is one way of demonstrating that the national welfare should trump individual concerns (usually those of females and non-white males, as the white male’s is already woven into the nation’s). Holly and Powell do their part, subjugating their gendered and racial differences to back up McClane, who supposedly fights his private war on their behalf as fellow Americans. Even Vietnam—a reliable symbol of a fractured America to be vigorously avoided—is mentioned by one of the FBI agents, who, after watching a helicopter hover over the besieged skyscraper, remarks, “This is just like fucking Saigon, ain’t it?”

Such examples of action cinema, notes Tasker, depend “on a complex articulation of both belonging and exclusion,” and a “placelessness” that enhances the hero character’s flexibility and appeal, not only to domestic but international audiences, all of whom have been exposed to media messages that stress American exceptionalism. In this way, McClane belongs everywhere his nation has influence, making his frequent furloughs from his New York beat seem less noticeable, and irrelevant. He is as much about the past as the present, as familiar as a Western hero or a soldier in a war film. He uses his patchwork references to popular American culture—especially the characters he most resembles—to maximize his appeal. It also helps him (and his conflicts) pass for mere entertainment, seemingly devoid of political ambition, while at the same time, perpetuating an ideologically soaked mythology, which he continually taps for identity and purpose. Reportedly, Die Hard 4.0 is currently in production, due to be released in late 2006, with McClane, now retired, being brought back into service after another terrorist plot unfolds—this time off American soil. It reflects both the intensification of the terrorist theme after the events of 9/11, but also the expanding use of American cops who cross over the nation’s

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165 Lethal Weapon 2, DVD.

166 Die Hard, DVD.

167 Tasker, Spectacular Bodies, 9.
borders—real and imagined—to battle national security threats abroad (such scenarios are the primary focus of Chapter Four).

**Loner supercops for a lonely superpower**

The spate of cop films that dominated the screens of the late 20th century continued the themes already in play, but offered exaggerated types of “supercops,” supplemented with non-human boosters from X-ray vision and motorized parts to memory chips and bionic limbs. In *Robocop* (1987), an Irish cop in a futuristic Detroit emerges as a techno-crimefighting spectacle; he returns for two sequels in 1990 and 1993. A similar theme weaves through the *Terminator* films (1984-2002), starring Arnold Schwarzenegger (another actor turned California governor). Other cop films of the era feature undercover cops, who endure the isolation and separation from the fraternity of police, while others update the classical Hollywood narrative of two males hailing from the same family or neighborhood then following divergent paths: one becomes a cop, the other a criminal. In *State of Grace* (1990), Sean Penn’s Irish cop returns to New York’s Hell’s Kitchen to investigate the people he loves most, including his best friend. Another variation is Johnny Depp’s stoic FBI agent in *Donnie Brasco* (1993), whose undercover role means getting close to criminals, betraying them, then feeling betrayed by the Bureau as well.

No doubt by the end of the 20th century, non-white males and women were expanding their profile in Hollywood’s spotlight, garnering roles with greater dimension and impact (the focus of the next chapter). However, the vast majority of Hollywood’s cultural production then and now features white male heroes as the primary attraction—however contradictory, transitional, and vulnerable their characterizations; this dynamism, in fact, being key to their survivability.
After 9/11, the nation’s political and cultural landscape changed dramatically, including Hollywood narratives about issues of law and order—whether domestic or international, the two becoming increasingly and indiscriminately intertwined. However, that sea change took time to flood Hollywood’s production line and become reflected on movie screens. Meanwhile, films released during the last decade of the 20th century (and the first few years of the 21st) largely reflected an optimistic, post-Cold War America, with record-setting economic growth and a political climate chiefly dominated by a sex scandal that resulted in President Bill Clinton’s impeachment (but which did little to dampen his job approval rating). This overall rosy portrait of America and its unfettered prosperity, though, remained darkened by a problem Du Bois had outlined more than a century before: the color line.

First, the O.J. Simpson case (and the spectacle of his white Bronco being followed, at slow speed, by a fleet of police vehicles) seized the nation’s attention in 1994, not only by exposing a controversial LAPD, but the nation’s enduring racial consciousness, with opinion largely dividing along racial lines, even trumping gender and class. After the Simpson trials, the latter civil trial finding him culpable, a Gallup poll reported that roughly three-quarters of both blacks and whites remain pessimistic about race relations in America, which reversed the optimism that surged in the wake of the Civil Rights movement two decades earlier.

Yet another incident drew attention to Los Angeles, and in particular, the contentious relationship between its police and minority communities. After four white officers beat motorist

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168 During the trial, the anger of black jurors (and their nullification of prosecutorial evidence) focused on exposing a larger truth about recurring patterns of racial bias in the LAPD, which the prosecution arrogantly dismissed and much of white America ignored. Once emotions subsided, and the subsequent civil trial found Simpson guilty (not to mention his own indifference to the black community that defended him), his symbolism as a racial victim eroded, prompting a consensus to emerge in more recent polls (regardless of race) that finds him guilty.

Rodney King, the cops were indicted for use of excessive force then acquitted by an all-white suburban jury. Their acquittal sparked rioting in South Central Los Angeles, where the largest concentration of black residents live. The insurrection left more than 50 people dead, more than four thousand injured, 12,000 arrested, and $1 billion in property damage—most of it occurring in the city’s already beleaguered neighborhoods (“echo” riots also rippled across other urban areas around the country).170 Finally, the Rampart scandal rocked the LAPD in the late 1990s, involving a group of elite anti-gang squads being investigated for their astounding success, which reportedly relied heavily on falsifying reports, framing innocent people, brutalizing suspects, and worst of all, drug dealing.171

The aggravated racial tension, coupled with the corruption scandal, provided the context for two early 21st century films by the same screenwriter, David Ayer, but which feature starkly different outcomes for the rogue cop at the center of their stories. The first, Training Day (2001), features a black cop whose rogue nature prompts his disgrace and elimination (profiled in the next chapter); the other, Dark Blue (2003), below, exemplifies the triumph of good over evil, but perhaps only when performed by a familiar white knight. More importantly, this film’s protagonist—although merely following the logic and trajectory of the rogue’s embodiment of the frontier myth to this point—also risks, in my view, exposing the manufactured “goodness” and “defensive” posture of such a character by having him exaggerate his features and functionality nearly to the breaking point. He represents the culmination of what the character and the nation he personifies have been hurling toward since their “dance” began. As this rogue

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170 See <http://www.usc.edu/isd/archives/la/la_riot.html> (10 February 2005); also see “Understanding the Riots: Los Angeles Before and After the Rodney King Case,” Los Angeles Times, 1992; and James D. Delk, Fires & Furies: The Los Angeles Riots of 1992 (Palm Springs: ETC Publications, 1995). The federal government eventually charged and convicted the four cops of violating King’s civil rights.

merely follows the path already laid out before him, embodying the familiar traits that have been encoded into the archetype, his acutely conflicted performance is not necessarily flawed but merely revelatory of the flaws inherent in the archetype and the national mindset he performs. Its oxymoronic deployment of lawless law enforcement, “defensive” aggression, and a criminalized crimefighter finally threatens to lay bare what it really is: aggression for the sake of its own self-preservation and further expansion. To most American moviegoers and popular reviewers, the protagonist in *Dark Blue* represented the latest in a long line of such American characters with bad habits and good intentions. However, as a case study here, under such close scrutiny, I hope to make clear that the character, like the nation, has escalated the stakes of both such a “civilizing” process at home and abroad, as well as a tolerance for increasingly “criminal” means for achieving goals. The rogue cop character below, then, is not an anomaly that sinks too far into criminality to be redeemable, but whose very redemption demonstrates how blurred the distinction has become between noble goals and ignoble means—not only for him—but for the nation he represents.

V. CASE STUDY: *DARK BLUE*—21ST CENTURY URBAN GUNFIGHTER

*Dark Blue* tracks the ordeal of white cop Eldon Perry (Kurt Russell), a rogue detective with an elite unit of the LAPD charged with investigating high profile cases. Convinced he acts in the service of a higher order of justice, he routinely plants evidence, fabricates records, and violates suspects’ rights, doing the dirty work the bureaucrats and courts refuse to do. Once Perry discovers that his white boss and surrogate father, Jack Van Meter (Brendan Gleeson) (also his father’s former partner) is deploying Perry’s methods simply to make himself rich, Perry embarks on a mission to expose Van Meter and make things right, even if it means going to prison himself. Their showdown plays out against the backdrop of the 1992 Los Angeles riots.
The film opens with the high-speed chase of King and his beating caught on videotape, followed by an intertitle announcing that a year has passed. A TV report also explains that the trial of the four officers is nearing an end, as they and the city await the verdict. A nervous and haggard Perry listens while pacing around a dingy room, then begins loading weapons. The timeline returns to five days earlier, when the jury began deliberating, and the focus switches to a pair of low-level criminals also talking about the trial while driving through South Central. The black Darryl Orchard (Kurupt) and the white Gary Sidwell (Dash Mihok) stop their speculation long enough to hold up a Korean-owned market, where they kill four people and steal a safe hidden in an upstairs apartment. Their crime is intercut with a police review board listening to the false testimonies of Perry and his white rookie partner, Bobby Keough (Scott Speedman), who shot and killed a suspect named Robertson. After the meeting, Perry assures Keough, (also Van Meter’s nephew), that what really matters is that “the bullets were in the bad guys.” Arthur Holland (Ving Rhames), a high-ranking black police official, also sits on the board and asks the toughest questions, revealing his scorn for Perry as Van Meter’s goon, and eventually declaring war on both of them. Another subplot involves Holland’s assistant and former lover, Beth Williamson (Michael Michele), who is now Keough’s black lover.

Perry is only aware that Orchard and Sidwell are Van Meter’s “snitches,” but once he and Keough trace the Korean market crimes back to the black-and-white duo, rather than be impressed, Van Meter orders Perry to find two other “suspects.” A concerned Perry, and an even more anxious Keough, search the files and find two sex offenders to frame. Initially the assistant DA resists Perry’s request for an arrest warrant, sensing the fabrication, but relents after Perry reminds her of the usual “playbook”: either she cooperates or a sexually explicit videotape from her past becomes public. Perry also finds a “friendly” judge at a bar, martini in hand, to sign the

172 Dark Blue, DVD, directed by Ron Shelton (MGM Home Entertainment, 2003).
warrant. With the help of a SWAT team, also under Van Meter’s control, they ambush one suspect, killing him, wanting no prisoner to contradict the official record. The other suspect runs but is cornered in an alley by Keough, who hesitates to pull the trigger. Perry eventually goads Keough into killing the suspect, then advises Keough on how to handle crucial follow-up details, including coping with a “facer”—a victim’s image that haunts a cop. Perry argues, “This asshole had it coming. All the fuck he ever did was ruin lives. You just saved somebody a shitload of misery, man, so get it together.” Intercut with the scenes of the SWAT ambush and Keough’s shooting are scenes of Holland addressing an emotional congregation at a black church, where he gives a preacher-like speech about how his “badge doesn’t seem to glow anymore,” but vows to stay in Los Angeles and become the LAPD’s first black chief.

Keough eventually cooperates with “friendly” investigators who record his fiction, at one point, having to erase and tape over a “mistake” that compromises the record. Shortly after, Keough seeks out his ex-lover, Williamson, to confess, and together they inform Holland, who vows to come down on Perry and Van Meter “like the Lord’s fury.” Meanwhile, Perry returns home to find his wife packing to leave him; she explains, “I watched you descend into hell, and I have been waiting for you to come back. Apparently, you don’t want to.” After walking the streets, Perry moves into the motel, and the story returns to the context of the opening scene. A showdown is then set in motion once Perry receives a call from Van Meter, who asks Perry to “do what you do,” and kill a supposed witness to the Robertson shooting. Finally cognizant of Van Meter’s criminality, Perry checks the Laurel Street address that Van Meter gives him, and discovers that it belongs to Orchard and Sidwell, whom Perry rightly figures have been ordered

173 Ibid.
174 Ibid.
175 Ibid.
to ambush him. Meanwhile, Keough and Williamson also head for Laurel Street to put the pair into protective custody. With all parties en route, the police radio announces that all units go on standby; the verdict is in: not guilty.

Driving through the streets, Perry notices Korean store owners standing on roof tops to protect their shops from looting; he also dodges groups of black males assaulting his car with bats and shouting at the misplaced “white boy.” Keough and Williamson experience a similar siege along their journey, with Williamson looking fearful and feeding more shells into her weapon. The two thugs, who are already on the roof waiting for Perry, fatally shoot Keough, who retains enough strength before dying to confess his betrayal to Perry. Meanwhile, Orchard and Sidwell escape, with Perry after them. Through the smoky haze and bodies of looters crisscrossing the road, Perry spots Orchard and Sidwell, whose car is halted by rioters, who then drag the white Sidwell out and beat him to death on the street. Orchard runs off, with Perry driving after him, finally hauling him into the car and threatening to kill him unless he confesses to his dealings with Van Meter.

Rather than a shoot-out, though, the film’s finale features Perry’s public confession and indictment of Van Meter. The context is a ceremony at the police academy to promote Perry to lieutenant, which occurs despite the city’s security breakdown. Perry begins his speech by congratulating his “four fellow officers” on their acquittal—the camera catching both the clapping but also the glares of mostly officers of color. In what director Ron Shelton calls a “wonderfully messy cathartic act of redemption,” Perry paints a stark portrait of an under-appreciated, overworked cop, who “is the last person a civilian wants to see until some shitbag shoves a gun in his face.”176 The department has been his “family’s business since Los Angeles was a frontier township,” he offers, recalling his grandfather’s stories about bringing horse

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176 Dark Blue, DVD. Also see Ron Shelton, Director’s Commentary, Dark Blue, DVD.
thieves and rustlers back from the mountains on the back of his Appaloosa. After the advent of
squad cars and traffic signals, his father joined the force, and “preyed on the predators that
preyed on the city.” There was never a question that Perry would be a cop—a Police Explorer
at the age of 9 and a teenager during the Watts riots, accompanying his father on the second
night. His chilling recollection, which stuns his listeners, recounts looters running out of a
burning Woolworth’s building, while his father took “potshots” at them with a deer rifle. Handed
it, the young Perry “winged” a looter, who ran back into the burning building just before it
collapsed, most likely burning alive.

Perry then points to his son and notes how “he hates cops,” for which Perry seems
grateful, explaining that he had been too busy with his career to pass on the family cancer to him.
“I was raised up to be a gunfighter by a family of gunfighters,” he confesses, seemingly ashamed
while still boastful. “And I made a career out of going after the worst most dangerous parasitic
sons of bitches to walk this planet.” He details his methods toward achieving such ends:
fabricating evidence, lying on reports, blackmailing colleagues, and muscling anyone who
resisted. “It’s a tough job. But I was a good soldier … just taking orders from my commanding
officer,” affirming Van Meter’s role before also producing Orchard for corroboration. “I’m slow,
Jack, but I get there. It was simple; it was about money.”

Van Meter tries several times to stop Perry’s tirade, dredging up Perry’s alcoholism and
mental instability, also disparaging Orchard as an unreliable and drug-abusing criminal. Perry,
though, points to the media at the back of the room, who have long suspected their collusion,

177 Ibid.
178 Ibid.
179 Ibid.
180 Ibid.
with one reporter even promising to print Perry’s speech “word for word.” Perry leaves in handcuffs, which he requests, and Holland takes control of the situation after exchanging words with an enraged Van Meter, who vows to take the department down with him. Once outside, Perry and Holland notice the sight of the city burning in the distance, then speculate about Perry’s own ugly fate. Perry requests a particular prison—perhaps one less dangerous for a convicted cop—prompting Holland to promise, “I’ll see what I can do.” The film’s closing sequence features an over-the-shoulder shot of Perry’s gaze at the ravaged city; it ends with a close-up of his face and its beleaguered expression of utter despair.

**White masculinity in blue**

Perry’s rogue cop is a performance of masculinity rooted in toughness, isolation, and a penchant for action first, reflection later. And his final, long-winded confession comes too late to save the man, but arrives in the nick of time to salvage the moral hero he personifies and the myths he supports. Like Ethan Edwards, Eldon Perry is the fall guy and the ugly American who must perform the “unpleasant tasks so that the majority of people are free to perform pleasant ones.” The words belong to Van Meter, but they aptly voice the rationale that Perry, as the most recent incarnation of the rogue cop archetype, lives (and falls) by.

Aside from a few seriously criminal acts, Perry’s routine, rule-breaking behavior links him to his screen ancestors, including his disregard for Miranda along with other conventions that attempt to impede his assaults on suspects, including aiming broken bottles at their throats to extract information. In general, the film celebrates a masculine universe, especially its “locker room scenes,” explains Shelton, known for his sports films (i.e., *Bull Durham, White Men Can’t Jump*), but who also applies the description to the bars and strip joints worked by Perry and

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181 Ibid.
182 Ibid.
Keough, along with Van Meter’s office, where men are free to drink, smoke cigars, and engage in “politically incorrect” banter, adds Shelton.  

Perry’s preference for the company of men—befitting the cinema’s fraternity of undomesticated warriors—includes his enemies, or as his wife, Sally (Lolita Davidovich), puts it, caring more about the people he hates than loves. A heterosexual masculine norm is also emphasized with his reaction to phone calls made by his teenage son to the “Sorority Slut Hot Line.” He explains to a distressed Sally that their son is merely “finding his dick,” and to be grateful that “at least he’s not a fag.” Shelton concedes that the scenes between Perry and his wife exist largely to “humanize” Perry, as “we get to see him be his testosterone-driven-macho-cop-tough guy self” and cope with the uncomfortable truths that she raises, including being jealous of his partner’s innocence and sadly under the spell of his father’s legacy.

Even the little girl who witnesses Keough’s shooting, contends Shelton, is “a bit of Peckinpah,” referring to the Western director’s use of women and children as symbols of innocence in contrast to the carnage of gunfighters. The theme of feminine virtue, however, does not extend to the film’s black women. Williamson’s moral standing is compromised as Holland’s former mistress and as Keough’s sexual partner. She balks at his desire to move beyond their uncomplicated set-up, which depends on using only first names. It also seems a transparent choice to cast such a light-skinned actress to help soften the taboo of their interracial coupling, which remains off limits in mainstream Hollywood films. Her racial difference also provides another opportunity to demonstrate Perry’s racism, as he teases Keough about his black

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183 Shelton, Director’s Commentary, *Dark Blue* DVD.

184 *Dark Blue*, DVD.

185 Shelton, Director’s Commentary, *Dark Blue* DVD.

186 Ibid.
“mystery” lover, noting “You be dating a sister,” injecting his version of “ebonics,” before adding with a chuckle, “I didn’t know you were an ebony and ivory man.” Even Williamson’s unleashed rage toward Perry—after they both watch Keough take his last breath—seems harsh, since Perry has already begun his transformation into the redeemed hero. Rather than seem a traditional use of a female character who lectures a male about lost virtue, her tirade seems more about piling on, and even less about higher ground when she hurls the term “motherfucker” at Perry to accentuate her emotions. It is difficult to imagine a white female being given the same dialogue. Holland’s black wife fares no better as a symbol of virtue. After being confronted with photos of her husband’s affair, she calmly vows to remain with him until he becomes chief then divorce him, suggesting she is as ambitious and duplicitous as he.

The film also reaches beyond the casting practice, begun in the 1980s, of putting black characters in authority positions over white leads to help “balance” the picture, or as Cedric Clark suggests, to serve as proof that racial uplift has occurred, and which is confirmed by the repeated appearances of such characters. Rhames’ Holland is an upright police official trying to be a force of good within the LAPD. His heroics, though, are undermined by his self-righteousness and his blatant desire to be promoted—a career path the normative cop hero must shun. Moreover, his showdown with Van Meter is ultimately trumped by Perry, who defeats Van Meter long before Holland can complete his more mundane paper chase.

The film’s racial consciousness goes well beyond a single character, however, permeating the smallest details to the most sweeping themes, including having the riots serve as

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187 *Dark Blue*, DVD.


189 Shelton admits that the original script gave Holland and his approach more screen time, as well as to include more scenes involving Holland and his wife, as well as one featuring her participation at the black church rally. But these scenes were cut after Shelton decided the story should focus more on Perry and his ordeal.
the dramatic backdrop. Racially charged language laces through most scenes, including one in which Perry speculates about Holland’s possible departure to Cleveland as its chief, predicting that the LAPD has to “pin his stars on another brother or the community will go ape shit.”\textsuperscript{190}

This theme of animals and cages recurs, including Perry’s shout out to a black male he wants to interrogate: “Hey, you, in the gorilla suit.” Another example is Van Meter’s lie to Perry, telling him that two “coloreds” committed the Korean market crimes to deflect attention away from his black-and-white thugs. Perry responds by calling the crimes “monkeyshines,” before heading to South Central to “rattle some cages.”\textsuperscript{191} Perry’s willingness to assume black equals criminal also accounts for why he buys Mr. Kim’s similar lie that black gang members committed the store crimes, nodding sympathetically at Mr. Kim’s lament that such people are more “like dogs.” Perry himself comes to admit he was duped by Mr. Kim’s “struggling immigrant-from-South Central tap dance.” More tellingly, rather than demonstrate Perry’s knowledge of “hood” lingo—\textit{de rigeur} for urban cops—Perry seems confused by the street expressions used by Maniac (Master P), whom he picks up to interrogate. After Manic explains that Mr. Kim is a “player” who “got game,” Perry complains, “What’s he play, golf?” demanding Maniac “speak fucking English.”\textsuperscript{192} Perry also invokes familiar stereotypes about the black body, referring to one suspect who runs away as a “Mandingo” who “goes track star,” referencing the 1970s film character and reiterating stereotypes about black athletic ability. He also refers to a suspect as “hey, G-Dog or GQ,” mocking the adopted names of hip hop characters. Although, Perry in the end critically re-establishes himself as a force of good, it does little to erase the accumulation of racist references and stereotypes, which remain largely uncontested. More importantly, race—so

\textsuperscript{190} Dark Blue, DVD.

\textsuperscript{191} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{192} Ibid.
crucial to creating key characterizations and the unrelenting atmosphere of tension—ultimately has nothing to do with the film’s showdown, which is between two white males: one redeemable, the other one damned.

Just as race conflates with gender to compound “othering,” class mixes with race to delineate further difference in *Dark Blue*. Like his screen ancestors, Perry’s class status is ambiguous, but being middle class is suggested, given his comfy home and his wife’s query about when his promotion will “show up” in his paycheck. His downfall, then, is implied by the loss of that home, which is replaced with a cramped motel room. Meanwhile, his estranged wife trades up from a cop to an attorney. Perry’s long hair and leather jacket also mark status as well as hipness, as he prefers that attire over business suits and/or blue uniforms. When prompted to wear a suit for a departmental hearing, he dons white socks, perhaps to signal his disdain. In contrast, Van Meter is usually shown in a three-piece suit and Holland in a uniform, which exempts both of them from Perry’s everyman status. Even Williamson eventually trades in her pantsuits for a uniform, telling Keough it is for “public relations … So people see everyone who wears it isn’t like you.”¹⁹³ Their encounter in a restaurant also captures the film’s duplicity: using race while pretending it does not matter. Williamson’s above comment could be construed as cop to cop or female to male as much as black to white; but, upon leaving the premises, she is joined by two other black uniformed officers, with one turning to Keough and suggesting he “chill, man.” With this closure, race makes the lasting impression.

Moreover, to notice “race” usually means to describe what is black, while whiteness hides in plain sight—even in Perry’s home. When he returns home one night, Sally is engrossed in an old black and white movie, even though most TV stations (as well as other film characters) are tuned into the riots. Her ability to remain undisturbed—insulated emotionally and physically

¹⁹³ Ibid.
from the city’s besieged areas—is rooted in her class privilege but also her whiteness (her disinterest even more incongruous when we learn that she works for the local jail). Even Orchard and Sidwell are watching coverage of the riots when they get the call from Van Meter to “smoke” Perry. In contrast to Sally’s comfortable indifference, their lower class status is captured in Shelton’s opening shots of the criminal pair, in which he explains that he intended to link “the working class minority community with downtown LA.” Aside from an old man who is wounded at the market shooting, though, the only characters we meet from the community are the two gangsters: their low life marked by their drug use, beat-up car, and slovenly home, with its rundown furniture and drugged woman slumped in a chair that Van Meter, after checking her pulse, determines is dead.

Orchard even understands the customary links between whiteness and middle class suburbia when he explains to Sidwell why the four cops will be found innocent, noting, “Ain’t no brothers on that jury out there … it’s Simi Valley, all good, decent white folk like yourself. That’s why they moved the venue. The cops are protected.” Even though Sidwell is of a lower social standing than the perceived white norm, he reflects the naiveté and privilege of a white perspective when he balks, “It’s on videotape … you can’t fuck with that!” Such profound truths, though, are put in the mouths of characters who are also betting on the verdict, with the loser furnishing the winner with a “ho”—whether “old-fashioned black,” “clumsy-ass Mexican,” or a “badass Puerto Rican bitch.” Such exchanges, argues Shelton, are for humor’s sake, but

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194 Mr. Lewis has no speaking lines in his hospital scene, since his larynx has been removed, leaving him only able to identify the races of his attackers—despite their masks—as black and white. The hospital scene also includes a black nurse and a black metro cop guarding Lewis, giving the impression that race in this context is irrelevant even though its express purpose is to tease out the race of the men who shot Lewis.

195 Dark Blue, DVD.

196 Ibid.

197 Ibid.
much of their banter had to be edited out so to maintain their presence as menacing rather than comic, which would undermine their presentation of criminality.\footnote{Tupac Resurrection, DVD, directed by Lauren Lazin (Paramount Pictures, 2003).} In a final exchange between Perry and Orchard, though, Perry—the story’s central protagonist and hero cop—has the last abusive word over the criminal, chiding Orchard for even botching Van Meter’s order to kill him, noting, “a simple fucking task and you couldn’t get it right.”\footnote{Dark Blue, DVD.}

The existence of a white partner for Orchard, the “wigger” Sidwell, also attempts to defuse the salience of race, as does Orchard’s practice of casually referring to nearly everyone as a “nigga.”\footnote{The uses of the “N” word, especially within the black community is complex, as is the difference between its traditional spelling and being modified with an “a” at the end. Tupac Shakur explains, “Niggers was the ones on the rope, hanging off the thing; Niggas is the ones with gold ropes, hanging out at clubs.”} When Sidwell is beaten on the street by other black males, for Orchard, they too are niggers, which he hollers at them before fleeing. In this manner, like Harry, Orchard seems unbiased in hurling the racial epithet at everyone on an equal basis, except that it also strips the word of its more common racialized intent. Orchard even complains to Perry how he made Van Meter rich, noting, “I made that nigga a gang of money.”\footnote{Tupac Resurrection, DVD, directed by Lauren Lazin (Paramount Pictures, 2003).} The use of the “N” word in another scene, though, clearly conveys a sense of unvarnished racism. After Van Meter and Holland enter the same elevator, Van Meter attempts to make small talk, which Holland cuts short, snapping, “Don’t hide behind LAPD blue, Jack, it’s not your color.”\footnote{Ibid.} He then confronts Van Meter about his ruthless methods, offering, “We can handle this like gentlemen, or we can get
into some nigger shit.” While Holland is talking attitude, Van Meter makes it personal and racist, threatening, “Oh, I plan to, nigger.”

In no small way, the presence of rap stars Kurupt (who portrays Orchard and who performs the film’s closing song), and Master P (as Maniac), helped the film garner a “small but loyal following,” which translated into better receipts once the film was released on video and DVD. Aside from the phenomenon and controversy of casting hip hop celebrities as criminals (and the occasional undercover cop, as discussed in the next chapter), they brought to this film a “strong presence of peace in the neighborhood,” where filming took place, and which one police watch commander warned was among the most dangerous in the city. Although, at the individual level, the two were most likely well compensated for their contributions (on and offscreen), their utility was largely based on their race and type, which still reeks of exploitation, being used primarily to facilitate white storytelling.

The film’s black rioters are similarly exploited to intimate an uncivilized environment that begs for a white knight’s rescue. As Shelton asserts, “the story doesn’t really have anything to do with the Rodney King riots, [but] it actually has everything to do with it. You’re talking about a corrupt LAPD scandal [and] that’s why the city’s on fire.” However, like marauding Indians in a Western, beyond their symbolism as threat, further specificity is omitted and racialized rage remains the story’s “straw man.” Even Shelton concludes, “this is not a movie

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203 Ibid.

204 With a budget of $15 million, modest for a major Hollywood production for United Artists, the film was made on a tight schedule in just 44 days. It earned mixed reviews in a limited theater run, perhaps reflecting some skittishness about wider distribution of such an incendiary film. It has fared better in the video/DVD secondary market. See Garth Franklin, “A DVD Review of Dark Blue.” (2003) <http://www.darkhorizons.com/dvds/d-darkb.htm> (14 April 2005).

205 Shelton, Director’s Commentary, Dark Blue DVD.

206 Ibid.
about civil rights, it’s a movie about Eldon Perry.” In this way, the factors of his identity are no more an accident than the gender and race of the rioters. Moreover, although the beating of King is the event that sparks the violent chain of events, his ordeal is reduced to a snippet of video at the film’s start, while Sidwell’s gruesome death serves as the film’s visceral showpiece. The filmmaker restages the horrifying incident in which several black males viciously beat white truck driver, Reginald Denney,\textsuperscript{207} describing the scene as “hard to watch,” but hoping it captures the lunacy of riots that he describes as having descended from justifiable social rage into madness. In Shelton’s view, then, the “madness” of the whole King debacle—from his beating to the riots in the wake of the cops acquittal—is best captured by recreating one example of black-on-white violence? Although Shelton takes care to provide expanded commentary and thoughtful context in the “special features” section of the DVD, the film leaves the imagery to speak for itself: blacks males are not so much victims of police maltreatment but familiar screen savages who rampage and kill whites. It is the epitome of spectacle \textit{as} narrative—one that dehistoricizes the record and replaces complexity with stereotypes, merely refreshing Hollywood’s already harmful legacy of racially skewed representations.\textsuperscript{208}

This masculinized, racialized universe is fundamental to Perry’s construction \textit{and} essential to his transformation into a redeemed hero. His violence is as ugly as the rioters (arguably even more so, given his badge), but his newly recovered moralism supposedly negates much of his previous behavior. Although he begins the story as these black people’s tormenter, he concludes as the viewer’s surrogate—if one accepts the film’s white gaze. In this scenario, not

\textsuperscript{207} In the Denney case, several black bystanders attempt to come to his aid, and eventually call emergency services.

\textsuperscript{208} Shelton’s film is an adaptation of an original James Ellroy story. The hard-boiled fiction writer has penned such neo-noir Hollywood films as \textit{LA Confidential}, and is known for his gritty portraits of Los Angeles and its cops. As Charles Taylor notes, though, Ellroy “has never been able to disguise the kick he gets from the racism, misogyny and homophobia of his characters.” See his review of film 21 February 2003. <http://salon.com/ent/movies/review/2003/02/21/dark_blue/index_np.html> (10 February 2005).
only is Perry transformed into an avenging angel, but also those who interfere with the “white boy” are the ones who seem capable of greater harm. After all, while they are shown rioting merely to score a free TV, Perry is battling for a society free of corrupt cops (like his former self). Such shifts in perspective and rhetoric have long been used to rationalize the brutal repression of black communities, whose periodic insurrections are first decontextualized then reframed to justify almost any means necessary for their quelling.209

Along Perry’s “journey” toward redemption, notes Shelton, “there are things [Perry] will do that we would never do but that help make the world safer.” Key to both his and Russell’s participation in the film, they explain, was that there be “a good guy there,” who has “just gone wrong, as opposed to a guy who [is] just evil.”210 Shelton moved up the scene where Van Meter’s criminality is exposed, since, in his view, the audience needed to know sooner “who the real source” of evil is. After this scene, explains Shelton, viewers are able to see that Perry is merely “out of control,” having “crossed the line because it was the best way to do his job … [and] the audience starts to realize there’s a good guy inside Eldon Perry … a lost soul,” who in the end offers a “wonderful mad defense” about why he does what he does.211 After Keough complains about Van Meter’s audacity, Perry explodes, pulling out his father’s gun and detailing his father’s and Van Meter’s former heroism:

The only goddamn reason this city’s here is because they made it possible. They built it with bullets … hunted down evil parasites that would’ve committed thousands of crimes—would’ve ruined hundreds of lives. They protected the good people, Bobby, so that they could grow and not the cancer.


211 Shelton, Director's Commentary, Dark Blue DVD.
This reiterates a familiar refrain of the rogue model and the nation that he embodies: a noble end justifies any ugly means. (It is similar to the justification that dropping the atomic bomb on Japanese civilians was to save the loss of many more American lives by; the choice made more palatable when framed as such a defensive move.)

Shelton’s description of Perry’s “lost” state then his path to redemption, however, is not only romanticized but disingenuous. Perry correctly assesses how slow he is to target Van Meter, but only after he thinks his own life is in danger. Rather than the “good guy” Shelton and Russell are describing, and which audiences and reviewers general accepted as a Dirty Harry-type rogue, Perry seems just as concerned with the preservation of his legacy as with justice, which seems awfully close to finally lifting the veil off such cloaked aggression. Reflecting another long-standing American value, is his targeting of such a lone example of “evil,” but which does little to disrupt the patterns of corruption he confesses is perhaps widespread (like his nation’s practice of isolating monsters like Slobodan Milosevic or Saddam Hussein to justify aggressive action that reaches beyond merely stamping out “evil”).

Perry does even less about the virulent racism he identifies and claims is running rampant in the police and justice systems. What counts, then, is only saving his soul and restoring his honor—along with the identity factors he personifies and the national myths he is performing. Race in Dark Blue becomes merely the sideshow in yet another story about the American frontier and its white cowboy heroes.

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212 In 2000, a federal judge gives the Department of Justice the power to monitor the LAPD for five years. The federal government has continued to threaten the launch of a massive civil rights lawsuit in connection with the many stalled but pending Rampart lawsuits. See Scott Bowles, “LAPD Agrees to List of Reforms; U.S. Will be Watching,” USA Today, 3 October 2000, 1A.
The urban frontier’s white knight and savage Other

Despite *Dark Blue*’s insinuation of police corruption as a form of “white” collar crime, the film settles for depicting street crime as the more serious threat to the nation. While cop families like Perry’s prey on the “predators” who roam the streets, more lucrative and far-reaching acts of theft are hatched in boardrooms and government chambers, but which are left largely undisturbed. Moreover, whereas violent crime in actuality claims more victims of color than whites, cinema’s priority on stamping out urban crime—framed as a service to mainstream white America—makes little sense unless a racist perspective is acknowledged.

In particular, *Dark Blue*’s logic is further clarified if one considers the nation’s fixation on taming frontiers, once for its formation, now for its perpetuation. While the frontier frame is identifying “enemies” and uncivilized monsters, it is difficult to see the “whites” of the faulty system and/or, in this case, institutionalized racism.

In scenes involving Perry and the DA, along with Perry and the judge, Shelton explains that he was attempting to depict the insidious nature of how “the real violence of the system’s corruption” takes place behind the doors of “a bureaucratic office [and its] white walls” [emphasis mine]. Such an exposé would represent a profound intervention in Hollywood and American storytelling, but that intent gets hopelessly lost in the romantic framework of the Western Shelton employs, and as situated in Dirty Harry’s new urban frontier. Even he concedes, “If you took out the cars it could be … 1870 in Tombstone.”

The 1992 riots not only frame LA

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213 The 1980s savings and loan scandal, and more recently with Enron and other corporate entities, which testify to the scale of theft operating at the top of the capitalist structure, yet, inner city crime continues to maximize attention.

214 Moreover, prison populations continue to be dominated by people of color, which only proves who gets prosecuted most often in American courts. See “Race and Incarceration in the United States, Human Rights Watch,” (27 February 2002) <http://www.hrw.org/backgrounder/usa/race/race-bck-onepage.htm> (10 February 2005).

215 Shelton, Director’s Commentary, *Dark Blue* DVD.
as an untamed frontier environment, but as he suggests, even a “third world city” engaged in a “civil war” that resembles “Beirut or Bosnia.” With these metaphors in mind, the film’s cinematographer searched for “the ugliest places in Los Angeles” that could best convey an urban apocalypse begging for a gunfighter to remedy, with Perry as that “gunfighter cop in the Wild West of L.A.” Shelton’s intent may have been to disrupt the customary conventions that cloak and maintain the system’s duplicity, particularly with respect to racism, but by using those same conventions, he merely reiterates them.

Moreover, Shelton posits that real police pay the price for such an overstressed system. He notes, “We ask our cops to be Arnold Schwarzenegger Terminators … to make our neighborhoods safe … but cops like [Perry] are going to do things we’re not going to approve of.” It is similar to the context that preceded Dirty Harry’s mission of restoring the system’s former equilibrium and the white knight’s place in it. Shelton’s interest in the “unholy alliance” that society has with its police—and the “double standard” it fosters—led him to envision Dark Blue as a story about what it might be like for this white cop “to get caught up” in the riots. In understandable ways, the character reflects Shelton’s fears about what most threatens his gender, race, class, and American way of life. His whiteness bleeds through his description of “our neighborhoods,” but which ignores the complaints of the city’s people of color about the lack of police concern for their communities, and as the King case made clear, how the police often become such people’s worst tormenters.

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216 Ibid. Russell starred in Tombstone (1993) as Wyatt Earp—another reluctant sheriff called to duty.

217 Shelton, Director’s Commentary, Dark Blue DVD.

218 Ibid.

219 Ibid.

220 Ibid.
More telling, though, about the film’s blindness to the race card it deploys, which ultimately defends the system’s (and the film’s) racism, is Perry’s vocal support for the cops involved in the King beating, which he never retracts. In fact, Perry reiterates his support in the finale. In an early scene, Perry had argued that his four “brothers” were set up for such a tragedy after the department outlawed the choke hold: “they take away the tactics that work and indict them for using approved tactics that don’t.”  He warned that those four cops “are going down because they followed the department manual or they get off and we’re back in the Summer of ’65,” referencing that year’s rioting in the city’s Watts area. This either-or explanation, though, sets up a false choice that implies that the cops were indicted for merely following departmental instructions, whereas their crime is rooted in beating King long after he ceased to resist arrest—it is of less importance what weapon they used to do so. In the film’s finale, though, supposedly after his epiphany, Perry reiterates his support for his “fellow officers,” even congratulating them on their acquittal. Although his speech concedes that police corruption is an understandable cause of public rage, his repeated stance in the King case gives the impression that—despite using the King tragedy to ground the film—only the problem of corruption matters, while racism’s evil is in the eye of the beholder, especially, to borrow Morrison’s imagery, if seen through “the bluest eye.”  As Ty Burr also notes, “[T]he problem with movies like Dark Blue is that they willfully ignore the systemic, historical, cultural, and class causes of racism in favor of pinning it all on a few bad apples. Sure, that’s entertainment. It’s also a lie.”

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21 LAPD tactics resulted in 15 deaths; during the same period in four other major cities, only one death is recorded. See Joe Domanick, “Rethinking the LAPD,” Los Angeles Weekly, 6-12 September 2002.

22 Dark Blue, DVD.

Shelton also invokes the “just entertainment” defense, telling one interviewer, “I don’t take a particularly morally superior view in all this, I’m just a storyteller.”\textsuperscript{224} Such films, though, even in Shelton’s own words, rely heavily on Hollywood’s conventions that “operate upon the assumption that there is a truth to every story and that revealing that truth is the goal of storytelling.”\textsuperscript{225} In interviews, he and Russell both lament the dearth of films about the King incident, even recounting the studio’s reluctance to make their film Yet, their \textit{Dark Blue} leaves King largely out of the picture and focuses instead on a plainclothes white male cop as the system’s embattled enforcer and its victim. While Althusser describes the cop as the interface between power and powerlessness, and a symbol of the system’s power to interpellate us, such movies turn the symbol into a racialized man with a face, a conscience, and a soul. It is Van Meter, though, who best sums up the enduring formula when he explains, “You got your hero and you got your villain. Modern thinking tries to complicate it but it always comes down to that … all that stuff they teach in college [about victims who victimize], it’s sad; it’s probably even true, [but] it really doesn’t matter.”\textsuperscript{226}

\textit{Dark Blue} is not a testament to the clout of any one actor, writer, or director. It is about their membership in the alliance of privileged perspectives that ensures that these American Adams (with badges) have continuity, momentum, and a lack of transparency. In other words, what concerns the white enforcer matters most, along with his representation of an America that continues to deny its own record of savagery when “defending” itself against supposed Others. The next chapter investigates the Other’s performance of an enforcement character, which

\textsuperscript{224} Quoted in Foley, \textit{Dark Blue}.

\textsuperscript{225} Lehman and Luhr, \textit{Thinking About Movies}, 38.

\textsuperscript{226} \textit{Narc} (2002)—DVD, directed by Joe Carnahan (Paramount Pictures, 2003)—is an independently produced film, avoids many of Hollywood’s conventions, offering an unapologetic look at a corrupt, out-of-control cop stripped of most illusions about his good intentions. Even this film, however, largely invests most of its energy in the showdown between two white males, rather than on enduring systemic ills.
usually fails in comparison to the white male’s, since the Other has so often been constructed as the criminal or savage whom he has long been commissioned to arrest or eliminate. The Other’s illegitimacy becomes especially acute when he/she attempts to portray a rogue, in particular, as such a performance only compounds *rather than cloaks* the rogue’s criminality, but which also risks exposing how unstable he really is as well.
CHAPTER 3: THE “OTHER”

AS CRIMEFIGHTER AND CHALLENGER

Don’t bust my balls, alright?
Officer Sharon Pogue in Angel Eyes

We have to live a double standard…work twice as hard as a white officer to be accepted … work three times as hard to convince the [black]community that [we’re]…there to do a job…to help them.
Black police officer quoted in Black in Blue: African-American Police Officers and Racism

King Kong ain’t got shit on me!
Detective Alonzo Harris in Training Day

Chapter Two traced the origins of the frontier myth along with the invention and trajectory of the rogue cop character (of the urban frontier); as a white, straight, “classless” male enforcer, he performs the nation’s dominant identities and “ exceptionalism.” This chapter deals with Others’ challenges to his hegemony by tracking their attempts to perform American enforcement characters, including the rogue variant. They usually fail by comparison, however, since they are defined (and marginalized) by the very characteristics, which the rogue cop exists to arrest. As their “deviance” is considered innate, the Other’s “rogueness” may be interpreted as further evidence of their “difference,” in contrast to his as mere tactics to deploy in times of crisis and as a means to an end. As such, this chapter first examines the increasing presence of white females in enforcement/defender roles, along with the dearth of black females, who are doubly marginalized on the basis of gender and race. This review of a female cop’s struggle to perform hegemonic masculinity culminates in a case study of Blue Steel, whose androgynous female cop challenges both expectations about gender and genre, as well as perhaps glimpsing the manufactured nature (and intent) of both realms. The chapter’s next section examines Latino cop characters, portrayed most often by Jennifer Lopez and Andy Garcia, whose “brownness” and ability to “pass” as white may complicate but ultimately sidestep a critical challenge of the racialized component of the archetype’s identity. The final section offers a case study of
Training Day, whose black cop at first resembles the redemptive rogue, but eventually evolves into an exaggerated reiteration of black criminality (and hypersexuality), which for most of American and Hollywood history has represented the very site of threat in most need of the white rogue’s attention and arrest.

I. FEMININE MASCULINITY AND CRIMEFIGHTER ROLES

As previous chapters have discussed, the most fundamental contrast with the rogue cop character’s masculinity is whatever is defined as female or feminine. Gender remains the most basic way to divide humankind, including marking the body as the most intimate site of unequal power relations. Given the dynamic nature of gender, however, women can perform masculinity, especially in roles and occupations seemingly most dependent on masculine “gifts,” including law enforcement. It is the conflation of biological and cultural criteria linked to maleness, however, that makes a woman’s performance of masculinity seem illegitimate.

White women were first hired by American police departments as early as 1905, even before they earned the right to vote. Mary E. Hamilton, one of the NYPD’s first female officers, explains in her memoir that females served in custodial positions, tending to other females and juveniles, as well as being tapped for their feminine “virtues.”¹ Venessa Garcia explains that women at the time were not “to replace men in their occupation but to aid and assist them, quietly and unassumingly.”² That approach remained in play until the women’s movement of the late 1960s eventually impacted hiring practices.³ At the time, though, the police were increasingly being viewed as representing a resistant male establishment. The era’s reformers,


² Venessa Garcia, “‘Difference’ in the Police Department, Journal of Contemporary Criminal Justice, vol. 19, no. 3 (August 2003), 333.

³ The Equal Employment Opportunity Act of 1972 extended Title VII aspects of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 to state and local agencies, making it illegal to discriminate against women for civil service positions.
contends Samuel Walker, assumed that hiring women, along with other “minorities,” would help overpower this resistance. However, women, not being any more monolithic than any other group, failed to ameliorate such conditions or to substantially alter police subculture—not to mention demonstrating a marked difference in treatment between white and black female cops. With white women reductively equated with “moral virtue, the domestic realm, social service, formal rules, administration …and emotions,” it is no surprise that male-dominated departments (then and now) resist the idea of female cops. Moreover, when a white woman adopts the masculinist norms, “she is criticized for not acting like a woman.” In turn, when she relies on traditional feminine approaches, she is considered “unsuitable for the job.” In actuality and for the most part, women of all races and ethnicities, as collective “outsiders,” utilize a variety of strategies to conform to rather than to reform institutions, including “capitalizing on stereotypical femininity” or adopting macho methods as their own. “Hegemonic masculinity is a central defining concept in the culture of police work,” thus, women are as likely to adopt its tenets to gain acceptance.

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4 Samuel Walker, “Racial Minority and Female Employment in Policing: The Implications of ‘Glacial’ Change,” *Crime & Delinquency*, vol. 31, no. 4 (October, 1985). Rather than the hiring of women and other minorities into the rank and file, interventions by entities like the Knapp commission *et al*, are responsible for substantially reforming many departments since the 1970s.


8 Ibid., 442.
Despite the initial surge in the numbers of women hired as police officers in the 1970s, their percentage of the total force today remains roughly 13 percent, with advancement slow and the rate of turnover high.\textsuperscript{9} Resistance remains strongest against women on street patrols, where violence may be more likely, requiring a female to kill, if necessary.\textsuperscript{10} It remains difficult for a society that deploys police to comprehend putting women so directly in harm’s way (a similar battle wages against women in the military). Yet, women have long been the victims of violence, even in the private sphere, despite society’s professed commitment to protecting them and their children. Multiple studies also reveal that women perform well on patrol and deploy tactics remarkably similar to their male counterparts. Female officers’ rate of success is highest in urban departments, where, ironically, they face the greatest risk of physical danger. However, given the cultural training about female “gifts,” there is also evidence that female cops “tend to defuse volatile situations and provoke less hostility” than male cops.\textsuperscript{11} It is estimated that only 20 percent of a police officer’s time is devoted to volatile duties linked to dangerous crimes, while 80 percent is spent on “social-work-type jobs” and administrative duties.\textsuperscript{12} Yet, police culture (and popular culture) foster the opposite impression: police work is “action-filled, exciting, [and] adventurous,” promoting an image on and off screen of cops as urban warriors rather than anemically paid workers who spend an inordinate amount of time coping with paperwork.

\textsuperscript{9} According to the National Center for Women & Policing (2001b), this figure estimates the percentage of women among all sworn law enforcement in large agencies (with 100 or more officers)—a figure that is less than four percentage points higher than in 1990. For all U.S. police personnel, the combined weighted estimate shows women represent only 11.2 percent, which is dramatically less than the participation of women in the entire labor force at 46.5 percent.

\textsuperscript{10} Prokos and Padavic explain what forms resistance takes: harsh treatment from supervisors, sexual and verbal harassment from fellow officers, and confinement to lower profile assignments; the process may also begin at the academy level through a “hidden curriculum.”


\textsuperscript{12} Garcia, “Difference,” 340.
changing legalities, and sustained stress. Given the reality of the job, and the belief about women’s virtues (fact or fiction), it seems logical that women would be more vigorously recruited as police, if not for the potency of the existing prejudices. As rooted in myths, they are intertwined in the nation’s enduring investment in a masculinist ethos that stresses regeneration through violence. It is also linked to the legacy of hegemonic masculinity undergirding the rhetoric and actions of war—whether waged against Indians, poverty, AIDS, or heroin—and coming at the expense of other approaches (“feminine” or alternatively masculine).

**Female masculinity in cinema**

By the early 1970s, Hollywood as well began reflecting the demands of social movements. However, before cinema reacted to gender shifts, the medium of television represented the cutting edge in terms of expanding roles for women and people of color. Within the entertainment industry, TV first emerged as serious competition for cinema in the 1950s, prompting many studios to adjust their business models and marketplace approaches, including devising gimmicks and technical enhancements such as 3-D and Cinemascope to reinvigorate the moviegoing experience. For their part, television producers and writers developed unique approaches to better exploit television’s extended format and intimate viewing practices. Moreover, by the end of the 1960s, before a female cop appeared on the big screen, Officer Julie Barnes (Peggy Lipton) debuted on the TV series *The Mod Squad* (1968-1973). As part of a “youth squad” recruited from the streets, Barnes is a former runaway from San Francisco, along with the James Dean-like white male and former car thief, Pete Cochran (Michael Cole) and the quietly outraged black male, Linc Hayes (Clarence Williams III), who is recruited after being arrested in a street riot.  

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13 Prokos and Padavic, “Gender,” 442.
As the 1970s progressed, and Hollywood films continued to resist female cops, another TV series, *Police Woman* (1974-1978), offered Angie Dickinson as Sgt. Pepper Anderson, an undercover agent in the criminal conspiracy division of the LAPD. Anderson posed in a variety of stereotypical roles to entrap criminals, but also presented an image of a white female who put herself in harm’s way for the larger public good. But the better known example of crime-fighting females from the era’s television is *Charlie’s Angels* (1976-1981), which announced its intentions in the opening voiceover: “Once upon a time there were three little [white] girls who went to the police academy … but I took them away from all that. My name is Charlie.” In each episode, his disembodied voice dispatched the women to perform “severely under-costumed undercover work … as prostitutes, sexy nurses or exercise instructors” to solve crimes.\(^{15}\) The show, though, most credited with opening up space for less fantastic but more challenging portraits of female cops is TV’s *Cagney & Lacey* (1982-88). It featured Chris Cagney (Sharon Gless) as an attractive, tough-talking blond, who followed in the footsteps of her hard-drinking Irish cop father, while her partner represented the more grounded married-with-children Mary Beth Lacey (Tyne Daly, already having earned her detective’s shield in the Dirty Harry film *The Enforcer*). The show, over its six-year run, showcased the two detectives working cases along with participating in the occasional shoot-out. More importantly, given their gender and race, the series investigated the obstacles facing two white female cops from different perspectives and who above all remain committed to each other as friends and partners. As Caryn James notes, “No other female cops [since] have been as down to earth and psychologically complex as those

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\(^{14}\) “The Mod Squad: One Black, One White, One Blonde,” &lt;www.tv.com/the-mod-squad/shows/677/summary&gt;. In 1999, the feature film, *The Mod Squad*, updates the TV show’s premise, including expanding the female cop’s role.

The limitations of the show are also apparent, as the final season showed Lacey recovering from being shot, while alcoholism finally subdued Cagney, who was left struggling to stay sober.

In the wake of second-wave feminism (roughly 1963 to 1982), films too began showcasing female characters, who, in key ways, contested key boundaries of traditional female behavior. They began to mimic male cops’ behavior by acting tough, flexing muscles, and brandishing updated weaponry. Previously, females conveyed toughness by demonstrating behaviors related to compromised sexuality (as did molls, film noir sirens, and other types of “fallen” women). In other words, a woman in classical Hollywood cinema was considered tough only if sexually manhandled. Such narratives usually adhered to a narrowly drawn binary that defined females either as the Madonna (maternal and/or virginal figure whose sexual purity is fetishized) or the whore (whose sexualized nature marks her as deviant, even dangerous). The first few roles in the 1980s that included tough, action-oriented women were primarily as sidekicks. As Tasker notes, “Like the black buddy … [she] provides a point of differentiation, emphasising the masculine identity of the [white] male hero.”

Such a female buddy was featured in the crimefighting film Internal Affairs (1990). Amy Wallace (Laurie Metcalf), though, is further marginalized as a lesbian whose personal life is virtually ignored and whose relationship with the lead male, although respectful, is strictly contained. During the film’s final showdown between cops and criminal (another cop, in this case), she is also seriously wounded, leaving the males to shoot it out—a fate similar to that of Daly’s character in The Enforcer. One reviewer, though, praises the “mysterious” way Wallace’s personal life is handled, but also concedes that “there is the inescapable suggestion that her lack

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17 Tasker, Spectacular Bodies, 28.
of overt sexuality is part of her strength as a woman cop.”

Indeed, she must be desexualized to enable the heterosexual male lead, Raymond Avilla (Andy Garcia), to focus on his troubled marriage. A key exchange occurs between Wallace and Avilla regarding his wife’s concern over having a female partner, which Avilla solves by explaining that Wallace is a “dyke.” (Given Hollywood history, had Wallace been a more major character, she would probably have been converted into a romantic mate for Avilla.)

Tough women in male roles began appearing across genres, and a much studied example of such a character who is relevant here is Sigourney Weaver’s feckless first officer, Lt. Ellen Ripley in *Alien* (1979). Ripley is part of a crew aboard a futuristic mining ship facing a slew of harrowing, extraterrestrial enemies. Initially represented a supporting character to the ship’s captain, the white male Dallas (Tom Skerritt), but Ripley, whom Weaver calls “Rambolina,” eventually became the standout (and recurring) character in sequels. Another example of the era’s female “masculinity” was in *Terminator 2: Judgment Day* (1991), with Sarah Connor (Linda Hamilton) as the mother of a young son who is destined to become a world savior but whose life is now threatened by a cyborg from the future intent on stopping his rise to power. The film’s lead Arnold Schwarzenegger, portrays a more humane cyborg who returns to save the boy, and as some reviewers point out, seems a more capable mother figure than Connor. For her part, she starts the story as a harassed waitress, but by the film’s end, “has acquired military discipline, becoming well-armed and self-sufficient,” just as Ripley transforms from an “inexperienced military leader … into a soldier.”

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18 James, “Women Cops.”

19 Tasker, *Spectacular Bodies*, 139.


Yet, brandishing weapons remains problematic for the female action heroine. Along with the films mentioned above, the gun-toting grittiness of Demi Moore’s Navy Seal recruit in *GI Jane* (1997) and Halle Berry’s lethal (and sexualized) secret agent Jinx in *Die Another Day* (2002) are often chided for being too fantastic. Such a “willing suspension of disbelief,” to use Bertrand Russell’s famous quotation, usually fails to impede the general acceptance of the fantastic circumstances of most male action heroes (i.e., Rambo, Indiana Jones). Perhaps it is not the disconnect with reality that disconcerts but the disturbance of well-established codes connecting masculinity with the phallus, and by extension, male control of the gun (the key phallic symbol). Thus, women “manhandling” weapons seems both unnatural and dangerous.

Despite inroads made by women muscling and shooting their way into uncharted territory, in most of these films they still act out of a maternal instinct or intimate worries. Such catalysts for action, though, do little to destabilize traditional gender roles, but rather reaffirm them. “The maternal recurs as a motivating factor, with female heroes acting to protect their children, whether biological or adoptive (*Terminator 2, Aliens, Strange Days*) or in memory of them (*Fatal Beauty*).”22 Even the more complex heroine in *The Long Kiss Goodnight* (1996) is split in two, emphasized “through the codes of costume and behaviour”: the tough, cross-dressing Charly Baltimore (Geena Davis) who kicks ass, and her alter ego, the “feminine” Samantha Caine who is “defined by her motherhood, community role, and thence by the needs of others.”23 Baltimore is a CIA assassin who loses her memory and becomes the unassuming mom, Caine, who lives with her daughter in a quiet New England town. Once she recovers her

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23 Ibid., 82.
memory, she struggles with balancing work and motherhood, which, in this case, means killing in cold blood (on behalf of the nation) while also preserving her maternal instincts.

Besides the acceptable motivation to protect loved ones and homesteads, female characters are usually permitted to behave aggressively in the case of rape. However, acting preemptively or out of revenge—even for rape—is customarily the dirty work males must do. In this manner, Sondra Locke’s character in Sudden Impact, discussed in the last chapter, represents something novel in trying to settle the score herself; but Harry’s protection of her vigilantism also restores male control and dominion over her actions.

The rape-revenge motive is resurrected (quite controversially) in the blockbuster film Thelma and Louise (1990), from Alien director Ridley Scott (the film described as everything from a buddy adventure tale to a postmodern outlaw action comedy). Louise shoots Thelma’s attacker, not for the attempted rape, but for his disparaging remarks about women made after the rape is foiled. This flimsier motivation that is more about retaliation, in many reviewers’ eyes, undermines “the likable Thelma and Louise and the legitimacy of their complaints about men, [as] we are led step by step to accept the nihilistic and self-destructive values they come to embody.” Vengeful violence, however, is not invented by these female characters but is a recurring theme in American films (and political rhetoric). As Callie Khouri, who wrote Thelma and Louise, explains, an assertive female character “is a validation of strength,” and about “[g]iving women a piece of the action, instead of relegating them to on-screen benchwarming.”

There also seems less of a general uproar over the stepped up violence against women in many films of the era, including Dressed to Kill (1980), in which Angie Dickinson’s character is

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24 The British born action filmmaker also directed GI Jane (1997), Gladiator (2000), and Black Hawk Down (2001).

slashed to death for adultery; *Body Double* (1984), which features a female gored to death with a power drill; and *Fatal Attraction* (1987), in which the female antagonist is transformed from jilted lover to monstrous stalker and whose refusal to die easily requires a lethal effort befitting a slasher film (a tamer ending had been replaced after test audiences complained that the character had not suffered enough). Such cinematic displays of hostility toward women prompt observers like Susan Faludi to suggest a backlash was underway in the 1980s that blamed feminism for a renewed masculine crisis—manifesting onscreen through gruesome treatments of an increasing number of female characters. Thus, the fuss over *Thelma and Louise* is less concerned with what John Leo calls its “apocalyptic craziness” than the fact that the mayhem is being performed by women. “Readings that pronounce the film dangerous and wrongheaded because it invites women to take on wholesale the tired clichés of masculinity … that prevail in the history of westerns, road movies, and action films depend on certain foreclosures … [and] this argument skips over the process by which the film explicitly parades the takeover of these clichés,” asserts Sharon Willis.

Whatever the motivation, female aggression in the above films remained trapped in the realm of intimate or domestic concerns. While Thelma and Louise pay for their rebellion with their lives, Sarah Connor and Lt. Ripley become soldiers *not* on behalf of the nation’s defense, but primarily to protect loved ones and themselves. In this way, they do not chase the same goals as male avengers, who seek restorative justice on behalf of society as a whole. Even if the male character perceives his duties as personal, which in essence he often *must* as the personification

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27 Ibid., 122.


29 Willis, *High Contrast*, 108.
of self-determination, his role reads, circulates, and sparks discussions as though it represents something larger and more profound, enabling his story to garner greater cultural acceptance and become part of the “national bloodstream.”  

In other words, given masculinity’s ability to act as a universal agent, a male’s mission is positioned to speak for the collective, while hers remains insular and isolated. Heated debates over masculinized screen females attest to their ability to contest the status quo; at the same time, their failure to make such casting practices routine (rather than rare) also indicates the limits of this approach.

Having witnessed the handful of female defenders and action heroines by the early 1990s prompted some observers to ask: “Will female shoot ‘em-ups help or hurt women?” Even scholars who previously dismissed action cinema as mindless, socially irrelevant entertainment began analyzing the ramifications of such roles. Feminist scholars, in particular (a roster that includes men), expanded and disputed the earlier observations of Laura Mulvey, who in her groundbreaking 1975 essay, argued that the male gaze of classical Hollywood confined women to positions of passivity, from which they served as objects of the gaze rather than as agents who drive the action. But women’s increasing participation in male-dominated genres, in particular,

30 Pauline Kael uses this phrase to describe the impact of Bonnie and Clyde; in John Leo’s review of Thelma and Louise he uses Kael’s phrase to speak of its similar impact on American society and discourse.

31 By the mid 1990s, the trend of female action stars begins to wane, as a few key projects slated for female leads are rewritten for male stars, including Steven Seagal’s Dead Reckoning, originally set to star Michelle Pfeiffer. See Carol M. Dole, “The Gun and the Badge: Hollywood and the Female Lawman,” in Reel Knockouts: Violent Women in the Movies, eds. Martha McCaughey and Neal King (Austin: University of Texas, 2001), 89.


33 See Laleen Jayamanne, “Introduction,” Kiss Me Deadly: Feminism and Cinema for the Moment (Sydney: Power Publications, 1995), in which Jayamanne, as editor, explains that feminist film theory covers three lines of inquiry, each complicating assumptions and augmenting prevailing approaches. The first begins in the 1970s and aims at a generalized study of women’s cinematic images so long ignored. The second encompasses consideration of the woman “as sign,” along with the development and utilization of psychoanalytic theory and “frame-by-frame analysis” of films. The third and more recent phase involves work on spectatorship. All three remain in play, continuing to overlap and diverge over key issues.
at least problematizes this assertion. Other scholars argue that having women act as aggressively as men is hardly progress. They charge that female masculinity in cinema comes at the expense of redefining female participation, and avoiding merely aping existing masculinist norms to actually alter the hero role to better reflect the unique perspectives of women.\textsuperscript{35} Jeanine Basinger contends, “Having a female in a mindless, violent, Arnold Schwarzenegger-type role is not a gain for women. If there is no extra female dimension to the character, there is … no progress … these roles still don’t deal with the reality of women’s lives.”\textsuperscript{36} I would argue, though, that Hollywood action films similarly fail to address the reality of most men’s lives too, but by specifically discouraging women from performing such fantastic, violent, incongruous, exhilarating onscreen characters, they are denied the full range of human expression—good, bad, and preposterous. More importantly, such a view reiterates essentialisms that frame violence as inherently male and non-violence as natural to females. Considering America’s embrace of aggressive action, American women too have absorbed its tenets, and to bar them from participating in its cinematic expression—given Hollywood’s cultural ubiquity and global influence—helps to maintain their illegitimacy as agents who can perform the nation. Although what is feminine has often served as a symbol of the nation (i.e., the Statue of Liberty), it usually cannot embody agency on behalf of the nation in a domestic setting. However, if placed on foreign soil, her nationality may overcompensate for her gendered difference—a shift that will be further explored in the next chapter, when America’s defenders cross the nation’s borders.


\textsuperscript{36} Basinger is chair of film studies at Wesleyan University and author of \textit{A Woman’s View: How Hollywood Spoke to Women 1930-1960}; she also is interviewed by Johnson for the aforementioned \textit{Glamour} article.
Female cops and crimefighters in Hollywood cinema

As the above characters demonstrate, female enforcers across genres seem only able to perform masculinity by mimicking male performances, especially with regard to “toughness” and gunplay. This next section examines females specifically performing as cops, and given the explicit role of cops in defending and enforcing the nation’s goals, females seem even less able to perform a cop character’s construction of masculinity. In fact, what is revealed below is a re-feminizing process, in which stereotypes about female emotionalism are reiterated as well as women often remaining in need of male rescue.

In the specific role of female cop, a few film roles first materialized in the late 1970s. Previously, female presence in crime films had been reduced to serving as the wives, girlfriends, and/or victims of both cops and criminals. As Linda Mizejewski notes, before the appearance of the “female investigator” who emerged in the late 1980s, there was only the traditional female “armchair detective (Miss Marple) or the hobbyist female detective (Nancy Drew),” both of who are “safely contained within domestic bounds.” Of the new crop of female detectives, perhaps finally reflecting the reality of the politics of the era, they disproportionately involve undercover roles. As the last chapter discussed, being undercover, even with male cops, hampers the ability to serve as a stand-in for national concerns that are customarily worked out in the public sphere and which undercover work too often obscures. The predominance of undercover roles for females, however, may be considered an appropriate frame for presenting such unconventional women who do dangerous work on the public’s behalf. By having them “pose” in more recognizable roles as wives and prostitutes (Madonnas and whores), among others, their radicalism is somewhat arrested.

An example is in *Black Widow* (1987), in which Debra Winger portrays a government agent working undercover to get close to a young woman (Theresa Russell) suspected of killing consecutive husbands for their money. Their cat-and-mouse game is intriguing but more akin to the trappings of film noir, with its intentional moral fog, but which hampers the customary cop film’s focus on justice. *Betrayed* (1988) is another undercover role for Winger in which she poses as an itinerant “combine girl” who works the American heartland during harvest time, but also becomes involved with the target of her investigation, Gary Simmons (Tom Berenger). After confirming that Simmons is a white supremacist planning a crime in which her participation is crucial, she becomes imperiled, emotionally and physically. Although she eventually kills Simmons in the line of duty, their unorthodox love story overpowers the focus on her crimefighting skills, and, again, has little to do with justice (or racism). The film’s focus is largely on her emotional instability, as she confides to her boss at one point, “I never had a family. The Bureau was my family.” At the end, when convinced that she has been recklessly exploited by the Bureau, she sidelines her career, choosing instead to reconnect one last time with her dead lover’s children—even if it means risking retaliation from the white supremacists who remain at large. Another female undercover cop appears in *Impulse* (1990), directed by Sondra Locke, with Theresa Russell as a prostitute who busts an illicit drug operation but also becomes fascinated by the sexualized trappings of her alter ego. Moreover, she must rebuke the sexual advances of her boss while consenting to sex with the prosecutor who is directing the task force employing her. Locke explains that the psychological pressure on such a female cop is what drew her to the story, yet the role is deemed “a male fantasy” by one reviewer, adding that no “lustful male director could have paid more attention to Ms. Russell’s sex appeal than Ms.

38 *Betrayed*, DVD, directed by Costa-Gavras (MGM Home Entertainment, 2000).
Locke does.“ Finally, there is *A Stranger Among Us* (1992), which places NYPD detective Emily Eden (Melanie Griffith) among an orthodox Jewish community to crack a theft-murder mystery from within. Eden, whom her partner chides for being a cowboy, solves the case and kills a few criminals, but the action takes a back seat to her forbidden romance with the rabbi’s son. Although her attraction to him is never consummated, the experience transforms her from a quick-trigger, tough-talking blond who sleeps around to a softened brunette who discovers spirituality and a renewed sense of modesty.

Not only do the roles mentioned above reiterate traditional stereotypes about women, but they also deploy familiar strategies to mitigate the challenge female cops might pose, including domesticating or fetishizing them. Although female cops in cinema face the same overemphasis on violence, the difference for females is that once the shooting stops, the focus turns to their troubled relationships, usually with men. These are shown to worsen if they make their job competition to their relationships, suffering further emotional torment, which already has its roots in some childhood trauma, most often involving fathers and/or other male influences. In other words, the female’s emotional rather than moral battle is the focus of such films, which exacerbates the narrowness of her already anemic appeal as a symbol of national purpose, clarity, and strength. Whereas the male rogue, in particular, is shown being capable of working despite his dysfunctional personal life (and perhaps *because* he is free to devote himself to his mission), all types of female cops are shown being seriously affected by their personal commitments. As the customary guardians of a society’s domestic arrangements, by showing their inability to perform well in both the public and private spheres—customarily assigned to men and women, respectively—a female’s traditional role and purpose also find reiteration and reinforcement.

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39 James, “Women Cops.”
Despite the new conservatism ushered in by the Reagan presidency, the era also reflected some absorption of tents of third wave feminism and produced a few female law enforcement officers who attempted to move beyond merely mimicking male “action” and stress intellectual over physical power. These female characters are included in *Silence of the Lambs* (1991), *Copycat* (1995), and *Fargo* (1996). The first two of these performances, though, slide into the dictates of a slasher film, with the criminal’s evil as meaningful as, if not more so, the cop’s persona as a force for good. *Silence of the Lambs* is the story of female FBI agent Clarice Starling (Jodie Foster), who must stop a serial killer by enlisting the help of the imprisoned cannibal, Hannibal Lector (Anthony Hopkins). Starling’s dependence on the mesmeric Lector, though, draws the viewer into his horrific orbit at the expense of her crimefighting perspective. *Copycat* is another film that depends on the trappings of the horror genre, but also features a capable female homicide detective, M. J. Monahan (Holly Hunter), who is progressively “buddied” with another female, a notable criminal profiler played by Sigourney Weaver. Monahan, though, is steeped in man troubles as well, which helps to undermine her representation of strength. In addition, she is offset (and nearly overpowered) by Weaver’s psychologically battered character as well as the insidious serial killer who terrorizes both women. Finally, in *Fargo*, the discovery of a series of murders in the North Dakota city enables Chief Marge Gunderson (Frances McDormand, winning an Academy Award for her role) to utilize her crack crimesolving skills, despite being in the last few months of pregnancy. Although the film aptly contests several stereotypes about women, especially to supplement her “nurturing” side with a sturdy competency usually reserved for male crimefighters, it is perceived by reviewers and audiences alike as a quirky but atypical cop story. As such, it remains a fascinating exception to the rule but not the start of a brave new trend. More

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40 See Dole, “The Gun and the Badge.”
importantly, since Gunderson is “neither maverick nor lone agent,” she is no competition for the hegemonic rogue male who dominates cop films.

Out of sight: black female crimefighters

Unfortunately, such patterns of female toughness, especially as so inextricably linked to female sexuality, only work for white women as crimefighters. Their ability to challenge patriarchy—however limited—is dependent on their whiteness, as the racialized gaze of white Hollywood produces a gender effect that cuts across race and a racial effect that complicates the concept of gender. According to bell hooks, “black female sexuality [is] … synonymous with wild animalistic lust,” which limits sexualized black female characters to the whore’s end of the binary, while at the same time denying them the polar opposite of sexual innocence. For most of Hollywood history, the only other choice to being depicted as oversexed is to have black female sexuality effectively erased. As Donald Bogle explains, such is the fate of the feisty, selfless caretakers embodied by the “mammies” who regularly appeared in classical Hollywood cinema. Thus, race here only serves to compound the handicap of gender; the net result is that the absence of black females in more complex roles is perhaps the most egregious omission among all female characterizations.

The career of Pam Grier offers a notable exception worth discussing here in brief, as she is a rare cinematic example of an avenging female who seeks justice—not just for herself—but on behalf of a community as a whole. An example of such complex motives can be gleaned from her role in Coffy (1973), one of the half dozen films featuring similar themes, in which Grier stars in the 1970s. In Coffy, her character abandons her career as a trained nurse to go on a one-

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43 Bogle, see Chapter 3, Toms.
woman crusade to kill or neutralize the dope pushers, pimps, Italian mobsters, and crooked cops whom she charges with having destroyed her family and ravaged her people. Coffy’s politician boyfriend, who claims to be working on behalf of “our people,” becomes another of her victims after she learns he brags to his white partners about how the rackets are color-blind, adding, “black, brown, or yellow—I’m in it for the green.”**44** Nelson George describes Grier as a cult figure who was “even embraced by many feminists for her ball-breaking action flicks.”**45** However, as Tasker notes, “[t]he ‘macho’ aspects of the black action heroine—her ability to fight, her self-confidence, even arrogance—are bound up in an aggressive assertion of her sexuality. Simultaneously it is the same stereotypical attribution of sexuality to the black woman which generates anxiety around her representation.”**46** One distinctive and progressive difference emerges, though, that distinguishes Grier from her white counterparts of the same era: her characters at least are permitted to have sex while still being able to represent a moral figure. More importantly, Grier’s characters drive the action, making the call as to how and when to deploy violence, as well as to operate unilaterally and often in the manner of a redeemable rogue. Several key factors limit her challenge at the same time. First, she is a product of independent or B-level cinema (specifically known at the time as Blaxploitation, which is discussed in more detail below) rather than mainstream Hollywood fare. Second, her actions are too often aimed at vengeance rather than justice, as in *Foxy Brown* (1974), who, after enduring a rape, sets her two assailants on fire to subsequently burn to death. Most critically, she remains an isolated figure who is not replicated in any sustainable way by black (or white) actresses.

**44** *Coffy*, DVD, directed by Jack Hill (MGM Home Entertainment, 2001).


**46** Tasker, *Spectacular Bodies*, 21-22.
Whoopi Goldberg offers a more mainstream portrait of a black female star in the 1980s, but her cop film of the era, *Fatal Beauty* (1987), and her character, Rita Rizzoli, merely reiterate the tendency to credit Rizzoli’s aggression to a maternal instinct, as she acts on behalf of the memory of her dead child. Whereas loved ones often serve as the catalyst for male action, it is rarely a male cop’s *raison d’être*. For Rizzoli, having been a negligent mother is what propels her to become a cop as an act of restitution. Moreover, as mentioned above, race conflates with gender to frustrate Goldberg’s representation of female sexuality. In this case, Goldberg transgresses the norms of screen femininity through costuming, cursing—her frequent use of “mother fucker” perhaps as problematic for mainstream males as well as white females—and, finally, being of a darker-skin tone, which enlists a complex set of issues relative to the marriage of Hollywood imagery and American racism. Although a sex scene is filmed with co-star Sam Elliott, it is cut from the final film, explains Bogle, because the studio assumed a level of discomfort over interracial sexuality, especially involving Goldberg, whom Hollywood often regards as “an asexual creature from another universe.”

It is Goldberg’s comic persona, though, that most debilitates her ability to seriously disrupt the racial norms of Hollywood, let alone redefine what it means to be a cop hero.

**Brown in blue: Jennifer Lopez’s cops**

Concerning other women of color in cop roles, several Hollywood productions have featured the Latina singer-actress Jennifer Lopez. Her first cop role occurred in *Money Train* (1995), in which she portrayed a transit cop and the love interest of the principle characters played by Wesley Snipes and Woody Harrelson (who borrow the *Lethal Weapon* set up of the stable black partner acting as savior to a troubled white friend). Lopez’s character, Grace Santiago, having grown up Puerto Rican in the Bronx, supposedly explains her onscreen

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toughness, which is showcased through boxing, shooting, and driving aggressively. At the same time, her body is often positioned and contained in female poses linked to sex, dancing, and body-hugging gowns. In *Out of Sight* (1998), Lopez played Federal Marshal Karen Sisco, who falls in love with a clever bankrobber (George Clooney), whom she is also doggedly pursuing. The film—part comedy, part thriller—stressed romance over crimefighting, and again presented Lopez as a competent but sexualized female cop. Finally, in *Angel Eyes* (2001), Lopez portrayed the uniformed Chicago cop Sharon Pogue, who has been toughened by an abusive father whom she turned into the authorities, but which left her an outcast among her family. More of the story’s focus, however, is on her feelings for a stranger named Catch (Jim Cavaziel), who remains a mystery until she learns they had met before at a car accident, which claimed the lives of his wife and son. Their second meeting occurs when he intervenes in a confrontation between her and a gunman who, having already shot her (a vest initially protecting her), is poised to shoot her in the face and kill her. His “lost” state, unable to remember the accident or his life prior to it, is matched by her loner status and inability to sustain intimacy, as she routinely takes out her frustrations on prisoners, whom she roughs up despite the disapproval of her partner—the black male Robby (Terrence Howard), who serves as yet another protective male. As the romance with Catch takes over the story, Pogue’s uniform is replaced with dresses and sexy undergarments; she also appears nude for the obligatory sex scene. By the film’s end, she has softened, learning to be sensitive as well as accept and reciprocate Catch’s love, which were behaviors previously unavailable to her.

Moreover, Lopez’s Latina identity is contained in the film by having an Anglo father (along with her Latina mother). Her blond hair may also soften her “difference” from the preferred norm of white American womanhood. Lopez, like her character, is Puerto Rican, who
having descended from Spaniards as well as Africans, also makes her a natural target for racial purists.\footnote{Cristina Veran, “Born Puerto Rican, born Taino? A resurgence of indigenous identity among Puerto Ricans has sparked debates over the island's tri-racial history—again,” \textit{Colorlines Magazine: Race, Action, Culture}, Fall 2003.} This was in part responsible for the controversy surrounding Lopez being cast in the role of the Mexican American pop icon Selena—a role that earned Lopez considerable critical acclaim, but also made clear the complex ethnic and racial markers that make up various Latina identities. Latinos, as part of Western culture, have similarly absorbed the value placed on whiteness, holding Puerto Ricans in lesser esteem for their African heritage. Moreover, such a blended heritage, earning the label of “brown”—despite ranging from fair-skinned to black—may also help explain the overt sexualization of many Latina characterizations. As with other female characters, the range of options is limited to Madonnas and whores, but which translates into Latina stereotypes as “frilly \textit{señoritas} or volcanic temptresses.”\footnote{Clara E. Rodríguez, \textit{Latin Looks: Images of Latinas and Latinos in the U.S. Media} (Boulder: Westview Press, 1997), 2.} As Clara E. Rodriguez points out, though, while the “good” Latina roles are rare today, the “Latin spitfire” or “hot-blooded tamale” remains the more prevalent and recognizable.\footnote{Ibid., 76.}

Although scarcely present in cop roles, Latina and black female cop characters have been more plentiful in contemporary TV crime dramas, including \textit{Third Watch} (1999-2005), although here too their progressiveness was constrained by tragic personal circumstances. The show featured a Latina plainclothes sergeant who was as much a cowboy cop as the males, but with a particularly bankrupt personal life and a life-threatening disease. The show also included a competent black uniformed female, but who spent most of the series as an outcast for being an Internal Affairs agent, as well as being shot while pregnant.\footnote{Ibid., 76.} There are also the numerous
female investigators and crime analysts on the current *CSI* and its many spin-offs, but which still largely feature white males being assisted by females and male Others. Although depicted as smart and able, these female crime specialists are rarely framed without cleavage and the suggestions of sexuality, enough to invite jokes from late night comedians. Such a formula of beauty plus brains remains an unflinching reality in contemporary Hollywood for actresses, who must be physically attractive even when employed in gritty “macho” occupations—such environments perhaps even prompting the need for exaggerated femininity. They also continue to stand in stark contrast to their male counterparts, including one of television’s most celebrated detectives: the pudgy, aging Andy Sipowicz (Dennis Franz) of *NYPD Blue* (1993-2005).

These Hollywood female crimefighters also remain remarkably different from Detective Chief Inspector Jane Tennison (Helen Mirren) of the long-running British TV series *Prime Suspect*, which also aired on American television. Its primary focus was the perspective of female cop boss, who embodied all that is usually denied female cops in Hollywood: complexity, maturity, and competency. The first of the six feature length programs (1991-2004) depicted Tennison being treated like an outsider, despite being in charge of a high-profile homicide investigation. Reveling in her strategies for coping, negotiating, and overcoming such obstacles, the show also indulged in the painstaking details involved in completing a murder investigation. Similar to how Carol M. Dole perceives *Fargo’s* chief, Tennison similarly carries the “markers of adulthood,” including “a lined face,” which usually relegates such females to matronly or grandmotherly roles. Unlike *Fargo’s* chief, though, Tennison is as obsessed with fighting crime, finding justice, and getting promoted as the male cops, making her not only a compelling figure

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51 The series also featured a tough-talking white female, who begins as a uniformed cop with a husband and two children, but who emerges in the last season as a competent albeit divorced detective.

to watch, but also serious competition for the males. Although the series dealt with her personal woes with lovers—a black colleague who works for her, a married boss who has power over her, and a live-in boyfriend (with whom she gets pregnant she chooses to terminate)—the series also left many of the scenarios uncomfortably messy and open-ended, defying Hollywood’s customary closure, in which most female characters wind up wed or dead.

**Close-up on *Blue Steel***

This stereotypical emotional component is also what disqualifies most female cops from being able to perform the rogue variant, in particular. This over-emotionalism calls her instincts into question and cripples faith in her discretion in knowing what rules to break in order to achieve a complex goal. Since she is intensely focused on her personal woes, it is also difficult to envision her acting on the behalf of society at large. This is especially true if her mission requires the deployment of intense violence and/or arguably criminal behavior (as a means to an end). As a result, her failure to perform rogueness only makes clear why *he* can.

Harking back to Althusser’s interpellation process of being hailed by a cop—presumably in a uniform—the film below, by fetishizing and playing with the possible shift in signification when the uniform is worn by a female, may help expose why it is so vital for the male rogue to dispense with his (de-linking him to the *state* and foregrounding his universal appeal and service to the nation). Moreover, this female cop’s androgyny may also make clear how much the male rogue’s assumed masculinity and heterosexuality is as culturally manufactured as is its relationships with other normative identity factors such as race, class, and nation.

Previously, I discussed how uniformed cop characters are exempt from center stage in most cop films. Too often they conjure images of the *state* rather than the plainclothes cop’s ability to evoke more autonomous imagery befitting the *nation*, which relies on him as an
autonomous individual. For a female screen cop, however, the uniform can serve as a signifier of empowerment because of its connections to official power. By covering up her body, traditionally representing a site of vulnerability, the uniform cloaks her in its authoritative meanings, helping to override the limitations her gender customarily poses. Put in the Althusserian frame, she is better able to hail us (and prove our interpellation) with her uniform on. This may also help explain why having a female in uniform is particularly disconcerting; and why female cops, like women in the military, initially wore skirts to differentiate them. Moreover, although the nation is gendered, American mythology and political rhetoric have labored to make the state faceless; thus, in a uniform, there may be space for “play” that enables her to at least disrupt the assumptions that cops should be unquestionably male.

*Blue Steel* (1990) is one of the scant few films to feature a uniformed female cop whose gender trouble and genre discomfort are among its chief aims. The film tells the story of rookie New York cop Megan Turner (Jamie Lee Curtis) who, within 24 hours in uniform and on patrol, kills a man holding up a grocery store. A moment of foreboding is included in an earlier training session in which she focuses on the male in a domestic dispute, shooting him but being shot by the woman, whom Turner assumes is an unarmed victim. During the robbery/killing, a Wall Street commodities trader, Eugene Hunt (Ron Silver), witnesses the action while taking cover on the floor, where he also finds the thief’s weapon to keep for himself. Since no weapon is found at the crime scene, Turner is suspended for using excessive force against what appears to be an unarmed man. Meanwhile, Hunt—a psychotic who listens to troubling inner voices—uses the thief’s gun to kill random targets. Once police find bullet casings at the crime scenes etched with Turner’s name, she is brought onto the case to be used as “bait” to catch the killer. Meanwhile, an unsuspecting Turner meets Hunt, who begins romancing her. But during an intimate embrace,
he incriminates himself, revealing his greater attraction to her weapon, and confessing how he has seen her use it. This sparks the first of many attempts by Turner to arrest him. However, with a lack of evidence and her word compromised by having dated him, he is free to kill again.

Homicide Detective Nick Mann (Clancy Brown) first views Turner as a liability but later shows affection for her as both his lover and Hunt’s victim. Other subplots include her strained relationships with an abused mother and an abusing father, along with a personal life limited to her friend Tracy Perez (Elizabeth Peña), who is married with children. Stepping up his aggression, Hunt kills Perez in front of Turner, but again cannot be charged with murder since he foils Turner’s eye-witness account. Eventually Hunt shoots Mann before raping her then escaping. For their final showdown, she breaks out of a hospital to go after Hunt alone, eventually killing him in a violent street gunfight, using the familiar spectacle of a Western-style shoot-out between lawman and criminal.

**Officer Megan Turner: male impersonator or female threat?**

The film, however flawed and limited in its challenge to the normative male-centered cop drama, problematizes several key aspects related to both gender and genre expectations. First, against the film’s opening credits, we see a figure putting on a uniform, slowly and methodically, until close-ups show buttons being fastened over a white bra, revealing the cop to be a woman. Veteran film critic Stanley Kauffmann points to the glimpse of white lace as complicating this cop’s effort to “seem sturdy,” but his point that a peek of a bra undermines her embodiment of a cop makes clear how the feminine signifier reads discordantly when intimately intertwined with a police uniform. Rather than interrogate his assumptions about cops being male, Kauffmann’s interpretation exposes the standard he believes violated here—that the cop’s gender is invisible until marked female, then it disturbs what usually goes unnoticed: normative masculinity.
The authority of the uniform occurs at another point in the film when Turner’s mother comes to visit the precinct house. The mother looks around and notes, “So, this is where you work,” to which Turner answers, sarcastically, “Yeah, Mom … see all these other people wearing the same outfit as me.” Rather than flash her badge or circle the employer on her pay stub, Turner too resorts to pointing out the obvious validation the uniform lends her. The uniform’s significance becomes further apparent through behaviors toward her when she is out of it. In these moments, she is “constructed as culturally feminine/beautiful,” with Hunt telling her, “I think you’re the most beautiful woman I’ve ever seen in my whole life.” Mann also tells her (out of uniform), “You’re a pretty girl … so maybe you’ve gone with someone who had a violent streak?” implying that she becomes a cop to cover up emotional scars lurking beneath the pretty façade. The uniform, by eclipsing the feminized surface, is what disconcerts; it is also what director Kathryn Bigelow may be unmasking: the layering of identity construction, and the disruption of the assumed union between masculinity and police authority. On another occasion, when Turner meets a blind date at her friend’s house, he offers, “You’re a good-looking woman, beautiful in fact,” then follows with, “So, why would you want to become a cop?” His reasoning that female attractiveness is incongruous with the job of cop prompts her sardonic explanation that she joined because she likes “to slam people’s heads up against walls.” She also compensates for the missing uniform in this moment of vulnerability by utilizing other

53 Blue Steel, DVD, directed by Kathryn Bigelow (MGM Home Entertainment, 2002).
54 Mizejewski, “Picturing,” 12.
55 Blue Steel, DVD.
56 Ibid.
57 Ibid.
58 Ibid.
police powers at her disposal: the ability to issue a ticket, informing her increasingly uncomfortable suitor that his taillight is busted and his registration has expired. Her tactic serves as a better reminder of police authority than flashing a gun. As the film makes clear, guns change hands—its power as ephemeral as the time it takes to pull a trigger. In contrast, the cop’s uniform, arrest powers, and routine ability to write a costly ticket represent more innovative depictions of police powers (however theoretical) than the usual gun play—whether performed by males or females.

In the final showdown with Hunt, underscoring the uniform’s significance, Turner embarks on the ultimate masculine makeover: she steals the uniform and gun of the male cop guarding her hospital room. Mizejewski describes this scene as one in which Turner is “clearly in drag … and an imitation man.” Rather than mere cross-dressing, however, this final sequence is perhaps more complex and suggests that Bigelow may be destabilizing expectations pertaining to both gender and genre, which accompany such showdowns between cops and criminals. Why does Turner put on a uniform (hers or anybody else’s) to engage in what turns out to be vigilantism, unless exposing the inherent conflicts in its symbolism and unstable deployment is the point? Since Turner rejects merely tracking, arresting, and transferring Hunt to the justice system in favor of gunning him down in the street, why wear a uniform at all? Why not wear the street attire she is now permitted as a detective—unless that is also the point: that she must wear the uniform to perform the masculine task of vengeful violence that is otherwise thought deviant for a female. This may be Bigelow’s point, but as I suggested with the Althusserian example of the uniform as a key signifier for a cop’s apparent power, Turner’s drag performance of maleness may also be calling into attention the rogue’s attempt to obscure his links to the state and its more explicit agenda that involves aggression rather than mere enforcement.

59 Mizejewski, “Picturing,” 16.
Turner’s gun: fetish or lethal weapon?

Although another masculine trait of Turner’s is to talk tough, especially when explaining why she is a cop, when it comes to performing the toughest aspect of her job—to aim her gun and take a life—she displays real fear as well as brute force. After the thief points his weapon at her, she not only shoots but pulls the trigger six times, emptying her weapon and sending him smashing through the window. Hunt steals the thief’s Magnum, while the police review board confiscates her more modest, standard issue .38. Her overzealous reaction, although perhaps akin to actual experiences involving rookies, is rare for Hollywood males. Its inclusion in Blue Steel serves to further isolate her as a hysterical female. As one reviewer notes, a “male rookie might have overreacted,” but “because Megan is not a man, and because this is the first significant episode in a film that never ignores her gender … her lack of composure takes on a sexually determined quality … Give a girl a gun, and look what happens.”

In the final sequence, in which Turner lets the gun fall from her hand, Bigelow perhaps indicates a rejection of this often misused symbol of masculine power and cinematic importance. If so, an earlier scene includes a more unique frustration of the gun’s customary symbolism. After Turner tracks Hunt to the park, where he is frantically digging in the dirt looking for the gun he buried there, she dares him to reach for hers, unzipping her jacket and revealing it resting in its holster just inches from her breast. As Christine Lane notes, “The mise-en-scène actually literalizes an equation in which Megan’s ‘phallus’ depends not on male sexual imagery but on a female breast.” This counter-image enables the weapon to transgress what is thought exclusively male, if not to a transgendered orbit, then at least to a space with more fluid gendered

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60 James, “Women Cops.”

boundaries. Turner’s ambiguous relationship with guns—losing, recovering, then rejecting them—also differs sharply from Hunt’s “psychotic fascination with … the very instrument of the cop thriller.”\textsuperscript{62} Bigelow may be calling into question the practice of fetishizing guns by further exaggerating their role in the story. Not only does her film’s title fixate on the gun, but the opening sequence of shots depict a gun in extreme close-ups that accentuate its exotic contours, while also dissecting the parts from the whole, thereby disordering its symbolic totality as a lethal weapon. It may also suggest Lacan’s notion of a woman as guardian of the phallus—and to which men must return to recover it after the symbolic castration that enables their subjectivity.\textsuperscript{63} The tension between holding and using the phallus in this scene may suggest this interpretation, rather than just female mimesis of a male’s symbolic power. After the camera traces each bullet being loaded into the gun, it also catches the “spinning of the chamber as though it were a movie reel, linking the phallic discourses of weapons to those of the cinema.”\textsuperscript{64}

Another complex destabilization in the film is linked to the symbol of the father—whether embodied by her biological father (an abuser), her boss (who doubts her fitness as a cop), her lover (given the literal surname, Mann, who fails to protect her after becoming her lover, also forsaking the usual male rescue scenario), and her tormenter (who stalks her with a phallic symbol that is not immaterially the same Magnum that belonged to Dirty Harry, the cinematic father of the rogue cop character). Even her close friendship with Perez, notes Lane, is a “reversal of family in which female homosocial bonds replace the nuclear unit”; it also “revises generic conventions by featuring the strength of female bonds … relatively unexplored territory

\textsuperscript{62} Needeya Islam, “‘I Wanted to Shoot People’: Genre, Gender and Action in the Films of Kathryn Bigelow,” in \textit{Kiss Me Deadly}, 112.


\textsuperscript{64} Lane, “Loveless,” 71. Also see Mizejewski, “Picturing,” 15-16.
in the cop film. Yet, it is when Turner is off-duty, out of uniform, and in a domestic setting that she confronts her father for abusing her mother again. She also handcuffs him despite his indignation that being her father forbids such treatment. Although she cannot complete the arrest, resorting to oblique threats about future behavior, her authority registers; she lets him go only after he reveals his vulnerability. It is a small act of empowerment but significant nonetheless.

Bigelow’s film, however, disappoints feminists looking to a female director to create a uniquely feminist heroine. As with *Thelma and Louise*, scholars note *Blue Steel*’s complex female character but also question her violence against Hunt, which ultimately invite comparisons to the Dirty Harry model of male behavior. Sounding ironically familiar to conservative criticism of the above female action characters, this type of feminist bias about vengeful women is as shortsighted as conservatives’ faith in its Biblical grounding. Both camps fail to notice how this behavior also functions as part of a national identity—an American penchant for settling conflicts through gun violence—even if the American is a female. *Blue Steel* flirts with the idea that females can be as attracted as males to violence for its illusion of power and as drawn to the gun as a symbol of its expression (phallic or otherwise). Mick LaSalle glimpses this possibility in Bigelow’s film, noting that Turner “may have an odd attraction to violence herself and that Eugene, however crazy, is able to recognize it.” Jude Schwendenwien echoes this view, describing the early robbery scene as one offering “parallel human feelings of fear and desire for the instruments of power.” Bigelow explains that *Blue Steel* is meant to be a

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65 Ibid., 73.

66 Ibid., 77. Lane argues that Bigelow’s films are drawn into a “feminist orbit,” using Christine Gledhill’s term, as they engage “feminist politics and encourage spectators to ask questions about gender, genre, and power.”

67 See Harriet E. Margolis, “*Blue Steel*: Progressive Feminism in the ’90s?” *Post Script*, vol. 13, no. 1 (Fall 1993).

cross between *Fatal Attraction* and *Dirty Harry*,\(^69\) with several mainstream critics noting the homage, dubbing Turner a “female Dirty Harry”\(^70\) or “Dirty Harriet.” However, if Bigelow’s intent is to question the cop film’s deployment of violence by borrowing conventions from the horror genre, particularly the monster imagery that Hunt personifies, the result often creates more chaotic spectacle than cogent critique.

The mere blending of genres is not the problem here, though, since the cop film already absorbs the conventions of the Western. With *Blue Steel*, however, the hunt for the monstrous antagonist overtakes the cop hero’s customary moral mission. Hunt’s psychosis is dangerous but appreciably different from Harry’s sociopathic Scorpio, who kills at random but selects targets from among the same social outcasts whom Harry is dispatched to protect, however reluctantly. As a result, the Harry-Scorpio match-up reaches beyond wide-eyed goodness versus blatant evil to present a showdown of considerable cultural significance. Hunt, on the other hand, is isolated from social cause or cultural excuse, which by extension, strips Turner of her moral license and mythological cover. Her vigilantism, more than any other factor, is what spoils her ability to match the stature of the normative male cop. By ignoring the thin blue line separating rogue from vigilante, and opting to stress the latter, Bigelow forfeits her character’s sense of higher purpose. No doubt, as discussed before, this line is often drawn on shifting sands, but there is usually a space dusted off onto which the white rogue finds firm enough ground to take a stand, turning private darkness into public light. Perry in *Dark Blue* finds illumination when he exposes corruption (despite having been its accessory for so long). Before him, Harry rejects vigilantism in the nick of time, choosing not to kill Scorpio until Scorpio reaches for his weapon, which

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gives Harry the moral go-ahead to kill. While Harry’s violence is rendered necessary to end Scorpio’s madness—and what he represents for all our sakes—Turner’s brutality fails such a test. Once Hunt’s violence turns from random targets to merely stalking her, his threat narrows, as does her moral justification for eliminating him. For her, it becomes personal and no longer society’s business. But in order to effectively represent the collective, as Harry did, the personal quest must replicate society’s, not become the end goal itself.

**Androgyny in blue and white**

As the above discussions indicate, there are many elements of *Blue Steel* that destabilize customary representations but also generate as many new as old tensions, which the film does not and perhaps cannot necessarily reconcile. In addition to interrogating the gendered significance of the police uniform and the cop film’s gun fetish, Bigelow’s casting of Curtis—frequently described as androgynous—helps to confound traditional meanings attached to female beauty. The contradictions between Curtis’s androgyny and the diegetic references to her character’s beauty (when out of uniform) not only unravel several layers of gendered meanings, but may also propose a more radical proposition: to reach beyond cross-dressing and/or female masculinity to transform the cop figure into a transgendered character who can crack open more narrative possibilities. This interpretation, though, is contradicted by the inclusion of a gunman who remains unimpressed by Turner’s androgyny, uniform, or cocked gun, when he simply shouts, “Get out of my face, bitch … I didn’t come here to fuck with you.” As such, he denies all her trappings of power and remains fixated on her gender and its implied shortcomings.

More importantly, the gunman’s Magnum is passed on to another white male, representing even more impressive significations of power, with Hunt’s class standing as vital to his identity construction as working class is to hers. Shortly after meeting, Hunt invites Turner to

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71 *Blue Steel*, DVD.
an expensive restaurant, with a second date including a chartered helicopter ride meant to impress her. She even questions his attraction to her, given the gulf between their social standings: his white-collar profession versus her blue-collar job; his well-appointed high rise compared to her unadorned apartment. There is no better example of his privilege, though, than his ability to afford high-priced legal talent to keep himself out of jail, along with having the confidence to threaten the police with harassment charges. Turner’s class status, which usually signifies the male cop’s normalcy, has the same handicapping effect it does for Clarice Starling in *Silence of the Lambs*, in which her West Virginia accent, among other class markers, “works as a sign of difference” and subordination. Both films emphasize “the working-class family backgrounds” of these female cops, but also compound the “already devalued status of women” as another factor of their identities.  

*Blue Steel*, while noticing class, is blind to its own whiteness, though, replicating the cop film’s customary containment of race. When first assigned to patrol, Turner is paired with a black male partner, attempting to obscure her white privilege while projecting solidarity as based on horizontal positions of marginality. When Turner and her partner discuss why they became cops, they conclude that—for underdogs like them—it is empowering. Or as her partner puts it, “Nobody fucks with a cop.”  

Females in cop films, along with other types of action cinema, continue to struggle for recognition. Although Hollywood’s female heroines find audiences and make profits, especially in aftermarket video and DVD releases, they have not increased the output of such characters. That is not to say that 30 years of feminist pressure has not effected changes within Hollywood narratives, as there continue to be breaches of traditional gendered boundaries. However, as long

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73 *Blue Steel*, DVD.
as gender, like race, remains bifurcated in the minds of most Hollywood producers and consumers, slippage will not necessarily equate with displacement of the hegemonic white male, who adapts, survives, and continues to be the star attraction, especially in the role of the rogue cop character.

II. COP ROLES AND THE MALE “OTHER”

Despite changes to real police departments, as outlined in the Introduction, most big city cops in cinema are still represented as white with black sidekicks, leaving most male Others to comprise even lesser characters, usually on the wrong side of the law. Cop films of the last few years, *Narc* (2002) and *City by the Sea* (2002), to name just two, still feature the troubles and perspectives of white cops. Meanwhile, the once-contingently white (with ancestors who hail from Southern and Eastern Europe) have too become accepted as movie cops, embodying a few distinctive characters, especially on TV. Beginning in the 1970s, there was *Kojak*, a charismatic and unconventional Greek American detective; *Columbo*, a fumbling but shrewd Italian American detective; *Baretta*, a more street tough example of an Italian American cop; and *Starsky & Hutch*, with a Jewish cop as a full partner rather than a mere sidekick. Concerning cops of Middle-Eastern ancestry, though, there is only one that is noteworthy: FBI Agent Frank Haddad (Tony Shaloub) in *The Siege* (1998). The film explores the prophetic scenario of a terrorist attack that leads to the set up of a modern day internment camp at Shea Stadium to house people of Middle Eastern backgrounds—the majority of them American citizens, whose national loyalties are now suspect. Haddad’s dilemma of having to straddle two cultures is evident in two scenes. One involves an exchange between Haddad and a Middle Eastern prisoner and suspected terrorist. After he curses Haddad, calling him a “woman” for shirking his “duty”

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74 In 2004, the TV show is resurrected as a feature film, *Starsky & Hutch*, but spoofs the TV show rather than update or remark it as a crime drama. Also during this era, there was the Jewish Capt. Miller on TV’s *Barney Miller* as well as the Italian Capt. Furillo on *Hill Street Blues*. 
to his people, Haddad strikes back, snarling, “Someday, I’ll tell you what your people did to my village.” The second scene involves Haddad’s horror when he learns his son has been put into the camp, he angrily recounts his son’s arrest to his boss: “They came to my house. My wife told them who I was. How many times did I put it on the line … We’re American citizens … [yet] they knocked her down, they took him out of my home!” Vowing to stay inside the camp with his son, he refuses his boss’s request to come back to work, noting defiantly, “This is where I belong,” rather than serve any longer as the Bureau’s “sand nigger.” Later, though, he proves himself to be a dutiful cop and loyal American after all. Since 9/11, the idea of a repeat performance of American cops who are Arab, Muslim, or with ties to the Middle East—however refreshingly compelling they would be, especially in an expanded form—is increasingly hard to imagine in the current political climate, and in a Hollywood previously scarred by accusations like those of the McCarthy era that it lacked patriotism and loyalty to America.

The omission that remains the most startling in crime movies, however, involves Latino cop characters, especially in light of changes to real police departments. That is, it makes little sense if not for the potency of the existing myths and prejudices that continue to invest in white masculine imagery. It is especially illuminating considering that Hollywood fixates on cop stories about the NYPD and LAPD, both of which include sizable numbers of Latinos, yet they remain grossly underrepresented in cinema.

Just as Italian American males are typecast as gangsters almost from Hollywood’s start, American born Latinos, as well as those described as Latins (hailing from south of America’s borders), are quickly typecast in a short list of stereotyping roles. Among their first Hollywood

75 *The Siege*, DVD, directed by Edward Zwick (20th Century Fox, 2000).

76 Ibid.

77 Ibid.
representations were as threatening non-Americans, including the Mexican *bandito*, depicted as a
criminal type or simply as a dark-skinned, Spanish-speaking intruder. Rarely is there a character
with ties to lands that were Mexican before the American conquest. Rather, Mexicans or
Mexican Americans are nearly always treated as foreigners or late arrivals who seem stubbornly
slow to assimilate. In times of the nation’s need for workers, Latin/Latino characters are often
softened or supplemented, becoming more benign (but no less stereotypical), and welcomed as
creators of danceable music or as helpmates to Anglos. There are also images, linked to an
assumed swarthiness, that summon the erotic but irrepressible Latin lover—as obsessed with sex
as the black male, but capable of seduction rather than acting on baser instincts. For the most
part, whatever the variation, the Latino/a, especially those most obviously deemed non-white,
most often appear in secondary roles, primarily to contrast with and to highlight the white male
hero’s suitability as the quintessential American.

In cop films, as in *The Siege* noted above, however, the Other is shown learning lessons
about being police “blue,” which is able to trump other racial, ethnic, or gendered allegiances.
That is not to say that the minority cop’s struggle to assimilate is a Hollywood invention. Quite
the contrary, as minority cops frequently complain of having to straddle two worlds but
eventually succumbing to the dominant white (or blue) norm. The problem with the screen
version of this struggle is that the minority cops’ perspective is of secondary importance: only
their loyalty to a white partner or to the department is of narrative importance, reflecting the
enduring importance of the white gaze. Very few cop roles tackle the problem of living with a
hyphenated identity from the Other’s point of view, choosing instead to focus on the triumphant
outcome of assimilation or acceptance of mainstream views about justice. Although it is natural
for humans to type each other in order to distinguish potential friends from foes, it is the practice
of stereotyping that is so destructive, as it reduces people to a few characteristics, often deemed fixed by Nature, and which short-circuits an individual’s ability to transcend the limitations imposed by group affiliation, especially if that group is marginalized. Most roles for Latinos in contemporary crime films are largely as stereotypes of gang members and drug dealers. It is not that such people do not exist in actuality, but that they comprise a disproportionate share of Latino representations, which are already so few in number.

Here again, TV represented the cutting edge, being the first to earnestly feature a compelling Latino cop: Lt. Martin Castillo (Edward James Olmos), the intense, humorless boss of the famous white and black vice cops who made *Miami Vice* (1984-89) a cultural phenomenon during the 1980s. Even though Olmos, a politically active Mexican American, explains how he was given creative control over his character, Castillo was a minor player and not the show’s main attraction. An interesting but lesser known Latino cop appeared in *Bound by Honor* (1993), a film about three LA gang members: two Latino brothers and their cousin, who is presented as problematically biracial. After one of the brothers escapes gang life to become an undercover cop, he eventually confronts the struggling cousin who is sinking deeper into criminality. Although the film is rare for putting Latinos front and center, its overall focus is a well-worn tale of gang life at the expense of other perspectives.

In cinema, then, there is only one stand-out Latino actor who has frequently portrayed a cop character: Andy Garcia. In *Black Rain* (1989), Garcia is the sidekick of the white rogue cop. However, Garcia’s Detective Charlie Vincent is gruesomely beheaded halfway through the film.

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78 Erik Estrada starred in the TV show *CHiPS* (1977-83) as a Latino highway patrolman and partner to a white male officer. However, the show was light-hearted fare that fetishized Estrada’s good looks, focusing very little on his ethnic/racial “difference.”

79 Ironically, the Latino cop is portrayed by the biracial Benjamin Bratt—his mother a Peruvian Indian who emigrated to America and married a German American, while the biracial character is actually played by the Mexican American Damian Chapa. Bratt also portrays Detective Rey Curtis on *TV’s Homicide: Life on the Streets* during the 1990s.
In *Internal Affairs* (1990), Garcia, still second-billed, has a more substantial role as cop Raymond Avilla, who eventually catches (and kills) corrupt cop Dennis Peck (Richard Gere). As an IA investigator, however, Garcia’s Avilla does not embody the standard cop hero. Instead, he represents the usually despised bureaucratic watchdog who exists to monitor departments and who is routinely treated in film (and often in actuality) as a “rat” rather than as an agent who performs a public good. An even more important shortcoming in terms of representing a Latino character is the reliance on stereotypes to imply a larger cultural connection. First, there is Avilla’s emotionalism and quick temper—a Latin stereotype that even Peck exploits, taunting, “You know what they say about Latin fighters, Raymond, too fucking macho [and] won’t back peddle when they have to.”

This plays on stereotypes of Latin *machismo*, which Omar S. Castañeda explains is “complex and multifaceted [but] too often, in Anglo-American interpretations, reduced to self-aggrandizing male bravado that flirts with physical harm to be sexual, like some rutting for the right to pass on genes.” Peck also insinuates a sexual tryst with Avilla’s wife Kathleen (Nancy Travis), prompting Avilla to confront her in a crowded restaurant then physically assault her (while shouting accusations in Spanish that remain un-translated, as if the mainstream “we” have no need to glimpse this Other’s digression). Having the blond Anglo wife also frustrates a more expanded understanding of Avilla’s ethnicity, as he is shown to have no other family or community ties.

At the same time, Garcia’s supposed “Latin looks” have not limited him to portraying only Latinos, as he has played nearly as many Italian American characters, most memorably as

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80 *Internal Affairs*, DVD, directed by Mike Figgis (Paramount Pictures, 1999).

the Corleone heir in *The Godfather Part III* (1990).\(^{82}\) Another of García’s non-Latino cops is in *Jennifer Eight* (1992), as the non-descript Sgt. John Berlin, who leaves the LAPD to work in a small town in northern California, where he gets embroiled in a murder mystery and falls in love with his chief witness (Uma Thurman), who is blind. Finally, in *Night Falls on Manhattan* (1997), García is Sean Casey, a New York cop-turned-district attorney, whose Irish names are inherited from his father, while his Latino roots are traceable only to his mother, María Nuñez, but who as deceased, is unable to fill in the blanks, either purposeful or incidental, of his blended ethnicity. Part of García’s ability to play arguably white characters as well as those marked specifically Latino (or read as “brown”) is rooted in his Cuban background. Being among the most assimilated, affluent, and privileged of Latino identities, Cubans are often accused of wanting it both ways: to be white but also claim status as the Other when it suits a particular need. Cubans *as a whole* may be better placed in American society, but the disparity between those identified as black from those who claim whiteness creates a complicated spectrum among Cuban identities that defies such easy dismissal, even among fellow Latinos. And like other Latino communities, mainstream America still interprets them as “outsiders” given their Spanish surnames and cultural traditions that often remain marked as “foreign.”\(^{83}\) This also ignores how American culture is created, with each immigrant group influencing what the nation is to be, while absorbing the cultural pastiche that is also in the process of becoming. As such, Cubans, individually privileged or not, remain largely cast and interpreted as not yet white enough. This

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\(^{82}\) As Rodriguez notes in *Latin Looks*, the Latin or Latino look dictates a person who is “slightly tan, with dark hair and eyes,” which may dominate casting choices but fails to represent such a vast array of peoples, 1.

liminal racialization allows Garcia and other Cubans greater movement across America’s racial borders, but still limits their full acceptance as Hollywood heroes.

**Black and blue in America**

For America, though, the “color” that remains most problematic—on and offscreen—is black, which unlike brown is usually unable to transgress the nation’s color line. Police departments first came into existence in the 19th century as white-controlled organizations, established in part to protect the white propertied classes against those attempting to encroach on their wealth and power. The fear of black insurrection, in particular, was most fierce in the South, where blacks outnumbered whites in many states, along with being considered white property. In the North, because racism established different but equally as potent barriers to black empowerment, it was initially nearly impossible for blacks to use law enforcement to advance themselves as previous out groups had done, having first to acquire political power.\(^{84}\)

The intertwined history of blacks and the Irish—the latter now moving up the ranks of political machines and securing police jobs through patronage—met again under increasingly hostile conditions, including the race riots of the 19th century, when “Irish police officers were just as antagonistic and brutal toward blacks as the Irish workers that led the mobs. These conflicts fed an animosity that survived for generations.”\(^{85}\)

Although several “free men of color” were hired in antebellum New Orleans as early as 1803,\(^{86}\) they represented rare exceptions and reflected the unique character of New Orleans’


\(^{85}\) Ibid., 3-4.

\(^{86}\) Ibid., xiii. New Orleans began as a French then Spanish possession; as such, its Creole peoples are derived from both Spanish and French aristocrats mixed with people of color, and who exists as a buffer between the city’s white rulers and black slaves. A similar mixed-race people of privilege in terms of skin color and class standing exist at the time in the Southern cities of Charleston and Savannah as well.
racial hierarchies, with its complex history of multiracial layers, including creoles. In the wake of the Civil War, though, long before white females entered the ranks, newly emancipated black males were hired as officers around the country. However, as Jim Crow began disempowering Southern blacks, by 1910, blacks literally disappeared from Southern police departments. In that year, the government reported that only 576 blacks served as police, most of them in Northern cities; while in the South, only four Texas cities and Knoxville, Tennessee, employed black officers. However, Northern blacks began to use the patronage system to secure themselves police posts, as the idea gained favor that “a few Negro police to patrol their own areas might be distinctly helpful,” although the prohibition on allowing them to arrest whites also curtailed their wider acceptance and upward mobility in departments at the time.

In the aftermath of World War II, black males again trickled into the ranks of police, given their distinguished service in the military—armed in defense of their nation—along with other ruptures to the racial order, which combined to encourage social movement. However, it was in the wake of the 1960s Civil Rights movement when many urban police departments, as it had done with females, vigorously stepped up their recruitment of “minorities.” Black cops, in particular, were recruited to better deal with the outrage over persistent white control, especially in large cities experiencing a surge of newly empowered black constituencies. Within a few

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87 Ibid., 17.

88 Ibid., 115.

89 Geoffrey P. Alpert and Roger G. Dunham, Policing Urban America (Prospect Heights, IL: Waveland Press, 1997), 215. In the early 1970s, Baltimore, Newark, Memphis, Miami, and New Orleans had populations with roughly 40 percent minorities but had less than 7 percent minority membership in their police departments. But criticism of filling the void too fast occurs in San Francisco, Dallas, Detroit, Houston, and Philadelphia; promotions attained by adjusting standards or scores, which further incites interracial friction within departments, as well as to put those who are promoted, even if qualified, under suspicion of tokenism, which is a complain that has dogged affirmative action policies from their inception. However, as Alpert and Dunham note, confrontational methods are often the only way to break the systemic levers in place that resist change. Lawsuits are filed beginning in the late 1970s by largely white police unions, which have been matched over the years by the efforts of black police unions to use the same courts to fight back.
decades, the few black police chiefs who emerged began implementing innovative programs “such as team policing, police storefront offices, and community policing” that prompted some marked improvements. Black female cops, however, found acceptance more difficult due to “interlocking systems of oppression” based on the intersection of racism and sexism. As departments continue to retain or fail to completely eradicate the “invisible wall” it took a century to build, black and other minority recruits remain stymied by the entrenched institutional racism that endures.

Black officers, like other minorities discussed above, have learned to become “blue” to fit in, even coming to see resistive blacks in ways similar to that of many white officers, viewing young black males in inner cities with suspicion, complicated by their own feelings, which range from embarrassment to associative guilt. Yet, despite the presence of several high-profile black police chiefs in a few urban departments, most ranking administrative and policy making positions in American police departments remain largely under white male control. Black cops still complain of what many scholars term “experiential racism,” involving discrimination “motivated by racial stereotyping and racial images that have become so integrated into the woodwork of the society that they are barely noticeable to most white Americans.” Moreover, as one black police officer puts it, it is not so much a racist conspiracy but a “good old-boys’

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system,” in which “some like-minded individuals … move up the chain, and then you have the same problem. It reproduces itself.”

No matter what trouble black cops may have in actuality, at the movies the picture is even more distorted. Black representation, though, is not merely a sideshow but a co-creator of white Hollywood. Blackness is so intertwined in cinema history that the first flickering images of a black face seen onscreen in 1903 was actually a white actor in blackface. In regard to Hollywood imagery, including its native-obsessed Tarzan films, one black cop complains that so often such imagery is the only exposure white people have of black people, including white rookie cops. When such cops are put in situations in which there are angry black people, “they may think that’s the type of mentality they’re dealing with and grab their pistol.”

In this way, life and art move beyond mutual imitation, helping to co-create each other’s sphere of influence.

**Birth of racist cinema**

Using blackness to signify menace has a long history in Hollywood, with most scholars pointing to D.W. Griffith’s terrifying would-be rapist in his 1915 film *Birth of a Nation* as a watershed moment with lasting consequences. In one of the film’s more infamous scenes, the “renegade” Negro soldier Gus (white actor Walter Long in blackface) lusts after a white girl, who, rather than be raped by him, leaps to her death off a cliff. More than simply conveying a strategy to avoid rape as a “fate worse than death,” the film reinforces the racialized myth that

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94 Ibid., 77.

95 Bogle, *Toms*, 3. Typical of the historical approach is Garth Jowett’s seminal book for the American Film Institute, *Film: The Democratic Art*, which is still widely referenced. Within its chronology of a century of films, only two pages are devoted to “black cinema,” as he terms it; he then defers to the work of contemporary black scholars and their efforts to chronicle “the abortive attempts to establish an indigenous black movie industry in the American cinema.” Even the early foundational works on black cinema by Thomas R. Cripps, Daniel J. Leab, along with Bogle continue to treat the subject as white scholars had: keep it segregated—and mention black contributions only when distinguishable from white-dominated Hollywood, but not usually as contributing to mainstream productions.

black males are lustful beasts. This scene also plays on the fear of miscegenation for its ability to pollute the white race, threatening white hegemony and its role in the nation’s self-image. Her willingness to die rather than risk this outcome engages white fears while also sanctioning a variety of “defensive” actions for arresting such a threat. That includes the era’s lynching of black males, often framed by Southern political leaders not so much acts of racist aggression but as a method for protecting threatened white women (as symbols of the nation’s racialized identity).97

Moreover, argues Bogle, Griffith’s depiction of the terrifying black brute sparked such an emotional reaction that sexualized black men were erased from Hollywood films for the next half century. Most cinema scholars, though, also acknowledge Griffith as the father of film, having “altered the entire course and concept of American moviemaking, developing the close-up, cross-cutting, rapid-fire editing, the iris, the split-screen shot, and realistic and impressionistic lighting.”98 As such, his influence remains profound, including his presentation of racist stereotypes, which he deployed with such force and clarity that they continue to inform and resonate within contemporary black imagery.99


99 See James Snead, *White Screens, Black Images: Hollywood from the Dark Side* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 37-45; Vincent F. Rocchio, *Reel Racism: Confronting Hollywood’s Construction of Afro-American Culture* (Boulder: Westview, 2000), 29-54. Spike Lee, for example, includes scenes from *Birth of a Nation* in his scathing indictment of Hollywood racism, *Bamboozled* (2000), which testifies to how contemporary black artists and audiences—as well as the society at large—still process such racialized images. Many scholars, though, resist reconciling Griffith’s contributions to cinema with his racism. As Rocchio observes, “There is a pervasive attitude that Griffith’s film is great art, and that the lamentable and even objectionable racist material can be separated from that” (cite page). Clyde Taylor agrees, noting, “Mainstream cinema scholars and aestheticians … have kept the race issue at arm’s length from their exploration of the film’s technique, refusing to synthesize these two discussions.” By doing so, argues Taylor, “the aesthetic [approach] not only conceals its alliance with ideological motivations, as it always must, but … in the specific instance of Griffith’s movie it works to suppress important social meanings.”
With the enactment and enforcement of the Production Code in 1930, among the bylaws that dealt with race were those forbidding all depictions of miscegenation. In addition, the Code’s professed commitment to the “special moral obligations” of cinema only outlawed depictions of “white slavery,” perhaps unable to see the immorality of restaging and rewriting the legacy of black slavery to suit a 20th century memory, already attempting to whitewash the historical record. Moreover, given the broad language of the Code, the effect of banning miscegenation onscreen discouraged nearly all portrayals of interracial interactions, unless it was made clear that race “mixing” was not occurring.

To take note of race in Hollywood or to even speak of “race films” is a fairly new phenomenon, rooted in post-1960s scholarship. Even for those observers who focus on the missing history of black representation, race is only mentioned when a non-white is involved. Yet, as Hazel V. Carby argues, “everyone in this social order has been constructed in our political imagination as a racialised subject,”100 and Hollywood, from the start, has been raced, its dominant whiteness using blackness to help define its norms. As mentioned in previous sections, whiteness, among other factors, is also integral to the construction of the screen hero, in part by having him vanquish blackness (now that Indians are subdued) as the most pressing threat to (white) America. For a segregated America straddling the 18th and 19th centuries, Griffith’s films, as well as the thousands that follow during Hollywood’s classical period, fail to position slavery and its legacy of racism as core problems. Rather, it is black sexual and political ambition that is most troubling, especially if it attempts to reach beyond its “natural” limitations to demand justice. Moreover, racism is usually not depicted as a systemic problem, but a failure of individual will on both sides of the color line.

100 Hazel V. Carby, “The Multicultural Wars,” Radical History Review (Fall 1992), 12.
Even in contemporary cinema, it remains difficult for a black male to perform aggression, given the sins of hundreds of black characters over a century of Hollywood filmmaking, which has framed him as the fearsome beast in need of annihilation. Bad guys in black hats, King Kong, dark people—killers by nature—have been constructed as the polar opposite of the white hero. How, then, can a black male portray toughness without evoking the conditioned response of fear? How can he perform aggression without appearing threatening, especially since his body (including his sexuality) has for so long served as the very source of cinematic menace? As Tasker notes, “Whilst blackness may be constructed as marginal within Hollywood narratives, it has a *symbolic centrality* [her italics]. This is particularly pronounced in the action cinema, a form that is played out over the terrain of criminality, and one that is often directly concerned with the policing of deviance.”\(^\text{101}\) In addition to the above strategy of erasing physically and/or sexually aggressive black males, another cinematic approach is to direct his aggression—still tightly controlled—on behalf of whites and their causes. In this way, the penultimate act is to die for one’s country, even one still denying black males full access to its advantages.

**Sidney Poitier: a model of restraint**

The arrival of Sidney Poitier as the first major black male as Hollywood star, however, did little to breach the borders that continued to police black aggression in cinema. Throughout the most prolific years of Poitier’s career, he was allowed few romantic leads with black actresses that could sexualize him or make him a romantic leading man. Furthermore, his two controversial (but tame) onscreen kisses with white actresses resulted in well-publicized death threats and boycotts, especially in the South. As a result, his body of work focuses largely on narrative conflicts in which he is a desexed protagonist among and in the service of whites.\(^\text{102}\)

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\(^{101}\) Tasker, *Spectacular Bodies*, 37
Though a combination of talent, a few complex roles, and 1950s pressure to make some measure of progress, Poitier’s star rose, but most of his characters are intelligent, stoic, and often righteous black men, which gave way to the changing social currents of the late 1960s, when his poignant dignity seemed much too passive.

One of his films, *In the Heat of the Night* (1967), however, is worth a closer look here, since he portrays Philadelphia homicide detective Virgil Tibbs. While visiting his mother in Mississippi, Tibbs is arrested on suspicion of murdering a white businessman who had been planning to build a much-needed factory in Mississippi. Although Tibbs is set free after the local police chief Bill Gillespie (Rod Steiger) discovers he is a cop, he faces worse dangers once he agrees to stay in town to help solve the homicide case. The chief resents Tibbs, not only for having to be assisted by this black “boy,” but also because he is being bested by this outsider cop who is smarter, better dressed (in what one character dubs “white man’s clothes”), paid more (Tibbs earns more in a week than Gillespie does in a month), and held less hostage to local politics. While Gillespie begrudgingly admires Tibbs’s skills, he loathes having to protect Tibbs from racist townspeople who turn on him as well. The film also exposes how class and regional differences compound the racial divide between the two policemen, whose only mutual interest is in solving the murder (actually a robbery gone wrong), with the thief merely after money to finance his girlfriend’s abortion. Racism even rears its ugly head amid this seemingly colorless crime, as the girl’s brother feels humiliated that his white sister is interrogated about her sex life in front of a black man, as well as having Tibbs strongarm the black woman who performs abortions, warning her about prison and the hardship of serving “colored people’s time.”

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102 Poitier wins the Academy Award for Best Actor for *Lilies of the Field* (1963), for portraying an unemployed construction worker who reluctantly but earnestly gets enlisted to help a convent of nuns build a church.
Like *Dirty Harry*, *In The Heat of the Night* is revelatory for its cross purposes, both challenging and affirming Hollywood conventions. It is progressive for depicting an intelligent, middle-class black cop character. But, like cop characters before him, Tibbs is devoted only to his work, which as he explains, consumes his life twelve hours a day, seven days a week. His solitary status also eliminates the need to equip him with a lover who might spotlight his sexuality. Moreover, no matter how progressive the film’s exposé on racism during such a charged period in American history—and despite director Norman Jewison’s liberal frame—it also affirms the time-tested Hollywood preference for suggesting individual solutions, while ignoring the political or systemic levers in as dire a need of adjusting or overhauling. At the end of the film, the two men come to respect each other, even hinting that Gillespie’s enlightenment may help transform the South from resisting the demise of Jim Crow to embracing racial tolerance. At the same time, the film isolates systemic racism only to the South, as if to suggest that Tibbs’s life in Philadelphia is free of racial oppression, which blatantly ignores the racialized history of Philadelphia’s police department. More importantly, at a key juncture in the film, Gillespie must rescue Tibbs, who is being surrounded by enraged whites who vehemently want to “kill the nigger.” They, like Turner’s gunman, refuse to see beyond the surface markers of difference to the cop underneath. Moreover, because Tibbs stubbornly refuses to leave town, although eventually solving the case, Gillespie is the more memorable hero for having saved Tibbs’s life, and implying that the solution to racism rests with individual whites who learn to accept “exceptional” blacks who prove themselves worthy.\textsuperscript{103} The white male rogue is similarly depicted as a lone figure—his isolation from the larger community (still paralleling his identity), though, is what allows him to act recklessly, even criminally, on America’s behalf. In contrast,\textsuperscript{103}

\textsuperscript{103} The sequel, *Call Me MISTER Tibbs* (1970), makes Tibbs a San Francisco cop, now married with a son, and with the family more a source of conflict than the racism, which foiled his previous try-out as an able, independent-minded cop.
the isolated black male and female cops discussed above merely compound their inability to overcome their “difference,” which seriously inhibits their ability to perform the nation.

**Black Power and Blaxploitation**

Despite greater attention to the plight of black Americans during the late 1960s and early 1970s, only a handful of films investigated richer stories about black life in America, including working class or middle-class conditions. There were a few exceptional independent films such as *Nothing But a Man* (1964), *Dutchman* (1967), and *The Spook Who Sat by the Door* (1973)—the latter film including a black cop who is asked to choose between his black and blue loyalties within a revolutionary scenario. Such complex films, often counterhegemonic in intent, though, are not widely supported or sustained. Most black characters who populated the more mainstream films of the era largely depicted blackness as criminal, like the “punks” who menace Dirty Harry and Popeye Doyle—these images merely updating what was already familiar. In actuality, changing portraits of black masculinity were being forwarded by members of the Black Power movement along with the political clout and celebrity status posed by Malcolm X and Martin Luther King.\(^{104}\) While Hollywood ignored these profound shifts in imagery, independent black filmmaker Melvin Van Peebles wrote, directed, and starred in *Sweet Sweetback’s Baadassss Song* (1971), which tells the story of a black male who earns his living performing in live sex shows in South Central L.A. until he is falsely charged with a crime and arrested. After being hauled in by police, he witnesses two white cops brutally beat up a black militant, whom he aids by assaulting the cops then fleeing for his own life. He becomes hunted by the LAPD, among others, until he finally makes it across the border to Mexico, vowing to return later to “collect some dues.” The film is credited with ushering in the lucrative film era now known as

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\(^{104}\) Both Civil Rights leaders are assassinated by the close of the 1960s; and by the early 1970s, many of the so-called black militants are similarly killed, imprisoned, or driven into exile.
Blaxploitation, as it grossed more than $10 million during the year of its premier, the most successful independent production on record at the time. More recent work by feminist and black studies scholars, though, criticize the provocative film for its misogyny and perpetuation of stereotypes, particularly the saliency of black sexuality.

A 1970s Hollywood, now having eliminated the once restrictive Production Code, also noticed the box office potential of such a sexualized black character, giving black filmmaker Gordon Parks the green light to create the mainstream vehicle *Shaft* (1971), which includes such a black hero. John Shaft attracts black (and interested white) audiences, since his persona is laced with the same signifiers found in the era’s cutting edge political thought, fashion, and music. Scholars also have examined the film’s political content for revealing stresses occurring at the time within the black community over more militant approaches to change. For instance, as in many of the era’s films, black militants are dismissed as preachy, even dangerous, while Shaft (Richard Roundtree), straddling both white and black worlds, is advanced as a successful intermediary. Others see the “superspade” of Blaxploitation—and his reclamation of sexuality—as a dangerous flirtation with the same circumstances for which the black buck was

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105 The film cost $500,000 to make, including a $50,000 loan from Bill Cosby, according to Jesse Algeron Rhines, *Black Film/White Money* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1996), 43. Also see Gladstone L. Yearwood, *Black Film as a Signifying Practice: Cinema, Narration and the African-American Aesthetic Tradition* (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 2000), 185-216. Parks had already earned respect in Hollywood for writing, producing, and directing *The Learning Tree* in 1969, but *Shaft* remains his signature film—not only for having been successful with diverse audiences but for garnering favorable reviews from several mainstream reviewers.

106 See Yaquinto, *Pump ‘Em*, which addresses the issue of utilizing both black and white women in Blaxploitation films—the black female usually given status as a symbol of support for the black “brotherhood,” while the white woman largely serves as a trophy, boldly contesting the taboos associated with miscegenation.

107 *Shaft* earns $1.2 million and grossed $10.8 million within a year. Parks’ son, Gordon Parks Jr., makes *Superfly* (1972), generating its own popularity and critical controversy.

108 Thomas Cripps observes that such Blaxploitation films also echo a cultural tradition that is linked to the “older Afro-American traditional folk heroes, among the most influential, the trickster modeled after Br’er Rabbit or the ‘bad nigger’ modeled after Staggerlee, the sexual outlaw of black urban folklore.” Thomas Cripps, *Black Film as Genre* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1978), 128.
condemned (and often lynched). Still, others argue that redrawing and purposely amplifying the black male’s supposed hypersexuality and aggressive tendencies represented calculated and politically informed choices to take back ownership of traits once used to marginalize black males. Or as Dick Hebdige explains, they reflect struggles over “possession of the sign.”

Eventually the limitations of such characters became manifest. As Mark A. Reid notes, they offered nothing radically new; “like the doll-makers who painted Barbie’s face brown, MGM merely created black-skinned replicas of white heroes of action films.” Within a few years, Blaxploitation faded away as the films increasingly fixated on formula or parody.

Despite its short life, such films made clear the untapped appetite and profit potential in putting more black characters on screen. Thus, as had occurred with the “race films” of an earlier era, talented black actors were once again pulled into the (white) Hollywood system and employed in the industry’s more mainstream efforts, but still largely confined to familiar roles as comedians, musicians, and athletes, including Fred Williamson, Jim Brown, and O.J. Simpson. On the other hand, the more complex talents of Richard Pryor and Bill Cosby were contained by Hollywood’s primary focus on their comedy—at the expense of their other gifts. Cosby became a buddy spy on TV’s I Spy (1965-1968), which became the first of many TV shows for Cosby over the next two decades, while Pryor was tapped for a series of 1970s comedy films that paired him with fellow comic Gene Wilder.

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110 Dick Hebdige, Subculture: The Meaning of Style (New York: Routledge, 2001), 17. Similar to Richard Pryor’s use of the “n” word, as in his searing comedy album, This Nigger’s Crazy, it takes back control of language or imagery once used to subjugate and becomes among the self-reflexive weapons.

111 Reid, Redefining, 84.
The upsurge in black sidekicks and buddies who began co-starring in mainstream Hollywood products also produced what Ed Guerrero labels a period of “neo-minstrelsy.” He points to roles such as Louis Gossett Jr.’s character in *An Officer and a Gentleman*, noting that he is “reduced to a deracinated zero, culturally differentiated only by the color of his skin.”113 In *Rocky* (1976), Carl Weathers serves to “whiten” and thus appropriately Americanize the swarthy, underdog Rocky (Sylvester Stallone), whose Italian ancestors also once struggled for acceptance in white America. Unfortunately, Weathers’s Apollo Creed bears a striking resemblance to the once forbidden black brute, with a formidable physical presence responsible for nearly beating Rocky senseless. Their match ends up technically in a draw, but thematically stands as a victory for Rocky, who holds his own against the reigning black champion. Rocky finally faces an idealized white opponent in *Rocky IV* (1985), but as he faces this blond Soviet boxer, the nation is able to trump race, with their Cold War rivalry becoming the match-up’s most defining feature. In this more globalized context, Apollo becomes Rocky’s sidekick and his fellow American. Even the film’s promotional posters knew to drape Rocky in the American flag, lest the connections be missed. Importantly, the film also anticipates a shift in the saliency of race, which perhaps is able to be trumped by nation as the more vital identity factor when American characters must embody or defend the nation’s interests abroad or against clearly marked “foreigners” at home. Rocky and Apollo combine to create a “tan” that foregrounds America’s red, white, and blue, and makes race less a divisive factor for Americans who face a common “foreign” enemy. This also opens up space for the Other to perform the nation, as Apollo does above, as long as his Americanness is clearly defined. This shift will be discussed further in

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112 Both men continue to use other media—principally stand-up and comedy albums—to showcase more racially and socially charged comedy, which often scorches rather than soothes mainstream America, especially in the case of Pryor.

Chapter Four, which examines American defenders operating in a borderless world that still requires American “solutions.”

Meanwhile, for the era’s films that depict American struggles within the nation’s sovereign borders, white masculinity remains vigorous. In those cop films, as previously discussed with the Lethal Weapon, Die Hard, and 48 Hour films, whiteness rules, with black cops serving as token bosses or supportive buddies. Howard Winant argues that the era’s pumped-up white masculinity was in direct response to the racial conflicts of the post-civil-rights period.114 While I agree that there are connections to this specific historical juncture, such adjustments to black and white characterizations are also linked to a larger continuum of American racial and cinematic practices with a much longer memory. Such recurring themes and familiar features of the rogue borrow as well as transcend such historical specificity, as they are rooted in sustained mythologies that also are able to incorporate particular moments of rupture; and these patterns combine to effectively present the most recent mutations as being as timeless as they are supposedly new.

As it did for Goldberg, Eddie Murphy’s comic ability also helped stifle his more radical potential after he attained superstardom as the lead cop character in Beverly Hills Cop (1984). Moreover, once his Detective Alex Foley leaves his Detroit base to travel to Beverly Hills to solve the murder of his white friend, and in so doing, largely forsakes further contextualization within a larger black community. Such isolation further accentuates his racial difference, which also forms much of the film’s comic premise. For example, as part of his tactics to solve the case, Murphy performs a variety of black characterizations he honed during his sketch comedy work on Saturday Night Live, which initially made him a star. He even rips off the persona of his

sidekick character in *48 Hours*, in which his Reggie Hammond warns a bar full of drunken rednecks, “I am your worst fucking nightmare … a nigger with a badge.” Acting out what Pryor would call the “crazy nigger” routine both alarms and confounds the affluent California community (along with his white counterparts) trying to contain him, and which mainstream audiences—most likely as distanced from Beverly Hills as Foley—found so funny. The film’s deployment of race, if only for the sake of comedy, along with Murphy’s comic gifts, rewarded *Beverly Hills Cop* at the box office; it remains among the top-grossing films of all time.

**Boyz in the Hollywood “Hood”**

Amid all the buddy, biracial, and comic films of the 1980s was director Spike Lee’s provocative cinema, with its investigations of urban street life, daily hassles with police, and the depiction of interracial and intraracial conflicts. Specifically, Lee tapped into the potency and cultural capital of hip hop for its celebration of defiance and outrage, albeit from a predominantly male point of view. An example is Lee’s use of the rap anthem “Fight the Power” by Public Enemy to accompany *Do The Right Thing* (1989), with its contempt for racist police. In many of the so-called “hood” films of the early 1990s, hip hop stars provided more than just music, also co-starring in key roles as troubled and often sympathetic “gangstas,” drawing not only from their celebrity and musical personas but borrowing from the history of American outlawry, which has long celebrated resistance as a strategy for coping, as well as the “practice of

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115 *48 Hours*, DVD, directed by Walter Hill (Paramount Pictures, 1999). Being a comic first also curbs the potential of Will Smith, whose contemporary roles include a riveting performance of prizefighter Mohammed Ali in *Ali* (2001)—enough to garner an Academy Award nomination. Even when he stars as the lead cop character in the two comic *Bad Boys* films (1995, 2003), he too is given a black sidekick—fellow black comedian-turned-actor, Martin Lawrence. A more novel approach would have been to pair Smith with a young white actor who took orders from his character and stood in his shadow. No doubt having two blacks actors headline a pair of successful, mainstream Hollywood productions is of no little consequence; nevertheless, their films represent exceptions, and light-hearted ones at that, rather than serious challenges to the hegemony of Hollywood’s white cops.

resistance through style.” In *New Jack City* (1991), actor-director Mario Van Peebles, son of *Sweetback’s* director, created a squad of black and white undercover cops with hip hop sensibilities, including Scotty Appleton (rap artist Ice T) as an obsessed cop who wants to avenge his mother’s death—acting more out of revenge than duty. Moreover, as in so many crime films before it, the film’s show-stopping performance belongs to the gangster Nino Browne (Wesley Snipes), whom Appleton cannot best either in terms of audacity or conviction.

Like Blaxploitation films before them, such “hood” films too often compound the notion of blackness as deviance. Rather than live up to what Todd Boyd calls the “renegade space” that is possible within crime cinema, the hood films usually affirm stereotypes and the dominant racialized order. The only key difference in these films, like early Blaxploitation, is that often the filmmaker is black. And even if committed to an alternative portrait, he must operate within an existing environment that encourages producing what is familiar rather than oppositional. Earl Ofari Hutchinson charges that in addition to Hollywood and the mainstream news media, which mirror each other and share a “tabloid obsession with sex, violence, and depravity,” some black personalities have discovered “a gold mine in pandering to the profane,” thereby cementing an “unholy alliance with the ghetto chic crowd.” hooks also indicts white Hollywood for finding comfort in promoting such images, noting, “a central motivation for highlighting gangsta rap continues to be sensationalistic drama of demonizing black youth culture in general and the contributions of young black men in particular.” Such media representations, she posits, only

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117 Hebdige, 18.


serve to “obscure the legacy of social operations whose function is oppression based on race.”

Other feminist writers also contend that gangsta rap, in particular, showcases black-on-black as well as gendered violence by privileging the overdetermined misogynistic and homophobic perceptions of some black males at the expense of other oppressed peoples. It also eclipses the presentation of other portraits of black masculinity. A few critics also fault black artists who focus only on themes of death and destruction as being disingenuous, as many of them are often themselves reared in middle class, suburban homes (like Chuck D of Public Enemy); secondly, rather than this “endless chain of recyclable signifiers that both allure and repel,” what needs to be shown “is the diversity and complexity of African-American life.”

Moreover, notes Boyd, the gangsta film is often just a racialized variation of the mainstream version, already complex terrain for Italian Americans negotiating their own dark history of Hollywood imagery.

Van Peebles created another notable cop film, *Gang in Blue* (1996), which investigates the conflict that black cops experience wrestling with loyalties of black versus blue. Van Peebles’ film is inspired by a real case of a black police officer who wages war on a band of racist renegade cops, but aside from its superficial blackface, it largely replicates the Dirty Harry’s *Magnum Force* of a good guy cop acting alone to battle a “gang” of bad cops. Such an approach fails to indict the system beyond the precinct house, keeping the effort parochial and in the Hollywood tradition of focusing on the individual, while ignoring the larger systemic picture.

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Another film inspired by a real case of a black cop battling a gang of racist cops is Charles Burnett’s *The Glass Shield* (1995). Burnett, whom Bernard Weintraub calls “the nation’s least-known great film maker,” makes a stronger effort to suggest links to wider departmental and societal racism, but also succumbs to the staples of the genre, focusing on the obligatory shoot-outs and confrontations between good cop-bad cop, which eventually overwhelm the film’s fresh point of view. Again, except for the novelty of the good cop’s blackness, it is *Magnum Force* with a stubborn focus on the individual at the expense of a more scathing critique of the larger racist frame. Moreover, pairing the cop hero Johnny Johnson (Michael Boatman) with a white female cop—who is further marginalized as Jewish—is perhaps an attempt to extend the scope of systemic oppression, but which also serves to neutralize any sexualized inferences, thus falling into the trap of reiterating another contemporary cop film cliché.

*Deep Cover* (1992), directed by black filmmaker Bill Duke, is yet another tale of a lone black hero and undercover cop, John Hull (Laurence Fishburne), shown battling a corrupt and racist system. It is a complex film that attempts to capture not only the interplay of interracial relations and power inequities, but also the contentious *intra-racial* debates about approaches to ameliorating conditions threatening the black community, most notably the ravages of drugs. The film, though, in order to foreground several nuanced black male heroes does so at the expense of re-deploying stereotypes about white, Latino, and Jewish males, along with subordinating differences based on gender and/or sexual orientation. Several racialized exchanges are illuminating for what they reveal about the film’s point of view. In the opening interviews, Hull, then the uniformed Russell Stevens, is asked by the white G-man, DEA Agent Gerald Carver

(Charles Martin Smith), “What’s the difference between a black man and a nigger?”\textsuperscript{124} This is apparently supposed to test whether Hull can be trusted with a delicate assignment, as previous candidates have been dismissed for answers that seemed too angry or too Uncle Tom-ish. Later, when Hull asks Carver if he ever killed anybody, Carver answers, “I went to Princeton to avoid all that shit!”—the comment perhaps designed to attest to the insulated nature of the government’s white power base and its distaste for taking responsibility for the bloodshed it often dispatches the Other to perform. Carver also cleverly keeps Hull committed to the mission by telling him that “millions of your people … are being destroyed before they’re ever born” by illicit drugs, adding to his general manipulation of Hull to pursue a Colombian drug lord. However, when the drug lord switches from being the nation’s enemy to its ally, Hull’s mission is rendered void and his life put in danger. In the end, Hull exposes Carver’s agenda and the government’s duplicity about the drug lord, asking, “What’s he, the new Noriega … he helps you fight communists [so] you let him bring drugs into the country to sell it to niggers and spics and you use me to do that shit?”\textsuperscript{125}

Hull’s Jewish partner in crime, David Jason (Jeff Goldblum), although seemingly designed to reference—however reductively—the complex history of black-Jewish relations, merely paints a particularly noxious, anti-Semitic portrait. Jason professes a love of all things black, including a penchant for having sex with black women, which Hull dissects as Jason’s urge to “feel like you’re fucking a slave.”\textsuperscript{126} Jason counters, though, explaining in racist terms

\textsuperscript{124} Deep Cover, DVD, directed by Bill Duke (New Line HomeVideo, 1999).

\textsuperscript{125} Although the filmmaker’s inclusion of such a naked indictment of the racialization of the nation’s drug problem may have merit, but presented in its customary conspiratorial contours is unhelpful, as is Duke’s frame of the nation’s drug problem as one that primarily affects blacks, despite evidence that the fastest-growing demographic for heroin use is white suburban kids, with whites also the number one users of powdered cocaine. It is true that more blacks than whites pay for their drug habits and trafficking practices with prison sentences, but that is an issue, perhaps the most egregious, that Duke leaves out of his film.
how much he envies Hull’s “gift of fury,” and his approximation of a “magnificent beast.” In their final exchanges, after Hull is confronted once more by the Christianized black cop named Taft (Clarence Williams III), who lectures Hull about “sins and souls,” Jason tries to convince Hull to forget this “Christian-Judeo thing that’s enslaved us all.” Although this could be read as engaging critical, horizontal modes of oppression, given Jason’s moral and criminal depravity, his lecture is merely meant to convince Hull to split the drug money with him and spare his life (which Hull does not). After both Taft and Jason are killed, the only redemptive act left open to Hull is to testify before a congressional subcommittee, where he wisely protects Carver but foils the government’s makeover of the drug lord. The scene also includes, not incidentally, a compromised black Congressman who accuses Hull of slandering one of America’s Latin American “friends.” In the end, when Hull is left with $11 million in drug money, he assesses his choices: keep it and be a criminal, give it to the government and be a “fool,” or “try and do some good with it [but] maybe it just makes things worse.” Offering but retracting the last choice thus negates Hull’s ability to be a hero or to see beyond his personal war, especially when he adds, “Either way I’ll probably just wind up getting myself in more trouble. It’s an impossible choice,” then asks in voiceover, “What would you do?” Again, rather than flesh out Hull’s torn loyalties to do his blue duty but forsake his obligations to the black community Taft has been urging Hull to re-join, the film forsakes the collective politics it flirts with, ultimately abandoning it for yet another close-up of a battered hero, one who is black and blue, but still

126 Deep Cover, DVD.
127 Ibid.
128 Ibid.
129 Ibid.
130 Ibid.
basically alone. It confirms that America prefers lone heroes who are detached from community, while leaving this black cop unable to find acceptance in any community.

During the era, Wesley Snipes also trades in his once stunning criminal credentials for a badge in *Murder at 1660* (1997), in which he portrays a District of Columbia cop dispatched to investigate a murder inside the White House, along with the more vital cover up. It requires that Snipes’s character, Detective Harlan Regis, kill the president’s enemy, which turns out to be the president’s national security advisor. Regis is also buddied in the film with a white female secret service agent, Nina Chance (Diane Lane), whose value as a sharp shooter saves Regis’s life. She also saves the president’s by throwing her body in front of his to take a bullet. There is great care, however, to avoid the suggestion of any romance between Regis and Chance. Yet, given the Hollywood history of male-female co-stars working closely together and saving each other’s skins, such distancing here seems remarkably inconsistent. Again, it makes sense if one recalls the century of taboo against onscreen interracial coupling, first as a matter of law, then as a matter of custom, which endures. During his career, Snipes has often experimented with onscreen romances with non-black females: with Lopez’s character mentioned above; in *Jungle Fever* (1991), whose central theme is the pursuit of the fallout from a relationship that transgresses race as well as class barriers; in *Rising Sun* (1993), in which a Japanese woman is the prize for which Snipes competes, while serving as Sean Connery’s buddy detective; in *One Night Stand* (1997) as a commercial director married to an Asian American woman but who has an affair with an intriguing foreign woman played by German born Nastassja Kinski; and, finally, in *U.S. Marshals* (1998), as a beleaguered, covert American operative with another foreign girlfriend played by French born Irène Jacob. The fact that the only two white females with whom he has physical contact are foreign is perhaps what makes them acceptable as
Snipes’s lovers, since they do not represent examples of American white womanhood, which leaves the taboo concerning homegrown interraciality undisturbed.

As a new century dawned, Hollywood made everything old seem new again, with sequels, remakes, and films inspired by old TV shows becoming plentiful. Among the resurrections was Shaft (2000) by writer-director John Singleton, who had made a name for himself with his critically acclaimed film Boyz n the Hood (1991). His new film updated the story of John Shaft, this time focusing on the original’s nephew, also named John, who is—as the reprised the Oscar-winning theme song by Isaac Hayes notes—“the man that would risk his neck for his brother man.” However, rather than a private eye, this John Shaft is a NYPD detective, who makes it his business to hunt down the rich white male responsible for a racially inspired assault-turned-homicide of a black male. Intent on doing things more brutally than even the NYPD permits (in all its screen incarnations), Shaft turns in his badge, which enables him to kill several people in cold blood and satisfy his highly individuated pursuit of justice. However, as such, he is converted from rogue cop to vigilante, which essentially disqualifies him from closer consideration in this study. In addition, at the film’s end, he joins his uncle (still Richard Roundtree) in the private eye business, never reclaiming his badge or status as a cop. As Jack E. White notes in his review of the 2000 film, what had made the original Shaft special was its novel depiction of a self-assured black detective talking back to “the Man.” The original Shaft, as a private citizen, carves out an alternative approach, avoiding the excesses and clichés of both the criminals and the police, suggesting that intelligent manipulation is often more effective than uncorked aggression. In contrast, the new Shaft is “transformed … into a thug,” inviting “young black moviegoers to applaud the kind of police abuse they protest against in the streets.”

Even more recently, *Crash* (2005) offered a host of cop characters, including a troubled black detective, Graham Waters (Don Cheadle), and a racist white uniformed cop (Matt Dillon), among others. However, despite the film’s critical acclaim (and controversy), as an independent production, it avoided reiterating most mainstream Hollywood conventions, and as such, lies outside the purview of my study. Moreover, although it purposely targets the enduring racism and xenophobia in America—and uses cops as the means for exposing the nation’s policing of such concepts—it largely interrogates race at the expense of gender and other factors that co-constitute difference. For example, while Cheadle’s cop struggles with conflicting loyalties to job, family, and his racial solidarity, he is unable to confront his own racism and sexism toward his Latino lover and fellow cop. Like so many films discussed above, it also reiterates Hollywood’s penchant for individual wins at the expense of a static system. One young black male character commits an act that attempts to disrupt the cycle of racial animosity in LA—no doubt a fresh perspective offering a glimmer of hope—but it comes at the expense of examining the larger racial order, which, in this case, the film has intentionally tapped for its narrative spine.

**Denzel Washington’s cops: armed with a gun but no penis**

While the presence of black cop characters has increased, displaying many progressive aspects and more subtle characterizations, there remains no black male (or female) hero who matches the sexual virility, physical aggression, and action-orientation of the white male rogue. Of the top-drawing black actors, most are, by Hollywood standards, limited by maturity from playing romantic leads, which may also account for their employability, their sexuality not

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132 *Ebony* magazine featured a story in January 1997 about what factors can be identified and that inhibit black actors from more widespread success. They include: the lack of major awards, success in action films not carrying over into other genres, the scarcity of roles for black actresses, and finally, the prohibition of black actors having onscreen relationships with white actresses to give them greater exposure. Subsequent awards for Denzel Washington and Halle Barry in major categories may have alleviated the pressure on the first factor, but the others remain in play.
having to be contained by narrative and/or visual strategies. Among Hollywood’s black male stars, Samuel L. Jackson is in his late 50s, Danny Glover is almost 60, and Morgan Freeman is nearing 70. No matter how successful, these black actors are then unavailable as romantic leads, especially with white actresses. In contrast, white actors, from the septuagenarian Sean Connery to the boyish Leonardo Di Caprio, are capable of being romantically linked onscreen with actresses of nearly any age or race/ethnicity. While their versatility helps to maximize their A-list potential, the repressed, contained, or erased sexuality of most black male characters continues to indicate the endurance of blackness as threat, which, as Cornel West posits, remains deeply rooted in white fear of interracial sex and marriage.\textsuperscript{133}

Denzel Washington is the one black actor who at times can transcend the limitations of being raced and the only contemporary black (non-comic) performer to move to center stage in part by being able to portray broad-based characters who are not necessarily race specific, such as the capable attorney in \textit{Philadelphia} (1993). At the same time, given the reality of the roles available, he has also played his fair share of specifically racialized characters, from a black Civil War soldier (garnering the 1989 Academy Award for Best Supporting Actor) to his critically acclaimed performances as anti-apartheid activist Steve Biko in \textit{Cry Freedom} (1987), the slain civil rights leader \textit{Malcolm X} (1992), as well as the 1960s middleweight contender Rubin Carter, in \textit{The Hurricane} (1999).

Even more to the point, Washington has portrayed more than a half dozen cop characters. His first enforcement/defender role was in \textit{Ricochet} (1991), which tells the story of cop-turned-district attorney Nick Styles, who is hounded by a maniacal criminal named Blake (John Lithgow), intent on destroying the man who put him away. At first glance it seems that Washington’s heroic character is a clean break from past black characterizations, except that he

is still vulnerable to the customary treatment accorded black males when it comes to sexuality and sexualized situations. Moreover, as Tasker posits, “Alongside Hollywood’s construction of the black male as a sexual threat, there exists an established tradition of representation in which the black man is suffused with a passive, Christian imagery.”\textsuperscript{134} The film’s most provocative scenes have Styles drugged, naked, and splayed across a bed (his arms tied to the frame, putting him in a crucifix-like position). Blake has hired a hooker to have sex with the ex-cop while a videotape frames the act as consensual rather than coerced. The scene sexualizes Styles while at the same time robbing him of control over the sex act; still, he manages to get an erection, despite being drugged on a mixture of heroin and cocaine, tied up, and struggling with the rape-like circumstances. The hooker even comments on his willingness to physically cooperate, demonstrating his “natural” ability to be sexual. Thus, despite the good cop approach, sex plays such a bizarre role in the film that it sustains the impression of the black male as sexually “deviant” or hypersexual. Moreover, presenting blackness as synonymous with criminal deviance also haunts the story in the form of Style’s boyhood friend-turned-drug lord Odessa (Ice T). Styles, like Dirty Harry before him, is betrayed by an inefficient and spineless police department that suspends him and puts him outside the system. Styles, then, enlists Odessa’s help to defeat his foe, Odessa doing the extralegal tasks Styles, the sanitized hero, cannot do. The juxtaposition of Styles and Odessa together, though, paint a portrait of blackness that does not stray too far from the legacy of black deviance coded into mainstream cinema.

In \textit{Virtuosity} (1995), which is a cross between a cop film and a fantasy thriller, Washington is LAPD detective Parker Barnes, who must finally subdue his non-human nemesis through virtual reality technology. After having lost his wife and daughter to a deranged criminal who wanted Barnes off his trail, Barnes hunts down his new target with the help of a beautiful

\textsuperscript{134} Tasker, \textit{Spectacular Bodies}, 40.
white criminologist, Dr. Madison Carter (Kelly Lynch), who believes in him long after the
department considers him a killer for going on a rampage after the murder of his family. Once
Carter’s young daughter is kidnapped, Barnes finds a new reason to fight the good fight and risk
his life: to save the young (white) girl. At the film’s end, Carter utters a tearful thank you to
Barnes but then walks away, offering no physical gesture of affection, not even a handshake.

the execution of the demonic serial killer, Edgar Reese (Elias Koteas), whose evil spirit lives on
in other people, who become killers using his same methods. Although the film is more
supernatural thriller than straight cop film, the same patterns of Washington’s other cop
characters can be detected in Hobbes, who is such a righteous figure that even one of his
colleagues dubs him a “saint.” Like many of Washington’s characters, Hobbes is allowed to get
angry and defend himself against his enemies but not to operate too far outside the rules. Even he
notes, “If I lost control … I’d be no better than the people we hunt.” As a black male, his
aggression must be subdued for him to be acceptable, but which negates his ability to perform
the rogue, who must be able to act aggressively *at his discretion* and to accomplish a higher goal.
This repressed anger for Washington’s character here and in other such roles only demonstrates
the limitations on his ability to challenge the white male archetype.

Also, like many of the above characters, Hobbes meets an attractive white female, Gretta
Milano (Embeth Davidts), for whom he has feelings, but which are not expressed beyond a
farewell embrace. When he leaves his young nephew with her to raise—saving both their lives—he
then sacrifices his own in an attempt to defeat the demon. The demon, though, lives on,
explaining how he almost faced extinction because “some self-righteous cop decided to save the
world” but failed in the end.
The Siege (1998), mentioned above for its Middle Eastern cop character, stars Washington as Anthony Hubbard, who heads the FBI/NYPD Terrorism Task Force, but who shares the screen with two characters who are as difficult to rein in as the terrorists. Annette Bening as the CIA operative Elise Kraft is protecting an asset for whom she has feelings, while using Hubbard, among others, to fulfill her extralegal political agenda. There is also Bruce Willis as Major General William Devereaux, who declares Martial Law and whom Hubbard finally arrests for torturing to death a prisoner. Their exchanges are as chilling as they are revealing about the nation’s thin blue line between security and fostering a police state—and what counts as defensive action versus naked aggression, especially if camouflaged behind patriotism and washed in the blood of ideology. (This is especially acute in light of the Bush administration’s recent claims that America has to torture suspected torturers in order to effectively prosecute its war on terror.) At one point in the film, Devereaux tells the assembled press corps, “There is historically nothing more corrosive to the morale of a nation than policing its own citizens,” but he promises that “our resolve” will hold steady as this new American enemy is “now face to face with the most fearsome military machine in the history of man. And I intend to use it and be back on base in time for the playoffs.” Devereaux’s hubris is as alarming as is his equating the unleashing of military power to a mere sideshow that should not disturb America’s sense of normalcy—especially its right to be entertained by professional sports that often approximate the art of war.

Concerning Washington’s representation of black masculinity, though, echoing the pattern under study here, his character serves as another desexualized black male (perhaps merely a redressed Poitier for contemporary times) whose female cohort is permitted a sexual liaison with a terrorist-prisoner while being kept out of bed with him. He is permitted a cozy

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135 The Siege, DVD.
dinner with Bening’s Kraft, dancing cheek to cheek, even kissing her on the cheek, but after her terrorist lover shoots her, Hubbard merely holds her hand and helps her pray before she takes her last breath. Again, the demands of the “nation under God” are camouflaged, as the film enables the nation to trump their racial and gendered differences to better represent a united America; at the same time, by making clear these two are not sexually intimate, the film also maintains the racial separatism that operates on the nation’s homefront.

In yet another cop film, *The Bone Collector* (1999), Washington portrays a suicidal ex-cop, Lincoln Rhyme, who after being seriously injured in a tunnel accident, is a quadriplegic who writes best sellers on forensics, although only able to move his head and finger. He is then called back into service as a forensics expert to help stop a serial killer, who is eventually revealed as a psychotic ex-cop, also a forensics expert, whose ultimate murderous goal is to kill Rhyme for helping to put him in jail. Rhyme’s helpmate is Officer Amelia Donaghy (Angelina Jolie), a uniformed, white female cop and former model who becomes his eyes and ears, and whom he mentors on the finer points of studying crime scenes and collecting evidence. After Donaghy kills Rhyme’s enemy in the nick of time, the film’s final scenes suggest they have coupled, hosting friends and family for a Christmas party. The film, though, presents by far the strangest handling of any of Washington’s interracial onscreen attractions, as he is paralyzed from the waist down, foiling any chance that he and Donaghy can consummate their union. Although they are physically able to kiss, they settle for touching hands and gazing lovingly at each other from a distance. Again, it seems preposterous since the novel on which the film is based explores the romance between Rhyme and Donaghy; and it is hard to imagine such a physical and emotional boundary being so policed if Jolie had shared the screen with Mel Gibson or Harrison Ford. Meanwhile, Rhymes’s trusty nurse, a plump black female named Thelma
(Queen Latifah), evokes the memory of the mammy—so desexualized and delimited that her inclusion smacks of mere tokenism.

Washington continues his track record of cop characters in *Out of Time* (2003), which, more significantly, allows him a sex life. In the film, he portrays Matthias Lee Whitlock, who is the police chief of a small department in one of the Florida Keys—not far from Miami—where his estranged Latina wife, Alex Diaz Whitlock (Eva Mendes\textsuperscript{136}), works as a homicide detective. After having an affair with the married Ann Merai Harrison (Sanaa Lathan), who is a black female he has known since high school and now married to a white man, he slowly discovers that Harrison has set him up to take the fall for supposedly murdering her over an insurance policy in which she names him as beneficiary. Whitlock had fallen for her battered wife story along with her supposed need for expensive cancer treatments, giving her money that actually belongs to the DEA as evidence from a major drug bust. Once Whitlock discovers that she is alive, however, he scrambles to stay one step ahead of the homicide investigation, being led by his wife Alex. In the end, Alex kills Harrison, saving Whitlock’s life, as well as believing that he had been merely coming to the aid of a friend and lover; in the final scenes, they share a kiss and resume their marriage. Like Lopez, the Cuban American Mendes, as a Latina, is customarily interpreted as brown rather than white, which lends her enough crossover appeal to be acceptable as a sexualized mate for black or white male characters, while still leaving undisturbed the social integrity of the black-white binary.

Leaving out his most famous and award-winning cop role in *Training Day* (2001), as it is discussed below as a case study, the above recap of Washington’s cop films makes clear that despite his star power, consistent box office draw, and critical acclaim, his blackness is still

\textsuperscript{136} Earlier in her career, her name was spelled with a “z” but billed with an “s” in the films under study here.
considered problematical enough to warrant special handling of his onscreen physical and sexual potency. Washington, although only just past age 50, has not been cast as a sexualized character and/or action hero for most of his career, prompting Esquire’s Tom Carson to note, “there’s something missing … and that something is sex.” When Washington is paired with Hollywood’s A-list of white actresses, for example in The Pelican Brief (1993) with Julia Roberts, it prompted bell hooks to note that “throughout the film, their bodies are carefully positioned to avoid any contact that could be seen as mutually erotic.” It is another case of adapting a novel for the screen, but dropping the romance between the white and black characters. Roberts, when commenting on why she so enthusiastically kissed Washington while handing him the Best Actor award (for his role in Training Day), explained that it was to make up for not being able to kiss Washington onscreen. However, Armond White claims that it is Washington who “refuses to do love scenes with white actresses,” which may please his “base black female audience,” but who might just as well be irked by his choice to “play Bojangles to a white girl-child” in both Virtuosity and Man on Fire—the latter film discussed in the next chapter. Besides, most moviegoers may not be aware of Washington’s moratorium on being romantically paired with white females onscreen and merely left with the impression that it is business as usual for Hollywood rather than a conscious choice for Washington. Moreover, if Washington is so committed to not slighting black women, why not insist that he have a black female co-star (who stays alive), which he has not had since Whitney Houston in The Preacher’s Wife (1996). Further, by allowing his characters to have sexualized relationships with Latinas,

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138 bell hooks, Reel to Real: Race, Sex, and Class at the Movies (New York: Routledge, 1996), 85.

Washington still leaves black females out of the picture, as well as validates the mainstream view of Latinas as sexually available to male characters on both side of the black-white divide. Rather than deal with the intransigence of the color line, this conveniently skips over it.

Meanwhile, as Nicholas D. Kristof of *The New York Times* notes, research suggests that 40 percent of Americans have dated outside their supposed racial category, yet “the movie industry is still too craven to imitate life,” especially for younger people who report a greater tolerance of interracial unions and who comprise the largest target market of Hollywood’s first-run theater exhibitions. Kristof adds that despite a half century having passed since American schools began integrating, “the breakdown of the barriers of love will be a far more consequential and transformative kind of integration—not least because it’s spontaneous and hormonal rather than imposed and legal.”¹⁴⁰ In not wanting to express any appetite for change that might race ahead of mainstream tastes, Hollywood and its skittishness about interraciality, however, is far from being just conservative. Given its ubiquity and influence, at home and abroad, Hollywood’s reluctance to depict changing race relations—while continuing to indulge in racist stereotypes—does more than merely skirt the issue to assure a predictable marketplace, it also helps to perpetuate racism and maintain the existing social order, which includes cinema as one of its most effective policing tools.¹⁴¹ Washington’s most celebrated cop character in *Training Day* represents the most flagrant case of a deviant black male, despite being a cop,

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¹⁴¹ While independent films and several plays tackle both the movement and consequences of interraciality, Hollywood chose to remake the Poitier film, *Guess Who’s Coming to Dinner?* (1967). The new film, *Guess Who?* (2005), is a comedy, in keeping with the most comfortable way mainstream audiences are thought able to handle such thorny issues. It reverses the racial roles—the male is white, the girl is black, and the black family (headed by Bernie Mac’s character)—feigns outrage, but which seems hollow in light of the shift in genre and the failure to take seriously the legacies of the social realities behind the comic set-up.
blending both the nefarious and seductive connotations of screen blackness with the most dangerous impulses associated with a Hollywood badge.

III. CASE STUDY: TRAINING DAY

*Training Day* tells the story of the black, decorated narcotics detective, Alonzo Harris (Washington), and his new white rookie, Jake Hoyt (Ethan Hawke), who is given one day to prove his worthiness to Harris. The ambitious rookie, looking for a promotion into the ranks of the elite undercover squad, is earnest but green, prompting Harris to taunt and test him. It becomes clear to Hoyt after a day in Harris’s “office,” a street-ready Monte Carlo, that although he learns truthful lessons about “street” justice, he also discovers Harris to be less a crimefighter who uses criminal means to attain a noble end, and more an ignoble criminal who has crossed the thin blue line forever. Hoyt also realizes that Harris is implicating him in his latest crime spree, either hoping to recruit Hoyt as another criminal accomplice, or frame him for refusing to become part of his “team,” which includes potent (and white) political and departmental accomplices known as the “three wise men.” By the end of the day, Hoyt has unknowingly smoked marijuana laced with PCP, helped deliver a false warrant resulting in Harris’s theft of drug money to “buy” a legitimate warrant, is nearly shot in a street battle with gangbangers, and survived another attempt on his life by Latino thugs. The penultimate act of criminality, however, involves the murder and armed robbery of a major drug dealer, whose fortune Harris steals to pay off a $1 million debt to Russian mobsters who are threatening to kill him for beating to death one of their members. At this film’s end, and replicating a *High Noon*-style shoot-out in an area of LA called “The Jungle,” Hoyt takes a stand and ends Harris’s reign of terror, although he leaves the three wise men—and the larger systemic rot they represent—untouched.
Monstrous masculinity

Like Ayer’s other script, *Dark Blue, Training Day* wallows in a masculinist universe, using language that polices males for signs of deviance, as in Harris threatening Hoyt with the prospect of a “pussy” desk job, or reminding him that only patrol “fairies” go to roll call. Hoyt is also chastised for having had a female training officer with whom he never had sex; in his defense, Hoyt offers, “I got a wife.” Harris fires back, “You got a dick.” While Hoyt’s marriage hints of a partnership, Harris’s is supplemented by mistresses who have collectively born him four sons (he offers to help Hoyt’s wife, who has only produced a daughter). According to director Antoine Fuqua, Harris’s El Salvadorian mistress (Eva Mendes) is typical of such victims—undocumented aliens whom men like Harris find fresh “off the boat,” then “raise” up as concubines. Her characterization is thin, however, as are most of the film’s female characters. Hoyt’s training officer is reduced to a missed sexual opportunity; a female judge is mocked because for being easily duped by a defendant; a drug dealer’s wife (Macy Gray) is shown as shrewd but greedy; even Hoyt’s wife and daughter exist to embody what he has to lose.

Smaller moments reveal other lessons in masculinity, as when Hoyt’s “virgin lungs” cough up a drag of weed he inhales, and Harris tells him to “man up.” Similar to Shelton’s scenes of male bonding, the initial meeting with the major drug dealer, Roger (Scott Glenn), with whom Harris had befriended as a fellow veteran, is a type of “boy’s club initiation” for Hoyt. Roger confirms for Harris Hoyt’s manliness, remembering Hoyt’s reputation as a high school football player, which Fuqua explains, along with war and policing, is another masculinist arena in which violence is often thought “sexy.” In many ways, “Alonzo was once Jake when he first

142 *Training Day*, DVD, directed by Antoine Fuqua (MGM Home Entertainment, 2003).
143 Antoine Fuqua, Director’s Commentary, *Training Day*, DVD.
144 Ibid.
came on the force,” notes Fuqua. A glimpse of Harris’s lost innocence can be detected when he warns Hoyt to keep his love for his family “deep inside,” as those feelings can make him vulnerable on the street. Although following Hoyt’s heroic effort of chasing down and single-handedly beating up two would-be rapists, Harris calls Hoyt a “cowboy,” offering him the highest accolade available for such males. It is clear, though, that Hoyt’s violence—aimed at preventing the rape of a child—differs from that deployed by Harris, who terrorizes a crackhead simply for sassing him. At the same time, Harris wonders if Hoyt is really “man enough,” as he puts it, to be on the street, warning him that “it takes a man to kill.” In the end, the morally bound Hoyt refuses to kill Harris in cold blood, settling for wounding him. But not to have fired his gun at all would have forsaken this measure of a man within the logic of a cop film.

Hoyt also proves to be a better father to Harris’s son, Alonzito. During their eventual showdown, while Hoyt protectively shields the boy, Harris uses him to secure his escape. Several scenes also reveal Harris as a failed father figure to Hoyt, calling him “son,” and telling him he reminds him of when he was a rookie. Later, though, when Harris’s crew wants to kill Hoyt, Harris balks, describing Hoyt as a “choir boy with a heart” and a “good man” with a “magic eye,” which also testifies to Hoyt’s moral superiority.

Race and class at the crossroads: the Valley vs. the Jungle

As Ayer did with his other script, he and Fuqua together create a film that they argue is color blind, but which seems disingenuous when racial imagery not only punctuates key moments, but also provides the film’s more vital subtext. A scene that hints of the potential for black-on-white violence involves Harris stopping in an intersection and blocking traffic until a white motorist beeps his horn. Harris responds by aiming his gun at the frightened driver until he signals his submission. With black drivers more plentiful in the neighborhoods the two cops are

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145 Ibid.
cruising, to cast a white male in the role is not an incidental choice, as it taps into the city’s racialized history (a scene that goes much further is included in Dark Blue, in which a white man is dragged out of a car at an intersection and nearly beaten to death). After Hoyt tells Harris he will “do anything” he is asked to do, Harris dubs Hoyt “my nigga,” which Fuqua explains, spelled with an “a” is a “term of endearment,” regardless of color; and which Ayer includes with similar ease in Dark Blue. However, when he boasts to Hoyt how the “bust-ass niggers” of the Jungle are “under my thumb,” the N-word represents mere disrespect for other black men.

Moreover, the Jungle is deemed so dangerous that Hoyt is told by Harris not to enter the area with “anything less than a platoon,” yet Harris lets his child live there. During Harris’s final tirade, he reminds the Jungle’s residents that he remains “the Man,” until Hoyt rips off Harris’s badge, sneering, “You don’t deserve this.” At that point Harris is stripped of both blue power and black empathy. Then a resident aims a gun at Harris, telling Hoyt to leave with the drug money, adding, “we got your back.” Hoyt had told Harris moments earlier, “They’re not like you … I’m not like you,” isolating Harris as the lone monster; and without his gun and badge, just another enraged black male, whom the residents now wave off dismissively. But Harris speaks the allegorical truth when he concludes his tirade with, “You can shoot me but you can’t kill me,” as Russian mobsters (the nation’s longest-running scapegoat) end his mortal existence; yet, the symbolic menace he personifies—so long a part of Hollywood imagery—lives on. Washington himself bears some responsibility for creating the monster Harris, taking credit for insisting that his character put his son in the line of fire to save himself, recalling, “If there’s anything in the

146 Ibid.
147 Training Day, DVD.
148 Ibid.
film that I demanded, it was that in the end, [Harris] suffers in the worst possible way.”

Having to deflect criticism about the film’s perceived racial politics, Fuqua argues that it simply makes sense that the community ultimately sides with Hoyt. “They side with good. It doesn’t matter what color Alonzo is. It doesn’t matter that Jake’s white and Alonzo’s black, they’re going with who’s doing the right thing.” Further, Fuqua complains that it reflects “small thinking” to “make a color issue out of this scene … he’s not about that at all,” or that the casting of blacks and whites in particular roles is not a reflection of any “subconscious” racism. In other words, Fuqua dehistoricizes the characters’ racialized identities, while at the same time drawing on racial stereotypes of good and bad as linked to white and black, respectively, and which was able to resonate with audiences.

As an American filmmaker, despite being black himself, he too has absorbed the nation’s racial codes and Hollywood’s deployment of them. Many mainstream critics notice Fuqua’s race but interpret it as another sign of the film’s “authenticity.” Michael Wilmington, though, points to the film’s “Quentin Tarantino streak,” as it “perversely plays with the usual mixed audience’s unease about black-white relationships on screen. And it also plays with their feeling that Los Angeles’ police force has a history of racism.”

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149 Lou Lumenick, “Villain in ‘Training,’” New York Post, 16 September 2001, 70. Several critics speculate that Washington wanted to shake up his career by playing against his usual righteous characters, which Fuqua too acknowledges. Just prior to his “dirty Harris” role, Washington had portrayed the stoic and Poitier-like coach who helps integrate a football team in Remember the Titans (2000). Entertainment Weekly notes that Harris is for Washington “less character study than career move,” as he “must have realized that he was in danger of letting himself get turned into a tough-talking liberal saint.”

150 Fuqua, Director’s commentary, Training Day, DVD.

151 Ibid.

happened if the movie “had flipped the races, with a rotten white cop showing a black rookie the
ropes.” He admits that he thought of Rodney King and O.J. Simpson while watching the film.\(^{153}\)

Complicating the film’s portrait of LA’s problematical blackness—including and most
especially its black cop at the center of the story—is the inclusion of several Latino characters,
who rarely rise above their stereotypical presence as brothers in deviance. After Harris brings
Hoyt to a Latino area (and abandons him there to be killed), the residents, like those in the
Jungle, stare at him as if he is the enemy, shouting, “hey, white boy.” Once it is revealed, though,
that Hoyt had saved the female cousin of a Latino gangster from rape, his life is spared. Again,
the Other falls in line, after supposedly comprehending the honor and noble intent of the white
knight. Another moment, though, offers the potential for play, however arrested, when the
Latinos initially aim Hoyt’s own gun at him, for a moment turning the tables on the cop. Then, in
a mockery of the Miranda rules such cops deliver, they announce: “You got the right to be bitch-
slapped”\(^{154}\) before dragging him off to be beaten. Such tendencies, if further developed, could
seem fresh and expansive, but at present are so small as to be noticed only in passing. The
filmmakers seem torn between wanting to acknowledge the horizontal links between Latinos and
blacks in LA’s most impoverished areas, but subordinate one for the sake of foregrounding the
other.

It is also no accident that the “three wise men” (a well-placed detective, a captain, and a
member of the district attorney’s office) are white, as they aptly embody the potency and
untouchable nature of the white power base controlling the big picture. There is also the scene in
which Harris makes up a phony media story about Hoyt’s death to demonstrate the department’s

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\(^{153}\) Roger Ebert, “Rogue warrior: *Training Day* a powerful vehicle for Denzel Washington,” *Chicago Sun-

\(^{154}\) *Training Day*, DVD.
instinct to protect itself; and such a story about Harris is heard in the film’s closing voiceover. The three wise men, though, are whom Harris aspires to become, but at present, merely works for them dirty their dirty work on the street. (An alternate ending shows them waiting for Hoyt after his “training” day ends only to learn that he has turned in—as official evidence—all the stolen drug money, spoiling their designs on coveting some of it.)

Interestingly, in terms of the interplay between race and class, the latter is made incongruous in order to accentuate the normalcy of whiteness. For instance, while the lesser-ranking Hoyt lives in the largely white suburbs of the San Fernando Valley, Harris resides in the “dark” and dangerous inner city, even though he earns a higher salary as a detective—and steals even more money. Such economic realities (or inconsistencies) related to class standing are overpowered by insisting on making more vital the racialized spaces each man inhabits. Hoyt’s privileged perspective explicitly frames the film: the opening scenes feature him waking up to the life-affirming sight of his wife breastfeeding their baby; its closing scenes show him returning to his suburban home as a place of refuge after his harrowing journey to, quite literally, the city’s Jungle. Los Angeles itself, notes Fuqua, “plays an important character in the movie”—its perilous locations lending the film a degree of realism. He was interested in filming “in the vein of a war movie such as Apocalypse Now,” or capturing an urban story in the spirit of the Western; and like Peckinpah, describes Harris’s crew as his own “wild bunch,”

including rapper Dr. Dre as Paul, another black cop with a violent temper. The film’s “enthusiastic demonizing of ‘the hood’” did not escape the notice of the Los Angeles Times movie critic

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Kenneth Turan, and Fuqua’s focus and fetish for exposed black bodies and their aggressive postures, as in *Dark Blue*, suggests an uncivilized state in which the “natives” post a dangerous physicality that white America (and its street Tarzan) must subdue.

**Taming the nation’s wolves**

Also, like *Dark Blue*, *Training Day* incorporates the fallout from the LAPD Rampart scandal, along with enduring controversies surrounding police misconduct. There is mention of that “Rodney King shit,” referring to the brutal methods used by some officers; and in a rare moment, Harris exposes Hoyt’s duplicity for using the outlawed “choke hold” too when pushed. In a more direct reference to the Rampart debacle, Hoyt, wary of Harris’s methods, notes, “With the scandal … it’s open season on misconduct”; even one of the three wise men warns Harris, “I do not want to see you on the front page like those other assholes.”

Although up to 80 police were involved in the Rampart scandal, in keeping with Hollywood’s penchant for telling the stories about lone heroes and isolated monsters, the film reduces the list of suspects to a chosen and highly racialized few. Unfortunately, the politically connected three wise men remain unscathed—and invisible, given the ending that was used. Wilmington criticizes the film’s failure to live up to its “own iconoclasm” in this way, noting that “a darker resolution, or at least a more honest one” was needed. One of *Training Day*’s producers, Jeff Silver, explains that

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158 The film’s official web site mentions drawing inspiration from several police corruption cases, citing a 1998 *Los Angeles Times* story about a study of 51 departments, in which each can “expect to have ten officers charged per year with abuse of police authority, five arrested for a felony, seven for a misdemeanor, three for theft and four for domestic violence.”
the film’s central theme asks: “Which do we want more: effective police or police who follow the letter of the law?”

echoing the arguments forwarded by Shelton and Russell with *Dark Blue*. *Training Day* similarly invokes then sidesteps the problem of the public’s insistence on law and order, but which often means tolerating more aggressive police.

Although Hoyt aspires to be upwardly mobile, boasting to his wife that his new assignment could enable him to climb the department ladder and own a bigger house, like other cop heroes before him, Hoyt mostly wants to make detective to be where the action is: to become the autonomous being, the self-made man among cops. Even Fuqua posits that his film is “about this young man’s … America Dream,” adding that Hoyt is “basically us,” serving as the American everyman who best understands the dream as well as the nightmare that could spoil it.

Most of all, the movie is “about a hero” who wants to do the right thing. Since *Training Day* hit theaters almost simultaneous to the events of September 11, Fuqua explains that in a post 9/11 world, Hoyt’s “mission” is even more necessary. He paraphrases Einstein’s famous quote that “the world is a dangerous place to live in, not just because of the evil people in it, but because of the people who do nothing about it.”

Hoyt, then, is the reluctant hero who goes “down into the belly of the beast” rather than refusing to do his duty, as a citizen as well as a cop, explains Fuqua. As is the case for previous heroes, conquering the supposedly uncivilized Other is what provides the excuse to act—deeds that put a face on the larger terror, but which leave the larger systemic causes undisturbed.

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159 Wilmington, *Training Day.*

160 *Training Day* official web site. “Production Notes.”

161 Fuqua, Director’s Commentary, *Training Day*, DVD.

162 Ibid.
What is notable about *Training Day*, however, is that the hero and the rogue cop are no longer ensconced in the same character. Hoyt saves the day, battling the unruly black Other (now, according to Fuqua, also serving as a metaphor for anti-American terrorism); unlike previous crusading cops, though, he is distanced from the nation’s army of cinematic warriors who usually perform such dirty tasks. Hoyt follows the rules, which, as Harris and Fuqua point out, though, may also have nothing to do with justice. Setting aside the significance of their racial difference for a moment, both characters are propped up by the same frontier mythology, which has left the rogue cop character steadily marching toward this schism ever since he first appeared onscreen (and in other American popular culture and political rhetoric). Steadily, the degree of acceptable criminality has been playing with the thin blue line to the point of dangerously obscuring it altogether. Is there a point when the means no longer justify the ends? Does the escalation in these latter films risk exposing dangerous flaws in the nation’s mythology and in the cop characters who embody it?

Harris even instructs Hoyt about breaking petty rules in order to concentrate on the “big fish,” boasting, “they build jails because of me.” Moreover, as Fuqua insists, everything Harris espouses about the positive yield from such rogue crimefighting efforts “is the truth.” As Harris explains, “Roger sold dope to kids [and] the world is better off without him,” especially when such “high rollers” cannot be stopped simply by rolling up in a squad car and announcing their arrest. Hoyt complains, though, that he became a cop “to put away … the criminals, not to be one.” In his response, Harris lays bare the mythology used to undergird hundreds of would-

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163 *Training Day*, DVD.

164 Fuqua, Director’s Commentary, *Training Day*, DVD.

165 *Training Day*, DVD.

166 Ibid.
be rogue characters like him and before him, on and off screen. “I walk a higher path, son,” and “to protect the sheep, you got to catch the wolf. And it takes a wolf to catch a wolf;”\textsuperscript{167} sounding hauntingly familiar to Teddy Roosevelt’s lasting philosophy that to defeat a savage you must become a savage.

Fuqua recalls how test audiences “wanted so bad” to believe that Harris would “turn out to be heroic … a good guy,”\textsuperscript{168} perhaps because his actions are so reminiscent of the hundreds of Western cowboys and crusading cops with whom most audiences are now so familiar. As such, to the mythology that is such an integral part of the American story (and which may also fulfill expectations about American behavior among non-Americans similarly exposed to Hollywood movies). But the character becomes so exaggerated in the end, obliterating any confusion over who is good and evil, that Fuqua wastes the opportunity to interrogate the cop film’s customary mythic and racist codes, the latter which he merely contemporizes; he may even have extended their reach, given the attention the film earned and the critical acclaim bestowed on Washington.\textsuperscript{169} It has been nearly 100 years since Griffith showcased his version of a sexually and physically depraved black brute. \textit{Training Day} too presents its black face, this time being more akin to what Franz Fanon would call a “white mask.” And with respect to the rogue, it begs the question: how much does Harris’s racial makeup contribute to the narrative and literal corruption of his rogue nature? Perry in \textit{Dark Blue}, despite being equally as criminal for most of the story, becomes available at the end for redemption. In contrast, it becomes impossible for

\textsuperscript{167} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{168} Fuqua, Director’s Commentary, \textit{Training Day}, DVD.

\textsuperscript{169} This black deviant/white savior combination did not go unnoticed when the film was prescreened for the National Association of Black Journalists. See Jay Boyar, “Less Than Role Model,” \textit{Houston Chronicle}, 30 September 2001, 10.
Harris to come back from the dark side. Is that rooted in his specific actions or his blackness; or could it be a combination of the two?

Many reviewers also mention the film’s nod to its cinematic brethren and ancestors, with Wilmington calling it “dirtier than Clint Eastwood’s Dirty Harry.” Fuqua too recalls, “I was … drawn to the script because it reminded me of the great cop dramas of the seventies.” Like many of these films, Training Day similarly presents itself as apolitical, or “just entertainment.” But, as Paul Smith notes, “any particular film that Hollywood makes will of necessity be bound up in a system of cultural and political formations; a film intervenes in those formations even as it emerges from a relation with and among them.” Rather than accept its responsibility for reflecting such sociocultural participation, Training Day’s cast and crew claim to be merely holding up a mirror to reality. Dr. Dre argues that the film is rare for being “so gritty and so true.” Fuqua goes further, noting that “it takes a lot of balls … to make this movie,” since it depicts such a “harsh reality.” The suggestion, though, that creating realism (already arguable in this case) negates a film’s ability to reflect a political perspective is spurious. It also is as unconvincing as Hollywood’s argument that its apolitical nature in rooted in its lack of realism.

In the end, Training Day presents two characters who duel over the soul of the movie cop character, ultimately settling the cinematic schizophrenia by presenting the white cop as a plastic hero, although his methods and respect for rules prompt even his creators to describe him as

170 Wilmington, Training Day.

171 Quoted on Training Day official web site.

172 Fuqua explains that he shot on location to show the kids in such neighborhood something positive: a black star and black director making a film. But it is hard to imagine that the area’s youth found the final story uplifting, seeing the black lead obliterated, the white cop returning to the safe suburbs, and the bureaucracy remaining intact. If anything it fulfills these people’s worst nightmares, especially in Watts, where the shoot-out with gangs occurs, as conditions have remained unchanged, if not worsened, since the Watts riots 35 years ago.

173 Training Day official web site. “Production Notes.”

174 Fuqua, Director’s Commentary, Training Day, DVD.
unrealistic—perhaps even untruthful. But such a character is not without purpose, especially in a post 9/11 environment, which seeks to restore, if only for a soothing moment, such an unsullied hero, who is a far and comfortable cry from the more effective but problematical rogue. This latter approach is embodied by Harris, but whose blackness dooms him to being demonized and destroyed, with his betrayal of his badge serving as further justification for this black man’s annihilation. It is what makes it possible to reject him, and by extension, perhaps perpetuate and reinforce America’s long-standing rejection of his race as well. Again, as with previous filmmakers, rather than a purposeful racist gesture on their part, the outcome is more likely the result of following a well-worn path, littered with such established mythologies, and which are themselves race-based. In other words, rather than a conscious effort to be racist, their behaviors and fates seem logical, natural—the result of myth’s ability to disarm critical analysis and now perform as reality.

In the next chapter, the rogue cop character crosses America’s borders to vanquish the nation’s “foreign” enemies who threaten security at home and abroad. The character also advances the nation’s political and corporate agenda in the international arena, along with realizing the long-standing American design to police the world. As an archetype, he will still embody many of the same hegemonic factors that worked for him at home: he remains a white heterosexual male whose denial of class remains intact. However, his “traveling” identity may reflect more the absorption of the processes of post-colonialism and globalization—as well as an embrace of multiculturalism, exploiting what Bhabha terms the “in-between spaces” of identity that open up in what seems an increasingly borderless world. In such a world, though, how will the American defender deal with racial hybridity: will he contest it or appropriate it as a strategy for its very containment?
CHAPTER 4: EXPANDING BORDERS
FOR HOLLYWOOD’S ROGUE COP

*Border towns bring out the worst in a country.*
Captain Hank Quinlan in *Touch of Evil*

We’re not here because we want to mess with your country … you want to live in the middle ages, you go right ahead. We just want to stop you from messing with ours.
American DEA Agent Mike McKay to an Afghani prisoner in *Traffic: The Miniseries*

*The United States and Great Britain share a mission in the world beyond the balance of power or the simple pursuit of interest … we cannot rely exclusively on military power to assure our long-term security … as we saw in the ruins of two towers, no distance on the map will protect our lives and way of life.*
George W. Bush, 19 November 2003

In previous chapters I have argued that the rogue cop character is the personification of American myths and hierarchies of privilege that are ever-changing and responsive to evolving sociocultural borders, which he—as a gendered, raced and performative subject—is literally and figuratively charged with policing. As such, he is a site of conflict onto which social stresses can be mapped, and which require him to perform both as subject and agent of hegemonic processes. Building on that foundation, this final chapter tracks his redeployment from domestic foot soldier to global warrior, which not only runs parallel to and reflects the nation’s ambitious trajectory, but, as a ubiquitous and influential cultural export, also participates in constructing that global hegemony. Moreover, the character often prosecutes his ever-expanding mission under the guise of national security interests. These have been framed as both “defensive” actions (that merely disguise aggression) and the obligation of a “chosen” people to advance civilization for all humanity, sentiments that have been articulated by American presidents from Teddy Roosevelt to George W. Bush. The character’s expansion—like the nation’s—essentially comprises two tracks: one involves policing the nation’s *physical* borders, the other engages threats (real and imagined) that result from a world becoming increasingly *borderless*, and which more than ever
supposedly demands American vigilance and action. The latter engages a self-styled “globocop,”
whose mission remains alarmingly self-directed (as does the nation’s), and which proffers
profound consequences for Americans and non-Americans alike.

In this chapter I revisit the key films that helped to introduce audiences, at home and abroad, to America’s ever-escalating interest in global policing. The first few films focus on American enforcers/defenders grappling with the porous and contentious Southern border with Mexico, including *Touch of Evil* (1958) and *The Border* (1982). Next, reflecting American operations in a *borderless* world, is an in-depth profile of *XXX* (2002), featuring a rogue “cop” character. This time he is disguised as a secret agent, who represents an “export” version of the domestic rogue cop, possessing similar identity factors and performing nearly identical functions, merely within an expanded world “beat.” The film also illustrates how crossing the border can enable shifts in the saliency of particular identity factors of the rogue archetype.

While his masculinity and projection of a “classless” autonomy remain constant despite crossing the border, his racialized identity is able to change, enabling his normative whiteness to absorb “color” and attest to the nation’s professed commitment to a multicultural (and anti-racist) unity. Despite continuing to prefer racial separatism at home, this preference for necessary hybridity abroad helps justify America’s claims to world stewardship for having accomplished such a “noble experiment.”

Finally, to demonstrate the profound shift in national storytelling in the wake of 9/11, the chapter concludes with a comparative portrait of three productions featuring similar stories about global drug trafficking (actually building on each other for inspiration), which not only reveal differences in national perspectives but also the aftermath of specific historical ruptures. Unlike the 1989 British television mini-series (*Traffik*) and the American feature film of 2000 (*Traffic*),
both of which explored the difficulty of policing borders amid the global juggernaut of the illicit
drug trade, the post-9/11 American TV mini-series (*Traffic*) overpowers the drug trafficking
storyline and dispenses with the politician protagonist to foreground the nation’s global War on
Terror. Such a grave scenario also requires the redeployment of a reinvigorated white rogue
cop—who alone can best “respond” to such violent challenges to American dominion.

To grasp the character’s evolution and expanding mandate that corresponds to his new
world “beat,” it is first necessary to comprehend how the nation he represents transitioned into
the global behemoth it is today. In the introductory chapter, I sketched out the path of American
ascendancy in broad strokes, and as related to the larger rubric of Western hegemony. Although
space here is similarly for covering in-depth more recent processes that facilitated American’s
preeminence, including globalization, such processes should be acknowledged for their ability to
complicate but also to ultimately enrich the nation’s already relative advantages and political
clout. Globalization, in particular, has also served to facilitate Hollywood’s domination of
world cinema, which as an American enterprise, also helps to further buttress the nation’s
hegemony.

I. **POLICING LA FRONTERA**

Of all the Hollywood characters, the rogue cop often best echoes the above shifts in the
nation’s perceived mission, gradually and similarly expanding from domestic urban cowboy to
international warrior, who is charged with defending the nation’s strategic and global interests (if
not the world’s). By tracking particular films that involve both the nation’s porous borders and
American attempts to police a borderless world, familiar myths concerning America’s concept of

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Press, 1991). He outlines the problems with labeling American domination imperialist or neo-imperialist, as these
terms have become so elastic as to hinder understandings of the processes involved, including … Although the U.S.
has been an imperialist force, deploying military power to expand its jurisdiction and enhance its capitalist
industries, these outcomes involve discrete phenomena as well as a combination of private and public policies.
itself and its role in world affairs become readily apparent. Just as tracking lawmen (and outlaws) in Hollywood Westerns often provides insights into America’s 20th century “memory” of its 19th century history, a similar mindset can be located in Hollywood films tackling contemporary concerns that are related to the nation’s changing global mission. The overwhelming impression that surfaces engages a persistent anxiety about the borders between ally and alien and/or immigrant and intruder, especially when those borders (literal and/or figurative) are perceived as similarly precarious. Like the Western’s ever-elastic image of savagery threatening to disrupt the nation’s destiny, rogue cop characters concerned with the maintenance or breaches of borders reveal a similar tension, hovering somewhere between vulnerability and invincibility.

The films in this next section particularly address America’s obsession with the border with Mexico—likely rooted in the manner in which these American lands (now comprising U.S. territory in the West and Southwest) were forcibly acquired through a contentious war with Mexico. America’s brand of imperialism as evident in its history of relations with Mexico runs the gamut from violently hostile to the paternalistic “Good Neighbor” approach. While the latter tendency is manifest in Hollywood musicals, the former is embedded in crime films, pitting cops and crimefighters against Mexicans, who are more frequently represented as “foreign” threats—even if American citizens or viable “guest” workers.176

One of the earliest films to feature such a character is The Border Patrolman (1936). As a Western, though, it sidesteps the political outcomes of border breaches to focus on criminals who are able to slip across the border to evade capture. Another Western, Border Incident (1949), also offers the usual array of stereotypes about Mexico as the “land of extremes.” Citing Alberto

176 Trumpbour notes that as early as 1919, the Mexican government “politely asked Hollywood producers to refrain from portraying the country as a land of greasers and squalor; they had little success until 1922, when the state called for a total boycott of Hollywood films,” which prompted Will Hays, Hollywood’s government watchdog and liaison, to open up negotiations with Mexico. See Trumpbour, Selling Hollywood, 60.
Dominguez’s 2000 documentary *The Bronze Screen*, which examines Hollywood portrayals of Mexicans and other Latin Americans, Roger Westcombe posits that *Border Incident*, more so than most films of its era, attempts a more “even-handed approach to its portrayal of the two nationalities,” probably as a result of so many of its crew members being “victims of the McCarthyist black list” and hoping to avoid replicating Hollywood’s tendency to see difference mostly as threatening.⁷⁷ Even so, Westcombe adds, “there is an evident symbolic distinction in *Border Incident* between day (good/white) and night (illicit/Mex), a dualism reinforced by the prominence of New World (American) technology contrasted with stone-age primitivism of the Old World”; this is demonstrated through American cops being guided by radio transmissions while the Mexican cops arrive in the dead of night in the back of a truck. “Reconciling these conflicting views of the allied nationalities is the camera. Its tendency to adopt a subjective point of view has the audience looking down ‘over’ the peasants—the Uncle Sam paternalistic viewpoint towards the needy which fit the liberalism of the time just as snugly as its anti-McCarthyism,” adds Westcombe.⁷⁸

A later example of such a border cop is presented in the noir classic, *Touch of Evil*.⁷⁹ The film features Hank Quinlan (Orson Welles) as an intimidating police captain operating in a small, seedy American town along the U.S.-Mexico border, but who makes it his business to exert influence on both sides of the border. Quinlan’s authority goes largely unchallenged until Ramon Miguel “Mike” Vargas (Charlton Heston), a high-ranking Mexican narcotics

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⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Differences between the 1958 and 1998 versions center on adhering to Welles’ original intent, according to the 58-page memo he wrote to executives at Universal International Pictures studio, which had edited his film before releasing it. With the 1998 re-release, reviewers concluded that the most noteworthy change involved the already acclaimed opening sequence, losing the studio’s superimposed credits and the Henry Mancini score, which had replaced Welles’s original use of natural sounds and source music.
investigator—in town on his honeymoon—offers to help solve a local murder, the jurisdiction of which is already murky, as the car bomb that kills a local tycoon and his mistress had been planted on the Mexican side before exploding on American soil. From the start, Quinlan distrusts Vargas, not only for being Mexican, but also as a “rigid, noble law-abiding policeman.”

Although they both want to solve the crime, Vargas makes it as much his mission to defeat Quinlan, who in turn is bent on destroying Vargas (in part by terrorizing his American bride). Meanwhile, Quinlan also uses his “unorthodox” methods to frame another Mexican for the double homicide, having vowed never again to let a killer go free after the unsolved murder of his wife 12 years earlier. Ultimately, Vargas needs help bringing down Quinlan, enlisting Quinlan’s loyal sidekick, Sgt. Pete Menzies (Joseph Calleia), who idolizes the man who once took a bullet for him but comes to understand the extent of his mentor’s abuse of power. Vargas and Menzies entrap Quinlan into confessing that he not only set up Vargas and his wife, but has been using criminal means to catch criminals for years.

Quinlan’s former flame, Tanya (Marlene Dietrich), who lives on the Mexican side of the border, offers the most fitting epitaph for her old friend, however, lamenting how Quinlan had been a “great detective … [and] some kind of a man” but a “lousy cop.”

Along with being a noir protagonist, as discussed in Chapter Two, which makes Quinlan much too tentative and morally ambiguous to be an acceptable rogue, his priority on vengeance is what further disqualifies him. While the character falls short, the film, however, leaves his rogue methods unscathed, which is in keeping with the continuum of the mythology being tracked in this dissertation. To his credit, like hero cops before and after him, Quinlan is not so petty as to accept bribes to make himself rich, but he is “corrupt,” like Perry in the previous chapter, in

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181 *Touch of Evil*, DVD, directed by Orson Welles (MCA Home Video, 2000).
becoming convinced (like the nation) that the rule of law often interferes with securing justice, and which customarily exonerates such “corruption” or rogueness (being merely a means to an end). In this frame, then, Quinlan’s downfall is not due to his ugly methodology, but his loss of focus (as he begins drinking again), and makes his goal about vengeance without the defensive veil provided by the customary (and noble) pursuit of justice. In other words, his personal agenda is too nakedly on display, which spoils his inclusion in Hollywood’s gallery of redeemable rogues who perform the nation. Had Quinlan’s enemy been a Mexican terrorist, he could have joined the ranks of The Searchers’ Ethan Edwards or Die Hard’s John McClane, as his methods would have been excused in the pursuit of a higher goal. Unlike these rogues, however, Quinlan never redeems himself—even though his crimefighting instincts had proved correct, having framed the actual killer. Had Quinlan been less consumed with hubris, he would have been exonerated along with his methods.

Quinlan attempts to explain himself early in the film when he notes how “border towns bring out the worst in a country,” and by extension, in the people charged with defending them. One critic finds another scene particularly poignant in making this point as well, noting, “The film’s moral authority is summed up with an unforgettable image of a man trying to wash the blood off his hands in an open sewer: the Styx-like river that divides Mexico and the U.S.” And despite Quinlan’s unredeemed ugliness, Vargas cannot serve as the film’s hero either. He not only failed to protect his wife or solve the murders, but his only accomplishment was to end Quinlan’s reign; and rather than admirable, this goal seems nearly gratuitous, as Quinlan was already in the process of destroying himself. Such an ambiguous ending in Touch of Evil is

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182 Ibid.
consistent with the conventions of film noir, which has a tradition of muddying its cultural critiques and camouflaging its exposure of myths about as effectively as traditional Westerns spin them into the best possible light. And, like most noirs, the film failed to resonate widely with American audiences at the time of its release, only being discovered later by film students and scholars who admired Welles and considered this film to be among his artistic jewels.\(^{184}\)

Moreover, despite Welles’ reported distaste for Hollywood’s racism with respect to Mexicans, by casting Heston and putting him in brownface, his attempt to contest Hollywood’s practices are seriously undermined. As Ebert notes, Heston is “made up to look dark but [speaks] with a natural American accent,” despite hailing from Mexico City. Ebert, though, gives Welles credit for depicting “the clash between the national cultures” in an ironic fashion, explaining that “Vargas reflects gringo stereotypes while Quinlan embodies clichés about Mexican lawmen.”\(^{185}\)

However, what Vargas confuses, his American wife (portrayed by Janet Leigh) clarifies, randomly calling a young Mexican the dismissive, one-size-fits-all “pancho,” which she explains she does so “for laughs.” Even the Mexican drug dealer who torments her is little more than an ethnic caricature—so comically proportioned that he fits in rather than defies Hollywood stereotypes of Latins/Latinos.

Following *Touch of Evil*, Hollywood continues to explore conflicts along the Mexican-American border, but usually in the straightforward manner of the Western. This staging changes with British director Tony Richardson’s more critical view of border politics in *The Border*. The film’s storyline is about an American border cop, Charlie Smith (Jack Nicholson), whose job is

\(^{184}\) According to Tim Dirks, at the time of its release, *Touch of Evil* was considered a box office failure, “criticized as artsy, campy, sleazy pulp-fiction trash, the low-budget film—in retrospect—has been ranked as the classic B-movie of the silver screen … It was met with rave reviews in Europe, and won Best Picture at the Brussels Film Festival.” <http://www.filmsite.org> (12 November 2005).

to stop the flow of Mexican immigrants entering the U.S. illegally—most of who are being aided by American businessmen interested in them as cheap labor and who regularly bribe cops like Smith to facilitate the process. After Smith discovers that his materialistic wife Marcy (Valerie Perrine) is spending more than he earns, he reluctantly agrees to work with his partner Cat (Harvey Keitel), who is corrupt in the customary sense for taking bribes; together they start trafficking “wets” (valued at $550 a head) across the border. That is, until Cat commits a murder and fails to stop the kidnapping of a baby belonging to a Mexican woman Charlie increasingly views as symbolic of the border’s more tragic effects. Growing distrustful of Cat and ever more sympathetic with her, Smith eventually redeems himself by becoming a rogue who turns on his colleagues to help her get her baby back. As he explains his behavior to her: “I want to feel good about something.”

The film, despite its critical view, also intimates that corruption along the border is not untenable. A nearly comical lecture is delivered by Smith’s chief, who tells a frustrated labor trafficker, with whom he conducts business, that he cannot control this honest streak in some of his border cops. In that way, and in the tradition of Hollywood storytelling, this supposedly iconoclastic film ends up fingering the failure of individuals as the chief cause of corruption along the border rather than an American economic system demanding cheap “foreign” labor while treating those same laborers as undesirables.

Even in contemporary films by such maverick directors as Roberto Rodriguez (Once Upon a Time in Mexico, Desperado), style overpowers substance, as Rodriguez superimposes postmodern ironies onto the traditional Western, using the frontier thesis as a way to frame but not interrogate the lawlessness and volatility of Mexican-American interactions. Like Quentin Tarantino, critics charge Rodriguez with being more interested in paying homage to Hollywood’s traditions and merely mixing up its themes with self-reflexive moments of

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186 The Border, DVD, directed Tony Richardson (MCA Home Video, 2004).
cinematic style, which invest in existing attitudes rather than present contradictory or more complex social and/or political commentary.\textsuperscript{187}

\section*{II. GLOBOCOPS: AMERICA’S COPS WITHOUT BORDERS}

There is another tradition of cop characters who grapple with America’s expanding jurisdiction: enforcement characters who go beyond merely “patrolling the periphery” or tiptoeing across the border like Quinlan to transgressing the nation’s geographical borders in order to tackle “threats” to America in an increasingly borderless world (more than ever deemed to be America’s business). This domain has usually involved military characters.\textsuperscript{188} However, their applicability is too often restricted by their membership in a collective that supposedly addresses official state interests, but which somewhat diminishes their ability to represent the more imagined nation. That may help explain why John Rambo is an \textit{ex}-soldier when called into service, as his detached status enables him to perform the extra-legal tasks the bureaucrats and/or military personnel, who \textit{must} follow orders, cannot do. Ever since the Vietnam experience penetrated Hollywood’s consciousness, there has been a conflation of military and policing roles, which often makes it difficult to distinguish one from the other; as outlined in Chapter Two, many Vietnam vets made the transition from soldier to cop (as in \textit{Lethal Weapon}). Moreover, since the 1960s, it seems almost routine to have national guard troops respond to urban riots or

\textsuperscript{187} A more hard-hitting independent film, \textit{The Gatekeeper} (2004)—directed, produced, and written by John Carlos Frey, who also plays the lead role—tells the story of border patrol agent Adam Fields, who has ties to anti-immigrant vigilantes, despite being a Mexican-American, which he hides by passing as an Anglo (the director too is Mexican American, born in Tijuana and raised in San Diego). After Fields embarks on an undercover assignment to crack a smuggling ring bringing illegal laborers across the border, he is mistakenly lumped in with them, and similarly subjected to their harsh living conditions and virtual enslavement. The film takes its name from the real life immigration strategy dubbed, Operation Gateway. Frey tried for 8 years to get a major Hollywood studio to make the film but after studio executives insisted his film’s political story be fronted by a love story, he opted to fund the project himself.

\textsuperscript{188} The Rambo character, as mentioned in the last chapter, although another favorite character whom Reagan was fond of quoting, shares more in common with Hollywood’s rogue cops than he does military characters, as, first, he is an \textit{ex}-soldier, and second, because he acts alone and becomes the reluctant hero and defender of fellow soldiers (and MIAS left behind in Vietnam) rather than to serve out specific military orders issued by the government.
quell campus protests—enough to break down the boundaries that once restricted the domain of soldiers fighting America’s battles “over there,” leaving enforcement of American citizens “here” to domestic police departments. Ever since the 1960s resistance to the war, soldiers have been increasingly dispatched to take aim at their fellow Americans, just as cops (if only onscreen) have more frequently been shipped overseas to behave like the nation’s soldiers. Even the animated *Team America: World Police* (2004) pokes fun at the confused mindset of such American figures. In this case, puppets form a quasi-military police force intent on battling terrorism to order global stability, but often represent their own worst enemies.

Other Hollywood characters, although only marginally considered national “enforcers,” nonetheless spread the idea that Americans know best, including characters from Indiana Jones to Han Solo—both portrayed by the quintessential Hollywood “everyman”: Harrison Ford, who has also taken a turn as a (futuristic) cop in *Blade Runner* (1982). While one of his everyman characters above works in an abstracted past (with Nazis serving as the globe’s menace), the others operate in an imagined future, in which aliens and androids are out of control and in need of American-style action. Similarly, in *Man on Fire* (2004), a burned-out government assassin named John Creasy (Denzel Washington) attempts to redeem himself by avenging the harm done to a family for whom he works as a bodyguard (actually recruited by his former American employer who counts on Creasy’s vengeance to eliminate enemies of the American state). Several factors, though, help situate Creasy within the model being developed in this project: as a black male, Creasy must die in order to fulfill his mission, which although taking place on Mexican soil, is in defense of American values, represented by the half-American child of the

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189 The controversy and difficulties of having military personnel approximate a police force in the ongoing war in Iraq has been well-reported and documented, as the practice is proving as dangerously on foreign soil (when civilians are mistaken for enemy combatants or “insurgents”) as it has been having national guardsmen quell riots or curb looting in urban areas, or in the wake of natural disasters like the one that devastated New Orleans in 2005.
Mexican industrialist. Washington’s role is also a reincarnation of Hollywood’s traditional dependence on having black characters sacrifice themselves on behalf of white protagonists; Washington, in particular, here reprises his character’s similar sacrifice in *Virtuosity* on behalf of a young white girl. However, like other cop characters who succumb to vigilantism, Creasy too chooses to kill his target rather than to arrest him, which suggests that his actions have more to do with revenge than justice, and, hence, forfeits his membership in the club of redeemable rogues at the heart of this study.

The next two films not only feature other rogues-turned-vigilantes, but more importantly, deserve mention here because they involve American enforcement characters who *should* be confined to domestic jurisdictions, but who transcend America’s borders in order to make occurrences on foreign soil their business. Each portrait features an obsessed, out-of-bounds protagonist, whom these films manage to celebrate as much as expose.

*French Connection II* (1975) picks up where *The French Connection* left off. The original film, as mentioned in the previous chapter, was lauded as one of the best American films about cops ever made, having earned critical and popular acclaim at home and abroad, but also applauded by real cops for its depiction of their occupational frustrations. The sequel, however, only serves to demonstrate the dangers of unleashing an American enforcer who, however effective in a domestic urban wilderness, becomes a national liability and a public embarrassment abroad. In this sequel, Hackman’s Doyle travels to France to pursue the elusive “French connection,” Charnier (Fernando Rey), the drug trafficker who escaped capture at the end of the original film. However, it soon becomes evident that the NYPD has sent Doyle to France merely as “bait” to draw out Charnier, who eventually has his men abduct Doyle and inject him with heroin until he is desperate enough to confess what he knows, which is little.
Convinced of Doyle’s marginalization, a half-dead Doyle is dumped off in front of French police, for whom he has been a nuisance since his arrival, especially to Inspector Henry Barthelemy (Bernard Fresson), the lead French detective. Barthelemy watches over Doyle, who endures withdrawal (cold turkey), and the two eventually join forces to pursue Charnier. But Doyle proves to be the better detective as well as a rogue, who through the process of beating up prisoners accomplishes his goals while Barthelemy is stymied by his approach of having to methodically canvass witnesses. However obnoxious, and irked that the French fail to understand his English or appreciate the majesty of American baseball, Doyle nails his man, relentlessly pursuing him on trams and boats, and in the film’s last shot, killing Charnier in cold blood. The ending satisfies his need for revenge but does little to disrupt the insidious drug trafficking problem, which the film shows also involving a corrupt U.S. military official. As in the first French Connection, Doyle’s personal demons forfeit his ability to be a redeemable rogue who can effectively and efficiently perform the nation.

Another film featuring an NYPD detective run amok on foreign soil is Black Rain (1989). As its tagline notes: “An American Cop in Japan. Their country. Their laws. Their game. His rules.”190 Like Doyle, this film’s lead cop Nick Conklin (Michael Douglas), has as much a reputation for causing trouble as catching criminals. Conklin and his partner Charlie Vincent (Andy Garcia, his role here discussed briefly in the last chapter) witness a murder in New York by a Japanese gangster named Sato (Yasuka Matsuda), and are then assigned to escort him back into Japanese police custody. However, almost immediately upon their arrival in Japan, Sato escapes with the aid of some of his underworld friends who come disguised as cops. Conklin and Vincent feel compelled to join forces with Japanese police to recapture Sato, although their

presence is unwelcome, with Conklin frequently disparaging both their methods and cultural differences, including (again) the failure to speak English. As the one official reminds Conklin, “This isn’t New York. We have rules here,” which is meant to insult Conklin but who interprets such a comment as proof of Japanese weakness. (Even his boss back at the NYPD chastises him for his disrespect for rules while at the same time acknowledging his effectiveness as a “hero cop”—the mixed messages adhering to the long-standing credo, at least in cinema, that police procedures and hero cops are mutually exclusive concepts).

Refusing to leave Japan, Conklin and Vincent are assigned a Japanese partner who also serves as their interpreter, Masahiro (Ken Takakura); or as Conklin puts it, “a nip that speaks fucking English.” Vincent tries to demonstrate some cultural sensitivity, including using chopsticks and learning a few Japanese words, even reminding Conklin that he needs to “smoke a little peace pipe” with his new Japanese partners (which borrows language from the Western and the conciliatory approach of some cowboys when dealing with the “good” Indian savage who wishes to cooperate). After Vincent’s beheading by Sato’s accomplices, however, Masahiro—whose representation stresses quiet nobility and what seems through an American lens like Asian passivity—becomes Conklin’s buddy. Their relationship, though, has as much to do with each one’s representation of his own national culture as it does their united effort to catch the killer. Eventually, Masahiro teaches Conklin about cooperation and “honor,” while Conklin teaches Masahiro how to follow one’s own instincts, even if it means breaking the rules. In what is now a very familiar refrain, Conklin explains that if the killer is caught, the means are justified. The film is also book-ended with a line of dialogue first uttered by Vincent then Masahiro, both warning Conklin to “watch your tail, cowboy.” It helps anchors Conklin’s

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191 Black Rain, DVD.
192 Ibid.
presentation of the urban cowboy and rogue cop whose people skills may be rough, whose appearance is unorthodox (wearing a Perry-like leather jacket and long hair), whose family is sacrificed (he is divorced), but who is still the best man for the job.

When the final showdown occurs, and after Sato and Conklin both demonstrate their prowess on motorcycles, the wily Sato and his martial arts moves cannot best Conklin’s old-fashioned fists and determination to win. In the end, Conklin learns humility (and a few Japanese words) from Masahiro, demonstrating his tolerance of the Other, and hence, his suitability to be the American hero in a global world. However, Masahiro, by refusing Conklin’s attempt to bow in respect, and instead holding out his hand for a Western handshake, signals his capitulation to Conklin’s American way. This suggests a cultural form of hybridity, albeit still on unequal terms. Further marking the film’s references to national perspectives is its title, which refers to the name the Japanese gave to the debris falling from the sky after the U.S. dropped the atomic bomb at the end of World War II. In a key exchange that captures the role of memory in framing contemporary perspectives, one Japanese gangster describes his childhood bitterness about the “black rain” to Conklin, explaining that his pursuit of money as a criminal (and spilled blood in New York that first got Conklin involved) is a “payback” to the Americans. By extension, given the film’s timing, and suggested in snippets of dialogue (similar to several Die Hard and Lethal Weapon films of the same era), there is evidence of American anxiety about the Japanese “buying” America or infiltrating American culture with everything from sushi bars to the martial arts craze. Most of these “threats” are addressed in the film, either showing American efforts to neutralize or openly defeat them, depending on the degree of perceived peril involved.

Also, in keeping with the theme of an uncivilized urban wilderness that justifies the rogue cop’s actions, one critic notes how director Ridley Scott “paints the night-time streets of Osaka
as some kind of neon-lit, nightmarish maze … the seedy, dangerous environment of this seemingly hostile city.” Ebert also notes that while in Japan Conklin’s other helper is the mysterious Joyce (Kate Capshaw), whose prostitutes are frequented by the gangsters. Yet, “the implausible way in which an American woman has been slipped into a Japanese role … spares us yet another set of geisha clichés,” but seems dubious in presenting a “blond from Chicago” as being privy to gangsters’ secrets and the code of the Yakuza (the Japanese criminal society).

She is not without rhyme or reason, however, as she serves several functions: Conklin’s attraction to her helps establish his normative masculinity and heterosexuality; he is able to lecture her about “choosing sides,” which sets him up as the responsible patriot; and she is available at the end of the film to reward Conklin with a kiss after he and Masahiro are honored by the Japanese police for their success. Lest any doubt remain, she whispers in his ear, “Nick, you’re a regular hero.”

In this next section, I analyze in-depth a film that combines many of the above tendencies and aptly illustrates how representations of blurred borders—physical as well as sociocultural—ultimately service the nation. It also suggests that one way of dealing with racial hybridity outside of America’s borders is to have the white archetype absorb color, which limits the degree of racial contamination at home by making sure it takes place across the border where it can also work to advertise the nation’s professed standard of men being created equal. In this way, the character’s multiraciality is put to work for the nation, not only to be used to advertise America

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195 Black Rain, DVD.
as a united front abroad, but also to take advantage of the Other’s “natural” deviance, which can be especially useful when unleashed on foreign soil in an effort to defeat non-Americans.

III. XXX: MASCULINITY AND MULTIRACIALITY FOR THE NATION

XXX is the story of American outlaw turned hero, Xander Cage (Vin Diesel), whose stellar reputation as an action sports outlaw attracts U.S. government interest in recruiting him to help stop a Prague-based terrorist group plotting a global attack. Initially, G-man Augustus Gibbons (Samuel L. Jackson) blackmails Cage with a prison sentence for stealing a car belonging to a right-wing California Republican who advocates, among other things, banning the music Cage holds dear. Cage also destroys the car while performing one of his stunts, which he routinely videotapes and distributes via the Internet to fans around the world. After Gibbons puts Cage through a series of tests to verify his intelligence and moral character, Cage surpasses even the potential Gibbons initially detected, eventually embodying the role of reluctant hero and daring patriot. He begins this journey by first infiltrating the terrorist group: a band of former Russian soldiers who call themselves “Anarchy 99,” using the number to commemorate the year they deserted the Russian army’s losing battle against Chechnya. Using Prague as their ground zero, they plan to launch a fierce biological weapon they hope will set off a global war, counting on each nation-state to blame another, retaliate, and thereby assure each other’s mutual destruction. Meanwhile, a group of Russian scientists fully develop the group’s secret weapon: a binary nerve agent called “Silent Night,” so-called for its ability to kill millions of people silently and bloodlessly. American intelligence officials know of its existence in theory but fear its deployment by the anarchists. Having already lost three agents to the mission, Gibbons recruits Cage, who is able to perform the extra-legal tasks and replicate the tried-and-true approach of using a redeemable criminal to stop the more dangerous kind. Or as Gibbons puts it, deploy one
of America’s “best and … brightest … from the bottom of the barrel.” However, after Cage falls for a Russian spy also working undercover, he takes matters into his own hands, defying Gibbons’s directives, which is fortuitous, as it enables him to bring down the anarchists as well as destroy their insidious weapon of mass destruction.

Through his exaggerated performance of masculinity, Cage also is in keeping with the scores of movie cops and enforcement characters who came before him, including mimicking their aggressive heterosexuality. That means including female characters in “flimsy tops and thongs” to suggest their availability as sites of sexual conquest. Director Rob Cohen concedes that he anticipated criticism for one scene in which a group of females are summoned for the anarchists’ amusement simply by shouting, “Bitches, come!” Another scene, meant to showcase the “gift” bestowed on Cage by the group, features an attractive woman “pole-dancing” around his bed post before slithering across the sheets as an enticement to join her there for sex. As Cage does, he utters, *à la* James Bond: “The things I’m going to do for my country!”

Cohen insists, however, that such exploitive imagery is offset by Cage’s crimefighting partner: Yelena, the Russian spy who also becomes his lover. As portrayed by Asia Argento (daughter of famed Italian horror director Dario Argento), she also aids the practice of pairing a “foreign” actress with an American actor of color, thus sidestepping the issue of the strict black-white binary that endures within the U.S. But she is far from being Cage’s equal. In their initial encounter, far from positioning them as future comrades, his dominion over her is quickly

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196 XXX, DVD, directed by Rob Cohen (MGM Home Entertainment, 2003).


198 Rob Cohen, Director’s Commentary, XXX, DVD.

199 XXX, DVD.
established. In order to convince the group’s leader Yorgi (Martin Csokas) that he is an American importer interested in the group’s sideline of stolen cars, Cage spars with Yelena, Yorgi’s tough-minded negotiator; thus, his ability to demonstrate his credentials comes at her expense, as he dismissingly quips, “Sweetheart, is there anything else you need to do … [while] us big boys have a conversation.”\footnote{Ibid.} Despite Cohen’s insistence that Yelena is a woman of “intellect,”\footnote{Cohen, Director’s Commentary, \textit{XXX}, DVD.} she largely exists to perform three vital functions: to accentuate Cage’s normative sexuality; to serve as the object of the traditional rescue scenario (as Cage initially stays on the job to save her); and to serve as the film’s naysayer, whose pessimism he can conveniently dismiss in order to emerge as the hero. As he tells her: “I’ve risked my life for a lot of stupid reasons. This is the first one that makes sense.”\footnote{XXX, DVD.} He even urges her to go back undercover to finish her mission, as well as to remind Gibbons that if Yorgi launches his weapon before the “regular” crew can be dispatched, it is “everybody’s problem.” Hence, in this way, Cage undergoes his final transformation: from dutiful agent to self-directed global savior.

Another marker of Cage’s particular mode of masculinity is discernible by his codename, XXX, which suggests the “self-imposed ratings of hard-core sex flicks.”\footnote{Bruce Westbrook, Review of \textit{XXX}, \textit{Houston Chronicle}, 13 May 2004, available at <http://www.houstonchronicle.com> (15 January 2006).} But as Peter Travers notes, “sex isn’t the fuel driving the script … [a]ction is,” with the film wallowing in the physicality of the masculinist universe of extreme sports.\footnote{Peter Travers, “XXX: Irresistible Junk,” \textit{Rolling Stone}, vol. 1, no. 904, 78.} Aided by special effects technology and stunt doubles, Cage is seen daringly surfing down a banister on a metal serving tray to evade gunfire and snowboarding down a mountain in front of an avalanche while being pursued by
men on snowmobiles with automatic weapons. Elvis Mitchell’s description of Cage as a “renegade violence specialist” who lives a “velocity-freak life” is authenticated by giving extreme sports stars—Tony Hawk, Mat Hoffman, and Rick Thorne—screen time in cameo roles. Hip hop star Eve also makes a cameo appearance as Cage’s business manager. In addition to the cultural capital from such tie-ins with sports and musical celebrities, the film’s soundtrack features the relentless rhythm and rage of industrial rock, along with “Euro techno,” including onscreen performances by the band Orbital. In fact, in a key exchange, Cage wins Yorgi’s approval by helping him finish the lyrics to “Anarchy Burger” by the Vandals; they recite together, “America stands for freedom/But if you think [you’re] free/Try walking into a deli and urinating on the cheese.”

Also de rigueur for an action film are the plentiful high-tech weapons, some sharing attributes with videogames. As Cohen explains, since Cage is not a trained agent, there is no other plausible explanation for his demonstrated prowess unless he mastered being a “first person shooter” from gaming. Cage even helps a fellow agent grapple with putting theory into practice, urging him: “start thinking Play Station [and] blow shit up!” In another situation, in which Cage proves unfamiliar with safeties on real weapons, Yelena takes over. However, he eventually comes to master a cache of lethal weapons, abandoning his rigged darts and stun-guns for actual bullets. The darts were not without purpose, though, as his use of a “splatter” dart on a Czech cop convinces Yorgi that he can be trusted, and also leads to uncovering Yelena’s status

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205 The film’s sense of danger is accentuated by the real life death of a stuntman who perished during the filming of a parasailing sequence. See John Horn, “Secret Agent Manly Man,” Newsweek, 6 May 2002, 56.

206 Mitchell, “Skateboard.”

207 XXX, DVD.

208 Cohen, Director’s Commentary, XXX, DVD.

209 XXX, DVD.
as an agent. As Bruce Westbrook puts it, the scene also aptly demonstrates that Cage may be “a brute—but he’s all right … [with] no urge to kill,” until after he appropriately shifts “from nihilist to patriot,” which also links him to previous rogue enforcers. Building on another action cinema tradition, vehicles are also used as weapons. And it is no coincidence that the car Yorgi secures for Cage is not the jewel of Europe, the Ferrari, but a vintage American-made Pontiac GTO, a 1960s era “muscle” car that personifies a usually masculinized physical feature. It is watching Yorgi deploy his biological weapon (on the very scientists who perfected it), however, that jolts Cage out of his game-boy mentality and into defender of the nation/world. As Cage watches the men die, he is visibly shaken, although short of Yelena’s tears. It is further proof of his moral compass; and like most redemptive cop characters, once Yorgi’s capacity for evil is confirmed, Cage earns his license to kill in order to prevent Yorgi’s global massacre.

More than any other arena in which to display Cage’s masculinity, though, it is through the military-like maneuvers that first expose his mettle. He aces his initial field test in part by using his working class background to spot an agent posing as a waitress, explaining how his aunt, a waitress, imparted her wisdom about not wearing high-heeled shoes at work. His second “field” test involves being dropped, along with two other hopefuls, into the middle of a cocaine plantation in Colombia. They are immediately apprehended by drug dealers, who threaten torture, which, in the tradition of Riggs and Rambo, provides Cage with an opportunity to prove his physical resolve. He also escapes in the nick of time, this time on a motorcycle, which he drives off the roof of a burning building while being peppered with gunfire from helicopters hovering overhead. After escaping, rather than display fear, he shouts defiantly, “I live for this shit!” More importantly, rather than stay focused on saving his own skin, he returns to help a

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210 Westbrook, XXX.
wounded comrade, prompting Gibbons’s praise: “you exhibited courage, leadership, and a willingness to protect a man you hardly knew,”212 all hallmarks of an American movie hero.

**Diesel’s multicultural “masculinity”**

The most vital indicator of the film’s approach to masculinity is its star attraction: Vin Diesel. Diesel began a bodybuilding regimen as a teenager, following in the footsteps of stars like Schwarzenegger. With Schwarzenegger approaching 60, notes one critic, Hollywood had been “desperately trying to pump some testosterone into the lucrative but enervated action genre.” Hollywood then took notice of Diesel as the “unlikely savior on the horizon … the very model of the new action hero.”213 The writer also notes how Diesel is part of “a nascent constellation of stars whose melting-pot backgrounds and features seem to [be] resonating deeply with young moviegoers of all colors. Hollywood has seen the future of the action hero, and it’s multiethnic.”214

At the time of the film’s high-profile debut, Diesel too was the subject of much speculation, especially concerning his identity: enough “color” to lend his characters the cultural cool customarily associated with racial Others, while also reinvigorating the whiteness Diesel also retains. Latino marketing specialist Santiago Pozo proclaimed at the time, “In the past, John Wayne and Jimmy Stewart were the face of America … Today it’s The Rock or Vin Diesel.”215 Cohen too mentions Diesel’s blended identity, as well as the usefulness of this multiraciality to American narratives, noting, “I think this country and the world have hungered for a decade to

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211 **XXX,** DVD.

212 Ibid.


214 Ibid.

215 Pozo quoted in Cagle; Pozo is CEO of Arenas Entertainment, catering to the U.S. Latin market.
find a face that represents the complex multiculturalism … of all the hopes and dreams of people who are not part of the traditional culture … [and] Vin Diesel is that face.”

In that vein, Cage’s multiraciality introduces a new variant for American heroes who operate outside the nation’s borders. In domestic narratives, America’s race consciousness is difficult to hide, but on “foreign” soil, such characters advertise the American melting pot as a *fait accompli*, with the multiracial hero testifying to America’s ability to subdue internal differences and transform itself into a united front when the nation is under “threat” abroad.

Yet, while Jackson and Diesel’s characters (of color) call the shots on the ground, acting as surrogates for the nation—much like the multiracial face Colin Powell and Condeleeza Rice provide for the Bush White House—the reins of real power remain in the hands of a commander and chief who is persistently white and male, remarkably privileged, incredibly insulated, and residing in the not-so-ironically labeled White House. However, by deploying white and non-white soldiers to do the nation’s bidding, on and off screen, the mythologies (on which American hegemony rests) remain undisturbed; as such, changes of a more radical nature, like extending such opportunities beyond these chosen few, are rendered unnecessary.

Diesel describes himself as “multicultural,” but remains tight-lipped about specifics. “I support the idea of being multicultural primarily for all the invisible kids, the ones who don’t fit into one ethnic category and then find themselves lost in some limbo.” Perhaps his fans of color helped make *XXX* one of the largest grossing films of that year, with overseas sales nearly matching the lucrative U.S. box office. Despite his insistence on ambiguity (even calling his

216 Cohen, Director’s Commentary, *XXX*, DVD.

217 Quoted in Cagle, “The Next Action Hero.”

218 Domestic box office of more than $142 million and overseas grosses of more than $135 million make the film one of the most profitable of 2002, as well as among recent films in general. See <http://www.thenumbers.com/movies/series/xXx.php>.
production company *One Race*), others have not stopped obsessing over his identity, some suggesting he is black as well as Italian, perhaps even Latino.219 His refusal to define himself, particularly as black, as so many mixed race Americans are prompted to do (for a variety of political and cultural reasons), remains a source of irritation to minority communities that wish to claim him as one of their own.220 Diesel, like Tiger Woods, may be attempting to undo the racial ties that still hamstring American society by refusing to abide by its existing racial categories.221 Bhabha is among the theorists who believes the “process of hybridity, incorporating new ‘people’ in the relation to the body politic, generating other sites of meaning and, inevitably, in the political process, [produces] unmanned sites of political antagonism and unpredictable forces for political representation.”222 Kobena Mercer, though, warns that simply embracing multiculturalism as a panacea to existing hierarchies of identity does little to interrogate the inequities that endure, and which are camouflaged without correction in the rush to celebrate diversity. He blames the depoliticizing effects of postmodernism, which attempt to transform former racial and ethnic identities by promoting a culturally fragmented but politically amorphous diversity, but one which still encourages “othering.”223

219 *Jet* magazine put him on its cover in 2002, claiming Diesel as the next rising African American movie star, and *Ebony* magazine in November 2002 asked: “is he Black or not?” *Gentlemen’s Quarterly* also put Diesel on its August 2002 cover, dubbing him “Hollywood’s first multiracial action hero.”

220 Other mixed race celebrities, including Halle Barry and Lenny Kravitz, have been pressured to openly declare themselves black, while singer Mariah Carey, despite her lightness, has been criticized for not clarifying her racial background earlier in her career; and New York Yankee Derek Jeter, who has a white mother and black father, told *60 Minutes* in 2005 that he receives death threats for dating women on both sides of the color line.

221 Maria P. P. Root, ed., *The Multiracial Experience: Racial Borders as the New Frontier* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1996), 637; Here Root notes that until 1989, only infants born to two white parents were officially white according to federal directives that determine birth statistics; in contrast, an infant born to one white parent took the race of the parent whose race was non-white; after 1989, an infant’s race is recorded as the same as its birth mother.


223 Some groups have responded by re-appropriating the racial ideologies once used against them. Mercer notes that this shift back to “black” from “ethnic minority” among British people of color “demonstrated a process
Even before Diesel became comfortable with his blended identity, he admits to experiencing pain growing up mixed race in a race-conscious society. Diesel tells interviewers that through acting he “found something refreshing about having my identity be crystal clear.” Earlier in his career he had written, directed, and starred in a short film, aptly titled *Multi-Facial* (1994), which follows a mixed-race actor through a series of auditions, in which, despite his talent, he is dismissed as either too white or too black for the roles. After earning rave reviews at showings in New York, the film received considerable attention at the Cannes Film Festival, where director Stephen Spielberg noticed, eventually offering Diesel the role of an Italian American soldier in his award-winning *Saving Private Ryan* (1998).

Like Andy Garcia, Diesel has nearly portrayed as many Italian American characters as those deemed more “brown” or multiracial, enabling whiteness to compromise without being wholly supplanted. (Or perhaps to restore these once contingently white ethnicities with color.) Before making *XXX*, a then 34-year-old Diesel played another Italian American character, Dominic Toretto, in the mega-hit *The Fast and the Furious* (2001), also with Cohen directing. In the film, Toretto is a gang member and former street racer helping an undercover cop—not surprisingly, an Irishman named Brian O’Connor (Paul Walker)—who wants to infiltrate and stop a renegade band of street racers terrorizing truckers on LA freeways. Diesel describes his character, another criminal turned crusader, to Jay Leno as someone who operates “outside the law,” like many of his other characters, with Leno clarifying for American viewers: “a bad guy who’s really a good guy at heart.”

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in which the objects of racial ideology reconstituted themselves as subjects of social, cultural and political change, actively making history.” Rather than compete for their individual voices in the public sphere and be reduced to an incoherent drone, Asians, Caribbean, and African peoples pulled together to embrace their shared common experiences under British racism, explains Mercer. Kobena Mercer, “Identity and Diversity in Postmodern Politics,” *Theories of Race and Racism: A Reader*, eds. Les Back and John Solomos (London: Routledge, 2000), 510.

224 From appearance on *The Tonight Show with Jay Leno* (NBC Television Network), 5 August 2000.
characters in *A Man Apart* (2002), in which he portrays DEA agent Sean Vetter, a former gang member and rogue cop who sinks into vigilantism, even forfeiting his badge to accomplish his most egregious acts of revenge against the drug dealers who killed his wife. Like (white) cop characters before him, he is also supplied with a black sidekick named Demetrius Hicks (Larenz Tate). Diesel’s next film, due out in 2006, is *Find Me Guilty*, in which he portrays another Italian American, mobster Jack Di Norscio, who defended himself in court for what would be the longest mafia trial in U.S. history. Scheduled for 2007 is *Hitman*, in which he plays Agent 47, a highly skilled assassin who works on a contract basis for “the Agency”; Diesel also serves as the film’s executive producer. It will be his third time playing a character already made famous as a video game star; the others include *Pitch Black* (2000) and its sequel, *The Chronicles of Riddick* (2004), which feature Diesel as the “lone outlaw,” but also the eventual savior of the universe—a timeworn story for him and Hollywood, despite its futuristic storyline.225

Thus, notwithstanding the enthusiasm and predictions that Diesel would supplant the normatively white protagonist, such a phenomenon has not yet come to pass. Rather than sustain a new trend, Diesel largely has “passed” as white—however tinged with color. And as the hegemonic racial identity in America as well as in Hollywood, whiteness survives once again by absorbing its challengers. This time the conflict may be mapped onto one man, who finds for himself an equilibrium, and which makes space for color without giving up the whiteness that also provides him access and privilege.

Colors that matter: red, white, and blue

As Cohen explains, Cage represents the kind of reluctant hero Americans like, “not a patriot” at first, but convinced in time of his country’s need for him. After Cage passes his Colombian field test and Gibbons offers him a job, Cage snarls, “Look at me. Do I look like a fan of law enforcement?” Gibbons presses on, explaining to Cage (whom he calls “dangerous … and uncivilized”) that “this is your chance to pay back your Uncle Sam for all the wonderful freedoms you enjoy.” Despite Gibbons’s call to arms, Cage continues to resist. Staring at Gibbons’s badly scarred and black face, Cage asks him if he “got all shot up for the Old Stars and Stripes,” adding, “I bet that flag is a real comfort every time you look in the mirror.” Gibbons has the last word, though, explaining that his scars are the “small price I paid for putting foot to ass for my country.” Having a black G-man be the one to remind Cage of their unified mission, and the “price” of “freedom,” helps solidify the myth of a united America no longer obsessed with race (especially in the face of global terror), at least while away from home.

Another scene in which Cage more nakedly represents the nation is when he is matched with a smarmy Czech cop charged with briefing Cage, and warning him not to interfere with a “Czech affair.” Echoing many an American screen hero, Cage snaps back, “I’ve never been under anyone’s jurisdiction.”

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226 XXX, DVD.
227 Ibid.
228 Ibid.
229 Ibid.
230 Ibid.
The film also revels in what critics notice is its homage to the iconic British agent, James Bond, who similarly served his nation while saving the world.\(^{231}\) Cage is made purposefully American, though, replacing Bond’s privileged class membership with Cage’s intentional ambiguity about class along with race, and consistent with the other rogue cops discussed above in emphasizing the myth of America as a classless society. Several indicators suggest Cage’s common touch, including replacing Bond’s tuxedo and pricey Aston Martin with Cage’s hip street clothes and muscle car, as well as to suggest that he was educated on the street rather than in a classroom. This also stands in comparison to another American agent whom Cage calls a “geek,” and who complains about being passed over for field work, in spite of having an impressive MIT education. Eventually the geek becomes Cage’s “buddy,” equipping him with gadgets and rigged weapons (like Bond’s “Q”). John Horn also notes that XXX coincides with the 40\(^{th}\) anniversary of the Bond series, and premieres just ahead of the latest Bond film, *Die Another Day*.\(^{232}\) But as Westbrook notes, for all “its alleged youthful fire, XXX is no less subservient to Bond’s tired formula of guns, girls and gadgets.”\(^{233}\)

Given the film’s timing, within a year of the events of September 11, Cohen posits, “I felt in the post 9/11 trauma … the bite at our psyche … that the intelligence community will become much more important,” explaining how his character demonstrates the advantages of interrupting threats rather than simply reacting to them.\(^{234}\) Also acknowledging the interplay between cinema

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\(^{231}\) The Bond films also coincided with “the values of the Kennedy era,” explains Cohen, becoming as popular in America and even prompting Hollywood to produce imitation Bonds, including the Matt Helm films starring Dean Martin, and TV series such as the *Man From U.N.C.L.E., I Spy,* and *Mission Impossible*—all early to mid 1960s era-variations with similar themes: American agents battling foes that not only threatened the nation, but the world. Cohen, Director’s Commentary, XXX, DVD.

\(^{232}\) Horn, “XXX Threat,” 56.

\(^{233}\) Westbrook, XXX.

\(^{234}\) Cohen, Director’s Commentary, XXX, DVD.
and real world events, he adds, “The spy adventure movie is aligning correctly with the zeitgeist of our time,” which he predicts will include more government agents as screen heroes in the future. Diesel too notes the film’s match with the mood after 9/11, explaining, “I grew up not far from the World Trade Center, so from the apartment I grew up in, my mother saw the second plane go into [one] tower.” He also admits to sharing the film’s patriotism, adding, “I felt I wanted to put on a uniform” and participate in the nation’s response. And that, he told Newsweek, could include playing “a nihilist recruited to save the world,” which “in the wake of this last, very patriotic year … makes sense.” This prompts the story’s writer to add, “Does it ever. With college grads flooding spy agencies with job applications, XXX’s timing couldn’t be better.”

Like Die Hard before it, though, the supposed terrorists at the heart of XXX are more akin to criminals, representing mere variations of traditional villainy, but which enable such films to borrow terrorism’s implied gravity without having to tackle its thornier politics. The movie terrorist’s motivation is thus stripped bare before it can prove larger than the crimefighting hero.

Having such an individuated, white male figure represent America on the global stage also extends to how the American president is frequently framed, as mentioned previously, the nation being similarly mapped onto the lone white male body of many U.S. presidents. Moreover, the American president also is frequently dubbed “the leader of the free world,” lending credibility (on and off screen) to the concept of one American male’s power over both nation and globe.

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235 Ibid.


237 Horn, “XXX Threat,” 57.

238 Ibid.
In laying out the nation’s response to September 11, President Bush, more than ever, seemed to be channeling the spirit and rhetoric of Hollywood’s globocop, especially arguing for any act that displeases him (and the nation he represents) be framed as a threat to America’s national security, thereby unleashing nearly any means necessary to make the nation feel safe again, even if it means dismantling the freedoms and democratic principles that U.S. soldiers were sent overseas to defend and perhaps die for. Such sweeping goals have alarmed many Americans as well as the nation’s most ardent allies, who have grown ever more anxious after the Bush administration’s goal switched from hunting down the Al Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden (generally given credit for masterminding 9/11) to invading Iraq for its alleged and amorphous support of global terrorist networks. Once Saddam Hussein’s rebuffed once and for all the request for UN inspectors to search Iraq for suspected weapons of mass destruction, the Bush team told Americans that war needed to be waged “over there” to avoid catastrophe at home that could come in the form of “a mushroom cloud.” Critics at home and abroad, though, have slowly been gathering evidence that the Iraq war has been an integral piece of a long-standing plan by neoconservatives in the Bush White House to reorder the Middle East, by fostering “regime change” of leaders (like Hussein) who resisted the Bush Doctrine envisioning the region’s transformation through the spread of American-style “freedom.” By the spring of 2006, however, a majority of Americans have now come to share what critics of Bush have long charged: that he behaves more like a rogue than a representative of a people, acting more like a movie character who is convinced that he alone knows what is right for America as well as the rest of the world. Moreover, in the years since 9/11, the ugly means Bush officials have ordered in the name of prosecuting the War on Terror have included vengeance against dissent even within the U.S., as well as the extraordinary suspension of civil liberties (via the Patriot Act),
along with sanctioning prisoner abuse (and torture) that evacuates international law as encoded in the bylaws of the Geneva Convention governing the rules of “acceptable” military behaviors.

Like many a rogue cop character—convinced he must break some rules in order to pursue a higher moral order—Bush has become the real world embodiment of the frontier-bred cinematic archetype at the heart of this study. However, if like so many movie rogues of late who have pushed the envelope, Bush makes preservation of his power more the point than the protection of the nation’s citizenry, he will be punished. However, as *Touch of Evil* demonstrated, the rogue’s demise does not translate into discrediting or destroying the mythologies that he embodies, as they prove to be bigger than any one man, on or off screen.

Politics and terrorism also slowly infiltrated Hollywood thinking in the years following 9/11, if only to make it gun shy about what type of films were deemed appropriate to release to such an anxious (and possibly reactive) moviegoing public. There was intense political pressure for Hollywood to not only curb some film content deemed critical of America, but also to produce films that helped to promote the war effort. With the need to unite the nation rather than to interrogate its internal divisions and foreign policies, the next section—echoing the trends captured in *XXX*—analyzes the American remake of a story that reveals different national approaches to a global problem but also the effect of 9/11. The most recent production renewing America’s habitual demand for revenge, and one that required the onscreen return of a white male outlaw (with a badge) who can best deploy old-fashioned, American-style justice.

**IV. GLOBAL TRAFFICKING: COMPARING PERFORMANCES OF NATION**

The much-acclaimed British TV mini-series *Traffik* (1989) presented a set of four interlocking stories steeped in the pernicious world of illegal drug use and abuse, including affluent smugglers, damaged addicts, and frustrated police. However, the main perspective in the
series is that of conservative government minister Jack Lithgow (Bill Paterson), who is charged with tracking British success in curbing illegal drugs in Pakistan by promising economic aid—an approach he quickly learns is no more effective than using his wealth and class privilege to stop his daughter’s addiction to heroin. Other characters who weave in and out of the story include a poor Pakistani who grows poppy to feed his family and the English wife of a high-end drug smuggler, who carries on the family business after her husband is arrested by two beleaguered German policemen. Although these cops are stymied by smug criminals, inept justice systems, and wealthy people whose money and connections complicate prosecution, their personal stories, aside from glimpsing their professional frustration, are left largely unexplored. Increased roles for cop characters is among the profound changes that occur when the story is transformed into American narratives.

In 2000, Hollywood retooled and collapsed the British series to fit the format of a feature film, as well as changing the “k” to a “c” in the title, and switching from heroin to cocaine trafficking, which required moving the border crossings to those involving the U.S. and its Latin American neighbors to the South. The film also substitutes the government official with a conservative Ohio supreme court judge, Robert Wakefield (Michael Douglas) who becomes the nation’s new drug “czar,” perhaps reflecting the American preference for non-career professionals from the heartland, who embody middle American values that can (in theory) overpower bureaucratic red tape and beltway cynicism (the *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington* model). The film, though, quickly betrays these assumptions, as Wakefield, like the British Lithgow, finds his access to power and money unable to protect his junkie daughter from being seduced by drugs. The film also includes the arrest of a well-heeled California drug smuggler, a criminalized Latino whose European wife continues the business to protect the privileged
lifestyle on which she has become dependent. Finally, and most importantly, the nondescript German police are replaced with an-depth characterization of an earnest Mexican policeman, Javier Rodriguez (Benicio Del Toro), as well as two “minority” police characters, Montel Gordon (Don Cheadle) and Don Castro (Luis Guzmán), who hound the California drug connection.

In 2004 American television resurrected the extended British format and premiered Traffic: the Miniseries on the USA cable network; later that same year, the miniseries was released on DVD for worldwide distribution. This Traffic retains the complexity of the prior productions’ interrelated stories, but makes the drug trafficking storyline service a narrative better suited to a perceived post-9/11 priority: America’s War on Terror, or as it is presented in the miniseries (in keeping with American offense as defense), a terrorist war on America. Accompanying the shift in focus is a beefed-up role for a rogue cop, in this case, DEA agent Mike McKay (Elias Koteas), who forsakes the rule of law for the violent abuse of law and order. Although based in Seattle, his turf also extends to Afghanistan, where he is charged with dismantling that country’s drug export operation. He ends up a rogue, however, operating alone to stop a drug shipment commandeered by Al Qaeda and headed for Seattle with smallpox onboard as an act of bioterrorism. Its supporting stories, taking place in Seattle, include the tailspin of a well-educated yuppie who becomes a smuggler and partner to a Chinese American gangster, and an illegal immigrant-turned-cab driver named Adam Kadyrov (Cliff Curtis), whose wife and daughter die on the fated cargo ship, prompting him to seek revenge on the smugglers responsible. Not only does a comparison of the three productions reveal differences in national approaches and correlations with specific historical moments, but also how particular identity factors maintain their hegemony, and in fact, become reiterated in times of national crisis.
White males behind the nation

Both the British miniseries and the Hollywood film portray the government officials as flawed patriarchs whose task of protecting their countries from drugs is as much a failure as their inability to safeguard their families from the ravages of drug use. As men in three-piece suits, working largely inside government offices, they seem ineffectual in a post-9/11 environment, with the American miniseries putting a street-wise cop back at center stage. What he shares with these other male leads, though, is an estrangement to family, as all three men remain focused only on their missions until their families are nearly destroyed through their neglect. Moreover, in the British miniseries and American feature film, the wives of the government officials are depicted as pawns or victims of their husbands’ actions, serving largely to showcase the men’s blindness to the domestic reach and consequences of the drug problem. Their privileged daughters likewise serve as the most intimate symbols of the despoil and costs involved. These versions also offer several female characters who represent effective dismissals of the customary flat treatments of such secondary or supportive characters, especially if female. While the government wives may be stereotypical, the pragmatic and pampered wives of the drug smugglers, in both the British miniseries and the American film, are showcased for continuing to run their husbands’ illegal enterprises. Their motives are shown ranging from traditional (to protect their threatened children and stand by their men) to provocative (in order to preserve their own comfortable existences). The mix of saintly and sinister motivations, though, makes them complex characters, and refreshingly progressive for such crime-soaked stories.

In the post 9/11 mini-series, though, with the wives as absent as the politicians, the only female character left with a substantial role is McKay’s wife Carole (Mary McCormack). Her rather straightforward purpose, though, is best captured by promotional copy for the miniseries
that frames McKay’s wife and son Tyler as “pawns in a D.E.A. investigation” looking into his possible criminal behavior. The DEA is trying to determine (as is the audience) if McKay is a redeemable rogue or simply a criminal with a badge. Despite Carole being afforded more screen time than the wives in previous versions, her contribution again is to largely demonstrate the motives of a protective mother and loyal wife, despite being a fleet cargo safety inspector. Given her profession, rather than allot some worry to the consequences of her husband’s mission, she is focused only on its consequences for her family’s domestic tranquility. It reiterates the long-standing practice of having female characters worry about the domestic realm, while the male, especially if the principle character, is concerned with the big picture. And far from being only about gendered clichés, her attitude captures the flipside of his sense of America’s extended jurisdiction: her representation of the isolated comfort and privilege afforded many Americans who worry only about what touches them personally, remaining oblivious to the consequences for the community or world at large.

The junkie daughters in the previous versions are also cut from the story and replaced by the McKays’ disgruntled son who merely befriends the drug-addicted next door neighbor, a teenage girl who offers their son easy sex and offbeat company. While he is drawn to her world, he remains a narcotics virgin. Meanwhile, the girl serves as an excuse for a McKay reunion at the hospital after she overdoses. She seems to have a purpose similar to the sirens and black widows of film noir, existing to add temptation to domestic drama but who are expendable in the end. This treatment misses the point of the earlier British mini-series and Hollywood feature, which depicted drugs being of capable of ruining the best of homes and tempting the most privileged, not a predominantly working or underclass problem, as many would have it.
Moreover, McKay’s insistence on acting alone underscores his representation of a particular masculinity, one that eschews diplomacy, détente, and coalition building (multilateralism), since these approaches are deemed feminine or too “often associated with neutered men, numbing statistics and operational paralysis.”239 For example, a scene involving McKay’s female supervisor finds her sifting through intelligence data but coming up empty; these scenes are then intercut with shots of McKay deciding by gut instinct about an informant’s veracity and trustworthiness. (The recent fallout from “faulty” intelligence that failed to predict or prevent 9/11 parallels this idea of bureaucratic ineptitude as compared to the presumed reliability of information derived from Bush’s “hunches.” The apparent failure of military action in Iraq to this point may serve as a stinging indictment of these assumptions about any superiority of “masculine” over “feminine” approaches, and as this study hopes to affect, presumptions about the fixity of gendering such methods and/or nations.)

An element, though, that is embedded in all three versions is the privileging of whiteness. Each version elevates the losses suffered by white people living in the First World over people, particularly of color, living in the Third; this is especially pronounced in the American versions. The suffering of non-whites is included but only because they are connected to white conflicts, not as stand-alone stories. In fact, the Hollywood film stirred up controversy and acclaim with the use of a photographic technique to distinguish the different geographic and sociocultural locales. It used a brownish, desolate cast to connote Mexico, cool conservative blues to define

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239 In the last presidential election, given its timing in the middle of the Iraq War, each candidate recounted his military service—with Democratic challenger, John Kerry, presenting himself as a decorated war hero; Bush, who had served in the Air National Guard, with rumors speculating that the Bush family had used its influence to place him ahead of others on a list, insisted that what counted was his present hard-on for war. Moreover, Bush supporters chided Kerry for his French ancestry, which in the present political climate of American politics is code for not being the right sort of American male—being more akin to Old World aristocracy than the New World frontier. A recent speech by ex-movie rogue-turned-California governor Arnold Schwarzenegger, who spoke on Bush’s behalf during the campaign, noted, if only in jest, that those who disagree with their Republican policies are “girly men,” referencing a Saturday Night Live sketch that credited the epithet to the actor.
middle America, and poster-perfect color to paint the upscale California connection. Although applauded for helping to delineate the narrative switchbacks, the choice also seems to exacerbate racist assumptions. The technique frames “black” ghettos as bleak and threatening, along with the washed-out shades of “brown” attempting to capture Latin America, giving it a lifeless appearance no matter how crowded with bodies.

Another less-than-subtle example of racializing is how Wakefield, in the feature film, finds his daughter: heavily drugged and being used as a sexual outlet by a black drug dealer. As the camera angle catches the sex act from her perspective, her defiler is blurred so as to appear only as a menacing blackness rather than as an individualized human being. It seems as racist as it is gratuitous, being used to signal how far the daughter has descended within the context of a race-conscious society.

On the other hand, the firm grip on whiteness enables several “minority” and “foreign” characters to gain notice, even while operating at the margins. In the Hollywood film, in particular, Del Toro’s Rodriguez (garnering the Academy Award for Supporting Actor) explains to U.S. agents that all he wants for his trouble is help building a baseball diamond in his hometown to help keep local boys occupied, as well as to provide them with a piece of the American dream. His desire to be paid back with such a mundane but socially meaningful act confounds the American cops, but proves his grasp of both hardship and hope. There is also an effective scene near the end of the film involving Cheadle’s cop character, who places a bugging device under the desk of the California smuggler. It seems a futile gesture, having been badly bested by the criminal to this point, yet it speaks to Gordon’s tenacity and his commitment to professional vigilance, presenting a fresh perspective that counts on subtle but vital details to reveal his strategy and which forsakes the macho and inflated tactics of the customary rogue.
Moreover, both the British miniseries and the American film admirably struggle to keep the subtext of collective frustration in play, even while individuals are spotlight for their personal (and emblematic) ordeals. The 2004 miniseries, despite its ensemble cast, however, dedicates most of its energy to cartoon-like characters who are clearly good or evil but rarely a blending of the two. This not only forfeits the complexity of the earlier versions’ ability to show how decency and malevolence battle for the same soul, but reinforces the long-standing American preference for clear-cut realms of good/evil to help facilitate the process of distinguishing “us” from “them,” and in so doing, justifying whatever violence or means necessary for vanquishing such demonized enemies.

In the 2004 miniseries, there are also no significant characters of color who act in defense of the nation, only non-whites serving as the customary criminals and victims. What is chiefly on display is the whiteness of McKay and his nuclear family. And like so many rogue cop characters before him, he seems erased of racial, ethnic, even religious markings (in comparison to the Muslims with whom he clashes in the Middle East). There is only his now ethnically drained Scotch-Irish surname, attesting to his earned status as the American “everyman.”

Markers that delineate class comprise an especially vital component in the British miniseries, and despite their ambiguity, can also be teased out of the American programs. Scenes in the miniseries, in particular, depict the victims of the human smuggling rings that inevitably engage issues of class as much as race/ethnicity and nation, as they involve poor people of color being sold and transported from Third to First World countries. As such, they represent the buying and selling of human cargo, now a more lucrative business than drug trafficking. While Hollywood tells yet another tale of a white male rogue preserving himself (and the nation he

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performs), this more desperate story involving the harrowing journeys of the now globalized Other is sidelined once again.

**Trafficking the nation**

Not only are the three programs’ First World perspective racialized, but the first two attempt to understand how Euroamerican policies often adversely effect and maintain Third World poverty and disadvantage. Their common First World response to the problem of illegal drugs is to reduce or eradicate supplies coming from the Third World instead of addressing the insatiable demand at home, which keeps a globalized black market alive, whether involving drugs or people. Both the British miniseries and the American film hint at the shortsightedness of such thinking, offering several scenes that make clear the conflicted feelings of the government officials charged with solving a drug problem that has yet to be properly understood. Lithgow, in his final sermon, warns, “We cannot police the world,” as drugs are too easy to produce, leaving only the option of limiting demand. At the same time, neither version of the story suggests how decriminalization may be as plausible an approach as treatment, rehabilitation, or prevention. Lithgow learns first-hand that treatment programs are rare and expensive, after paying handsomely for a private facility for his junkie daughter, an option unavailable to most British citizens. In the Hollywood film, Wakefield similarly struggles with his office’s limited ability, urging his staff to think “outside the box” and consider methods other than chasing suppliers across the border. He is greeted, however, by a deafening silence. He also notices that no prevention or treatment experts attend his meeting, illuminating the politics and priorities that will hamper his effectiveness.

Wakefield gives a similarly bleak speech at the close of the Hollywood film, lamenting, “There is a war on drugs and many of our family members are the enemy. And I don’t know how

you wage war on your own family.” Like Lithgow, Wakefield, is positioned, though, to speak for the rest of their societies, if not the wider world. Their perspective, then, is ours, which only serves to reinforce the ingrained tradition of well-intentioned white men as everyone’s surrogate, and through whose eyes both art and life are to be experienced by all others.

Another distinctive feature of the British version involves the much more nuanced task for Lithgow to keep in mind when pressuring Pakistan to curb its illegal drug trade: his nation’s professed commitment to help developing countries replace contraband economies with sustainable and lawful investments that not only advance global trade but also ameliorate human suffering. The British version even demonstrates a measure of empathy for some Third World characters, implying that they are as much victims of First World greed—in a systemic sense—as they are captives to a harmful cash crop that provides short term survival for farmers and smugglers alike. As one farmer tells Lithgow, he grows poppy to provide for his family and no other crop pays him as well. Lithgow later learns that the Pakistani government, rather than help the farmers survive, are poisoning the fields, leaving the soil unfit for any crop, which only further exacerbates the grinding poverty already affecting much of the region. He also discovers that the West’s promise to send fertilizers to help these farmers convert the land is similarly and shamelessly broken.

Both American versions of Traffic largely forsake this complex and even compassionate aspect. In the film, among the key non-American characters, only the honest Mexican cop Rodriguez is framed sympathetically. Otherwise, Latin America is shown through the usual lens of routine torture, military coups, greedy juntas, and frequent revolutions whose roots in centuries of European colonialism and more recent American interventions are sidestepped. The

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242 Traffic, DVD, directed by Steven Soderbergh (Polygram USA Video, 2001).
film, however, exposes a few critical flaws in American approaches to problem-solving, including the tendency to declare “war” on problems from poverty and diseases to illicit drugs.

Due to post-9/11 timing, rather than depicting villains as “terrorists” (while ignoring their underlying politics), however, the American miniseries makes the villains’ methods—or terrorism—the story’s central villain. The Afghan characters, supposedly representative of Al Qaeda at large, are reduced to dehumanized figures that merely harbor evil, and which seems everywhere but nowhere in particular. (This seems to echo the nation’s current rhetoric, which is having difficulty defining the enemy in the War on Terror, which is only worsening America’s fear of a never-ending and lawless frontier—one fraught with savages who never seem to die.) As a match for their evil, the nation’s mission is as much the film’s protagonist, merely using McKay and his partner as weapons to ensure a noble end. Despite being undercover agents, the series’ opening scenes show McKay’s partner driving through the clotted pedestrian traffic in a conspicuous Jeep, then adding to the absurdity by shouting out, “Look out, American coming!” However incongruous, the scene is purposeful, as it establishes the imagery of America and its rogue agents as saviors amid the uncivilized Afghan wilderness, where they seem like underdogs working against a mass evil, but one as undefined as the brown faces that impede the progress of his Jeep.

Unlike the British version’s consideration of (and the Hollywood film’s indifference to) Third World perspectives, the 2004 miniseries presents only moments of unvarnished contempt. The rogue’s clear-eyed mission toward a noble goal stands in sharp contrast to the previous Traffik/Traffic’s politicians, who in comparison to the rogue’s macho (and xenophobic) tactics, now seem faltering and ineffectual. As McKay and his partner question their hospitalized prisoner, the Afghan farmer tries to explain his government’s program to pay farmers like him

just $250 an acre to grow anything but poppy, which usually yields them more than $2,000 an acre—a scenario purposely similar to the one involving Lithgow in Pakistan. Unlike Lithgow’s mixed feelings, however, McKay reacts by kicking the farmer’s bed and shouting, “Cut the bull!” with his partner adding, “Why don’t you let us know when you want to pull the turban out of your ass,” meaning the point when the farmer will stop dodging, and confess his involvement with Al Qaeda. McKay, wearing a FDNY baseball cap to signal his emotional allegiances to the 9/11 tragedy, earlier had explained to the prisoner: “We’re not here because we want to mess with your country … you want to live in the middle ages, you go right ahead. We just want to stop you from messing with ours.” Again, this enlists the familiar theme of showcasing an American battling on foreign soil not to advance his (or his nation’s) agenda or to interfere in another nation’s sovereignty, but as a defensive measure meant only to protect a vulnerable America. A few minutes later, after his partner leaves the room, McKay diverts the security cameras and begins his own plan of action. In light of recent controversies over prisoner abuse by American military personnel in prosecuting the War on Terror, unlike other rogues, this movie agent is only able to imply physical threat.

To its credit, the American miniseries does expand the concept of trafficking to include an integrated universe, with human cargo being moved along with the more customary contraband. Several scenes suggest, with surprising accuracy, the cooperative nature of professional smugglers and their appetite for variety, as well as their occasional usefulness to the CIA. McKay, having learned the ropes from his brief partnership with the spy agency, similarly traffics in heroin but only to buy information about the cargo intended to kill American civilians. Although his colleagues pause briefly to consider the costs of his logic, and interrogate his wife

244 Ibid.

245 Ibid.
about his possible criminal behavior, once reports show an outbreak of small pox, they forgive McKay’s contempt for the usual rules and appropriately reframe him—just in the nick of time—as the story’s American hero.

Rogues die hardest

More recently, as mentioned earlier, an even more familiar rogue cop is poised to make his screen comeback in Die Hard 4.0, due out in late 2006. It features the now iconic NYPD supercop, John McClane, who is reportedly on vacation in the Caribbean, when ensnared in a terrorist plot, which he must personally and definitively thwart. He is the most recent of a long history of “last man standing” narratives, whether underwriting the appeal of a movie character or the reach of an American president (and the fun-house mirror reflections between the two). Both have performed the role of the world’s “policeman,” reflecting a fusion of liberator and imperialist, whose missions often continue to sanction violence as the ugly means to a noble end. Thus, for better or worse, Hollywood’s rogue cop continues to be perceived as the nation’s “fictional” guardian, protecting the invented collective, or to borrow Anthony Giddens’s phrase, the “bordered power-container” with “demarcated boundaries … sanctioned by law,” which confers on cops and other authority figures the control over “the means of internal and external violence.”

Increasingly occupying a world of expanded and breached borders (real and imagined), the rogue cop is increasingly dispatched to sketch out new lines in the sand, especially in the Middle East, where the so-called “clash of civilizations” is most evident. And as Billig’s study of nationalism makes clear, ideological rhetoric is most effective when woven

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246 Giddens, Nation State, 121.

into the fabric of everyday life, which includes being embedded in entertainment products that usually slip by without the same scrutiny accorded more blatant political rhetoric. Like masculinity, whiteness, and the existence of class privilege, the “nation” too hides in plain site. But when what is national becomes global, and what is global becomes Americanized, for whose benefit will this American “everyman” continue to perform?

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248 See Billig, Banal Nationalism.
CONCLUSION: RESEARCH FINDINGS
AND PROPOSING A WORKING MODEL

Our enemies are innovative and resourceful, and so are we. They never stop thinking
about new ways to harm our country and our people, and neither do we.
President George W. Bush

The great enemy of the truth is very often not the lie—deliberate, contrived and
dishonest—but the myth—persistent, persuasive and unrealistic.
President John F. Kennedy

[Our job] has everything to do with right and wrong and nothing to do with rules and regulations.
Lieutenant Henry Oak (Ray Liotta) in Narc

The myth of the frontier has been an integral tool America has deployed to construct and
maintain its dominion: as a colonial frame to settle the New World, as a means to complete its
continental expansion, and to prosecute an imperialist agenda and a New World Order. Each new
configuration of the “frontier” involved the taming of the wilderness and conquest of the
“savages” to advance the ideological project of nationhood. Framed as an aggressor rather than a
victim, the frontier myth of the savage has enabled American aggression to be advertised as
defensive, progressive, and justifiable—exonerating all manner of violence so long as it is
prosecuted on behalf of a higher moral purpose.

In this ever-changing frontier scenario, the individual actor—the frontier hero—has been
omnipresent and key, whether embodied by an American president or a fictional character
derived from popular culture, including Hollywood’s rogue cop archetype at the center of this
study. As I have shown, the “mission” of such iconic figures, along with their personal
narratives, works to conceal the underlying systemic inequalities that perpetuate the nation’s
mythologies and dominion. Importantly, such fictional frontier characters, in tandem with
political figures who similarly exploit the frontier myth, mutually reinforce each other’s
performance of nation. Their “dance” exemplifies Althusser’s notion of the interrelated realms of
the hegemonic process: the state’s *explicit* policies of coercion (as in policing and foreign policy), which cooperate with the *implicit* ideological messages encoded into cultural products, including cinema. The above discussion addresses the key points related to the *first* component of this study’s central argument: that America’s frontier myth helps to camouflage and advance the nation’s hegemony.

The *second* and *third* components of the central argument include that Hollywood’s rogue cop character, as an archetype, embodies the ideology, methods, and “redeemable” rogueness derived from the frontier myth; and that the rogue cop archetype is comprised of hegemonic identity factors that constitute a normative subject in American society, and which collectively embody what the nation privileges most.

As I have shown, the archetype, *as a cop*, presents a suitable vehicle for performing the nation’s goals, as Althusser has suggested, by demonstrating how a subject becomes interpellated into the hegemonic order by responding to a cop’s hailing. In this manner, the Hollywood archetype is doubly performative: first, as the *literal* performance on-screen (a benign fiction posing as mere entertainment rather than ideology); two, as the *figurative* personification of the nation’s “policing” of its political and sociocultural borders.

**Research findings**

Growing out of this study’s central argument, several research questions were raised in the Introduction, which the chapters’ analyses and case studies of illustrative films have attempted to answer. Through tracking the repeated performances of the rogue cop archetype across decades of Hollywood cinema, a consistent pattern of substantial evidence has emerged that can attest to his role in reiterating and perpetuating the frontier myth on behalf of sustaining the nation’s dominion.
In Chapter 1, I reviewed the scholarly literature related to identity factors that constitute the hegemonic archetype and nation: gender/sexuality, race/ethnicity/whiteness, and class. By tracking how these concepts evolved and changed in light of challenges to identity assumptions that emerged in the wake of the 1960s (i.e., second wave feminist theory), my review revealed how the archetype has been “pre-wired” to adapt: first, as a construct that is changeable by design; second, as a result of the interventions by scholars in post-60s literature that attempted to unmask how identity factors work together to create a hierarchy of privilege, and which participates in interlocking systems of domination and oppression. Thus, Chapter One served to historicize identity and contextualize its deployment in my study’s archetype.

In Chapter 2, the rogue cop character’s invention, along with the depiction and role of his frontier precursor and early ancestors were delineated. Through pinpointing key moments that fostered his construction, several features of his performance and usefulness to the nation can be charted along a continuum, which has repeatedly produced consistently similar representations over the long history of the archetype’s existence in Hollywood cinema. Among those features are his embodiment of individualism and performance of a classless, self-made “everyman,” which is traceable to one of the nation’s first iconic figures, the American Adam (of the New World as the New Eden). However, as this image of nurturing America’s “virgin land” gave way to the contentious portrait of the frontier as the setting for armed conflict between Indians and frontiersmen (or savagery versus civilization), the chapter also demonstrated how the frontiersman’s particular performance of masculinity and whiteness became essential components in defining the nation. It also charted examples of how their actions embodied America’s endemic rationale for aggression at home and abroad. With Hollywood’s invention came another predecessor: the Western gunfighter/cowboy, whose celebration of America’s
frontier myth was revisited in order to highlight other features that the archetype would manifest. Those include his reluctance to fight unless provoked (and only in self-defense or on behalf of innocent victims who cannot protect themselves), as well as being an “outsider” who stands apart from the community and as a “rogue” whose contempt for rules and embrace of violence is deemed unfortunate but necessary.

After positing that the tumult of the 1960s marks a redeployment of the frontier myth to encompass the “uncivilized” urban areas of America, I also discussed the invention of the rogue cop archetype, perhaps best exemplified by Dirty Harry, but subsequently replicated by dozens of characters who followed and were purposely constructed in Harry’s likeness. By importing the mythic features and identity factors of the Western gunfighter into this new urban cowboy, the frontier’s purpose is also encoded into the urban crime film without loss of appeal and functionality, as well as its service to the nation’s mythologies. For Dirty Harry in the 1970s, this American “everyman” was dispatched to quell the threatening, radical “minority” (whether defined as female, gay, black, brown, or poor) that was challenging the nation’s “silent” or “moral” majority. Rather than embodying privilege, however, the rogue cop archetype is presented as an embattled underdog or reluctant hero who is merely defending himself (and, by extension, the nation). Given the obfuscation of class as a factor of his identity in America, markers of his class affiliation were often difficult to identify, sometimes even conspicuous in their absence. Rather than be presented as a mainstream agenda to retain the status quo, the archetype’s ordeal has been consistently presented as intensely personal, which helps to cloak his links and relevancy to the larger national picture. As such, the chapter outlined the ways in which a rogue cop character has consistently echoed the political or presidential rhetoric of his day, which characterized wars from Vietnam to Iraq as American actions that were unfortunate but
necessary. This interrelation between rogue cop characters and political figures exemplifies the collaborative nature of the hegemonic process that facilitates American mythmaking—on and off screen.

What is distilled from studying Harry’s offspring is how the archetype has a malleable nature as well as the capacity for reinvention when challenged, appropriating features of the Other as a strategy for containing their opposition. As the *Lethal Weapon* and *Die Hard* films demonstrate, the rogue cop character reflects inroads made by the era’s feminism along with marked shifts in race relations. They also reflect national concerns about the Cold War, the effects of globalization, and economic rivalries with other nation-states (i.e., Japan).

The case study of *Dark Blue* also reveals the character’s inherent weaknesses, as the more his conflicted logic is put to the test (i.e., offense posing as defense), the more the veil cloaking his agenda wears thin (much like the nation’s of late). As the benevolent lawlessness of *Dark Blue*’s rogue cop becomes overstressed, his ability to execute and complete his mission nearly reaches the breaking point. Although he was generally accepted by audiences and reviewers as the latest in a long line of cop characters with bad habits and good intentions, my close reading of his cross purposes exposed the flaw that has accompanied the rogue archetype (and the nation’s mythologies underwriting him). I contend that through such an exaggerated performance, we can see more clearly how the rogue’s dirty work for the nation is not the ugly means to a noble end, but perhaps the point of the exercise itself.

In Chapter 3, the Other’s challenge of the archetype’s persistent masculinity\(^1\) and whiteness was revealed, as they have increasingly portrayed cop characters themselves (instead of their stereotypical representations as criminals) after being encouraged to press for change in

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\(^1\) He is depicted as heterosexual, but as a lone figure, is rarely coupled on a permanent basis or shown having sex, as like the knights of old, his mission is all-consuming.
the wake of the 1960s social movements. My analyses confirmed, however, that these Others cannot successfully embody a cop character as a performance of nation without substantially erasing their gendered or raced differences, and professing their allegiance to police “blue” or the nation’s white masculinity. Moreover, it seemed nearly impossible to replicate the rogue, in particular, as he is often charged with policing the very deviance that essentially defines and marginalizes them in the first place. While the rogue’s slippage into deviant or criminal behavior is framed as a means to an end, the Other’s “deviance” is considered innate and fixed by Nature and not on behalf of a moral imperative. As such, their attempts to be “rogue” merely compound other traits that already render them unsuitable.

A case in point of those traits was assessed in Blue Steel, in particular. What is revealed in this film is that the police uniform that customarily frustrates the male rogue’s autonomy and presentation of the American everyman, in contrast, helps underwrite her authority by linking her to the state in part by “covering up” her gender, which otherwise works against her ability to serve as an emblem of national strength. However much such female representations spotlight the potential for intervention and movement among representations of the Other, as they have been constructed in opposition to what they are trying to represent, they ultimately fall short. I also discerned that these female representations are consistently focused on emotional problems at the expense of crimefighting efforts; and if they make their cop jobs as important as their relationships, they suffer further torment and isolation.

This chapter, in its review of the few black female cops and crimefighters who have appeared onscreen—rare for their double marginalization in terms of gender and race—I determined that they cannot replicate the white female’s representation of virtue, let alone effectively challenge the white male’s dominance. A black female, by consistently being
represented as oversexualized or desexualized, is severely limited in her ability to contest the status quo, although she can continue to be of service to whites. (Condeleeza Rice is an illustrative example of this maxim: a desexualized black female with no family or private life of her own, making her suitable and available to serve the nation, although unable to perform it.)

The case of Latino female and male cops makes clear their problematical relationship to normative whiteness as well as to its polar opposite: blackness. Although their “brownness” enables them to transgress the color line, they often resort to “passing” as white in order to find roles or to sidestep America’s racial divide. Either strategy, as the films under review confirm, did little to displace the white norm, but merely negotiated a liminal space that was opened up by their ambiguous position in the nation’s racialized order.

Finally, the chapter concluded with a case study of a black male cop (in *Training Day*). At first he appears to resemble the redemptive rogue, but soon slips into a vigorous reiteration of black criminality. In addition, his white sidekick takes over the story’s moral center, becoming the white knight’s restoration of the social order and ameliorating the savage conditions of the urban wilderness. The black cop’s failed performance as rogue also exposes how portrayals by Others are in perpetual conversation with those stereotypical representations—historical and contemporary—that essentially defined their subordinate roles.

Chapter 4, in tracking rogue cop characters who cross the nation’s borders to vanquish America’s perceived enemies abroad, revealed how such “globocops” give voice while reinforcing the discourse accompanying America’s actual and ever-escalating global policing. With respect to the character’s identity factors, my case studies of mainstream Hollywood films reveal that the globocop’s whiteness is able to absorb color to advertise the nation’s professed commitment to a multicultural utopia (as in *XXX*). However, in times of acute crises, as in the
aftermath of 9/11, this accommodation of race is circumvented. An example of this phenomenon is evident in the recent American TV miniseries, *Traffic*, which restored the white rogue, along with other “corrections,” which are discernible through comparisons with the earlier feature film and the original British TV miniseries.

**Delineating a working model**

Together my research findings suggest the contours of a working model of the Hollywood rogue archetype:

**First**, as I have shown, the archetype is comprised of identity constructs that signify and perform the nation. These constructs—gender/sexuality, race/ethnicity, and class—represent, in domestic terms, the hegemony of heterosexual masculinity, preeminent whiteness (and the frontier’s perennial non-whiteness), as well as the persistent denial of class affiliation. The first two constructs represent conflations of sex/sexuality and gender, as well as race and ethnicity, respectively. Although in reality these categories are discrete, they perform as interrelated phenomena that foreground a hegemonic identity in America. With regard to class, no less a factor in American identity and society, the fiction of its disappearance sustains the essential myth of a classless social hierarchy.

**Second**, the working model accounts for the ideological rationale for American hegemony abroad. Features of this include: *benevolent* intentions, *defensive* posturing, *redeemable* rogueness, *individual* autonomy, *underdog* status, *reluctant* intervention, and *necessary* violence against “threats” to America.

**Third**, these identity factors are not fixed; rather, as constructs, they are changeable, allowing for movement and flexibility within the hegemonic order, which helps to explain how both the rogue cop archetype and the Other reiterate themselves while also reordering their
existing relations of power. These identity factors are also flexibly deployed against America’s enemies within the nation’s physical borders as well as within a “borderless” world. That is, the saliencies of these identity factors vary over time, context, and “threat.” For example, while the rogue cop’s masculinity and class denial appear constant, his whiteness is able to absorb color on behalf of America’s multiracial/multicultural ideal. As I have shown, this occurs in XXX but only as the context involves threats across or outside the nation’s borders.

Fourth, that the working model is applicable to future research, and that I envision three types of uses for which it could prove helpful. The first use is to apply the model to new Hollywood films that feature a variation of the rogue cop archetype. The second use would be to serve as a means for gauging American influence (or what Geoffrey Nowell-Smith calls the “Hollywoodization of world cinema”\(^2\)) by comparing Hollywood’s archetype against those cop characters in another nation’s cinema in order to identify appropriated and/or imitative features. The third use involves using my template to identify and analyze the cinematic characters—and their supporting myths—who perform the nation in other societies’ cinemas.

**Lasting consequences of America’s last man standing**

This study has attempted to account for the performative role of myths in general and their deployment in particular to support American hegemony, at home and abroad. In so doing, I have endeavored to expose the processes of mythmaking as something more than its constructed nature and its “mere entertainment” (a benign influence rather than a potent conveyor of ideology).

My research reveals a representational strategy in the construction of American identity and the nation that demonstrate not only the adaptability of the rogue cop archetype, but also its

possible end game. I am suggesting that there is a point when the myth can no longer cloak American aggression nor convincingly make the case for the nation’s good intentions or defense-only claims. More recently, the nation has come to be increasingly compared in popular fictions and political rhetoric to the rogue character it has been exporting for the past 45 years.

The current political climate and state of world affairs, especially the War on Terror, is fostering the return of films that echo those themes, including the specific reprise of the rogue cop, John McClane, who will appear again in *Die Hard 4.0* (due for release in 2006), but this to battle terrorism *across* America’s borders. This climate attests to the mythical promise of America’s renewal and regeneration through perpetual violence, which has long been ensconced in its ever-elastic myth of the frontier. Being unable to clearly locate what Turner once characterized as the “meeting point” between savagery and civilization has left American myths at risk of further unraveling to the point that they may be rendered ideologically useless and politically dysfunctional.

As this study’s analyses of more recent rogue performances have revealed, whether policing a domestic nightmare (as in *Dark Blue*) or the global horror of international terrorist networks (as in *Traffic: The Miniseries*), both protagonists represent inflated portraits of violent white males who insist on playing by their own deadly rules. Do these exaggerated rogues suggest an end game is near—for them and the frontier myth that inspires them? Given the nature of hegemony, though, the myth is not likely to simply fade away, no more than the nation. As America attempts to sustain its global dominion, will it invent new myths or merely rework the frontier myth? If the latter, will the rogue cop character be around to represent the last man standing or to signal America’s last stand?
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