

The Man Who Could Go Either Way:  
The Many Faces of Cowboy Masculinity in 1950s American  
Film and Advertising

by

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## **Abstract**

This thesis explores the cowboy as an iconic figure of white masculinity in the middle-class in 1950s America, focusing on film and advertising as a means of interpreting images of idealized manhood. It explores films including *High Noon*, *Rio Bravo*, and *The Searchers*, as well as print advertising from Levi's and Marlboro, to juxtapose different projections of masculinity. It finds that, contrary to expectation, the cowboy was not just a singular image of stoicism and martial power, opposed to domesticity and consumerism. Instead, he was more of a language through which different values could be expressed. This creates an intriguingly contradictory image: the cowboy is domesticity and anti-domesticity, invincibility and anxiety, fashion and anti-fashion, and a relic of America's past and the herald of its future all at once. In this regard he becomes a surrogate for diverse masculinities interacting on the backdrop of the early Cold War.

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## Introduction: Varmint Tracks

*The locomotive's mourning howl resounded in the empty streets of the town, as though heralding the arrival of the violence that was to ensue. Doors and windows slammed shut as the young cowboy rode in. Mothers pulled their children inside. The sheriff, still swaying in the noose in the center of town, watched him with lifeless eyes. The cowboy tied up his horse and felt for his revolver, a Colt Peacemaker single-action. The weight of justice hung from it like a funeral shroud. Ash from the burning end of a cigarette fell onto his jeans, faded with months of hard wear in patterns of electric blue streaks. Spurs clinked above Cuban heels as he climbed the stairs to the saloon, old wood creaking beneath him. He kicked open the doors to the saloon, leveling his Colt. Painted women and black-clad banditos stared daggers at him, but he felt nothing -- nothing but rage and the rush of revenge. "I'm lookin' for the man what killed my Paw!"<sup>1</sup>*

Who is the cowboy? On the silver screen, he is John Wayne, Clint Eastwood, Gene Autry, Slim Pickens and Gary Cooper. Historically, the cowboy is just a cattleman; he is a cow-wrangler on horseback in the agrarian Old West. But in fiction, he takes on many more shapes: he might be a hero out for revenge, a rebellious bandit in blue jeans, a singer whose hat seems glued onto his head, a violent killer, or a morally-conflicted anti-hero. Each of these identities plays out their role on the same backdrop of the Old West and what we imagine are its stories: Native Americans attacking white settlements *en masse*, dramatic Mexican standoffs in the middle of town, shootouts with bandits at the saloon, and other dramatic tales of romance and violence. In this regard, the cowboy in Western fiction becomes a warrior, heavily-armed, tough, strong and often solitary.

The cowboy today, however, is a figure of contention. "Cowboy diplomacy," an ironic term used to portray American foreign policy as brash, violent and prone to intimidation, has a generally negative connotation. "Is that you, John Wayne?" jokes Private Joker in *Full Metal Jacket*, mocking Sergeant Hartman's ultra-masculine tough-guy persona.<sup>2</sup> A saying attributed to an I Corps Marine says: "There are always two ways to do something – the right way and the

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<sup>1</sup> This wonderfully-clichéd line comes courtesy of Kate Beaton, "Bowie and a Western," *Hark! A Vagrant*, accessed Feb. 26, 2016. <http://www.harkavagrant.com/index.php?id=201>

<sup>2</sup> *Full Metal Jacket*, directed by Stanley Kubrick. United States: Warner Bros. Pictures, 1987, 3:05.

John Wayne way. We might as well do it the right way.”<sup>3</sup> He has a strangely mixed character, equally a hero as a fool.<sup>4</sup> And yet he still lives on in film, be it at the hands of Quentin Tarantino or in forgotten reruns on The Western Channel. In advertising, too, tough cowboys are used to sell products to people, whether they play those cowboy tropes straight or subvert them comically.<sup>5</sup> He appears as a representative or advocate for countless products, representing individualism and folksy wisdom and rugged masculinity to sell products like beer, trucks, cigarettes, and even catheters.<sup>6</sup>

To me, too, the cowboy is a mixed symbol fraught with ambiguity. I am not an American, nor do I have any in my bloodline, and American conceptions of the cowboy are not much a part of Chinese-English Canadian heritage (any more than the usual bleed-over of American culture into Canada). But the cowboy is nonetheless a part of my childhood. Before my maternal grandfather died, he watched Westerns almost all day. He watched strong, almost-always white men in narratives where Chinese men were almost entirely absent, and imagined himself as a strong white hero. This hero, of course, was in the process of taking a gun to people of color and criminals (and/or both). And his ancestors, in the times depicted in many of those films, worked on the railroads with aching backs and calloused hands. Spurred on (get it?) in my youth by that cowboy image, I got a plastic toy revolver from a dollar store with a big orange nose on the

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<sup>3</sup> Richard Slotkin, *Gunfighter Nation* (New York: University of Oklahoma Press, 1998), p. 520.

<sup>4</sup> Paul Dickson’s *War Slang* tellingly carries two definitions for John Wayne: “(1) To act heroically. (2) A soldier who “acts it up” for the media, especially the camera.” This source also corroborates Slotkin’s observations. Paul Dickson, *War Slang: American Fighting Words & Phrases Since the Civil War* (New York: Dover Publications), p. 278.

<sup>5</sup> A Budweiser commercial comes to mind: the cowboy threatens violence against the townsfolk when the local saloon doesn’t have Budweiser, but when a fresh shipment comes in... he leads the crowd in a spirited rendition of Elton John’s *Tiny Dancer*. “Budweiser Cowboy Commercial,” YouTube, Sept. 2, 2011, accessed Feb. 29, 2016. Starts at 0:27 after an excruciatingly long introductory animation by the uploader. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HgOUcMjouvU>

<sup>6</sup> Really! Everything you need to know is in the title: “I’m a Professional Cowboy & I Use Catheters,” YouTube, Mar. 24 2015, accessed Feb. 29, 2016, 0:03. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2soNikzS0m4>

barre, and imagined myself as a tough masculine hero fighting off imaginary Natives and bandits. In my youth, the cowboy was always the “good guy.”

But now, I approach the cowboy from the perspective of a historian of masculinity, coming from a background of reading and writing works about turn-of-the-century ideas of manhood: how ideals of masculine behavior are formed, spread and enforced, as well as the shapes they take in so doing.<sup>7</sup> In this regard, my work is in the same vein as works like Gail Bederman’s *Manliness and Civilization* (1995), to which I owe a great debt for introducing me to the study of masculinity. And just as a scientist might look at science-fiction and be unable to shake the voice in the back of their head pointing out inaccuracies, this study of gender has made it hard for me to *not* examine the gendered implications of the things I watch or read, including my own hobbies. One of my perhaps weirder interests lies in denim, studying how jeans are made, how they react to wear, and of course their history.<sup>8</sup> In my studies I came across some old 1950s advertisements for Levi’s jeans (which make up the majority of Chapter 4 of this analysis) depicting strong, masculine cowboys in Old West settings wearing thick blue jeans.

This got me thinking. Almost everyone knows one of the guises of the cowboy, especially men, who are often exposed at a young age to the cowboy as a potent example of a “real man.” He is an icon of masculinity, invested with strength, power, autonomy, and violence in all his forms. However, much of what we accept in popular culture as the characteristics of the cowboy is the result of historical reimagining in the United States of America during the early Cold War period. The cowboy is thus a constructed figure, cobbled together of different and often conflicting identities, and the grand majority of these depictions was based on perceptions

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<sup>7</sup> A note on tone: I hate historical works in which the historian disappears behind a *Wizard of Oz*-like curtain to present passive-voiced history, suggesting that their analysis has simply sprung into being from nothingness, appearing one day on a professor’s desk or shot hilariously out of a printer into an unlucky graduate student’s face. Accordingly, I want to show a little bit of “how the sausage is made” here.

<sup>8</sup> Expect a certain amount of denim geekery throughout!

that had begun to form during the Great Depression and the Second World War, but only truly proliferated afterwards in the early stages of the Cold War.

Ten percent of all fictional works produced in the 1950s were Westerns.<sup>9</sup> John Wayne, perhaps the most famous (or infamous) movie cowboy, hit the peak of his career in this decade as well.<sup>10</sup> The Marlboro Man advertising campaign—cowboys leading its charge—catapulted Marlboro cigarettes from seventh in America to first in the entire world.<sup>11</sup> The cowboy's popularity skyrocketed through the mediums of film and advertising. On a backdrop of political uncertainty, general economic prosperity (for white middle-class families), and large national debates on gender, sexuality, and politics, though, the cowboy represented different things to different people. But his intensely masculinized image, standing alone, tall and firm, was inscribed on the American consciousness. With imagery of cowboys, then, a multitude of visions of idealized masculinity were presented in film and advertising, each presented as inherently and powerfully American.

Many standards of masculinity existed prior to the Cold War cowboy, of course. Before him (and alongside him) were other icons of masculine power like the Victorian “manly” gentleman, characterized by self-restraint, refinement and reason, and the Rooseveltian man, full of declarations of “strenuous masculinity” that paired a civilized character with virile masculine power.<sup>12</sup> The cowboy, more akin to the latter than the former, adopted those same virile

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<sup>9</sup> Michael Kimmel, *Manhood in America: A Cultural History* (New York: Free Press, 1996), p. 252.

<sup>10</sup> William Luhr, “John Wayne and *The Searchers*” in *The Searchers: Essays and Reflections on John Ford's Classic Western*, eds. Arthur Eckstein & Peter Lehman (Detroit, Wayne State University Press, 2004), p. 75.

<sup>11</sup> Barry, *Visual Intelligence*, p. 278.

<sup>12</sup> Deeper analysis of Victorian manliness can be found in Stephen J. Ducat, *The Wimp Factor: Gender Gaps, Holy Wars, & The Politics of Anxious Masculinity* (Boston: Beacon, 2004). An analysis of Rooseveltian masculinity can also be found in Gail Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization: A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States, 1880-1917* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995).

associations but paired them with a generally more rugged and coarse demeanor.<sup>13</sup> The cowboy lives on to this day as an icon of masculinity, used by everyone from John Wayne to Ronald Reagan to George Bush Jr. to invoke the connotations of that image.

But what makes the cowboy so incredibly persistent, and so distinctly American? Why him over any other image of masculinity, like a football player, a dockworker, a Minuteman, or a soldier? All of these models of masculine behavior are white, male, and reflect the norms of the time of their emergence, but the cowboy has a unique appeal. The reason for this seems to lie in the mythology of America both as a country and as a construction assumed to be the product of the ingenuity of white American men. This mythology of America is an ongoing process; it is remade and recontextualized continuously. The cowboy's depictions are important to our understanding of this mythologizing process, and the ways he has been constructed are important to learning about American masculinity in the early Cold War period.

As a consequence, we have to examine how and why cowboys experienced a surge in popularity, and were remade into a myth of American manhood, in the immediate post-war period from 1945 to 1960, and what this says about American masculinities (plural) of the era. This analysis is centered on the popular culture mediums of film and advertising, as both of these were critical to the process of the cowboy's myth-making in this period. I interpret the cowboy here as less as a single identity responding to a single list of anxieties, and more a *language* through which a multiplicity of male identities might be expressed. It is my argument that, far from a simple claim that "the cowboy responded to fears of male neurasthenia," the cowboy is a far more complicated and confusing figure. Yet all of these forms of the cowboy are part of a mythology constructed around the Old West.

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<sup>13</sup> This also works in reverse: Theodore Roosevelt's regiment in the US Army was known as the "Rough Riders," playing on cowboy images.

I should clarify here on what I mean when I say “mythology.” I follow Richard Slotkin in interpreting mythology as “a deeply encoded set of metaphors that may contain all of the ‘lessons’ we have learned from our history, and all of the essential elements of our world view. Myth exists for us as a set of keywords which refer us to our traditions.”<sup>14</sup> It is a transmission of information from a culture to the individuals which comprise it, carried out in coded language. Myths are means of dealing with the anxieties of society through the medium of metaphor, where “stories of struggles and quests, gods and heroes act out the conflicts symbolically.”<sup>15</sup> A mythology exists to impart specific messages to the people who consume it, forged in accordance with the values of those who created it. These mythologies are specific to culture; in this case, I am studying the mythologies constructed by the American white middle class of the 1950s of what it means to be a white American.

But how does myth-making work in this context? I study advertising and film here because they were, factually, some of the most prominent means by which conceptions of the cowboy were codified in the 1950s, for reasons I will be exploring in their respective sections. Both advertising and film are mediums that are specifically tailored to mass audiences. They must appeal to something *in* their audiences: something that audience fears, something they want, or something which they otherwise appreciate. They are both constructed and artificial, but they must appeal to some actual need of the audience which can be used to sell product.

Chris Wharton notes that “advertising needs to seek out people’s real lives and existences and speak to their needs and desires [...] in order to be successful [it] needs to sell us a view of the world and by implication a view of ourselves, our relations with others and the world we live

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<sup>14</sup> Richard Slotkin, *The Fatal Environment: The Myth of the Frontier in the Age of Industrialization, 1800-1890* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1998, reprint of 1985 original), p. 16.

<sup>15</sup> David H. Murdoch, *The American West: The Invention of a Myth* (Reno: University of Nevada Press, 2001), p. 15.

in. Advertising both reflects that world and shapes it.”<sup>16</sup> Accordingly, advertising can be conceived of as a medium which (1) attempts to appeal to particular audiences and affect their worldview and (2) is a product of the worldviews of that audience. Filmmakers do something similar. As Jill Nelmes puts it, “the audience will have been attracted to the film from broadly similar reasons to do with narrative, genre and star expectations [...] [and] the film most usually reflect[s] ideological values that are generally accepted as common sense by the majority of the audience.”<sup>17</sup> Film is thus a product of the society in which it was developed, either implicitly, since it reflects the norms of that society, or explicitly, since it must be marketed to a particular audience’s expectations. This makes films extremely valuable as barometers of culture.

Both advertising and film were especially ubiquitous in early Cold War America. Motion pictures emerged before the First World War as a central part of American popular culture; they are perhaps the only major cultural form which developed in working-class milieus prior to spreading to the middle- and upper-classes (in the 1920s). This broad class appeal has, since then, cemented film as ubiquitous in American culture. Advertising, too, exploded in popularity with the growing power of consumer society in the 1950s, existing all around us, on billboards, magazines, newspapers, television, radio, and any number of other mediums. But because both are indirectly beholden to their targeted audiences, both advertising and film can be read *backwards* as reflections of the presumed values of their targeted audiences: as reflections of the societies that produced a particular iteration of them. We might thus be able to determine something about American middle-class white men in the 1950s by analyzing the media that targeted them, without needing to rely on the words of one or two commentators and interpreting their statements on American society as necessarily true of the entire country.

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<sup>16</sup> Chris Wharton, *Advertising: Critical Approaches* (New York: Routledge, 2015), p. 6.

<sup>17</sup> Jill Nelmes, ed. *Introduction to Film Studies* (New York: Routledge, 2012), p. 130.

It is not my intention, as a result, to present a tidy history where everything can be boiled down to one or two significant factors, because advertising and film are inexact sciences, and so is history.<sup>18</sup> Many histories of masculinity, like Michael Kimmel's *Manhood in America*, opt for a somewhat neater interpretation of history through the use of the trope of the "crisis of masculinity" as a fundamental means of explaining changes in the disposition or orientation of ideals of manhood.<sup>19</sup> This refers a "collapse of the basic pattern by which men have traditionally fulfilled the code of masculine role behavior, namely, the good-provider role, and the resultant intensification of the gender role strain."<sup>20</sup> The implication here is that there is at least one pivotal moment in history at which the male gender has been transformed via a traumatic psychological shift, split into discrete categories of "masculinity then" and "masculinity now" by a moment of periodization or a discrete collection of fears or anxieties. This is typically announced by the declarations of Great Men, who have often spoken at great length about a crisis of manhood, either as an impetus to political or military action or as a general fear—and in Theodore Roosevelt's case, all of the above.<sup>21</sup>

Recent writers, like Tim Edwards and James Gilbert have challenged the perception of a masculinity crisis, noting that the rhetoric of male crisis in historical work began in the 1950s, during a time of an uncommon fixation on gender, the idea of a large-scale paradigm shift in masculinity being the result of this perception.<sup>22</sup> This should not be taken lightly. Much as the

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<sup>18</sup> This history is a mess! This mess is history! Zach Weinersmith sums it up best: Saturday Morning Breakfast Cereal. "Most Important Driver of History," accessed Mar. 9, 2016. <http://www.smbc-comics.com/index.php?db=comics&id=2947>

<sup>19</sup> Kimmel, *Manhood in America*.

<sup>20</sup> Ronald Levant, "Men and Masculinity" in ed. Judith Worell, *Encyclopedia of Women and Gender: Sex Similarities and Differences and the Impact of Society on Gender*, Vol. 2. (London: Academic, 2002), p. 718.

<sup>21</sup> See Theodore Roosevelt, "The Strenuous Life." Speech at Hamilton Club, Chicago. April 10, 1899.

<sup>22</sup> Tim Edwards, *Cultures of Masculinity* (New York: Routledge, 2006), p. 19. The accepted standard seems to be calling it a "so-called" crisis of masculinity or through the extremely liberal use of scare quotes... both of which I am doing here. Many of these works seem to have changed nothing about their analysis except replacing "crisis of masculinity" with "so-called crisis of masculinity," and "what the 1950s were like" with "what men believed the

assumption that war is necessarily a critical turning point in human history or that “Great Men” are the principal drivers of history predisposes historians to view history before wars as necessarily oriented *towards* that war, the idea of a crisis of masculinity orients any history of men towards itself.<sup>23</sup> It privileges a view of history that shoves events into lists of “factors leading to the crisis” and “results of the crisis”—the idea that this factor or the other *led to* or *emerged from* the crisis—when the idea itself of a crisis needs to be questioned. Gilbert notes that the so-called crisis is a historical projection that was itself constructed as a genre by gender-complaint writers in the 1940s and 50s, so we need to be very careful about how we treat histories of masculinity from that period.

He also notes that it is possible for the Great Men that have often been taken at face value as indicators of crisis to have been “reacting with hostility to the changes that other men in society were quite happy to accept.”<sup>24</sup> While it is certainly true that people writing about the so-called crisis may have been anxious about their status, or fearful of the changing boundaries of racial and gender orders, and accordingly engaging in a policing of boundaries, care must be taken to not unduly extend this perception to all men of a particular period rather than situating them in time, class, race, and such. It is doubtlessly true that *something* related to masculinity happened in the 1950s, but the answer is more fluid and dynamic than a simple narrative of crisis or a single set of anxieties.

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1950s were like”... which may say something about the way gender-crisis literature has shaped the assumptions of our field.

<sup>23</sup> Jane Tompkins addresses this assumption, and many others, in Jane Tompkins, *West of Everything: The Inner Life of Westerns* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), p. 28. How many people’s high school history classes, for instance, had lists of “factors that led to World War One?” The alliance system, the British naval arms race, the French desire to retake Alsace and Lorraine, territorial rivalries between all involved; these were contributing factors, to be sure, but they are understood solely in the context of a narrative about World War One. Similarly, histories of male crisis reproduce themselves by interpreting any developments in masculinity as being part of a narrative of male crisis.

<sup>24</sup> James Gilbert, *Men in the Middle: Searching for Masculinity in the 1950s* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), p. 9.

For my own part, I am of the same tradition as Gilbert. I shy away from calling it a “crisis of masculinity” both for the reason Gilbert articulates as well as its troublesome implications that there is a single strain of masculinity as opposed to a multiplicity of diverse masculinities, and that there are distinct “pre-crisis” and “post-crisis” periods. It is undeniably true that America in the 1940s and 50s was heavily concerned with gender, and that ideals of what it meant to be a man or woman came to the fore rapidly, with political implications. But this is a constant process of change unbroken by singular moments of violent shift: these changes are better described as accelerations of existing trends, experienced differently along lines of race, gender, sexuality and class.<sup>25</sup>

What this means is that the first fifteen years of the Cold War were not just “a time of anxiety” or a “a time of crisis of masculinity,” and even within the outwardly narrow-sounding confines of white, male, heterosexual, middle-class America there was a surprising amount of difference lurking below the surface of conformist suburbia. If conformity, then, is the most visible presentation of white middle-class American men in the period, other means of tracing societal anxieties should be analyzed. The diverse ways that cowboys and denim were mythologized in film and advertising can thus be analyzed as a surrogate for the ways that white middle-class American men navigated the shifting social circumstances of the early Cold War: consumerism, industrialization, shifts in the boundaries of gender and race, social conformity, political uncertainty, and an absolutely relentless anti-Communism.

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<sup>25</sup> It is more akin to the term “constant crisis,” although this is also a troubling term in that it implies masculinity is always fragile and endangered, which “elides the operations of power and creates false equivalencies.” The reality is that gender is always in flux and change. This change is not necessarily negative or violent, but simply *is*. Masculinity is a constructed concept, and accordingly it shifts in accordance with those who construct it. Toby Ditz, “The new men’s history and the peculiar absence of gendered power: some remedies from early American gender history,” *Gender and History*, No. 16, 2004, pp. 5-6.

Some questions follow to get us started: Why did the cowboy have such great cultural power in this period? How did cowboys become a symbol of white masculinity by the time of the early Cold War? What can we observe from his shifting and conflicting depictions, and how did this polymorphic nature add to his appeal? What aspects of him appealed to a white, middle-class male audience, and how did those aspects differ depending on other factors? What does the mythologization of cowboys in such diverse forms say about American men? All these questions and more will be explored at length, in order to show how the diverse ways in which cowboys were mythologized through film and advertising reflected and reinforced the shifting social circumstances faced by American men in the 1950s.

## Chapter I: Surveying the Landscape

Cowboys became ubiquitous in the 1950s thanks to a number of factors, principally those of gender, race and sexuality. In order to explore how they attained this state of ubiquity, however, we need to explore some of the context of the immediate post-Second World War period. It would be a difficult venture to capture, for our part, the essential spirit of what it means to exist in the 2010s; depictions of America in the 1950s sometimes reduce it to a trite one-sentence summary, which is not especially useful in demonstrating the variegated dynamics that inform the cowboy's image.<sup>1</sup> The early stages of the Cold War marked the acceleration of numerous trends both as a result of and in response to changing socioeconomic conditions. American men returned from the Second World War abroad to a changed situation at home; women now worked in the factories in the throes of industrial expansion, and a culture of consumerism was created thanks to pent-up consumer demand. The GI Bill and other federal policies distributed wealth to the middle-class, who could then spend that money on the consumer goods they desired. The immediate post-war period, then, was a time of flux for the men of the growing American middle class, as they negotiated relatively rapid change and reacted in differing ways to it.

While the so-called crisis of masculinity is again an overstatement, the situation of the war introduced complications to the imagined order of gender, race and sexuality. During the war, emergency measures led to more and more women entering professional domains once thought of as inherently masculine, as corporate policy changed from barring women to actively recruiting them and pushing them into "men's jobs" as a patriotic duty so as to take advantage of

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<sup>1</sup> The effect is kind of like Foucault's critique of the popular image of Victorian society being summed up, effectively, as a time of sexual repression. In the same way, an image of early Cold War America as simply "a time of return to an imagined tradition" or "a time of fear of nuclear annihilation" do a disservice to history's depth. This is the first and last time I reference Foucault in this entire work, thankfully. Michel Foucault, *History of Sexuality, Vol. 1: An Introduction* (New York: Pantheon, 1978), pp. 17-50.

the booming post-Depression war economy.<sup>2</sup> By 1942, only 13 percent of polled Americans had any objection to wives working outside the domestic sphere.<sup>3</sup> Yet by the end of the war in 1945, pressures by men to push women back to the home and act as homemakers increased as part of an informal policy of what Elaine Tyler May has called “domestic containment.”<sup>4</sup>

Containment is perhaps the most well-known keyword in Cold War American national security. It was a seemingly defensive political strategy based on keeping the Soviet Union, and its Communist ideology, in a state of stalemate by clearly proscribing spheres of influence. At home, though, this met something different. Domestic containment was another manifestation of this kind of idea on a smaller scale: the central idea, as May puts it, is that that “if subversive individuals could be contained and prevented from spreading their poisonous influence through the body politic, then the society could feel secure.”<sup>5</sup> This was a kind of microcosm of the lines being drawn on maps in the American government, and another manifestation of the United States’ obsessive demonization of Communists following the Red Scare of 1919-1920.<sup>6</sup>

Social forces deemed perverse, like Communism, were to be kept at bay with spheres of influence at home by enforced non-deviance and conformity. Activity that was outside the bounds of a semi-mythological Christian “traditional, stable (white) family” of a masculine breadwinner husband and a feminine stay-at-home wife and mother taking care of her children was viewed with some suspicion. These pressures took social forms. A social push, both from this and from a Depression-era yearning for stability, made the home an effective battleground

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<sup>2</sup> Elaine Tyler May, *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era* (New York: Basic Books, 1999), p. 50.

<sup>3</sup> Polls originally cited in Peter Filene, *Him/Her/Self: Sex Roles in Modern America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986), p.161-62. Referenced through May, *Homeward Bound*, p. 50.

<sup>4</sup> May, *Homeward Bound*, p. 16.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>6</sup> K.A. Cuordileone, *Manhood and American Political Culture in the Cold War* (New York: Routledge, 2005), p. xiii.

for fighting influences that were seen as corrosive to the nation itself.<sup>7</sup> This push came from different angles: governmental policy enforcing particular conceptions of proper behavior in the state apparatus, social shaming within suburban communities, and popular-culture depictions in film, many of which were tied very closely to specific codes of behavior through industry guidelines like the Motion Picture Code in effect from 1930 to 1968 (which is popularly known as the Hays Code).<sup>8</sup> Other factors, too, were seen as deviant or perverse. Southern African-American civil rights activists, labor unionists, women's rights activists, pacifists, and rebellious youths like the Beats of the 1950s rejected these conformist ideals, and were labeled as "pink" as a consequence.<sup>9</sup> Note the feminine connotations of this pejorative: those who were seen as too liberal or could be imagined as pro-Communist were overtly labeled as insufficiently masculine.

The heart of the battleground for domestic containment was principally the developing physical space of the burgeoning middle class: the suburb. Postwar suburbs, encouraged by federal mortgage subsidies, freeway construction, and municipal changes to land use, became symbols of domestic uniformity. Suburbs offered white Americans an imagined return to normality. But this perception was a mythological construction as well. Suburbs were not a new concept on an international scale, but they had previously largely been the domain of the wealthy. The particular expression of suburbia in the postwar United States, however, had a more democratic character, with a much larger demographic, and a more middle-class

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<sup>7</sup> May, *Homeward Bound*, p. 14.

<sup>8</sup> It is not my intention here to delve too deeply into the dissemination and enforcement of these social codes, as this is a whole other can of worms. However, I interpret it in line with intellectual devices like Antonio Gramsci's idea of cultural hegemony, which proposes that certain values might be woven into the fabric of a culture such that they become known as "common sense." His top-down model of imposition (i.e. the ruling class changing the rules to naturalize their power over weaker classes) dramatically overstates how this functions in this context; this was not just a push by the government or the rich to enforce norms of domestic containment, and there was plenty of room for power to move in multiple directions. It does provide a useful model for understanding how these pressures might work, though.

Antonio Gramsci. *Selections from the Prison Notebooks* (London: Electric Book Company, 1999).

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid*, p. 16.

orientation. It was also intentionally made to reflect certain values. African Americans were excluded from suburbia by de facto segregation and the Federal Housing Administration's redlining policies denied mortgages to black families, amongst others.<sup>10</sup> While institutionalized racism was publicly decried by American leaders, segregation and maltreatment persisted. Land-use and land-renewal policies targeting urban "unsightly" or "bad" neighborhoods for demolition and reconstruction also disproportionately targeted African American neighborhoods, attempting to replace them with a normative vision of white suburbia.<sup>11</sup> As white Americans filtered out of the cities to the suburbs, African Americans filtered in, and were pushed away from suburbia. Andrew Wiese suggests that "by the mid-1950s, 'suburbia' had become a spatial metaphor for whiteness itself," carefully excluding people of color to enforce a particular vision of white domesticity.<sup>12</sup>

In spite of this, however, the African American population in suburban areas increased by 1 million between 1940 and 1960, although suburbs remained segregated and African American places were "aberrant, threatening, and negatively valued" under policies of domestic containment.<sup>13</sup> For Asian-Americans and other people of color, suburbia represented an opportunity to flee the crowding of urban ethnic enclaves and build lives in spacious suburban homes.<sup>14</sup> Suburbia was thus a complex dynamic. People of color had begun to enter into the imagined white suburban space, and were carefully excluded from "white spaces," creating, in the minds of some, anxieties of race.<sup>15</sup> But suburban life also offered a comfortable routine

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<sup>10</sup> Andrew Wiese, *Places of Their Own: African American Suburbanization in the Twentieth Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), p. 162.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid*, p. 109.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid*, p. 104.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 114 & 109.

<sup>14</sup> May, *Homeward Bound*, p. 27.

<sup>15</sup> May notes that only 45 percent of whites even outside the South would remain in the neighborhood if large numbers of people of color moved in.

*Ibid*, p. 11.

wherein roles could be stabilized, and it was a place to enjoy the leisure products that emerged out of consumer society.

The Second World War had limited the amount of consumer products like automobiles and home appliances on the market, and had imposed restrictions on others in the name of preserving resources for the war effort. Wartime Levi's jeans, for instance, had their arcuates (the V-shaped back pocket stitching) painted on rather than stitched in order to preserve cotton thread.<sup>16</sup> With the end of the war, and a booming economy, though, these restrictions fell away. The "baby boom" resulting from soldiers returning home from Europe also in turn fuelled a boom in housing, which in turn fuelled a boom in consumer appliances, automobiles and other consumer goods for the home. Suburbia became a place of domestic enjoyment of consumer goods for the new and rapidly expanding middle-class. Advertising budgets correspondingly ballooned exponentially. For example, the J. Walter Thompson Co. advertising agency saw its billings increase from \$78 million by 1945 to \$172 million in 1955 and \$250 million by 1960.<sup>17</sup> This being said, not everyone was accepting of this culture of mass consumerism. There was a growing literature claiming that the rugged sprit of individualism, assumed and portrayed for the most part as masculine, was weakening via exposure to comfortable life.<sup>18</sup> This meant that domestic containment extended into the home, and what an individual purchased said something about them. Although the idea of purchases reflecting something about their purchaser was not

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<sup>16</sup> The term "arcuates" specifically refers to the shape of an arc (like that which is on the back pockets of Levi's jeans), but it also refers in a more general sense to any back pocket stitching, regardless of whether or not it actually has an arc-like shape. Back pocket stitching in a straight line or in more exotic forms is still an arcuate.

<sup>17</sup> Edd Applegate, *The Rise of Advertising in the United States: A History of Innovation to 1960* (Plymouth: Scarecrow Press, 2012), pp. 133-147.

<sup>18</sup> This was not new either: Theodore Roosevelt's "Strenuous Life," as noted earlier, warned against the power of "over-civilization." Fears of the weakening of men thanks to the influence of civilization extend far, with the late 19<sup>th</sup> century being a prominent example. It persists to this day; *Fight Club* (1999) director David Fincher articulates much the same fear: "We're designed to be hunters and we're in a society of shopping. There's nothing to kill anymore, there's nothing to fight, nothing to overcome, nothing to explore." Gavin Smith, "Inside Out: Gavin Smith Goes One-on-One with David Fincher," *Film Comment* Vol. 35, No. 5, Sept/Oct. 1999, p. 64. See also Roosevelt, "The Strenuous Life."

new (as this had, to some degree, been one of the defining features of “consumer culture” in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century), the scrutiny placed on those habits was more intense.

Domestic containment also echoed into the government. What one did in one’s home and personal life was thought to be a potential avenue for Communist infiltration. In 1950, Senator Joseph McCarthy accused the State Department of harbouring ninety-one claimed homosexuals in its ranks, sparking what David K. Johnson calls, in his work of the same name, a “lavender scare,” with the charge of “perversion” being a looming threat. Although fears of so-called perversion were bandied about prior to this by figures like Senator Kenneth Wherry, McCarthy’s accusations came about after the USSR had tested their first atomic bomb in 1949, after the beginning of the Korean War in 1950, and after Alger Hiss’ conviction for perjury in that same year.<sup>19</sup> Despite finding no examples of it, the Investigations Subcommittee of the Committee on Expenditures in Executive Department’s report declared unanimously that “sex perverts in Government constitute security risks,” citing a weakness of “moral fiber [that] makes them vulnerable to the blandishments of the foreign espionage agent.”<sup>20</sup> This claim was repeated by politicians, newspapers and other commentators.<sup>21</sup>

What this implies is interesting in terms of its relation to gender norms. Homosexuality was equated with a lack of masculinity, and thus a lack of what were perceived as masculine values like resilience.<sup>22</sup> As a transitive property, then, a lack of masculinity was perceived as

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<sup>19</sup> Randolph W. Baxter, “Homo-Hunting’ in the Early Cold War: Senator Kenneth Wherry and the Homophobic Side of McCarthyism,” *Nebraska History* No. 84, 2003, p. 122.

<sup>20</sup> Subcommittee on Investigations of the Committee on Expenditures in the Executive Departments, *Employment of Homosexuals and Other Sex Perverts in Government* (Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 1950), 5, digital reproduction accessed Feb. 17, 2016.  
<https://ecf.cand.uscourts.gov/cand/09cv2292/evidence/PX2337.pdf>

<sup>21</sup> The idea that they were perhaps contributing to this perceived security hole by setting up a big neon sign labeled “dear actual Soviet agents: here are the people who are probably going to have the most reason to hate us” was apparently unconsidered. See David K. Johnson, *The Lavender Scare: The Cold War Persecution of Gays and Lesbians in the Federal Government* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), pp. 114-6.

<sup>22</sup> Walter L. Hixson, *American Foreign Relations: A New Diplomatic History* (New York: Routledge, 2016), p. 260.

directly and immediately detrimental to the defense of the nation against Communism and other so-called deviant elements in the minds of some men. Indeed, the idea of “tough-guy masculinity was the source of language and metaphors in foreign policy discussions where clichés from western films served as descriptions of the strengths of American determination and the character of our response to threats,” so the maintenance of a specifically white masculinity that kept Others at bay was an intrinsic part of domestic containment.<sup>23</sup> This is not to say, of course, that every white heterosexual man was involved in repelling non-traditional women and people of color and homosexuals and others, but it does show some of the prevailing conceptions of what was at stake.

In the absence of an outright “hot” war, the means of fighting the enemy had entered America itself, to be waged in homes and personal lives. Fingers were pointed, not just at a high governmental level, at those deemed possible “security risks.” On the home front (for indeed it was a “home front” of the Cold War), conformity was thus a notable pressure, strongly noted even by individuals in this time period. There are two major works that should be addressed on this theme: David Riesman’s *The Lonely Crowd* (1950) and William H. Whyte Jr.’s *The Organization Man* (1956), both sociological commentaries on American society and the rise of industrialism and politics of conformity. While I analyze them as commentaries on what a certain section of American white men believed, I do not wish to interpret them as an entirely factual interpretation of what American men of the 1950s believed. But both were widely read and disseminated, kicking off hundreds of derivative works, and they reveal something about what people were *thinking about*, either prior to them being written or as a result of it. The manners in which these works articulated their arguments, too, provided the vocabulary for men to discuss perceived issues.

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<sup>23</sup> Gilbert, *Men in the Middle*, p. 3.

Riesman, a sociologist, set out to identify and critically analyze the primary characteristics of what he called tradition-directed, inner-directed, and other-directed societies, as they related to America.<sup>24</sup> He argues that tradition-directed societies were intensely bound by old patterns of life, with little innovation or attempts to progress along an assumed industrial-capitalist direction. Along with many Eastern countries, Riesman considered the Middle Ages in western society to be an example of a period “in which the majority were tradition-directed.”<sup>25</sup> More relevantly, he identifies a period of transition centered on the Industrial Revolution where, he claims, American society as a whole experienced a shift from inner-direction to other-direction. He argues that inner-directed peoples, emerging in Western society with the Renaissance and Reformation, were marked by expansion, original thought and “character types who can manage to live socially without strict and self-evident tradition-direction.”<sup>26</sup> The fundamental source of direction for an inner-directed individual in this model is implanted by parents and elders but nonetheless proceeds with human agency towards an objective, filtering choice through a “rigid though highly individualized character.”<sup>27</sup> In this regard, at the expense of some rigidity, the inner-directed individual forges their own way forward, less concerned with ritual and more about their own personal agency and ability.

The other-directed type, as Riesman calls it, is somewhat more dismal in prospects. He identifies this type as being the product of then-contemporary American society, “in the upper middle class of [American] larger cities: more prominently in New York than in Boston, in Los Angeles than in Spokane, in Cincinnati than in Chillicothe.”<sup>28</sup> This is to say that there was something about the city environment that made the development of an other-directed society

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<sup>24</sup> David Riesman, *The Lonely Crowd* (New York: Yale University, 1989, reprint of 1950 original), p. 8.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid*, p. 12.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid*, p. 14.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid*, p. 15.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid*, p. 19.

more likely. In this case, Riesman argues that the overall character of post-war American cities is that of other-directedness, that is, being less concerned with one's own desires and character and more concerned with others' approval in light of urban bureaucracy and suburban comfort. He pins some of the blame on parental failure to teach inner-directed values: "parents make him feel guilty not so much about violation of inner standards as about failure to be popular or otherwise to manage his relations with [...] other children."<sup>29</sup> This creates a situation wherein a child is more concerned with sociality than having inner-direction. He also cites a lack of parental certainty about how to raise children brought on by destabilization of certainties in the workplace, and a turn to mass media as a means of raising children in the absence of self-assurance.<sup>30</sup> Thus, he identifies as primary causes of other-directedness the comforts of suburban society, workplace bureaucracy and poor parenting brought on by changes in types of work.

What this says is that Riesman perceived the rugged, individualist spirit often associated with masculinity as weakening in response to modern conditions.<sup>31</sup> His presentation of other-direction is akin to that of a virus, as he warns his readers that "we may assume that, unless present trends are reversed, the hegemony of other-direction lies not far off."<sup>32</sup> There is an inherent call to action here, with the potential to reverse the perceived weakening of men. The book was met with enthusiastic sales, and garnered Riesman a reputation as an "all-purpose critic of social and cultural affairs" despite him later noting that its findings and methods were

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<sup>29</sup> Note the gendering of the child here: "the parents make *him* feel guilty about *his* relations..." in *Ibid*, p. 21.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 49-51.

<sup>31</sup> One might crudely overlay discussions of male neurasthenia in the late 1800s/early 1900s here; that is, the idea that the "comforts [...] and cultural refinements that were so characteristic of America's superior civilization" was weakening men by softening their hard edges via physical weakening of the nerves. This is not so much the same fear repeating itself – "history repeats itself" is a trite idiom – but rather a marker of continuity in anxieties about white American manhood. See Ducat, *The Wimp Factor*, p. 67.

<sup>32</sup> Riesman, *Lonely Crowd*, p. 20.

uncertain.<sup>33</sup> This provided a language with which to discuss the potential for other-directedness and indicated a popular discussion about conformity's effects.

A similar discourse can be seen in William H. Whyte's *The Organization Man*, a sociological commentary on the culture emerging around industrial bureaucracy and its perceived effects on men. Whyte describes the rise of the titular "Organization Man" who emerged from the decline of the Protestant ethic: that is, struggle no longer necessarily garnered material reward thanks to large organizations often being dominated by those who "by birth and personal connections had the breaks."<sup>34</sup> He argues that "The Organization"—the collective structure and culture erected around post-war industrial-consumer society—caused the average American to invest more faith in collectivity, and spread the notion that collective entities like the Organization were capable of making better and more informed decisions than a single person, no matter how rugged or individualist.

The "committee way," he argues, is the only way to succeed in business thanks to layers and layers of administration and management, stifling the "great entrepreneurial spirit" of America.<sup>35</sup> The Organization emerges as a foe: something to be fought in cultural warfare. Whyte places the onus on the individual man, rather than society, to do battle with The Organization for the sake of his own individuality, "for the demands of his surrender are constant and powerful, and the more he has come to like the life of organization the more difficult does he find it to resist these demands, or even to recognize them."<sup>36</sup> Before he "turns" into an

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<sup>33</sup> Steven Welland, *Intellectual Craftsmen: Ways and Works in American Scholarship* (New Brunswick: Transaction, 1991), p. 93.

<sup>34</sup> William H. Whyte, Jr. *The Organization Man* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1956), p. 17.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid*, p. 18.

<sup>36</sup> He notes towards this end that "the fault is not in the pressures of industrial society—an agrarian society has pressures as powerful—but in the stance we assume before these pressures." *Ibid*, p. 399 & 404.

Organization Man, Whyte implies, a man must reassert his individuality and become less obliging and submissive to the way of industrial society.

Parallels between *Organization Man* and *Lonely Crowd* can already be observed. They both hold that industrial society has stifled individualism and inner-direction in favor of a collective society that is more concerned with placating others and allowing their opinions to direct the actions of the individual (i.e. other-direction).<sup>37</sup> But Whyte was also concerned with economics, and how the people of suburban America spent their money. The post-war consumer culture provided suburban middle-class Americans with goods to purchase and media to consume. He explains that young couples of the time “are extremely budget-conscious. They can rattle off most of their monthly payments down to the last penny; even their ‘impulse buying’ is deliberately planned.”<sup>38</sup> He also articulates a sentiment of “inconspicuous consumption” that pervades suburban society, with the goal being not to keep up with the Joneses, but to “keep *down* with them [...] a neighbor vaunting worldly goods [...] is an offense – not to them individually, mind you, but to the community.”<sup>39</sup>

We might thus infer that the suburban society Whyte describes was increasingly concerned with other-directed appearances, and that people intentionally spent to cultivate an air of not being outside one’s means or otherwise showy with their purchases. Whyte notes that the residents of suburbia were deliberate about this imagery, “maintain[ing] that their suburbia not only looks classless but *is* classless.”<sup>40</sup> From this we can observe Whyte’s thesis on suburbia: that the other-directed middle-class in American suburbs desired pretensions of classlessness and

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<sup>37</sup> Whyte also specifically uses the terms “other-directed” at some points in the book. Clearly he is writing in the context of a society that has already accepted Riesman’s observations.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid*, p. 322.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid*, p. 313.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid*, p. 299.

the appearance of conformism, being unfettered by luxury and consumer culture in spite of their flirting with it.

Whyte thus articulated a sentiment akin to that of Riesman; that is, the idea that rugged individualism was being stamped out by consumerism and industrialism, “reducing individuality to styles of consumption.”<sup>41</sup> A call to action is a central element of both works, calling for active opposition to the trends of urbanization and industrial consumerism, which Riesman and Whyte identify as the central threats to American manhood. It would be a mistake to assume that any of these works spoke for all men, or even a *majority* of men, necessarily, but this does give us some idea of the specific composition of the discussions surrounding white masculinity in this period: other-directedness, over-civilization, and a bureaucratic structure that kills individuality.

Others blamed different targets. Acerbic polemics like Philip Wylie’s *Generation of Vipers* (1942) establish women, rather than business, as the more fundamental reason for the creation of other-directed men.<sup>42</sup> In *Generation of Vipers*’ tenth chapter, “Common Women,” Wylie denounces “momism” as the fundamental illness facing America; that is, that the state of American motherhood is the factor at the source of American decline, and that a “matriarchy” has consumed American society. His commentary constructs a particular image of “mom” as encouraging other-directedness in men by smothering them as boys, dismissing their inner-directed aspirations, for instance, of “being a surveyor in the Andes [...] so there was nothing left

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<sup>41</sup> Gilbert, *Men in the Middle*, p. 10.

<sup>42</sup> I am generally loath to use terms that are so ideologically loaded when introducing a work—they colour the reader’s perspective unfairly, after all—but these terms very adequately describe the book’s tone. He goes as far as comparing the figure of “mom” to Hitler and Goebbels. Some of this might be dismissed, or at least mitigated, by an attempt at exaggerated, racy humor, but Wylie himself appears to flip-flop on this issue. Rebecca Jo Plant notes in *Mom: The Transformation of Motherhood in Modern America* that Wylie recalled repressed memories of sexual abuse by his mother. In unpublished archival materials, he describes a preoccupation with homosexuality and sexual bodily indeterminacy. He speculates that these created in him a sense of resentment towards matriarchal figures, leaving me unconvinced of his claim of satire (or, at least, the idea that it was *completely* satire). Philip Wylie, *Generation of Vipers* (New York: Rinehart & Company Inc., 1962, reprint of 1942 original), p. 189. See also Rebecca Jo Plant, *Mom: The Transformation of Motherhood in Modern America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), p. 23.

to do [...] but to take a stockroom job in the hairpin factory and try to work up to the vice presidency.”<sup>43</sup> Here, he observes, the “mom” figure erodes the inner-direction of the male child, giving them no alternative but to work in the bureaucracy of industry in a job producing—of course—products for women. Mothers are thus reconstituted as actively involved in the erosion of masculine authority and power.

The Organization too, he claims, had become a tool of moms: “mom is organization-minded. Organization, she has happily discovered, are intimidating to all men, not just to mere men. [...] Mom has many such organizations, the real purpose of which is to compel an abject compliance of her environs to her personal desires.”<sup>44</sup> Wylie portrays maternal figures as selfish and violent, “rap[ing] the men, not sexually, unfortunately, but morally, since neuters come hard by morals.”<sup>45</sup> He thus demonstrates, in the span of one sentence, his own perceived sexual superiority to women, his perception of mothers eroding American men’s moralities, and a dismissal of anyone outside the bounds of a male/female dichotomy (leaving “real” men as the sole saviors of society).<sup>46</sup>

*Generation of Vipers*, in three years, had sold over 75,000 copies, and by 1955 it had sold over 180,000.<sup>47</sup> Wylie at times claimed the work was a satire, but at other times he expressed a sentiment that he had struck an important nerve.<sup>48</sup> In a footnote to the 1955 edition of the book, he claimed that he had entered “momism” indelibly into the cultural landscape, and argued that

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<sup>43</sup> *Ibid*, p. 189.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid*, p. 192.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid*, p. 189. Yikes...

<sup>46</sup> He also denigrates women’s suffrage with the claim that “mom’s first gracious presence at the ballot-box was roughly concomitant with the start toward a new all-time low in political scurviness, hoodlumism, gangsterism, labor strife, monopolistic thuggery, moral degeneration, civic corruption, smuggling, bribery, theft, murder, homosexuality, drunkenness, financial depression, chaos and war.” Truly an enlightened discourse. I am more inclined to believe the satire in this section, although Poe’s Law is in effect as usual. *Ibid*, p. 191.

<sup>47</sup> Plant, *Mom*, p. 19.

<sup>48</sup> Wylie, in a 1954 interview with the *New York Times*, expressed resentment that “that’s the first thing they’ll put in my obituary—a woman hater. Me.” He was not far off the mark. Philip Wylie, Interview with *New York Times*, 1954, reported in Plant, *Mom*, p. 20.

the resultant “pouring out[of] articles, monographs, bulletins, research reports and shelves of books show[ed] how right [he] was to speak as [he] did of a certain, prevalent sub-species of middle-class American woman.<sup>49</sup> Although he was certainly looking to stir the pot once more, he was not wrong about the body of literature that emerged from the book on “momism,” which had entered the American public consciousness as vocabulary to describe a perception of over-mothering.

A host of other works followed the trail blazed by Wylie, including Edward A. Strecker’s *Their Mothers’ Sons: The Psychiatrist Examines an American Problem* (1946), Ferdinand Lundberg & Marynia F. Farnham’s *Modern Woman: The Lost Sex* (1947), Strecker’s *Their Mothers’ Daughters* (1956) and more. All of these works attempted to categorize mothers into different “types” as a means of tracing how their children grew up, with an implicit assertion that mothering incorrectly could lead to other-directedness.<sup>50</sup> The fear of momism infiltrated magazines like *Look*’s series on “The American Male” (republished as an essay collection under the title *The Decline of the American Male* in 1958), with such titles as “Why Is He Afraid to Be Different?” “Why Do Women Dominate Him?” and “Why Does He Work So Hard?” all of which had self-explanatory contents and overt anxieties about the masculinity of the era.<sup>51</sup> The fear of men being ruined by female figures also manifested itself in men’s magazines, with such titles as “I Wouldn’t Marry a Virgin” and “American Males are Afraid of Sex” prominently displayed on their covers.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Quoted in Wolfgang Lederer, *The Fear of Women* (New York: Harcourt, 1968), 68 and in turn quoted in Roel van den Oever, *Mama’s Boy: Momism and Homophobia in Postwar American Culture* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 7.

<sup>50</sup> Full examinations of all of these are in van den Oever, *Mama’s Boy*, pp. 8-13.

<sup>51</sup> George B. Leonard Jr., “Why Is He Afraid To Be Different?” Robert Moskin, “Why Do Women Dominate Him?” & William Attwood, “Why Does He Work So Hard?” in *The Decline of the American Male* (New York: Random House, 1958).

<sup>52</sup> These magazines had some truly bizarre claims on the front, so I wouldn’t take them *too* seriously, but they are certainly things that were discussed. Frank Zappa’s *Weasels Ripped My Flesh*, notably, takes its incredible title

All this demonstrates, in short, several prominent topics of discussion in the 1945-1960 period: the fear that conformity was stifling American masculine individualism, the fear that women were in some way involved in the process of “conversion” from inner-direction to outer-direction, the desire to appear classless, and the push to subvert or somehow fight “The Organization.” Although the cowboy had been a figure of note in America prior to the 1950s—especially immediately after Frederick Jackson Turner announced the closing of the frontier in 1893—he took on new roles and expanded in popularity as result of these sociocultural conditions. All this served to give him a frontier to traverse, a horse to ride, and a gun to shoot.

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verbatim from a *Man's Life* cover. See Will Hulsey. *They Cheat Death*, cover of *Man's Life*, September 1954, digital reproduction accessed Mar. 1, 2016. <http://www.coverbrowser.com/image/mans-life/3-1.jpg>  
See also Will Hulsey. *Crushed by 20 Feet of Coiling Death*, cover of *Man's Life*, September 1957, digital reproduction accessed Mar. 1, 2016. <http://www.coverbrowser.com/image/mans-life/9-1.jpg>  
See also Will Hulsey. *Weasels Ripped My Flesh*, cover of *Man's Life*, September 1956, digital reproduction accessed Mar. 1, 2016. <https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/en/8/8e/ManAgainstWeasel.jpg>

## Chapter II: Fireside Stories

*Guitar strings glittered under the Texas sun, seeming to sweat beneath its gaze. The band behind him played one final chord, harmonizing with his voice, and the crowd at the saloon broke into raucous applause. One of the frets buzzed under his finger as he looked up – saw the raised tomahawk reflect the sunlight, an arc of white about to descend on the cavalryman’s neck, saw the Indian’s face contort in concentration, saw the soldier open his eyes wide, just barely aware of the ambusher’s presence. The guitar fell from his hands, announcing its arrival at the ground with dissonance, as he drew his six-shooter. BANG! The crowd went silent. The tomahawk went careening into the wall behind the Indian, who stared stunned at his hands. The cavalryman turned and barreled him to the floor. The cowboy took a bow. “And that’s how a Texas Ranger does things, folks!”*

The cowboy is perhaps the most prominent figure in Americana, and has been used in advertising, fiction, and politics as a symbol of America itself. In the popular culture conception, the cowboy is a figure of frontier justice dispensed at the business end of a gun, be it a Colt revolver or a Winchester rifle, by stone-cold gritty badasses and singers who could never lose their hats alike. In each guise, he is a strong white man with a quick revolver draw fighting off foes foreign and familiar.<sup>1</sup> This, however, is a strange image to anyone who has even cursorily studied the Old West. Gun control was an important issue in the Old West, as newspaper editorials even then calling the “six-shooter [...] a relic of barbarism, as it were, in the annals of stock raising” can attest.<sup>2</sup> Your average cattleman certainly was not packing a pistol even in Texas, site of countless Westerns, where by 1882 the six-shooter had been outright banned.<sup>3</sup> The sheriffs of the Old West were, like today’s policemen, more concerned with drunks and stray dogs and minor civil disobedience than seeing any real violent action.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> This added alliterative appeal was actually absolutely accidental, assuredly.

<sup>2</sup> *Caldwell Commercial*, 2 March 1882. Reported in Richard W. Slatta, *The Mythical West: An Encyclopedia of Legend, Lore, and Popular Culture* (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 2001), p. 161. Also see Robert J. Spitzer, *Politics of Gun Control* (New York: Routledge, 2015), p. 12, and Ray Allen Billington, *Westward Expansion: A History of the American Frontier*. (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2001), p. 273.

<sup>3</sup> Slatta, *Mythical West*, p. 163.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

The whitewashed West, too, is mostly a fabrication, with Mexican *vaqueros* establishing essentially the entire basis of the cowboy image.<sup>5</sup> Some historians estimate that one in three cowboys was a Mexican *vaquero*, and that one in four cowboys was African American, an image of remarkably different racial composition to the average Western film.<sup>6</sup> More Europeanized Native American bands, as well, had “a written alphabet, a newspaper, good relations with missionaries, and, sometimes, plantations and slaves,” like nearby bands deemed “civilized” by European settlers, including the Cherokees, Creeks, Choctaws, Chickasaws, and Seminoles.<sup>7</sup> It goes without saying that works of fiction *fictionalize*, turning historical images into a more compelling or interesting or action-packed narrative, but the exact changes to the cowboy’s image that take place in the realms of Westerns and advertisements are the products of ideological narratives.

Original instances of the Old West being used for entertainment were relatively diverse. William Frederick “Buffalo Bill” Cody’s famous Buffalo Bill’s Wild West show, debuting in 1883, was essentially the first example of the Old West being used as a source of entertainment. While the show did showcase heroic white cowboys like Wild Bill Hickok, who performed “exaggerated versions of [...] his real-life adventures,”<sup>8</sup> the show was not entirely whitewashed. It featured “Indians, [...] Mexicans, Cossacks, Gauchos, Arabs, [...] American Negroes, and detachments of the fully equipped Regular Soldiers of the Armies of America, England, France,

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<sup>5</sup> See Danilo H. Figueredo, *Revolvers and Pistolas, Vaqueros and Cabelleros* (Santa Barbara: Praeger, 2015), p. 4 for more information; the sombrero was the ancestor to the cowboy hat, and ponchos and related garments served as the basis of other cowboy wear.

<sup>6</sup> Kenneth Wiggins Porter, *The Negro on the American Frontier* (New York: Arno Press, 1971). See also W. Sherman Savage, *Blacks in the West* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1976) & Quintard Taylor, *In Search of the Racial Frontier: African Americans in the American West, 1528-1990* (New York: W.W. Norton and Co., 1998).

<sup>7</sup> Patricia Nelson Limerick, *The Legacy of Conquest: The Unbroken Past of the American West* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co, 1987), p. 192.

<sup>8</sup> Joseph G. Rosa, *The Gunfighter: Man or Myth?* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1969), p. 7.

Germany, and Russia”<sup>9</sup> as part of the Grand Review of Rough Riders of the World, the show’s opening act. Additionally, historical figures of the West like Sitting Bull appeared in the show with a band of twenty braves, performing dances and other programming.<sup>10</sup> In this regard Cody “invit[ed] once-excluded peoples into the American myth,”<sup>11</sup> allowing them, as Rough Riders all, to participate in the myth of the Old West.

Historian Eric Hobsbawm calls Buffalo Bill’s show an example of the “non-ideological Western:”<sup>12</sup> a vision of the West that was more about drawing crowds and entertainment than it was about delivering any particular reference to the present day. Its heroes were multiracial. The Mexican, the Cossack, the Gaucho, the Arab, the African-American were all Rough Riders, after all; they are included in the same collective grouping as white cowboys were.<sup>13</sup> The implied “ideological Western,” then, represents a reinvention of history along the lines of a particular narrative. Hobsbawm identifies a great deal of subsequent Western films and novels as being part of a process of homogenization, where the “cowboy becomes the tall, lanky Aryan” fighting off the societal Other in an allegory for segregation, anti-immigrant sentiments, and other anxieties of the audience to which that work was directed.<sup>14</sup> Hobsbawm’s analysis of the cowboy as an ideological figure is a simplification; while this Aryan cowboy fighting off racialized Others is certainly a fair portion of Western films, the cowboy is more diverse, as we will soon be seeing. However, he is fully correct in his assertion that the cowboy in Western narratives often has an

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<sup>9</sup> Louis S. Warren, *Buffalo Bill’s America* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2005), p. 430.

<sup>10</sup> Examples of all of the above can be watched at: “BUFFALO BILL’S WILDWEST SHOW,” YouTube, 22 Feb. 2012, accessed Feb.29, 2016. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kjIH5AUglos>

<sup>11</sup> Warren, *Buffalo Bill’s America*, p. 430.

<sup>12</sup> Eric Hobsbawm, “The Myth of the Cowboy,” *The Guardian*, 20 March 2013, accessed Mar. 1, 2016. <http://www.theguardian.com/books/2013/mar/20/myth-of-the-cowboy> This is supplementary material for Chapter 21 of Hobsbawm’s *Fractured Times*, making this distinction more explicit.

<sup>13</sup> This being said, “Rough Riders of the Old West and Other Riders of the World” does not exactly fly off the tongue as well.

<sup>14</sup> As opposed to an assumed Us, the Other is a means of defining ourselves against an external group with criteria either true or imagined. Hobsbawm, “Myth of the Cowboy.”

ideological purpose, and responds in allegorical form to conditions surrounding writers who employ his image.

The use of imagery of cowboys and the Old West as a metaphor for present conditions is far from a recent construction. In 1893, Frederick Jackson Turner, an American historian from Wisconsin, set out a depiction of American democracy as being defined by its movement through frontier society, its conquering of land and its taming of nature to create civilized societies. His Frontier Thesis, as it came to be known, held that America was defined by its “coarseness and strength combined with acuteness and inquisitiveness [...] that dominant individualism, working for good or evil.”<sup>15</sup> The cowboy’s primary traits are here defined as 1) their individualism, 2) their physical power, 3) their lack of personal over-civilization, and 4) a kind of folksy rationality. The cowboy is refigured as a civilizer, an agent of white American domination of the landscapes of the Old West, carrying out a doctrine of Manifest Destiny: the divinely ordained impetus for white settlers to travel westwards and carve out, with the sweat of their brows and rugged masculine power and violence, an independent domain of America.

This conception of the American cowboy is the central agent in what renowned historian Richard Slotkin calls the Myth of the Frontier. As settlers expanded westward, the actual “frontier” disappeared into the drudgery of daily life, property disputes, and general mundanity. But the concepts of Manifest Destiny and the Frontier Thesis had taken root as a kind of origin story for American nationalism, projected both backwards into the past and forwards into the future: the story of the West became a metaphor for the creation of America. Slotkin explains the Myth of the Frontier thusly:

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<sup>15</sup> Frederick Jackson Turner, “The Significance of the Frontier in American History,” Speech at American Historical Association in Chicago, 12 July 1893.

The Myth of the Frontier was developed by and for an America that was a colonial offshoot of Europe, agrarian in economy, localistic in politics, tentative as to nationality, and relatively homogeneous in ethnicity, language and religion; yet the Myth has been most thoroughly and impressively set forth in the ninety years that followed the closing of the Wild West, in and for an America that is a preeminent world power, urban-centered and fully industrialized, centralized in government, and heterodox in culture.<sup>16</sup>

Even within under a century of the “Wild” West no longer being “wild,” the story of how American *men* settled the landscape and imposed upon it order with strength and violence and grit and individual (inner-directed) determination became enshrined in a cultural canon of the United States. Though it is told and retold, the basic story remains the same, and every depiction of the cowboy in this analysis is based on this mold despite their differences. This Myth of the Frontier is a very powerful construction that fills three primary purposes.

Firstly, it reinforces existing mythologies of Americanness and extends them. It is part of the same tradition as the Frontier Thesis and Manifest Destiny. In so doing, it upholds and underpins many of the assumed bases of American society and provides a potent backstory for America. It constructs the Frontier as something which defines America as a unique space, constructing America as a separate category to Europe and “domestic foreigners” like Native Americans.<sup>17</sup> The idea here is that although white America begins with European settlers, the crucible of masculine individualism and violence forged a land for *us* as opposed to *them*. The Myth of the Frontier projects Americanness into the past and makes it a powerful force of narrative. It takes historical events and shapes them into a narrative with a clear start, middle, and end; the actual, literal frontier is only the first step of many in the conquering of new, metaphorical frontiers.

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<sup>16</sup> Slotkin, *The Fatal Environment*, p. 15-6.

<sup>17</sup> This was outlined by the Naturalization Act of 1790, which excluded Native Americans and other subordinated groups (i.e. anyone but free white men) from citizenship. Joel Spring, *Deculturalization and the Struggle for Equality: A Brief History of the Education of Dominated Cultures in the United States* (New York, Routledge, 2016), p. 17.

Secondly, the Myth responds to particular conceptions of the present. Slotkin notes that the America that constructed the Myth of the Frontier was not very much like that of the actual frontier. It was no longer a scrappy underdog, nor an agrarian society, nor a decentralized monoculture (though the perception of the Old West as a monoculture is itself an imagination). Yet the Myth of the Frontier provides a frame of reference that posits that although America is no longer entirely a rural society, it *came from* one. As Slotkin elaborates, “myths are stories, drawn from history, that have acquired through usage over many generations a symbolizing function that is central to the cultural functioning of the society that produces them. Historical experience is preserved in the form of narrative; and through periodic retellings those narratives become traditionalized.”<sup>18</sup> What this implies is that by retelling the Myth of the Frontier a connection between past and present is necessarily created, so to say “*we* are like *them*.” The Myth of the Frontier provided a powerful context in which people in the present might liken themselves. Like the Minutemen, the Alamo, the Last Stand, and Pearl Harbor, the Frontier became a symbol plucked from its historical context.<sup>19</sup> It becomes a trope that provides a language with which one might address conditions in the present.

Thirdly, the Myth of the Frontier thus projects its narrative into the future, enshrining “lessons” about the values of the survival of the fittest and Manifest Destiny, as well as the power of inner-direction in the hands of white American men who were thought to have “civilized” the land with physical power and violence. It becomes an instructive oral history, extolling the cultural virtues of those who created it (i.e. white men) and the actions they took in so doing. It not only justifies past myths and links people in the present to the past; it also serves to fling those lessons forward into the future. Yet it is also true that these mythologies are not all

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<sup>18</sup> Slotkin, *Fatal Environment*, p. 16.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*

the same; the values presented in this mythology to be pushed into the future differ depending on the writer of a particular iteration of that myth.

The Myth of the Frontier serves to split the cowboy, effectively, into two. He is, historically speaking, a rider driving cattle to the slaughter across the plains of the American West, and in this regard he is neither a martial warrior nor a settler “civilizing” the land. But the cowboy in this conception becomes a mythological character comprised of several different roles. The cowboy in the Myth of the Frontier is remade into a martial figure, “civilizing” the land by wiping out often-racialized Others with both his gun and his practical wisdom. And while in many depictions the cowboy is a wanderer on the edge of civilization, civilization is never far behind him; in this regard his roaming is the spearhead of American westward expansion. The rugged individualist spirit evangelized by the Myth thus transforms the cattleman into the wanderer, the settler, the lawman, the rebel, the killer and the hero all in one.

The Myth of the Frontier accordingly paved the way for the popularity of the cowboy. Although he attained extreme popularity in the 1950s, his origins (at least in the context of his 1950s depictions) lie in the 1930s as depicted in powerful ideological narratives. Sandra Curtis Comstock argues that the atmosphere of the Great Depression (1929-39) played a large role in this process. Most historians estimate that nearly 25 percent of the American workforce was unemployed at its peak in 1933.<sup>20</sup> Many Southwestern farm workers migrated to California in search of opportunity. Famous and influential commentaries, like Dorothea Lange and Paul Taylor’s “Again the Covered Wagon,” drew parallels between the migration of these workers and the original frontierspeople, noting that “the refugees seeking individual protection in the traditional spirit of the American frontier by westward migration are unknowingly arrivals at

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<sup>20</sup> Timothy Hatton & Mark Thomas, “Labor Markets in Recession and Recovery: The UK and the USA in the 1920s and 1930s,” in *The Great Depression of the 1930s: Lessons for Today*, eds. Nicholas Crafts & Peter Fearon (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 330.

another frontier, one of social conflict.”<sup>21</sup> These workers are thus conceived of as not only similarly lacking in employment, but also navigating a new Frontier similar to the old one; and this new Frontier could be conquered in a similar fashion. Lange’s photographs depicted impoverished workers in Levi’s denim overalls (which were widely worn in California as a result of Levi’s originating in San Francisco), creating an association between denim and the struggle of “real Americans.”<sup>22</sup> Cowboy movie-esque imagery of men walking lonely roads in their Levis jeans and Stetson hats served to make this assertion more concrete.<sup>23</sup> Cowboys became a symbolic tool; they were a part of the parable of the new American Frontier, where people are back to working by the sweat of their brow to make ends meet and where all (white) men are equal and the lines of class were blurred. Their clothing, too, especially in the form of denim, became associated with the cowboy and the Myth of the Frontier, which advertising companies were quick to exploit (as we will be seeing in Chapter 4).

Comstock argues that the uncertainty of the Depression, and its resultant deterioration in working conditions for urban laborers elsewhere in the country, spurred on a search for the “real America,” creating narratives that likened the struggles of rural tenant farmers with urban-wage workers, jeans and cowboys serving as “mnemonic image[s]” of what American workers in the cities were facing.<sup>24</sup> She subsequently asserts that photo-magazines and newspapers full of depictions of jeans-wearing “embattled Southern textile workers, destitute sharecroppers, and

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<sup>21</sup> Dorothea Lange & Paul Taylor, “Again the Covered Wagon,” *Survey Graphic* 24, July 1935, digital reproduction, accessed Feb. 12, 2016. <http://newdeal.feri.org/survey/35348.htm>

<sup>22</sup> Michael Denning, in *The Cultural Front: The Laboring of American Culture in the Twentieth Century*, argues that the 1930s were characterized as well by a period of American nationalism celebrating on a cultural and political level the producing class of farmers and laborers, with “Americanism” being the domain of the everyman who labored unlike plutocrats or consumers. Michael Denning, *The Cultural Front: The Laboring of American Culture in the Twentieth Century* (London: Verso, 1997), p. 129.

<sup>23</sup> Sandra Curtis Comstock, “The Making of an American Icon: The Transformation of Blue Jeans during the Great Depression” in *Global Denim*, eds. Daniel Miller & Sophie Woodward (New York: Berg, 2011), p. 38.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid*, p. 36.

striking miners,” served to create emblems of Americanness.<sup>25</sup> The cycle is simple when broken down: photographers take pictures of the poorest of the poor to demonstrate what “real America” back on the effective ruins of the Frontier was experiencing, which in turn is picked up by other media to draw comparisons between rural farmers and urban workers. In this sense, the cowboy and denim became powerful symbols invested with meaning to liken the struggles of America to its most desperate. Other works, like Archibald MacLeish’s epic 1938 photo-poem *Land of the Free* and John Steinbeck’s *The Grapes of Wrath* hammered home the association of the America of the 1930s with the America of the Old West, with the Myth of the Frontier resounding. The cowboy in Levi’s jeans thus became the way for Western films to “gesture towards working-class, Western, and populist rhetorics and America’s past and present all at once.”<sup>26</sup>

Consider, for example, *Stagecoach* (1939), directed by John Ford, following a group of strangers riding through Apache country, with Geronimo’s attacks on white society serving as a backdrop. The film depicts John Wayne in his breakout role as “The Ringo Kid,” who among many others is clad in a pair of cuffed Levi’s jeans that can be dated to about 1933 or 1937.<sup>27</sup> While he is an outlaw and a coarse, rugged gunfighter by comparison to the more aristocratic fallen Southern gentleman Hatfield (John Carradine) and the villainous banker Henry Gatewood (Berton Churchill), he is portrayed as the film’s moral center; “though an outlaw, he has the most fully developed sense of community.”<sup>28</sup> He values Dallas (Claire Trevor), the prostitute, despite social censure of her profession, and is very strongly committed to what he views as his duty of

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<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 38.

<sup>27</sup> *Stagecoach*, directed by John Ford. Burbank: United Artists, 1939. Digital reproduction, accessed Feb. 10, 2016. 0:28. [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LGT5\\_Nt9gRQ](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LGT5_Nt9gRQ) Ringo’s jeans are first visible at *Ibid.*, 19:05, although the first image of a character wearing blue jeans is at *Ibid.*, 2:52. I do not have the most high-definition version of this film, but judging from the exposed back pocket rivets, back cinch, suspender buttons and lack of a red tab, they seem to look more like the 1933 revision, but it is difficult to say conclusively. The 1937 revision of the 501s had hidden back pocket rivets, but it is possible for them to have simply worn through the denim, as the pair he wears in the film looks reasonably faded. Either way, the subsequent revision was in 1944, so it is either one of these two.

<sup>28</sup> Randy Roberts & James S. Olson, *John Wayne: American* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1995), p. 162.

killing the Plummers to avenge his father and brother's deaths, claiming that "there's some things a man just can't run away from."<sup>29</sup> He plays the role of an outsider in the film, distrusted by authority but "affectionately regarded by average Americans," principally valuing his independence when he is not defending the defenseless.<sup>30</sup> In these regards Ringo is portrayed as an apparently archetypical icon of independent white masculinity, fighting off Others and making the land safe.

Denim was here used to signify a kind of rugged everyman status due to its association with the cowboy. But this is somewhat odd, historically speaking, as the film purports to be set in 1880; real cowboys did not commonly wear jeans until about the 1920s, as they often considered Levi's blue jeans to be the clothing of the poor and farmers by comparison to the (often second-hand) woolen pants they favored.<sup>31</sup> But what matters here is not so much historical accuracy, which was often thrown out the window in Westerns, but rather appealing to a middle-class mythology of attainable masculine ruggedness. Images of Dust Bowl American men in Western wear and jeans, like those in MacLeish, Steinbeck, and Lange and Taylor, contributed to a middle-class conception of cowboys and denim as transcending the boundaries of the class; they were, effectively, classless. But market realities in the denim world also did the same.

Back in the cities, Depression-era economic necessities changed the American consumer landscape. The Smoot-Hawley Tariff Act (1930) raised import duties on imports from Europe, including the Parisian fashion houses that were highly influential in women's fashion; department stores switched their focus, using the shock value of selling denim dungarees (still

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<sup>29</sup> *Stagecoach*, 1:01:24. His commitment to his duty also shows up at *Ibid*, 31:12: "Not 'till I finish the job." Steinbeck's *Grapes of Wrath* echoed this sentiment: "I know this – a man got to do what he got to do." John Steinbeck, *Grapes of Wrath* (New York: Penguin, 2006, reprint of 1939 original), p. 224.

<sup>30</sup> Roberts & Olson, *John Wayne*, p. 165.

<sup>31</sup> Jeremy Agnew, *The Old West in Fact and Film: History Versus Hollywood* (Jefferson: McFarland & Company, 2012), p. 126.

thought of as low-class) as a means of asserting freedom from Parisian domination.<sup>32</sup> Celebrities like Greta Garbo wore them as well, piggybacking on their sartorial edginess.<sup>33</sup> The National Recovery Administration (NRA, 1933) also mandated that the national government develop codes stabilizing labor costs as a means of helping keep the economy afloat. The NRA’s “Cotton



**Figure 1:** Levi Strauss & Co., “Mens Bib Overall Dealer Adv.” Ad mat, 1927 (but see text). Digital reproduction. <http://i.imgur.com/3dUuaOw.png>  
 Also appears in Lynn Downey, *Levi Strauss & Co.* (Charlston: Arcadia Publishing, 2007), p. 57.

**Figure 2:** Levi Strauss & Co., “Wheeee.” Print advertisement, 1937. Digital reproduction. <http://i.imgur.com/4JFW07Z.jpg>  
 Also appears in Downey, *Levi Strauss & Co.*, p. 61.

<sup>32</sup> Comstock, “Making of an American Icon,” p. 28.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid*, p. 24.

Code” preserved existing ideas of “tiers” of skill in clothing manufacture (in the order of women’s clothing at the top, men’s clothing, cotton clothing and work clothing at the bottom), standardizing a hierarchy of wages where “work clothing” was paid the least in accordance with their perceived lack of skill.<sup>34</sup> In an attempt to minimize costs, department stores began to observe that it was in their best interests to exploit these discrepancies in wages by playing contractors against each other – by getting contractors to produce “work clothing” that was nonetheless fashionable and appealing to customers.

Levi’s, by the 1930s, was in a time of market transition. In the 1920s, the company had marketed principally to working-class men, with advertisements like those in Figure 1, a Levi’s ad mat (a collection of ads distributed to store owners so they could place advertisements in their local newspaper), being typical of the period. Advertisements of this sort appeared in local newspapers like the *Woodland Daily Democrat*, from Woodland, California, in which the top-right ad appeared in the August 25<sup>th</sup>, 1924 issue.<sup>35</sup> They are not glamorous by any means, focusing on “pleas[ing] the most exacting workingman” with practical stress on their roominess (and hence mobility) and “satisfactory wear” with a guarantee of a new pair free if they rip or the buttons detach. The primary factor here is their durability: they are advertised as “outwear[ing] any other make.” But there is a shift in their marketing philosophy in the 1930s.

Unemployment and plummeting farm income spurred by the Depression led to a decline in spending by rural laborers (i.e. the principal audience of workwear designed for actual work).<sup>36</sup> Larger chain stores wielded superior purchasing in these conditions, and could force

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<sup>34</sup> *Ibid*, p. 29.

<sup>35</sup> *Woodland Daily Democrat*, August 25, 1924, p. 12, digital reproduction at Newspapers.com, accessed Mar. 20, 2016. <https://www.newspapers.com/newspage/52334967/> This site requires a subscription, but the ad is visible in the small preview image, in the top-left of the page.

<sup>36</sup> *Business World*, *New York Times*, 4 February 1932. Referenced in Comstock, “Making of an American Icon,” p. 34.

concessions from workers and manufacturers out of desperation, allowing them to undercut the local stores upon which brands like Levi's and Lee depended. Workers could no longer afford to buy from local chains, and many stopped paying for jeans they had purchased on credit.<sup>37</sup> The National Labor Relations Act (or the Wagner Act) of 1935 put the force of the government behind the right of collective bargaining, leading to a massive expansion in unionization, which had far-reaching implications. Labor unrest in California from 1933-4, fomented by poor treatment of workers in the fields and factories, created a workers' campaign to buy union-made goods only and boycott those that did not support union action. Levi's did not allow for unions until 1937, meaning that their business among actual working-class labourers suffered, so they focused on targeting a middle-class demographic. Playing off the popularity of "dude ranches," a form of agritourism where families that could afford it could immerse themselves in the landscape of the Wild West, Levi's began focusing their advertising in California on Western fetishization.<sup>38</sup>

One example of this can be seen in Fig. 2, a Levi's advertisement from a 1937 issue of *Men's Wear*, advertising "authentic Western Apparel that fits into every occasion" in the middle of a circle formed by rope designed to suggest a lasso. The advertisement depicts four white cowboys clad in fitted denim with big cuffs, brightly-colored Western shirts, polished black cowboy boots with Cuban heels, and bolo ties around their necks. One of them lassoes a calf while the other three wait their turn. The ad also tells readers to check their community lists for "rodeos, roundups, dude ranch trade" et cetera, positioning itself as a part of dude ranch culture. What this implies is that if you buy Levi's products, you too can be part of the cowboy myth. The cross-class appeal is also present here, advertising their shirts as being "'tailored like a dress

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<sup>37</sup> Comstock, "Making of an American Icon," p. 34.

<sup>38</sup> The company did not make substantial inroads in the American East until the 1950s, so these advertisements were confined mostly to the West.

shirt' from sturdy, high-luster fabrics, in solid and novelty satins, rayons, celanese, sateens, broadcloths, etc.” The inherent contradiction in advertising a sturdy item of workwear as being akin to a dress shirt and made out of high-luster fabrics including “novelty satins” is a powerful symbol of advertising appealing to a working-class ethic to sell to a middle class audience.

This ethos was reflected in Westerns of the period, with “B Westerns,” made on the cheap with limited marketing and rushed production, reflecting dude ranch sentiments. Between 1930 and 1941, 1,336 Westerns were made, with only 66 of them being A Westerns.<sup>39</sup> B Westerns were being cranked out at a breakneck pace in this period. Plots were simplified, moral complexity was excised, and acting was often unpolished. After Ken Maynard introduced songs into some of his films in the early 1930s, the trope of the “singing cowboy” emerged in the B Western. Songs, after all, were cheaper to film and create than long, drawn out action scenes with brawls and stunts that required stunt doubles and careful coordination. The audiences of the Depression era were exposed to a carefree West, “filled with music and fun and where justice and good always triumphed over villainy.”<sup>40</sup> The “singing cowboy” marked a new kind of characterization of the figure of the cowboy from that of the relentlessly hyper-masculine Lassiter. Roderick McGillis points out in *He Was Some Kind of a Man* that these protagonists also had a feminine side:

The sartorial splendour of many of the B western stars marks their interest in appearance, fashion, and material things. These guys not only dress prettily, they also often sing. This aspect of their identity conflicts with the hard riding and hard shooting they display in their pursuit of the scruffy villains who threaten community cohesion and peace. So too does their interest in cooking and child rearing and domestic life.<sup>41</sup>

The “singing cowboy” thus represents a novel style of presentation of the cowboy image. He is strong, powerful and handy with a gun, but he dresses well, sings, cooks, rears children, and can

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<sup>39</sup> *Ibid*, p. 135.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 140-1.

<sup>41</sup> Roderick McGillis, *He Was Some Kind of a Man* (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2009), p. 23.

work inside the home, synthesizing masculine and feminine roles. I do not necessarily agree with McGillis' language of "conflicts" (mostly because it is certainly possible to do all of the above and still be masculine; it is just a different kind of masculinity!), but this stands as an image of cowboy masculinity that differs with the hyper-masculine ideal. One might argue that some of this is a sanding-down of edges: an attempt to make the figure of the cowboy more palatable for a general audience. This may be true, but the image presented—the image that many young suburban men in the 1950s grew up idolizing and enjoying—differs, and the Myth of the Frontier is still very powerfully present in a relatively uncomplicated form.

Gene Autry in *Ride, Ranger, Ride* (1936) is one example of this cowboy masculinity; he is established as a character in the film's opening shot with a very well-fitted and immaculately-clean Western shirt (which looks to bear creases from being freshly pressed<sup>42</sup>) and a Boss of the Plains Stetson hat with four neat creases.<sup>43</sup> He wears multiple outfits throughout the film, changing into a fitted tasseled jacket and cavalry pants for the second musical number and an all-white ensemble for his eventual marriage at the end of the film.<sup>44</sup> His hair remains slicked and stylish the entire movie. But the usage of Western clothing marks him as a "loyal Texas son" by comparison to the villainous Duval, the cavalry's interpreter, who turns out to be the alter ego of Chief Tavibo, one of the leaders of the local Natives, trying to lure the whites into a trap.<sup>45</sup> Duval wears aristocratic clothing, with a crisp white shirt, a bow tie and a black top-coat, and makes his

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<sup>42</sup> One of these is visible in *Ride, Ranger, Ride*, directed by Joseph Kane. Los Angeles: Republic Pictures, 1936. Digital reproduction, accessed Feb. 10, 2016. 1:23. [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LGT5\\_Nt9gRQ](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LGT5_Nt9gRQ)

<sup>43</sup> I admit that I'm not totally sure about this one – the size and shape of the brim looks like a Boss of the Plains model to me, at least. The Boss of the Plains model does not come with creases in the top, though. Maybe those were added later.

<sup>44</sup> Outfit during the song can be seen at *Ride, Ranger, Ride*, 2:28. Marriage attire can be seen at *Ibid*, 51:58.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid*, 0:28. Amusingly, this same song asserts that he has "conquered every soul since a hundred years ago;" since the film is set between 1870-1793, when the Texas Rangers were disbanded, this would mean that the white cowboy Gene Autry has "conquered every soul" as far back as 1770... when Texas was founded by Spanish settlers. He apparently also conquered time, which would doubtlessly be a useful power!  
*Ibid*, 0:39.

Arnoldo De Len, *Tejano West Texas* (United States of America: Texas A&M University Press, 2015), p. 1.

abode in a well-furnished office. Like the film's general portrayal of Natives, he uses deceptive tactics, attempting to throw a knife into Autry's back while he is in an honest and open cantina-room brawl.<sup>46</sup> I interpret this as an intentional visual cue; Duval is an aristocratic-looking interpreter, contrasting with Autry's rustic look and cowboy heritage, suggesting that Autry is more honest and courageous by comparison, and that the more openly "civilized" folk of the Old West were either ineffectual or outright detrimental to the efforts of "real" Americans like Autry's character. The idea here is that the frontier was settled by "real men" rather than the aristocrats that drove trade and land acquisition.

The vision of the Old West in this film is uncomplicated and clear, with Native Americans either serving as comic relief or as deceitful villains who cannot be trusted.<sup>47</sup> Frog Milhouse (Smiley Burnette)'s declaration that Colonel Summerall (Robert Homans)'s attempt to make peace with the Natives is the result of him "know[ing] nothin' about redskins"<sup>48</sup> is proven correct when they inevitably attack, only to be laid low by Autry and the Texas Rangers' guns. Women, too, are largely absent, acting either in non-speaking roles or in positions where they "exist only to serve the needs of men."<sup>49</sup> In Dixie's case, she is little more than a combination plot device (for advancing the rivalry between Autry and Cameron) and a means of rewarding the male hero.

We can thus observe several things from this period; cowboys and denim served as class-crossing symbols of an assumed "real America" derived from the Myth of the Frontier's rugged individualist aesthetic. The Depression was the catalyst for the dissemination of this imagery,

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<sup>46</sup> *Ibid*, 23:08.

<sup>47</sup> Little Wolf (Chief Thundercloud) is perhaps the most prominent representation of the comic-relief Native in the film, acting as a scalp-happy character who spends the majority of his screen time chasing down unlucky cavalryman Rufe Jones (Max Terhune) which is played for laughs at *Ibid*, 7:40.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid*, 4:19.

<sup>49</sup> Tompkins, *West of Everything*, p. 40.

with cowboys and denim taking on the beginnings of an intrinsically American meaning. Ringo and Autry, although on opposite sides of the A/B Western divide, operate with the same associations; their more rugged dress and their cowboy attitudes mark them to the audience as American heroes, defending (white) society from external foes. Denim and cowboys had not yet become ubiquitous, and their depictions in advertising and film were less diverse than they would be by the 1950s; but the 1930s served to codify their tropes and establish a language that would be adapted and played with by others, used to sell to diverse audiences and to allow them to imagine themselves in rugged masculine roles.

### Chapter III: Stars in the Dirt

*The street echoed with the gunshot, speaking it back to him in chorus. Billy Zane slumped to the ground, clutching his stomach. He stared at the gunslinger, a mixture of hatred, surprise and resignation in his eyes – the last look of a dead man. He pulled the trigger again. The Colt roared, and Billy fell, his white Stetson falling from his head into the dust, its surface marred with red. The doors to the saloon opened, men and women quietly filing out, necks all craned at Billy's body. "We knew you could do it," one man volunteered, staring at the cowboy. "Y'all couldn't even muster the huevos to be out here," he replied. "You ain't got no right to say a damned thing to me." He put the Colt back into its weathered holster, wiped his forehead with a frayed bandana, and got onto his horse. "Buenos noches," he told the crowd, and rode into the long dark.*

By the 1950s, McCarthyism and atomic terror (spurred on by the testing of the first hydrogen bombs in the US in 1952 and the USSR in 1953) had contributed to the creation of a nation that was at the same time prosperous and terrified in theretofore unprecedented ways, dealing with the unease of this contradiction. Martin Halliwell describes it as “at once a period of optimism and high expectations but also the beginning of half a century of ‘profound, embittered malaise’ that has taught us that we cannot trust ‘our neighbors, our workplace colleagues, our sources of information, or our institutions and leadership.’”<sup>1</sup> Depictions of the cowboy in the 1950s reflected this unease in diverse and conflicted depictions. As established last chapter, the Western had existed for long enough to have a codified language of tropes and visual imagery concatenated over its decades of depictions. What this implies is that the genre had been established for long enough that it could now be remolded, reshaped and used to tell different stories. As Richard Slotkin argues, this led to a rise in “filmmakers who sought to use its vocabulary to allegorize a wide range of difficult or taboo subjects like race relations, sexuality, psychoanalysis, and Cold War politics;” filmmakers thus used the Western more directly as a messaging tool to address these subjects and to make instructive arguments about the present.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Martin Halliwell, *American Culture in the 1950s* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007), p. 8.

<sup>2</sup> Slotkin, *Gunfighter Nation*, p. 349.

It is here that we come to the meat and potatoes of the cowboy's depiction in the 1950s. An American flag represents different things to someone on the political left and someone on the political right, but the symbol of the flag itself does not change. The cowboy is like the flag in the sense that the basic tropes of his symbol do not change by the 1950s, but are perceived differently. The cowboy remains the same, but his portrayal differs in Westerns of this period; he is a more diverse and complicated figure than ever before. However, I wish to start this chapter in the opposite direction to the previous one – with Ringo and Autry in mind – so as to make a more powerful comparison between these periods, and to make several trends in masculinities clearer.

*High Noon* (1952) depicts the temporary return from retirement of Marshal Will Kane (Gary Cooper) as he attempts to find allies to fight the recently-paroled killer Frank Miller (Ian MacDonald) and his posse of criminals, while negotiating his relationship with his new wife Amy Fowler Kane (Grace Kelly). Kane has some similarities to Ringo and Autry, in the regard that he is an image of bravery and dutiful masculinity. He frames the fight against Miller as a matter of his own duty and responsibility, even when his wife delivers an ultimatum forcing him to pick between duty and love.<sup>3</sup> His efforts to save the day are explicitly termed as masculine when compared to his former deputy Harvey Pell (Lloyd Bridges); the successful businesswoman Helen Ramirez (Katy Jurado), Miller's former flame and Pell's current girlfriend, chastises Pell for not joining Miller, explaining that "it takes more than big broad shoulders to make a man."<sup>4</sup> The implication here is that physical maturity and strength do not in themselves make a man, but rather one's individualism and commitment to duty.

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<sup>3</sup> "I'm the one who sent [Miller] up [to prison]!" *High Noon*, directed by Fred Zinnemann. Los Angeles: United Artists, 1952, 14:06. Amy delivers her ultimatum at *Ibid*, 16:04.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid*, 42:10.

This sentiment is echoed by the film's opening theme, which makes this association overt: "if I'm a man I must be brave, and I must face that deadly killer or lie a coward, a craven coward, a lynch' coward in my grave."<sup>5</sup> His eventual fight against Miller is not just an issue of law, but rather manhood; only a *real* (idealized) man would commit to doing their duty in the face of persecution and adversity. Like Ringo and Autry, Kane's righteousness is carried out through extralegal violence, with Justice of the Peace Percy Mettrick (Otto Kruger) fleeing town upon mention of Miller's imminent arrival.<sup>6</sup> The alternative to violence—legal trial and imprisonment—has both figuratively and literally left the town, transforming "justice" into "frontier justice." In the inevitable showdown, even Amy breaks her Quaker code of pacifism to protect Kane, shooting Jim Pierce (Robert J. Wilke) in the back.<sup>7</sup>

From these details alone, it would be simple to conclude that *High Noon* was a tale of heroic Myth of the Frontier masculinity; a lone hero saves the day with violence despite townsfolk who are too cowardly to help and too concerned with the potential for Northern investments than eliminating a criminal.<sup>8</sup> This would be a narrative of the inner-directed triumphing over the other-directed with the use of violence, and an allegory for the inevitability of violence in the real world. It would be instructive in a way that communicates the necessity of carrying out the hard task of violence against the Soviet Union. But the film's themes are far deeper than this. Its portrayal of Kane is far more ambiguous. He faces what appear to be overwhelming odds, and despite knowing that his loss is nigh-inevitable and despite being rejected at every turn, he fights anyways.<sup>9</sup> And unlike Ringo or Autry, he is *scared* of the

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<sup>5</sup> As the film's opening song states at *Ibid*, 0:40.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid*, 19:39.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid*, 1:22:16.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid*, 49:00.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid*, 36:19.

possibility of his death. He anticipates it throughout the film, to the point that he writes his will before facing Miller's gang, but still goes out to face them.<sup>10</sup>

Also unlike Autry, he is completely rejected by the townsfolk, and the only thing that saves him in the end is Amy's timely intervention. He is saved not by his inner-direction or courage, but by a woman pressured to do her duty by another woman. While the town is largely white save for some Natives outside the tavern and former sheriff Martin Howe's (Lon Chaney Jr.) maid, the most powerful individual in the town is a woman of color, Helen Ramirez, who admonishes both Kane and Amy to do what needs to be done. He is thus rendered as dependent not on other white men, but on women and people of color. This is a remarkably different vision of the Old West, and is deliberately ambiguous; it can be read as an allegory for anti-Communism (through its focus on standing alone rather than upholding the whims of the group), anti-McCarthyism (through its critique on the Hollywood blacklist forcing people to stand alone), or both, with the inner-directed man standing with only his wife, leaving behind the town with his sheriff's star tossed disgustedly into the dirt.<sup>11</sup>

John Wayne called the film "the most un-American thing I've ever seen in my whole life," and his film *Rio Bravo* (1959) was a direct response to it.<sup>12</sup> The writer of *High Noon*, Carl Foreman, was run out of the country by McCarthyists. John Wayne noted that "I'll never regret having helped run Foreman out of this country," and *Rio Bravo*'s director, Howard Hawks, claimed that he "didn't think a good sheriff was going to go running around town like a chicken with his head cut off asking for help, and finally his Quaker wife had to save him."<sup>13</sup> Masculinity

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<sup>10</sup> Clocks are prominently featured in the film's visual direction, counting down in real-time until the showdown, and the effect is more akin to counting down the minutes to an execution rather than a big action scene. One example of clocks being used in Helen's apartment at *Ibid*, 24:50. More examples can be seen at *Ibid*, 34:59 or 36:30, when Ben Miller enters the tavern and when Kane enters, respectively.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid*, 1:24:09.

<sup>12</sup> Roberts, *John Wayne*, p. 349.

<sup>13</sup> Agnew, *Old West in Fact and Film*, p. 180. Run-on sentence preserved from original quote.

is thus defined in *Rio Bravo* by its lack of dependence on others, particularly women and people of color. Accordingly, *Rio Bravo*'s hero, Sheriff John T. Chance (John Wayne) does not show fear in his fight against the villainous Joe Burdette's men. Townsfolk show up in droves to help him, it is implied, because he is a real leader who can appeal to the innate sense of duty of *real* Americans, by contrast positioning Kane as un-American. Chance even has the ability to pick and choose the ones he wants on his side, and even then, they still show up for the final battle.<sup>14</sup> Women like Feathers (Angie Dickinson) stay out of the action and take on extremely submissive roles.<sup>15</sup> People of color, like Carlos Robante (Pedro Gonzalez-Gonzalez) are relegated to comic relief and "sidekick"-like assistance for the protagonist: a strong white man, defending the town from a violent criminal gang.

Chance's character is specifically juxtaposed with that of Dude (Dean Martin). Dude, as Peter Lehman puts it, is an allegory for reclamation of masculinity: "Dude was once a figure of ideal masculinity, but drinking has destroyed this. At the beginning of the film, he is groveling, ill shaven, poorly dressed, and overly nervous. [...] After the transformation, he is a good-looking man, calm in the face of danger."<sup>16</sup> The depiction of cowboy masculinity here, then, was deeply prescriptive, communicating blatantly an ideal of fearless and powerful masculinity

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Richard Slotkin's *Gunfighter Nation* includes a very intriguing analysis of "John Wayne Syndrome." While this refers more to the 1960s, the depictions of Wayne as a soldier inspired "excessive guilt or shame for feelings of guilt or grief" and stigmatized "responding to battlefield stress with a normal human mix of fear and bravery." This is especially interesting in the regard that it shows the separation between ideals of masculinity and masculinity on the ground; certainly some of these ideals are more attainable – or harmful – than others. John Wayne: not the best role model. Slotkin, *Gunfighter Nation*, p. 520.

<sup>14</sup> See *Rio Bravo*, directed by Howard Hawks. Burbank: Warner Home Video, 1959, 2:02:50 for one such example, where he tells Stumpy (Walter Brennan) that because of his crippled leg and limp he will not be able to help. In the final shootout, Chance asks "Who'll turn up next?" and Colorado Ryan (Ricky Nelson) jokes, "Maybe the girl with another flower pot," at *Ibid*, 2:09:45.

<sup>15</sup> One example at *Ibid*, 1:07:33. "I won't make it any harder for you. I won't get in your way. I'll just be here. You don't owe me a thing. And you won't owe me when it's all over. When that happens, just tell me to go and I'll go." She has known him for, what, a couple days at this point? Even for an invincible cowboy power fantasy, this is a little over the top...

<sup>16</sup> Peter Lehman, *Running Scared: Masculinity and the Representation of the Male Body* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2007, reprint of 1991 original), p. 63.

devoid of doubt or vice. Lehman also argues that characters like Stumpy (Walter Brennan) served only to heighten Chance's masculinity by comparison: "he fulfills the traditionally feminine function within the group; he cleans, cooks, and keeps house."<sup>17</sup> The film thus builds Chance up as a paragon of masculinity, untethered by activities deemed feminine in favor of masculine power against adversity. This image is not substantially different to *High Noon*, as Kane is also juxtaposed with other men to build up his masculine image, but the masculine images that are built up in each film were different, and reflect different values.

Here the cowboy is refigured into a deeply political image: he becomes a tug-of-war between the American left and the American right, representing a multiplicity of masculine identities, all explicitly American, that conflict and intersect in different ways. For the left-wing writer Carl Foreman and director Fred Zinnemann, the cowboy in *High Noon* was a figure of inner-direction standing up for a town which Zinnemann himself dubbed "a symbol of a democracy gone soft."<sup>18</sup> Kane is left alone to meet his fate against persecution, scared and uncertain, with the help of his wife and a woman of color. His vision of America was a metaphorical Frontier of alienation and abandonment, with the necessity of depending on others outside the paradigm of martial masculinity to deal with the persecution of society. For the right-wing John Wayne, the cowboy was something similar: an attempt to "play a role in the struggle against Communism [...] [and] to 'sell America' to the American people, whose patriotism had gone flabby: 'I think we've all been going soft, taking freedom for granted.'"<sup>19</sup> John Wayne's cowboy, however, was an invincible hero, immune to fear, who did not depend on women or people of color to save the day. His America was a white Frontier of fearless courage and martial

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<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>18</sup> Fred Zinnemann, *A Life in the Movies: An Autobiography* (New York: Macmillan Books, 1992), p. 96.

<sup>19</sup> Slotkin, *Gunfighter Nation*, 315-6, including a quotation from Emanuel Levy, *John Wayne: Prophet of the American Way of Life* (London: Scarecrow Press, 1988), p. 314.

strength. The cowboy's nature as a language or symbol is made clear; he represents different things to different people.

A third vision of the cowboy lies in *The Searchers* (1956), directed by John Ford (director of *Stagecoach*), and starring John Wayne as Ethan Edwards opposite Jeffrey Hunter as Martin Pawley in their journey to rescue Martin's captured sister Debbie (Natalie Wood) from a band of Comanche Natives. Both Ethan and Jeffrey are visually marked as cowboys by their completely anachronistic denim jeans.<sup>20</sup> This is particularly interesting in the regard that the film is supposedly set in 1868, which was five years before Levi Strauss' first pair of riveted jeans, and about 45-50 before actual cowboys started to wear them. This gives some hints about their iconic status as associated with the cowboy mythology.<sup>21</sup>

Like Ringo, Autry, Kane and Chance, Ethan ticked all the boxes of a "real man": he is a soldier and an intensely inner-directed cowboy.<sup>22</sup> He is duty-minded and "do[es]n't believe in surrenders," but his duty is more of revenge than rescue.<sup>23</sup> He is not as unemotional or invincible as Chance; he was, as Martin puts it, a man who "could go crazy wild," prone to fits of rage and intensely racialized violence.<sup>24</sup> This propensity for violence against the Comanches even extends to Debbie, when she is found as a captive wife of Scar's.<sup>25</sup> His obsessive hatred and racism are depicted as shocking and distasteful even to the characters of the film.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Ethan also wears a double-breasted cavalry shirt similar to the one he wore in *Stagecoach*; whether this is intentional or not I do not know. The exact details of Ethan's and Martin's jeans are not quite clear in the film, but judging by Laurie's jeans, they are almost certainly Levi's from the 1940s-50s period. A good detail shot of Laurie's jeans is in *The Searchers*, directed by John Ford. Burbank: Warner Bros. Entertainment, 1956, 53:17.

<sup>21</sup> More on this next chapter.

<sup>22</sup> *The Searchers*, 36:10.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid*, 11:15. See also his declaration that "[the Comanche] never learns there's such a thing as a critter that just keeps comin' on" at *Ibid*, 43:35.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid*, 52:30. Ethan desecrates the body of one Comanche dead and even starts angrily killing buffalo because "at least they won't feed any Comanches this winter!" When Scar is finally slain, Ethan even takes his scalp. Corpse desecration occurs at *Ibid*, 26:45, while his buffalo slaughter occurs at *Ibid*, 1:10:15. Scalping is at *Ibid*, 1:54:40.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid*, 1:27:42.

<sup>26</sup> See the reaction to him mocking Martin as a "half-breed" for being one-eighth Cherokee at *Ibid*, 5:15, or his being admonished to "[not] let the boys waste their lives in vengeance" at *Ibid*, 24:45.

While the film's depiction of women was more akin to *Autry* than *Kane*, with women either serving as plot devices or markers of domesticity, the film's depiction of the Natives was different from the other films I have analyzed. While the Comanche are still antagonists, their leader, Chief Scar (Henry Brandon) is humanized by his revelation of his motives: "two sons killed by white men... for each son I take many scalps."<sup>27</sup> In this way he is portrayed as a dark mirror of Ethan: he is an inner-directed tough warrior from a proud history, driven by vengeance to acts of violence and cruelty on account of the actions of his enemies. Race can be observed here as filling a different function; rather than a means of dividing "good guys" and "bad guys," it is a far more granular and humanized depiction. The possibility is here introduced that the enemy may be just like you, and that it is possible to hate them *too much*.

The film's depiction of the ideal cowboy is made strikingly clear by the comparison between Ethan and Martin at the end of the film. While Martin enters the household to be with Laurie and the rest of the remaining family, Ethan hesitates at the door, while a song in the background asks: "a man will search his heart and soul, go searching way out there; his peace of mind he knows he'll find, but where, O Lord, Lord where? Ride away, ride away, ride away."<sup>28</sup> He is left alone on the doorstep, presumably to find his death in the unforgiving wastes, his violence and sociopathic tendencies alienating him from the happy domestic life of the rest of the family.

In this regard, another vision of the cowboy is brought to the table; the cowboy is here rendered as a relic of an old age, left behind by civilized society and cursed to "wander forever

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<sup>27</sup> *Ibid*, 1:24:10.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid*, 1:57:41. This also makes it clear that Ethan isn't just out to tie up or feed his horse; whether or not he actually enters the house is irrelevant, as he is cursed to ride away in search of his peace of mind, which may never actually be obtained.

between the winds,” just as he cursed the buried Comanche.<sup>29</sup> His urge to commit violence, while sometimes necessary, can go too far, and his life might be wasted on hatred and vengeance. This is a very different figure to the John Wayne in *Stagecoach*.<sup>30</sup> This Wayne, Ethan, is used to illustrate the value of family, which is made clearer in an earlier version of the script, where Debbie’s likeness to her mother is what saves her.<sup>31</sup> Yet this is a family from which he is also excluded thanks to his violence. This is certainly incongruous by comparison to the Wayne who supported American militarism abroad, and who constructed the cowboy as an invincible right-wing power fantasy in *Rio Bravo*.<sup>32</sup>

The narrative here is far more complicated, with the cowboy serving as a navigation of issues of gender and race; I shy away from calling Ethan’s eventual change of heart on killing Debbie necessarily a marker of his denial of racism, but it is clear that it is an issue of concern to Ford and presumably the audience.<sup>33</sup> This is a complicated image to which I do not have definitive answers. *The Searchers* was in this way a prototype for the anti-Westerns of the 1960s; as William Luhr attests: “this is not a film that glorifies the westward expansion of white culture or the traditional western hero. Instead it critiques it all in disturbing ways. [...] [Unlike Ethan,] Gary Cooper’s Will Kane was not savagely racist, murderous, genocidal, mutilating, and possibly adulterous.”<sup>34</sup> Are we to interpret Ethan’s abandonment as a positive—old and outmoded lifestyles falling by the wayside of progress—or a negative, a tragedy of strong, inner-

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<sup>29</sup> *Ibid*, 26:55.

<sup>30</sup> Some commentators even note direct cinematographic similarities between *Stagecoach* and *The Searchers*, particularly in the establishing shots of Ringo and Ethan. However, this could just be John Ford’s camera style rather than an intentional comparison, so I leave this possibility open-ended. Scott Eyman & Paul Duncan, *John Ford: The Searcher, 1894-1973* (Los Angeles: Taschen, 2004), p. 151.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid*, p. 151 and 154.

<sup>32</sup> Slotkin, *Gunfighter Nation*, p. 514.

<sup>33</sup> Eyman and Duncan claim that this scene shows Ethan as “confront[ing] and transcend[ing] his racism and hatred,” but it is an equal possibility that he simply believes that she hasn’t been sufficiently “tainted,” that is, he accepts her as white rather than Comanche. It is certainly *something* about tolerance, but it is tough to say definitively.

<sup>34</sup> Luhr, “John Wayne and *The Searchers*” in *The Searchers*, p. 82.

directed men being unable to adapt to a strange new world? No definitive answers are apparent, but the imaging of masculinity in the film consciously casts the sociopathic Ethan against the more reasonable and less white Martin. This presents an interesting issue: both Martin and Scar, who have varying amounts of Native blood, are presented as at least comparable in their masculinity by comparison to Ethan. In this way, *The Searchers* questions the Myth of the Frontier and decenters the cowboy as the sole masculine image; its presentation of the cowboy, then, is more a mixed bag than *High Noon* or *Rio Bravo*.

Some scholars believe that these depictions of the cowboy were a response to fears of the Organization, or of consumerism, or of “momism,” all discussed in Chapter 1. Riesman himself observes in the 1961 preface to *Lonely Crowd* that “the great majority of readers in the [1950s] have decided that it was better to be an inner-directed cowboy than an other-directed advertising man, for they were not on the whole being faced with the problems of the cowboy, but rather those of the advertising man.”<sup>35</sup> The cowboy was thus conceptualized as a means of escaping the problems of advertising men and bureaucracy, a “proposed solution [...] in a renewal of traditional masculine vigor and individualism.”<sup>36</sup> In a landscape where men largely determined the boundaries of propriety and rescue women, one might conceive of this as a counter to “momism” as well; of these films only *High Noon* presents women in any real position of power or with any claim to authority over men.

Mark Moss furthers this ideal in *The Media and the Models of Masculinity*, arguing that “the success of the warrior male during World War II, at least in the United States, was significant. [...] Virtually every facet of society was recalibrated toward the war effort and it grew to unheard-of proportions. There was little room for introspection and less for

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<sup>35</sup> Riesman, *Lonely Crowd*, pp. xxix-xxx.

<sup>36</sup> Gilbert, *Men in the Middle*, p. 4.

alternatives.”<sup>37</sup> This position holds that the cowboy became a singular masculine archetype forged out of war’s pressures, as diamonds to coal, and was maintained with conformity. He argues further that the cowboy, the autonomous hero, “lingered on in the postwar period as a fantasy element for men to summon when involved in the drudgery of the organization or when trying to adapt to the post-war environment.”<sup>38</sup> The mythology of the cowboy, Moss argues, could be called upon to reimagine oneself as an inner-directed martial hero in order to ignore or fight the reality of daily life.

So, in Moss’s approximation, in the face of fears that other-directedness and consumerism and conformity were destroying male initiative and rendering the cowboy—the driving factor of the Myth of the Frontier and thus the imagined pinnacle of Americanness—a dying breed, men could draw on the cowboy to pretend to be strong in the face of weakness and adversity. He further argues that “while the [C]old [W]ar developed, its primary symbols seemed to be too intellectual or too technological for most people to understand in tangible terms.”<sup>39</sup> Accordingly, Moss’ idea of the cowboy is articulated as a means of parsing Cold War symbols in a way that makes sense to the layman; that is, through narratives of good and bad. Narratives of good and evil, with more straightforward means of destroying that evil, sprung up as a means of articulating anxieties of war in this approximation.

I argue that Moss, while on the right track, has only part of the picture. It is clear from films like *Rio Bravo* that the cowboy can be a figure of border maintenance, fixing ideas of what men and women, whites and people of color, *should* be in the eyes of the writers of those characters. It is also apparent that the cowboy can be a figure in whose roles white audiences could imagine themselves, fighting off bandits or Natives or brooding about the struggles of

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<sup>37</sup> Mark Moss, *The Media and the Models of Masculinity* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2011), p. 86.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid*, p. 87.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid*, p. 109.

daily life. But even John Wayne's cowboys are not so clear-cut in certain depictions: who would want to be Ethan Edwards, a sociopathic racist rejected by the world? Cowboy narratives allegorize reality, true, but their depictions are hardly simple, as we can observe from looking at *High Noon*, *Rio Bravo*, or *The Searchers*. While the uncomplicated stories of the B Western largely disappeared from theaters thanks to competition from television, the A Western only became darker and grittier with the popularity of spaghetti Westerns in the mid-1960s and revisionist Westerns (or "anti-Westerns") in the early 1970s.<sup>40</sup> The cowboy, then, is an increasingly diversified figure; he says far more than just acting as a monolithic response to fears of industrialism or race or gender.

So what does the cowboy represent, if not an uncomplicated response to 1950s masculine anxieties? The answer is that the cowboy in 1950s Westerns exists as a kind of mouthpiece through which varying messages and fears can be expressed; he is not so much a homogeneous response generated by any singular masculinity, but is more a language through which *different* masculinities (plural) might be expressed. The cowboy protagonists of *High Noon* and *Rio Bravo*, then, can be understood as competing politicized visions of ideal masculinity. In *High Noon*, the cowboy tenuously stands alone against persecution as part of a politically-left narrative, rejecting his community and sticking to his family. In *Rio Bravo*, the cowboy stands fearlessly with his community to save the day in a politically-right power fantasy. And in *The Searchers*, the cowboy is an ambiguous character, a violent killer and a hero all in one, touching on themes of race and gender but seemingly not offering a single definitive response while its hero is left to wander the wastes alone.

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<sup>40</sup> Peter Lev, *Transforming the Screen, 1950-1959* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), p. 204. Jeremy Agnew, *The Creation of the Cowboy Hero: Fiction, Film and Fact* (Jefferson: McFarland & Company, 2015), p. x.

The cowboy's treatment, and his eventual fate, differs substantially in each, whilst working from the same symbolic language; in all three depictions the cowboy is part of a mythology of America and of the Frontier, but he abandons his community (*High Noon*), stays with his community (*Rio Bravo*), and is metaphorically exiled from his community (*The Searchers*) in turn. Yet there are many of the same questions being asked here; accordingly, these depictions of the cowboy can be compared more thoroughly in order to understand the particular issues that he is used to analogize. We can thus examine some of the common themes of cowboy depictions to reverse-engineer what American men were thinking about (or at least the American men who watched and produced these films, which seems to generally be white, middle-class men). In this sense, these themes become "conversations" within culture, orchestrated using the cowboy image. These conversations take on familiar forms. From *High Noon*, *Rio Bravo*, and *The Searchers* we can examine conversations in the cinematic realm on the issues of the characteristics of the "real (white) man," his place in the community, his place in the world relative to women and people of color, and his use of violence. Each should be analyzed in turn in order to explore the discussions that were taking place using film as a medium.

The "real man" in all three films is one who endures despite adversity and carries out their duty. In this regard, all three films agree; Kane, Chance and Ethan are all deeply committed to doing their respective jobs. They put in the work necessary to be undertaken in order to succeed, but Kane and Ethan are rewarded for it only with alienation. In this way we might observe parallels with Whyte's depiction of the transition away from the Protestant Ethic and its ethos of struggle against one's environment.<sup>41</sup> Only Chance sees a perfectly happy ending of the three, his struggle against the environment garnering positive results; and it is only he who gets

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<sup>41</sup> Whyte. *The Organization Man*. p. 17.

out of his respective film psychologically unchanged.<sup>42</sup> Both Kane and Ethan are troubled and conflicted figures, unsure of their place in the world but still dramatically soldiering on. This can be read at face value: the role of the cowboy, and thus an ideal of masculinity, is ambiguous and mutable, and his place in the new order of the world is uncertain. Even his status as a hero or villain is unclear and changing. Is the hero really heroic, and the villain villainous? Or is it all just varying shades of grey? The latter seems more likely, overall.

The cowboy's place in the community changes as well in each film. Chance remains a pillar of the community as a result of his efforts, but Kane and Ethan are alienated. While Martin gets to return to the family and community, Ethan is left outside to wander, and while his devotion to family ultimately affects his final decision on Debbie's fate, he is left alone at the end, the closing door literally and figuratively shut[ting] him off from reuniting with his family."<sup>43</sup> This can be read as a rejection of domestication. As James Chapman notes, "the alternative to domestication for the western hero was an ever more solitary existence at the periphery of civilization."<sup>44</sup> Accordingly, the message for audiences can be interpreted as a positive interpretation of domesticity (since Martin gets to go home and be happy) and a rebuke of inner-directedness; that is, inner-directedness must be tempered with family or you will be cursed to wander forever.<sup>45</sup>

Kane's dynamic is quite similar; the community rejects him one by one throughout the film, leaving him with only his wife to save him. This has interesting implications in terms of community and gender roles, in the regard that by the survival-of-the-fittest standards of the

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<sup>42</sup> Kane's ending is marginally more positive than Ethan's in that he survives his fight and rids himself of the cowardly populace, but this is very much bittersweet.

<sup>43</sup> Agnew, *Creation of the Cowboy Hero*, p. 155.

<sup>44</sup> James Chapman, *Cinemas of the World: Film and Society from 1895 to the Present* (London: Reaktion Books, 2003), p. 166.

<sup>45</sup> To borrow a title from an excellent movie, this is no country for old men.

imagined West, Kane has *screwed up*, and demonstrated himself insufficiently fit by letting his enemies overpower him. This represents, to media scholar Philip Green, “a vivid demonstration that the masculine individualism that, until now, we thought was being apotheosized by this movie, is not in the end enough.”<sup>46</sup> This is not just a patriarchal daisy chain of “Gary Cooper is loyal to his principles, Grace Kelly to Gary Cooper,” but rather a demonstration that “what stands above abstract moral principles and even the law is not just the individual conscience but *the family*.”<sup>47</sup> In this regard, the film communicates that domesticity with one’s family is a positive, even if the rest of the world rejects you. This also demonstrates at least some favor towards women taking on more active roles (at least in times of need).

Each of these visions of the cowboy presents a different interpretation of white men’s interactions with Others. In line with the aforementioned commentary by Wayne and Hawks denigrating Kane for being saved by a woman, Chance does not rely on either women or any person of color (with Carlos filling a sidekick/servant kind of role) to get protect his predominantly-white community. Predictably, John Wayne as Chance is the most “traditional” of these visions, with women occupying submissive roles and people of color acting as servants and sidekicks, which is consistent with his commentary in a *Playboy* interview in 1971, where he infamously stated:

I believe in white supremacy until the blacks are educated to a point of responsibility. [...] I don't feel guilty about the fact that five or 10 generations ago these people were slaves. Now, I'm not condoning slavery. It's just a fact of life, like the kid who gets infantile paralysis and has to wear braces so he can't play football with the rest of us.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Phillip Green, *Cracks in the Pedestal: Ideology and Gender in Hollywood* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1998), p. 153.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>48</sup> Interview with John Wayne in *Playboy*, May 1971, digital reproduction, accessed Mar. 1, 2016. [https://pages.shanti.virginia.edu/Wild\\_Wild\\_Cold\\_War/files/2011/11/John\\_Wayne\\_Playboy\\_Int2.pdf](https://pages.shanti.virginia.edu/Wild_Wild_Cold_War/files/2011/11/John_Wayne_Playboy_Int2.pdf)

Note the separation inherent in “the rest of us.” These attitudes can be taken as reflections of a particular standard of masculinity which cast white men as naturally more civilized and educated by comparison to people of color. But the other two visions of the cowboy are more inclusive by way of comparison. Kane depends on his wife and on Helen Ramirez for support both mental and practical. While Ethan is certainly not an inclusive figure, his racism is portrayed as shocking, and Martin, even as a part-Cherokee, is demonstrated to be a hero. Each of the films thus draws different boundaries of race relations that are more and less accepting of other cultures, and contains a different message for its audience.

The last one of these conversations is about violence. The centrality of violence in each film can be chalked up to literary convenience—building up to a large confrontation is a natural part of drama in many films, after all—it fills different purposes in each film. For Kane, violence is an unfortunate necessity to carry out his duty, a premise which extends to Amy as well, whose violation of her Quaker oaths to protect family is quite telling. But violence is seen as inevitable, and the clock counts down to destruction. Sound familiar? For Ethan, violence is a means to an end of personal revenge and frontier justice; it is the means by which he attempts to maintain the border between “our world” and “their world” so as to protect white society from the Comanches. For Chance, violence fills a more formulaic end; that is, the gun is conceived as a “necessary adjunct to justice [...] ensur[ing] peace and order and fair play and freedom.”<sup>49</sup> And since the “Western offers itself as a myth of American origins, it implies that its violence is an essential and necessary part of the process through which American society was established and through which its democratic values are defended and enforced.”<sup>50</sup> Violence thus occupies a number of roles: a sociopolitical commentary on the Cold War, a means of maintaining borders

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<sup>49</sup> McGillis, *He Was Some Kind of Man*, p. 6.

<sup>50</sup> Slotkin, *Gunfighter Nation*, p. 352.

of Us and Them (or a vision of the US and them, if you want to be clever), and an effort to naturalize violence as a normal part of the maintenance of American democracy (and an implied necessity to repel Communism).

Clearly the cowboy was capable of representing many different things to many different people. But this elasticity was not unlimited. His mass appeal in the American 1950s can be explained by the fact that, like the flag itself, his many faces—the many forms of masculinity he represented—made him a staging ground for diverse standards of gendered behavior, all using the same general metaphorical language but speaking subtly different words. He could appeal to the political left and right and many places in between. He appealed to those who supported America’s new culture of domesticity and those who worried about it. He appealed to alternating visions of inclusion and exclusion based on gender and race. He spoke to common concerns of the family, persistence and duty. And his violence represented an even wider range of messages about the Cold War and the fate of American society. The cowboy is not a singular archetype, then, but a series of concurrent iterations of a similar image, each story told differently. These are not necessarily delimited, however. They rely, by and large, on the same tropes, and the virtues they espouse are generally similar (with some notable differences of opinion), but the *message* differs depending on who is telling the story. The cowboy is a means of parsing societal anxieties, yes, but not just in one way that can be easily reduced to, say, “men drew upon the cowboy to give them strength in the face of the Organization.” But it is in advertising, the heart of that Organization, that we can observe more of how the cowboy was sold to people, and why it attained such a mass appeal.

## Chapter IV: Patronize Your Neighbor

The dynamics of consumerism, and of the imagined Organization Man at its heart, represented more than just the purchasing of goods and the acquisition of physical objects. They represented something far deeper: the things one purchases, as Elaine Tyler May observes, “demonstrated success and social mobility, and defined life-styles.”<sup>1</sup> Domestic containment also implied that the “character” of one’s purchases was an important factor to consider. Let us consider a fictional character’s purchasing habits, as a momentary aside: Tyler Durden in *Fight Club*’s fixation on purchasing bland Ikea furniture from a catalog reflects his disconnection from the world, his preoccupation with frivolity as a distraction from his own problems, and his bland life, establishing for the reader or viewer his character.<sup>2</sup> In this regard we might also read his purchasing habits as a distinct part of the image he projects to the audience. I do not mean to imply, of course, that the purchases of every household in the 1950s should be subjected to literary scrutiny; I intend only to call attention to the idea of character in purchasing and how it is projected to others (which, of course, can be applied to contemporary life as well). In this regard, purchasing habits reflect on a rough level something about their purchaser.

May also observes that “along with the ideology of sexual containment, postwar domestic consumerism required conformity to strict gender assumptions.”<sup>3</sup> So, products purchased by people ideally conform to particular expectations of gender: feminine women and masculine men. As Johnathan E. Schroeder and Detley Zwick observe, “as an engine of consumption, advertising plays a strong role in promulgating dualistic gender roles and prescribing sexual identities;” this is to say that they are powerful tools of shaping expectations of gender and

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<sup>1</sup> May, *Homeward Bound*, p. 162.

<sup>2</sup> No offense meant to Ikea purchasers, of course. I myself write this from atop an Ikea desk, made out of boring dark plywood, veneer chipped at the edges, completely devoid of innovation or aesthetic value aside from a watered-down mix of Nordic and Eames-like minimalism. I am Jack’s smug hypocrisy.

<sup>3</sup> May, *Homeward Bound*, p. 162.

sexuality.<sup>4</sup> Even if they are not actively trying to shape those roles, they still reflect their surrounding context; they are the product of a society with particular expectations of gender to which marketers react.<sup>5</sup>

Advertising campaigns, in this regard, were immensely powerful, and the postwar economic boom and expansion in commodities allowed advertising companies new opportunities to sell product. Prior to the war's end, government pressure in America to "save today [...] so that they might become purchaser consumers tomorrow" restricted purchases before the end of the war and encouraged them afterwards.<sup>6</sup> Advertising budgets tripled between the end of World War II and 1959, using their power to push messages and sell products.<sup>7</sup> Advertising is the product of intention; advertisers use deliberate efforts to tap into the psyches of the audiences to which the products they are selling are targeted, with very little room for coincidence and accidents in the messages that they deliver.<sup>8</sup> Effective use of visual language in advertising simplifies the product to its most easily understood form, targeting customers and allowing them to imagine themselves as the leading character in a "story" told through condensed cultural symbols.<sup>9</sup> What this implies is that advertising is used to sell defined lifestyles.

Advertisements depicting products being carried by soldiers form a connection between that product and martial strength or militarism. Advertising depicting glamorous celebrities forms a connection between the product and glamorous luxury, et cetera, creating and reinforcing the buyer's self-perception. This is a well-documented social phenomenon called the

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<sup>4</sup> Jonathan E. Schroeder & Detlev Zwick, "Mirrors of Masculinity: Representation and Identity in Advertising Images," *Consumptions, Markets and Culture*, Vol. 7, No. 1, March 2004, p. 21.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid*, p. 22.

<sup>6</sup> Lizbeth Cohen, *A Consumer's Republic: The Politics of Mass Consumption in Postwar America* (New York: Vintage Books, 2004), p. 70.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid*, p. 301.

<sup>8</sup> Sammy Richard Danna, "Changing Male Image in Advertising: An Investigation" in *Advertising and Popular Culture: Studies in Variety and Versatility* (Bowling Green: Bowling Green State University, 1992), p. 147.

<sup>9</sup> Ann Marie Barry, *Visual Intelligence: Perception, Image, and Manipulation in Visual Communication* (Albany: State University of New York, 1997), p. 279.

Diderot Effect.<sup>10</sup> As coined by anthropologist Grant McCracken, this theory argues that (1) most products people purchase reflect their sense of identity; and (2) products that people purchase that do not reflect their sense of identity change how they purchase in future.<sup>11</sup> Advertising serves as a middleperson in this conception, creating a “brand image” that conveys particular aspects of an imagined lifestyle or story into which viewers might insert themselves; it sells a product as being part of an identity so that people will buy it.<sup>12</sup> Accordingly, men who want to imagine themselves as archetypically masculine tend to purchase products that they perceive as being consistent with or augmenting that sense of masculinity; conversely, women who want to imagine themselves as archetypically feminine tend to purchase products that appear feminine.

Advertising for jeans is a notable venue in which this gendered advertising took place.<sup>13</sup> Levi’s in particular managed to sell their products so powerfully (dovetailing with Depression-era Dust Bowl narratives) that their jeans can be seen in fictional narratives of the Old West before jeans even existed! Throughout *The Searchers*, characters can be seen wearing pairs of Levi’s jeans, identifiable by their V-shaped arcuates and the red tab conspicuously sticking out of the left side of the right hand pocket, which can be dated only to the 1940s-1950s.<sup>14</sup> I previously noted that this is incredibly anachronistic; the film’s story is set in 1868, as indicated by the title card, but Levi’s only came into being as a denim company in 1873, five whole years

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<sup>10</sup> This theory was named after French philosopher Denis Diderot, who wrote of acquiring a luxurious new dressing gown, only to find that his other possessions seemed cheap-looking by comparison, setting off a process of purchasing goods that meshed more readily with the gown and sending him into debt.

<sup>11</sup> Grant McCracken, *Culture & Consumption: New Approaches to the Symbolic Character of Consumer Goods and Activities* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988), p. 127.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 77-8.

<sup>13</sup> I should note that although I focus very much on the masculinized advertising of denim, it has a rich tradition of being advertised to women with such campaigns as “Lady Levi’s,” amongst others.

<sup>14</sup> One clear example (on Laurie) in *The Searchers*, 53:17. The jeans in question have belt loops, hidden back pocket rivets, two back pockets, a back pocket red-tab (which was only added in 1936), symmetrical arcuate stitching, no visible crotch rivet, and no tightening cinch. Downey, *Levi Strauss & Co.*, p. 65.

after the film's stated date.<sup>15</sup> The earliest riveted trousers in America were made in 1870, by the Reno, Nevada tailor Jacob Davis. By 1871, Davis bought bolts of "denim" cloth from Levi Strauss & Co., then a dry-goods company, and entered into a partnership with Levi Strauss himself, who backed him financially as he filed a patent application for riveted "waist overalls," which was granted in in 1873. These "waist overalls" were quite different to the style we know today: they had a single back pocket (on the right hand side) with visible rivets sticking out of the top corners, a cinch at the back for tightening the waistband, suspender buttons at the front and back, a crotch rivet at the base of the button fly, and no real "fit" in particular.<sup>16</sup>

So by this timeline and description, a pair of five-pocket riveted denim trousers worn even by farmers would be impossible; and this is doubly so for the cowboys, who as previously noted regarded jeans as low-class.<sup>17</sup> Yet modern denim—five-pocketed, shaped to the wearer's body, with two back pockets and belt loops—is so ubiquitous that it is projected back in time to the 1860s. The message to take from this is not simply that films are often historically inaccurate, although this is obviously true. Rather, the film reminds viewers of the Myth of the Frontier by association. More clearly: the cowboy wears jeans, even before jeans really existed, to symbolize that he is part of the "real American man" working class more concerned with durability and practicality than any considerations of fashion. In addition to the Depression-era Dust Bowl images of the new Frontier, all populated with romantic figures of cowboys in Levi's jeans walking down dusty old roads, the association of cowboys with denim had persisted by into the 1950s, thanks to new associations circulated by advertising for consumer commodities.

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<sup>15</sup> *The Searchers*, 1:30.

<sup>16</sup> The oldest pair of surviving Levi's jeans is a good example of this pattern. Subsequent reproductions of this pattern, like those produced by Levi's currently under their Levi's Vintage Clothing line, are more tapered and cede more to present expectations of fit. Mike Chino, "Levi's Unveils the World's Oldest Pair of Jeans at Fall 2011 Fashion Preview," *Eccouterre*, 19 Sept. 2011, accessed Mar. 2, 2016. <http://www.ecouterre.com/levi%E2%80%99s-unveils-the-world%E2%80%99s-oldest-pair-of-jeans-at-fall-2011-fashion-preview/>

<sup>17</sup> Agnew, *The Old West in Fact and Film*, p. 126.

The cowboy is one of the most popular ways of signifying a connection to the Myth of the Frontier and Americanness in advertising. He has, at some point or another, been used to advertise just about everything. As William W. Savage Jr. asserts, “he needs no proper identification because his clothes give him away, and so does his demeanor; he is immediately recognizable, and in popular entertainment there is seldom doubt about what his responses will be in given situations.”<sup>18</sup> The cowboy, then, is an established language; like in my analysis of 1950s Westerns, he is a symbol common to multiple interpretations of masculinity that might be used for different purposes, and to sell to different people. He provides a role in which consumers might imagine themselves, or at least presents the product as being akin to particular self-images; accordingly, a person who considers themselves as having “cowboy” traits will be more likely to buy a product that presents that particular brand image.<sup>19</sup> Although early models, observed earlier in Figs. 1 and 2 from the 1930s, existed, the model of the cowboy in advertising most powerfully emerges in the 1950s.

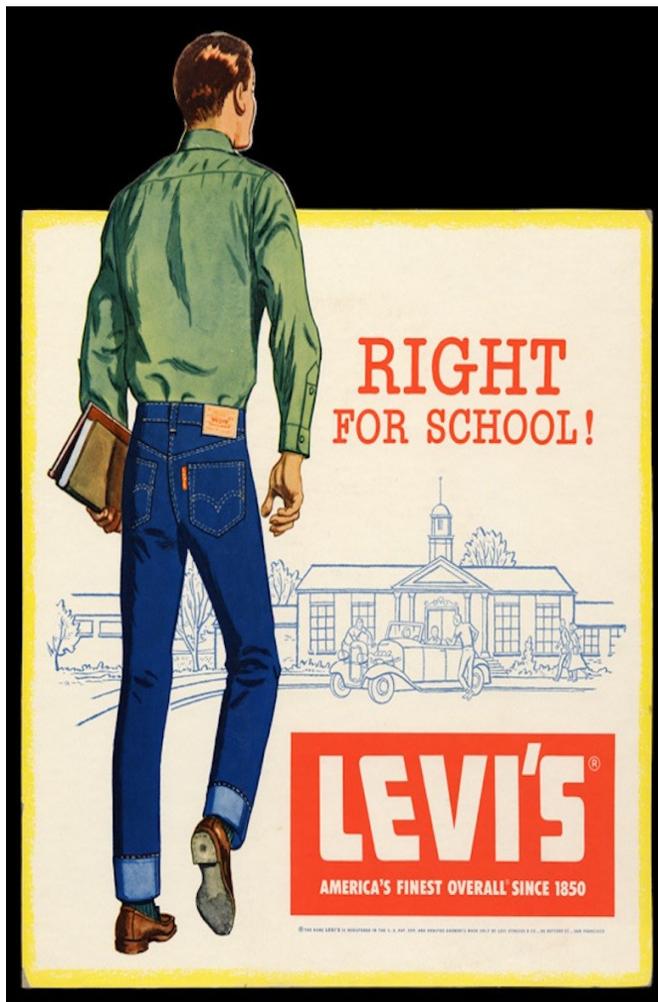
There are two primary commodities from the 1950s where the image of the cowboy was effectively used in advertising to sell product: denim jeans and cigarettes. Jeans were discursively tied to classlessness, Americanness, and cowboy Myths of the Frontier by Depression-era depictions of Dust Bowl laborers navigating new social Frontiers, but they were hardly ubiquitous. By the late 1940s, however, Levi Strauss & Co. had expanded its distribution from the West, in California, to the Eastern states of America, where they struggled to convince parents and teachers that denim was appropriate for wear by children. One New Jersey mother, in a letter from August 29, 1957, sums this sentiment up: “while I have to admit that this may be

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<sup>18</sup> William W. Savage, *The Cowboy Hero: His Image in American History and Culture* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1979), p.4.

<sup>19</sup> Ahmad Jamal & Mark M.H. Goode, “Consumers and Brands: A Study of the Impact of Self-Image Congruence on Brand Preference and Satisfaction,” *Marketing Intelligence & Planning*, Vol. 19, No. 7, 2001, p. 482-92.

‘right for school’ in San Francisco, in the west, or in some rural areas I can assure you that it is in bad taste and ‘not right for School’ in the East.”<sup>20</sup> The writer here sarcastically echoes Levi’s advertisements like Fig. 3, which asserted that Levi’s jeans were “right for school!” By the 1960s, however, denim jeans had saturated the market, with sales doubling nationally between 1962 and 1965, and then quintupling between 1965 and 1970.<sup>21</sup> The space between, then, is a significant period for analysis.



**Figure 3:** Levi Strauss & Co., “Right for School!” Print advertisement, 1950s. Digital reproduction. <http://i.imgur.com/hOzIM1f.jpg>

Also appears in Downey, *Levi Strauss & Co.*, p. 76.

<sup>20</sup> Downey, *Levi Strauss & Co.*, p. 73.

<sup>21</sup> John Brooks, “Annals of Business: A Friendly Product,” *New Yorker*, 12 Nov. 1979, 73-4, quoted in Beverly Gordon, “American Denim: Blue Jeans and Their Multiple Layers of Meaning” in *Dress and Popular Culture*, eds. Patricia Anne Cunningham & Susan Voso Lab (Bowling Green: Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 1991), p. 34.

In the post-war period, economic prosperity meant an increase in average American income, which was usually funnelled toward the domestic realm. The money income of Americans rose by 50 percent between 1935 and 1950, with a 53 percent rise in purchases of clothing.<sup>22</sup> Wartime rationing that had limited the production of Levi's jeans through restrictions on thread and fabric had disappeared, and consumers rushed to stores to purchase new jeans.<sup>23</sup> Levi's capitalized on this with an optimistic plan distributed to their retailers with four essential parts: making quality jeans, pricing them so dealers could make a profit, selling it through home town merchants, and continuing to tell the world about their jeans "through dominant advertising."<sup>24</sup> Accordingly, Levi's leveraged its advertising power to target multiple demographics so as to effect the kind of popularity that characterized their business by the end of the 1950s and onward.

This popularity was not established uniformly across geography and age. Jeans did not mean the same thing to everyone; to a middle-aged man in California, a university-age beatnik in New York, and a child in New Jersey, they carried different significances. Accordingly, I identify three main targets of Levi's advertising in the 1950s: middle-class white men, middle-class white male children, and the middle-class family. Levi's marketing to each demographic differs, with different images of the cowboy being presented in order to sell products.

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<sup>22</sup> US Bureau of the Census, *Historical Statistics of the United States, Colonial Times to 1970* (Washington: US Government Printing Office, 1975). Also referenced in May, *Homeward Bound*, p. 148. This amount outpaced expenditure on food and drink (at 30 percent) but was actually fairly small by comparison to other industries, like automobiles (205 percent), recreation (185 percent) and household operation (205 percent).

<sup>23</sup> Downey, *Levi Strauss & Co.*, p. 75.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid*, 74.



**Figure 4:** Levi Strauss & Co., “First in the West... Because They Last!” Print advertisement, 1950. Digital reproduction. <http://i.imgur.com/3ZKfmq7.jpg>

Advertising to the first group tended to take the form of the tried-and-true Western cowboy image, like that which is depicted in Fig. 4, an ad from 1950. The ad depicts a white cowboy bent down outdoors over a fire, making tea or coffee, clad in slim Levi’s jeans with cuffs upturned and a vibrant green plaid shirt with a red scarf. In this regard the West is portrayed as part of a romantic B Western myth: the cowboy is clean and wears pristine, vibrant clothes, and the Frontier is a place of adventure and fellowship. In the background is a large wagon, cattle being driven by two men. The text “first in the west... because they last!” dominates the ad, stressing practicality, durability, and a “real American” status through its invocation of the Myth of the Frontier. The phrase “patronize your home town merchant... he’s your neighbor” at the bottom stresses community and the small-town purchasing indicated by the Levi’s post-war marketing policy. The image of the cowboy here is akin to that which is depicted in *Ride, Ranger, Ride*, with a non-threatening West promising adventure. But the “first in the west” rhetoric, as well as the Frontier setting, suggests that this depiction of the cowboy is distinctly American.



*From left to right:*

**Figure 5:** Levi Strauss & Co., “For Rugged Wear... It’s Always Been Levi’s.” Print advertisement, 1950s. Digital reproduction. <http://i.imgur.com/iBfGjFy.jpg>

**Figure 6:** Levi Strauss & Co., “Cut for the Cowboy!” Print advertisement, 1956. Digital reproduction. <http://i.imgur.com/O5FOsY8.jpg>

Other ads from the 1950s, like Fig. 5, also invoke the West with a depiction of a cowboy with Levi’s jeans, revolver pointed out a window at foes who can be assumed to be Natives, judging by the arrows sticking out of the window’s frame. The jeans are thus directly linked to the conceit of the Myth of the Frontier: strong men lay down the law with guns. The jeans are portrayed as “the original cowboy pants,” which again is a complete historical inaccuracy, but it appeals to a mythology of denim as part of the West. Durability and dollar value are again stressed with assertions that “you’ll never find a better value, dollar for dollar, than Levi’s,” that

they are “made of the world’s heaviest denim and riveted at strain points,” and that they are “tailored slim and trim for solid comfort.”<sup>25</sup> Comfort, however, is a new factor; rather than just being durable or tough, they are also fitted in a way that allows the wearer to retain their mobility. While early working-class ads like Fig. 1 stressed the overalls’ looseness as part of their “comfort,” it is clear from the visuals of Fig. 5 that comfort plays a different role here: these jeans are cut very close to the body with an aggressive (for the time!) taper.

Fig. 6, from 1956, adopts a less martial and more domestic cowboy image, advertising with a picture of very snug Levi’s jeans on a middle-aged looking cowboy with a western shirt, cowboy hat and Cuban-heeled cowboy boots, reading his mail. The ad claims that the jeans are “cut really snug – the way the working cowboy wants ‘em;” this is an interesting claim, as most of the early Levi’s jeans were completely anti-fit, allowing for maximum freedom of motion (as suggested by Fig. 1). But the term “working cowboy” is especially intriguing in this context: if real, Old West cowboys didn’t wear super-tight jeans, then who did? The answer lies in the metaphorical “cowboys” rather than the real ones. Judging by the advertised tightness of the fit, I assume that this ad was directed at East Coasters, at whom the 1954 revision of the Levi’s 501 jeans was directed.<sup>26</sup> Thus, the cowboy is more overtly likened to the metaphorical “cowboy,” wearing Levi’s jeans in times of leisure. The cowboy in this advertisement, reading his mail, is certainly a more domestic image than the cowboy in Fig. 5 fighting off Natives or the cowboy on the range in Fig. 4. The same rhetoric of being “comfortable in action” and “super-tough XX denim – reinforced with real Copper Rivets” comes into effect here. The jeans have become

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<sup>25</sup> Insofar as I know, the Cone Mills denim used in Levi’s jeans from the 1950s weighed about 12 ounces per yard, tightening up to 14 ounces after the initial wash or soak (as was the standard for unsanforized jeans). Most contemporary denim is about 7-9 ounces, but some artisanal brands have managed to hit a terrifying 32 ounces. Surely they would balk at some of the experiments people have done with denim today.

<sup>26</sup> The 1955 revision of the 501, by comparison, was wider in the leg, like earlier Levi’s jeans.

fashion, paradoxically, stripped of their initial meanings which are then re-contextualized and reused to sell product.

Even these relatively similar advertisements reflect a diversity of demographics in middle-class white America, as well as their distinct historical contexts. By the 1950s, leisure time had expanded substantially. With this came a new style out of California, focusing on garments that were perceived as practical and hard-wearing. The resultant “leisurewear” that emerged heavily borrowed from workwear and cowboy-influenced clothing as a continuation of what William Ramsey Scott calls a pre-existing “interest in vernacular style and the folk[, which] reflected a shift in thinking about class in America” from the 1930s.<sup>27</sup> So for some men, the cowboy in Levi’s jeans was appealing thanks to them being an imagined part of the Old West, a “dude ranch” costume to be worn because of a fetishization of folk styles to which all three of these advertisements respond.

The “shift in thinking about class,” however, is important, in that it links back to what Whyte observed about the fixation on image of middle-class suburbia, and all its domestic containment-induced homogeneity. His assertion that “suburban residents like to maintain that their suburbia not only looks classless but is classless” implies a focus on images of classlessness and a lack of division between people in the community.<sup>28</sup> The idea he forwards of “keeping down” with the Joneses and not “vaunting worldly goods” make it clear that this classless image must not be showy, and must be on par with the appearance of other neighbours’ goods.<sup>29</sup> The avoidance of displays of luxury and the presentation of a humble “character” are thus quite important. Finally, he calls attention to the budget-consciousness of members of the young

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<sup>27</sup> William Ramsey Scott, *Dressing Down: Modernism, Masculinity, and the Men’s Leisurewear Industry in California, 1930-1960* (Ann Arbor: UMI, 2008). Dissertation for University of California, Berkeley, p.127.

<sup>28</sup> Whyte, *Organization Man*, p. 313.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*

suburban middle-class, planning out even their impulse buying.<sup>30</sup> We can thus identify several characteristics that make their way into goods they might purchase: they should appear classless, should avoid luxury in favor of practicality, and should be durable and a good value for money.

Jeans are thus imagined as the epitome of a practical, frugal garment that appears to be untethered by class associations: “you’ll never find a better value, dollar for dollar, than Levi’s [...] the original cowboy pants.”<sup>31</sup> Echoes of this association can be observed in all three advertisements; they stress the toughness, durability and dollar value of the garments. They look classless, thanks to class-spanning associations derived from Depression narratives, they are durable, thanks to the manner of their construction, and they have a strong value for the money expended in purchasing a pair. The cowboy is here used as a communicator of a practical “character” and a middle-class fantasy of “classlessness” which appealed to those looking to maintain a humble image.

Yet the idea of classlessness was itself an imagined characteristic, however, rooted in middle-class values and relying on a dude-ranch nostalgia for “the imagined past of the cowboy and stereotypes about the primitive, natural characteristics of the folk.”<sup>32</sup> The new “leisurewear” provided a response to this sentiment: it appealed to practical activity and allowed middle-class individuals to play the roles of imaginary American citizens freed from the strictures of class. As Beverly Gordon analyzes it, jeans were and are thought of as “practical, long-lasting and unchanging [...] cheap, comfortable, and associated with physicality; they represented freedom from dutifulness, and because they were simultaneously associated with work and play, came to stand for a society where there really was no distinction between the two.”<sup>33</sup> To some men, then,

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<sup>30</sup> *Ibid*, p. 322.

<sup>31</sup> Levi’s. “For Rugged Wear... It’s Always Been Levi’s.”

<sup>32</sup> Scott, *Dressing Down*, p. 131.

<sup>33</sup> Gordon, “American Denim” in *Dress and Popular Culture*, p. 35.

the cowboy's appeal lay in his imaging relative to domestic containment. In this way, the cowboy could be conceived of as a more domestic image; he becomes a metaphor for a leisure class that is more concerned with the cowboy's associations with practicality and his classless image than actually doing hard labor. Fig. 6's depiction is more along these lines.

To others, the cowboy could be a powerful alternative to the other-directed Organization Man that Riesman and Whyte described. As William Ramsey Scott argues:

during "soft" leisure time, men could perform "hardness" by referencing manual labor and the rough-and-tumble frontier. In an age when middle-class institutions like consumption and suburbia threatened one's masculinity and the newly-bureaucratized workplace limited individuals' autonomy, the self-reliant, ultra-masculine cowboy was an appealing archetype to access.<sup>34</sup>

For men concerned with Whyte's Organization Man and the fear of other-directedness, then, cowboys in denim advertising communicated a performative element. As John Fiske observes, "a middle-aged executive wearing jeans as he mows his lawn on a suburban Sunday is, among other things, aligning himself with youthful vigor and activity (in opposition to the distinctly middle-aged office desk) and with the mythic dignity of labor."<sup>35</sup> The jeans-wearer thus aligns themselves with youthful vigour and virility, replacing the drudgery of repetitive deskwork with hard physical labor suggesting youth. Jeans in this conception are being purchased as a performative symbol; they allow men to "perform" the role of a young, strong cowboy both within their own minds and in a manner that is visible to them and people who might see them on their mythical dude ranch.

The cowboy squatting over the fire in Fig. 4 and fighting off Native invaders in Fig. 5 are more like this, targeting middle-aged middle-class men to sell them a youthful fantasy to ward off the Organization's degenerating influence. But here we come across another differentiation in

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<sup>34</sup> Scott, *Dressing Down*, p. 130.

<sup>35</sup> John Fiske, *Understanding Popular Culture* (New York: Routledge, 2010, reprint of 1989 original), p. 1.

the cowboy image. Unlike Fig. 6's more domestic image, the cowboy in Figs. 4 and 5 is more of a rebel, doing hard work and fighting off invaders to denote youth and inner-direction and strength; in other words, the opposite of the domestic Organization Man. The cowboy becomes a rebellious figure, fighting against the Organization as Whyte and Riesman implored. He is, simultaneously, a domestic and wild image, and echoes of this differentiation manifest in other Levi's advertising from the period.

Many sources, like William Ramsey Scott's *Dressing Down*, appear to assume that the only targets of consumerist advertising in the period were middle-aged men. Yet it would likely be a weak advertising campaign to only target one specific demographic, no matter how expansive! Accordingly, 1950s Levi's advertisements also address other markets within the white-male-middle-class paradigm. By the 1950s, Levi's and other denim companies were still engaged in a protracted battle with parents and teachers in the East to sell denim to younger men and kids. For kids who were raised with television Westerns of cowboys fighting off Natives, and whose toys reflected Western images—coon-skin caps like that of Davy Crockett, cap guns, rubber-tipped arrows, tom toms, etc.—jeans were an essential part of the costumes of their idols.<sup>36</sup> Thus, advertisements directed at these other demographics took on different connotations.

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<sup>36</sup> *The Guide to United States Popular Culture*, eds. Ray B. Browne & Pat Browne (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2001), p. 903.



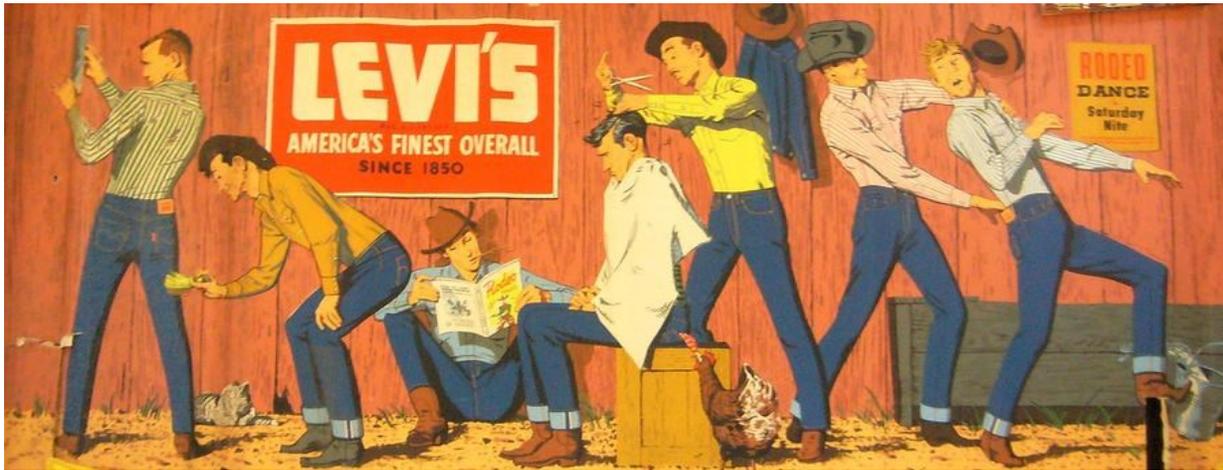
From left to right:  
**Figure 7:** Levi Strauss & Co., “Follow the Leader... Wear Levi’s.” Print advertisement, 1951.  
 Digital reproduction. <http://i.imgur.com/o4zRRky.jpg>

**Figure 8:** Levi Strauss & Co., “Know Your West!” Print advertisement, 1954.  
 Digital reproduction. <http://i.imgur.com/cMfapKm.jpg>

Fig. 7, an ad from 1951, moves away from dude ranch themes in order to present an image of three squeaky-clean looking boys, one college-age and two younger, all with the same slim jeans with big upturned cuffs and colorful shirts, holding basketballs that suggest that Levi's are being used as sportswear. The marketing instead stresses popularity: "follow the leader... wear Levi's" and "more popular than ever on campus and playground" in place of Western mythologizing and discussions of the toughness of their denim. This makes sense; younger audiences generally don't need to make the financial decisions, so discussions of durability and practicality are not as powerful to them as fitting in. The target audience here is young, middle-class men. For these men and boys, then, the appeal of jeans lay in their stylishness and ability to make you fit in at school, an image which contrasted sharply with the rebellious images of denim that emerged in films like *The Wild One* (1953) with Marlon Brando.

But the imagery of the Old West is not absent in later advertising to young men. Fig. 8, from 1954, is part of a collection of Levi's advertisements directed at young men to "Know Your West!" and all the standbys of the Myth of the Frontier are displayed here. The image at the top depicts the Sioux leader Red Cloud, massive war bonnet on his head, with a primitive-looking tomahawk in hand, raised to strike in aggression. He is painted as a "cowboys and Indians"-style villain. Other illustrations present other aspects of the Myth of the Frontier in the founding of Tombstone, and the idea of "Yankee skill go[ing] West." The advertisement also establishes its own mythologizing, too, declaring that the original Levi's jeans were the "first choice of cowboys since 1850 – and first choice of active boys today." How cowboys wore riveted Levi's jeans twenty-three whole years before they were actually invented is obviously a little ridiculous... unless, of course, this were marketing rhetoric used to extend Levi's jeans even

further into the American past so as to sell the product as being conducive to a cowboy identity.<sup>37</sup> For these boys, then, the appeal is much like “dude ranch” fetishization of Western wear for men; it is the clothing of their idols and a step towards the “cowboys and Indians” fantasies of playgrounds nationwide.



**Figure 9:** Levi Strauss & Co., “Rodeo Dance.” Print advertisement, 1950s. Digital reproduction. <http://i.imgur.com/8lFJUla.jpg>

Fig. 9 takes this focus on cowboys and adapts it, depicting seven young men wearing slim Levi’s jeans, fitted button-up shirts, and cowboy hats and boots beside what appears to be a barn. The ad depicts them as preparing for a Saturday-night “Rodeo Dance,” as the sign on the wall indicates. Each of the boys seems to be quite focused on their appearance; the boy on the far left checks himself out in a mirror to ensure his hair looks good, and the boy behind him brushes off the first boy’s jeans. Beside them, another boy is having his hair cut by one of the other boys (and seems rather unhappy about the whole affair!). And beside them in turn are two other boys,

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<sup>37</sup> Sarcasm is fun!

one stopping the other from tripping over a water bucket by grabbing him by the jeans' waistband.<sup>38</sup>

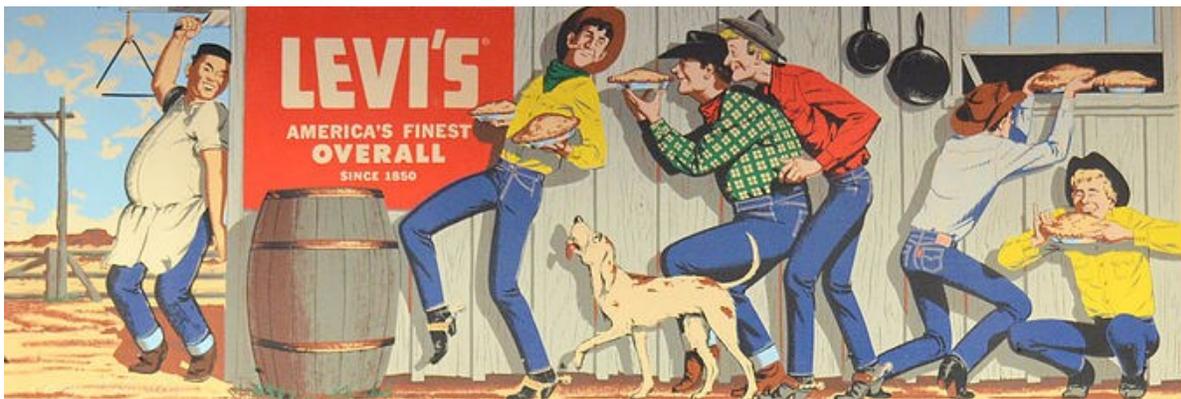
Unlike the marketing stressing durability, practicality and the other primary factors of Californian leisurewear that were marketed to middle-class men, the vision of Levi's in this ad seems more concerned with *looking good*. The depicted boys are dressed to impress and more concerned with their appearance than mobility. Secondly, while the scene depicts a rural, outdoorsy scene—such that there is a chicken wandering around – with imagery of cowboys and rodeos, it is ultimately centered around the home and around civilization. This scene, without the cowboy hats and the dirt on the ground, could easily be transplanted into a home. The Frontier in Fig. 5 is an essential part of the ad; although the cowboy is well-dressed, he is *outdoors*, civilizing the land. The Frontier is central to any interpretation of the ad. In Fig. 9, however, the cowboys are depicted in a more domestic scene. The ad, at its core, is seven young men preparing for a dance and getting haircuts, with the setting of the West being largely set dressing. To me, this reads as both an extension of the Western romanticism demonstrated in Fig. 8; it lets young men imagine themselves as cowboys but has become a sign in itself. The Myth of the Frontier is almost completely absent. For these young men, the appeal, like in Fig. 7, lies simply in looking good.

Fig. 10, from 1958, continues this theme, depicting five boys and their trusty dog stealing pies from the windowsill of an Asian baker. The boys are dressed similarly to those in Fig. 9. They have cowboy boots (two of them even having spurs for unseen horses), slim jeans, bright western shirts and scarves, and cowboy hats. But again, the scenario depicts a scene that would

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<sup>38</sup> While this image, by our present standards of masculinity, can be read as a little bit homoerotic in its presentation, I would warn against necessarily interpreting it as such for fear of projecting our present on the past. It seems to symbolize more youthful rambunctiousness and energy than a wry hint of homosexuality, although this is difficult to definitively say without detailed knowledge of the artist or advertising agency.

not be out of place in a domestic setting: it depicts five boys and a dog stealing pies from their neighbor more than any attachment of a myth of the Frontier. This ad in particular is interesting in that it depicts a person of color, which previous ads avoided; although the baker is large, caricature-like in features, and brandishes a cleaver above his head, he does not seem to be portrayed as a menacing enemy like Red Cloud in Fig. 8. The boys do not appear to be in any real danger. They are simply up to mischief.



**Figure 10:** Levi Strauss & Co., “Pies.” Print advertisement, 1958. Digital reproduction. <http://i.imgur.com/oxIk3lw.jpg>

The baker, too, wears Levi’s jeans and cowboy boots, which is intriguing in that non-whites were depicted in previous ads, if at all, as being primitive villains and societal Others against which white men could define themselves (and thus America). Although he nominally fills the role of “antagonist” to the young boys, he is still part of society. I doubt that the artist necessarily had an activist objective here, but he can be read in the same manner that the boys are. These ads depict regular people in domestic scenes that might take place in suburbia, only with a mask of the Old West overlaid atop them. The baker, then, might imply that Asians are part of that domestic suburban scene in real life. The appeal here is more like Fig. 9: jeans are

part of a make-believe scenario that is more of an allegory for suburbia than it is an allegory of the Old West.

There are a couple important observations to make here. Firstly, it should be obvious that individual advertisements, much like advertisement campaigns, are not addressed to a single distinct audience. Many of these advertisements directed at young men and kids were read and consumed by multiple audiences. Consider Fig. 9, for example: to young men, the advertisement seems to communicate that Levis are part of looking good (rather than any explicit concern with the Myth of the Frontier), but for older audiences the ad could be taken as an invocation of youthful masculinity (e.g. “wearing Levi’s jeans imbues you with the youthful vigor of these young cowboys”). But the presentation of cowboys here is a tonal shift by comparison to ads like Figs. 4 and 5, depicting cowboys outdoors in Myth of the Frontier landscapes, and more akin to the everyday, domesticated cowboy in Fig. 6.

The third genre of Levi’s advertisements in the 1950s makes this domestic angle more powerful. Levi’s established two new collections early in the 1950s: Denim Family and Lighter Blues. The Lighter Blues line was more typical of Californian leisurewear, a line made, as the name suggests, of lighter blue cotton twill garments. The advertising for this line dispensed altogether with imagery of cowboys, as shown in Fig. 11. The tagline “beyond compare for leisure wear,” and the father’s smoking pipe, make its targeted objective far clearer: these are the clothes of the urban middle-class. The Denim Family line, depicted in Fig. 12, depicts exactly what the title describes: a stereotypical nuclear family consisting of a white man, woman, son and daughter, all clad in Western-themed denim outfits. The depictions of each differ. While the man is depicted in one of the smaller, uncolorized images armed with a rifle, this is a relatively small part of the image. The colorized picture of the man depicts him with dressy trousers, a

denim jacket, and a vibrant red scarf. The colorized image of the wife depicts her wearing more domestic clothes, but in some of the background images she can be seen wearing the same outfit as her husband. The depiction of the cowboy here is almost completely divorced from Myth of the Frontier associations. Jeans and denim jackets here serve not as markers of any particular myth (indeed, the only person in the advertisement wearing more traditional jeans is the young girl!), and act instead as just means of selling a commodity.



*From left to right:*

**Figure 11:** Levi Strauss & Co., "Beyond Compare for Leisure Wear." Print advertisement, 1953.  
Digital reproduction. <http://i.imgur.com/AfkMRrc.jpg>

**Figure 12:** Levi Strauss & Co., "First Name in Denims!" Print advertisement, 1954.  
Digital reproduction. <http://i.imgur.com/CyOu7Ue.jpg>

Even within a fairly proscribed genre of advertising (that is, “white cowboys used to sell tough jeans”) we can already observe multiple cowboy masculinities; he is the cowboy out on the range, the domesticated everyman who just happens to wear jeans, the young man trying to fit in, and the family man in a smart denim jacket. He is a conformist and a rebel all at the same time. Perhaps this reflects Levi’s attempt to spread Western leisurewear to the eastern states of America; their advertising reflects varying ideals of masculinity, more and less domesticated, and more and less situated in the Frontier. This reflects dynamics of change; indeed, the very name “jeans” originated in the 1950s, a sentiment, which Lynn Downey observes, “may have something to do with the way teenagers appropriated denim in the 1950s and the fact that ‘overalls’ represented denim’s past and that of their parents.”<sup>39</sup> What we can infer from this is that denim’s character was in flux. It was at the same time a symbol of the old world and Myth of the Frontier to the older generation, and a new, appropriated and reinterpreted symbol for the younger generation. This, of course, depended on location, as what was normal wear for the children of the Western United States differed to that which was worn by the children of the Eastern states.

The diverse character of these works can be interpreted in a number of different ways. It is true that Levi’s had been using “dude ranch” imagery in its advertising since the 1930s, and scenes of domesticity had been used since then as well.<sup>40</sup> Images of the West were part of Levi’s cultural cachet, and some of this theme in the advertising discussed in this chapter can be explained as historical inertia. To this day, even, Levi’s still uses the image of two men with horses trying to pull apart a pair of jeans (first patented in 1886) on the patches of their jeans;

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<sup>39</sup> Downey, *Levi Strauss & Co.*, p. 82.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 62.

scenes of the West are expected with Levi's jeans.<sup>41</sup> But in Levi's advertisements of the 1950s we *can* make some powerful observations about the cowboy: he is deformed and transformed by post-war consumerism into a symbol that, like his depiction in films of the period, appeals to diverse audiences, some of which were on opposite ends of the same discussions. His treatment in this market becomes full of apparent paradoxes: he is fashionable anti-fashion, a conformist anticonformist, and a domestic symbol of the outdoors. He is a lifestyle used to sell a lifestyle surprisingly unlike his own. And it is this focus on lifestyle which drives the most prominent symbol of the cowboy in American marketing: the Marlboro Man.

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<sup>41</sup> *Ibid*, p. 21.

## Chapter V: Gunsmoke

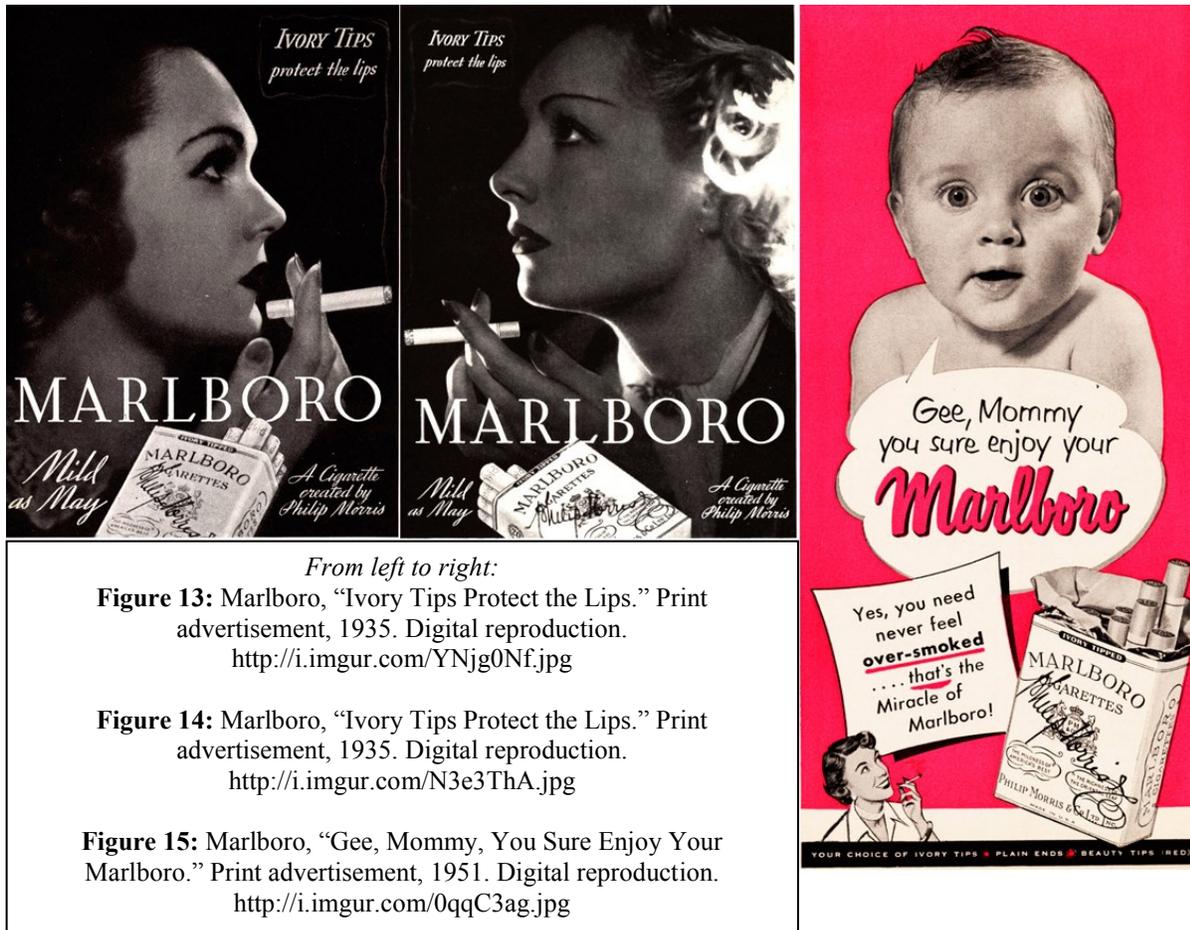
The Marlboro Man is perhaps the most prominent example of cowboy imagery being used to sell products, and it shows, judging by the sheer volume of literature produced about him. Be it in the study of advertising, the study of the Myth of the Frontier in the 1950s, or even the study of masculinity, the Marlboro Man is virtually inescapable. And in all of these fields it is the same set of characteristics that is often subjected to scrutiny. To quote OASIS (Organized Against Sexism and Institutionalized Stereotypes), a collective of men in the late 1980s analyzing men's presentation in advertising, the Marlboro man is defined by "his hat, his horse, the leather, and the look in his eyes. [He is] distant, self-assured, aloof and unapproachable. He rides with confidence, a strong sense of himself, a strong sense of his power."<sup>1</sup> He is a tough, gritty cowboy like Kane or Ethan, but minus the visibility of psychological weakness. By comparison to the cowboy's presentation in denim advertising, the cowboy in Marlboro advertising is a more homogeneous figure, although he too appeals to a range of demographics.

The Marlboro Man did not emerge from nothing. He was the product of an advertising campaign dreamed up by Leo Burnett, the head of a creative team that was in charge of revitalizing Marlboro's image. Prior to the 1950s, Marlboro was a relatively small player in the cigarette industry. Their advertising campaigns, too, were only of middling success, and had a very different character to the hyper-masculine mythical Frontier of "Marlboro County" that we know today. From the late 1920s until the 1950s, Marlboros were heavily marketed towards women, using claims of the mildness and elegance of the brand's cigarettes to present them as a feminine product. They even marketed their cigarettes as having a white or red "beauty tip,"

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<sup>1</sup> They do so in a way that is very similar to Jean Kilbourne's *Killing Us Softly: Advertising's Image of Women* (1979), applying feminist gender critique to the study of men and masculinity. While the narration is rather stilted, I feel that *Stale Roles and Tight Buns* is an underappreciated must-watch for anyone studying men's presentations in the media. Dick Hughes, John Lapham, Walter Locke, Michael Markovits, and Michael Weiskoff. *Stale Roles and Tight Buns: Male Images in Advertising* (Brighton: OASIS, 1989), 0:24.

which hid lipstick marks from view and projected a feminine and luxurious air.<sup>2</sup> Anyone who has seen a Marlboro ad recently knows that this is quite a difference!



From left to right:  
**Figure 13:** Marlboro, “Ivory Tips Protect the Lips.” Print advertisement, 1935. Digital reproduction.  
<http://i.imgur.com/YNjg0Nf.jpg>

**Figure 14:** Marlboro, “Ivory Tips Protect the Lips.” Print advertisement, 1935. Digital reproduction.  
<http://i.imgur.com/N3e3ThA.jpg>

**Figure 15:** Marlboro, “Gee, Mommy, You Sure Enjoy Your Marlboro.” Print advertisement, 1951. Digital reproduction.  
<http://i.imgur.com/0qqC3ag.jpg>

Marlboro advertisements from the 1940s had a remarkably different tone to those of the 1950s onward. Early ads like Figs. 13 and 14 are some early examples of Marlboro advertisements, and are part of the same campaign from 1935.<sup>3</sup> Each depicts glamorous-looking white women, made-up with heavy eyeliner, dark lipstick, immaculate curls and luxurious clothing, holding fantastically-large cigarettes and staring away from the camera. The cigarettes are also devoid of any markings or stains, a visual representation of the tagline “Ivory Tips

<sup>2</sup> Sara E. Quay, *Westward Expansion* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 2002), p. 60.

<sup>3</sup> I should give credit here to the Stanford School of Medicine’s collection of cigarette advertising, a part of their Stanford Research into the Impact of Tobacco Advertising initiative, as an essential resource for historical study of cigarette advertising – and from which most of the images used in this section were derived.

protect the lips.” The elegant cursive used in the subtitle “Mild as May” and “a cigarette created by Philip Morris” underscores the general vibe of the advertisements; they are very luxurious and distinctly feminine. They are advertised as distinctly “mild” and refined, unlike the presumed coarseness and commonness of their competitors. The models looking away from the camera might be interpreted as an attempt to convey a mysterious air, and the usage of the term “ivory” amplifies the luxurious atmosphere. Their cigarettes, these advertisements say, are for people of a higher standing, a class above the general public, and smoking them will afford the user a certain amount of likeness to the glamorous models used in their advertisements.<sup>4</sup>

Fig. 15, from 1951, takes on a slightly different tack, featuring a baby saying the words “Gee, Mommy, you sure enjoy your Marlboro,” implicitly making the subject of the advertisement a mother rather than a seductive, glamorous woman augmenting her beauty. The advertisement is more visually vibrant and fun in tone, with a bright pink background, sharper, more whimsical fonts, and no declarations of Marlboro as a “luxury cigarette.” A smiling cartoon of a woman dressed in fine jewellery and a sharp shirt demonstrates more fully the target audience: she is less aristocratic in dress, although no less feminine, by comparison to earlier ads. While it may seem surprising to see pictures of infants being used to sell cigarettes now, they served an important role in cultivating an image of cigarettes as being respectable and “a part of normal family life.”<sup>5</sup> The target audience here seems to be new young mothers rather than younger single women; the lack of the bourgeois overtones might be interpreted as a part of a domestic containment mood.

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<sup>4</sup> As for the size of the cigarettes... well, sometimes a cigarette advertisement is just a cigarette advertisement.

<sup>5</sup> “Stanford Research into the Impact of Tobacco Advertising,” *Stanford School of Medicine*, 3 Feb. 2016, Digital, accessed Feb. 7, 2016.

[http://tobacco.stanford.edu/tobacco\\_main/images.php?token2=fm\\_st142.php&token1=fm\\_img4318.php](http://tobacco.stanford.edu/tobacco_main/images.php?token2=fm_st142.php&token1=fm_img4318.php)

At this point, Marlboro's campaign to expand the market of women smokers was met with minor success, as they were only the seventh-largest cigarette company in America, with little recognition elsewhere.<sup>6</sup> Two major developments spurred a change in their campaigns. The first of these factors was a great rise in awareness about the scientific linkage between smoking and cancer, necessitating a game change in marketing. Prior to the Marlboro Man, one of the most popular means of advertising to male demographics was through appeals to doctors and health. These campaigns "represented men as the arbiters of health by virtue of a relationship between masculinity and a technoscientific-medical rationality. Cigarette smoking, these advertisements seemed to suggest, would endow men with this rationality."<sup>7</sup> Camel cigarettes in particular pushed this model of masculinity with bold declarations that "More Doctors Smoke Camels."<sup>8</sup> This style of advertising suggested a scientific heroism, where one's rationality was constituted as masculine power. These advertisements accordingly suggested "heroic virtues such as selflessness, determination, and devotion" as part of their portrayal of doctorial masculinity.<sup>9</sup>

Philip Morris, the parent company of Marlboro, also got in on the boom in science-themed advertising with ads like Fig. 16, from 1942. This ad was even printed in the Journal of the American Medical Association, which should demonstrate something about the then-present awareness of the detrimental effects of smoking. This advertisement relies on "recognized laboratory tests" and scientific comparisons to other brands to make its point. The center image of this ad is intended to evoke a doctor's prescription, with an explanation making this overt by

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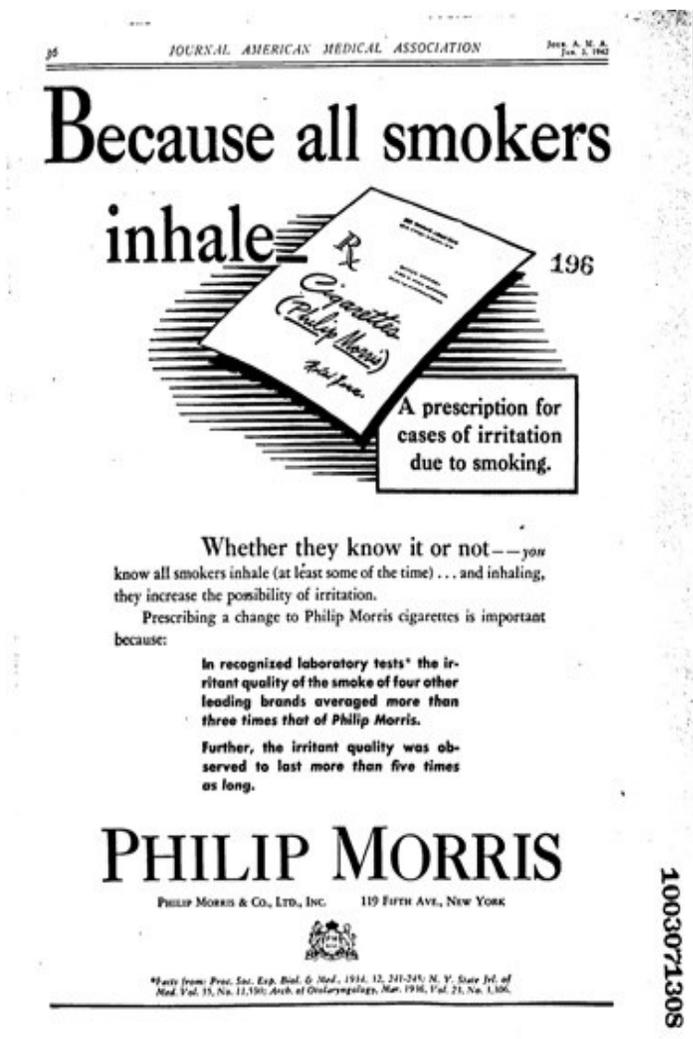
<sup>6</sup> Barry, *Visual Intelligence*, p. 278.

<sup>7</sup> Cameron White, John L. Oliffe & Joan L. Bottorff, "From the Physician to the Marlboro Man: Masculinity, Health, and Cigarette Advertising in America, 1946-1964," *Men and Masculinities*, Vol. 15, No. 526, 2012, p. 527.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 530.

helpfully labeling it “a prescription for cases of irritation due to smoking.”<sup>10</sup> The image presented of the cigarettes here is one of reason and science. It communicates that by smoking Philip Morris cigarettes, you, like the scientist or doctor, are a reasonable and intelligent man making a responsible choice to smoke their cigarettes over those that trials deemed less prone to irritation. The scientific community which had been a source of their advertising strategy had turned against them, presenting evidence of the deleterious effects of smoking, necessitating an alternative strategy for selling product.



**Figure 16:** Marlboro, “Because All Smokers Inhale...” Print advertisement, 1942. Digital reproduction. <http://i.imgur.com/R4camDc.jpg>

<sup>10</sup> And the main thing here is just “cases of irritation” as opposed to, say, lung cancer.

The second factor was that Philip Morris, in response to this scientific awareness, developed a filter that was intended to decrease the volume of smoke that entered the user's lungs. They also developed a new box that was resistant to being crushed (and thereby damaging the cigarettes) at this time. Filter cigarettes were considered to be "sissy" and a marker of being unable to handle a stronger cigarette (as one might consider watered-down beer inferior to stronger sorts). Leo Burnett notes that "we had this buddle with our top creative people and we thought, if filters were regarded on the sissy side, the natural thing was to look for a masculine image."<sup>11</sup> Accordingly, models of masculinity were necessary to counter the perceived "sissy" influence of filters, to reframe and recontextualize them as a masculine product so as to get self-perceived masculine men to buy it.

More men were smoking than women, as well, so a campaign that could sell the filtered Marlboros to men and bypass their reputation as effeminate was in order to capitalize on this market reality. Phillip Morris changed tactics to market the new filter and box to a more ripe market: young men and adolescents, according to Leo Burnett, "who were just beginning to smoke as a way of declaring their independence."<sup>12</sup> Burnett was very clear in his approach to this campaign, trying to by his admission "sell flavor in the cigarette, masculinity in the smoker."<sup>13</sup> The resultant Marlboro Man campaign thus didn't just conveniently use cowboys because they were popular. It used them because they could be employed to reinforce and appeal to an imagined-traditional state of masculinity in targeting a specific audience.

In this way, the Marlboro Man "celebrated virtues of individualism, autonomy, and self-sufficiency [...] function[ing] very effectively as a critique of the institutional authority of health

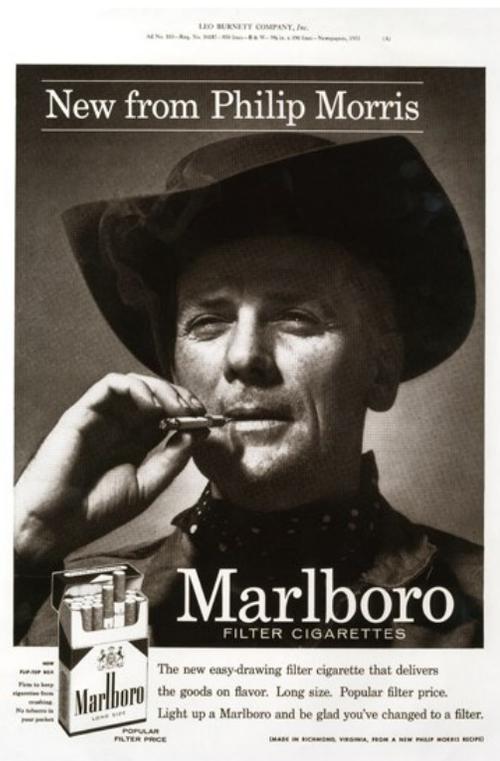
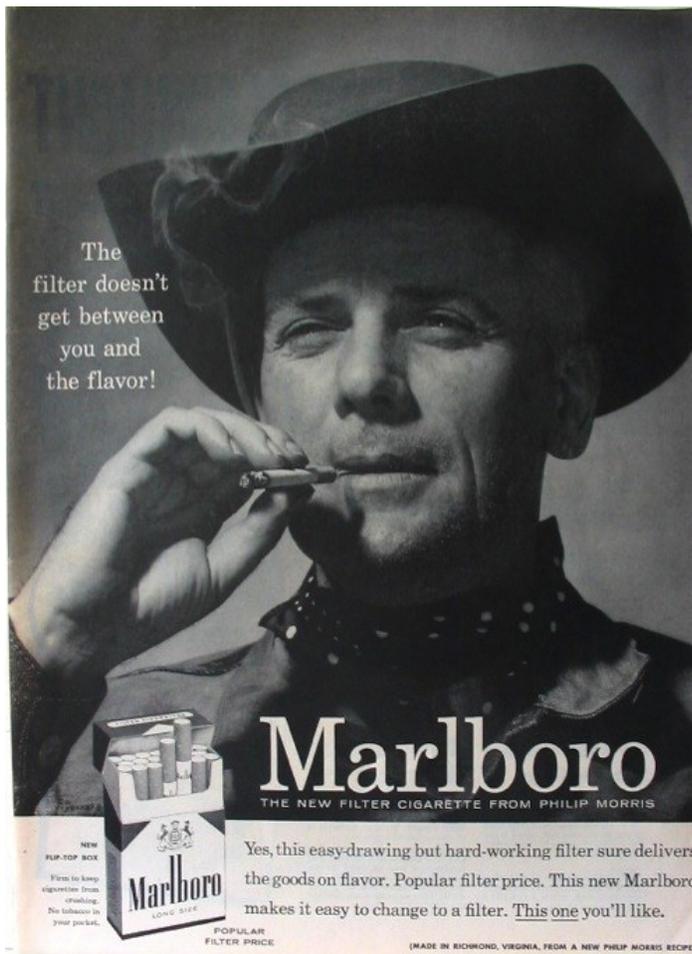
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<sup>11</sup> Reported in Subroto Sengupta, *Brand Positioning: Strategies for Competitive Advantage* (New Delhi: Tata McGraw-Hill, 2005, reprint of 1990 original), p. 62.

<sup>12</sup> William Meyers, *The Image-Makers: Power and Persuasion on Madison Avenue* (New York: New York Times Book, 1984), p. 70. Referenced in Barry, *Visual Intelligence*, p. 278.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

and medicine and its calls for the regulation of tobacco consumption.”<sup>14</sup> The masculinity thereby presented did a complete flip from a rational image concerned with science to a devil-may-care badassery. The Marlboro Man emerged in 1954 as part of the company’s revitalized campaign, presenting to the public a succession of “regular guys” in masculine roles; pilots, golfers, ranchers, officers, and cowboys, all strong, masculine and powerful, with distinctive tattoos on their wrists and hands.<sup>15</sup>



*From left to right:*

**Figure 17:** Marlboro, “The Filter Doesn’t Get Between You and the Flavor!” Print advertisement, 1955. Digital reproduction. <http://i.imgur.com/QAcDZot.jpg>

**Figure 18:** Marlboro, “New from Philip Morris.” Print advertisement, 1955. Digital reproduction. <http://i.imgur.com/jDbWUW5.jpg>

<sup>14</sup> White, Oliffe and Bottorff, “From the Physician to the Marlboro Man,” pp. 527-8.

<sup>15</sup> Quay, *Westward Expansion*, p. 61.

The figure of the cowboy was the most prominent of the Marlboro Man ads, and although the company tried other roles, market research suggested that he was the most appealing to a chosen audience.<sup>16</sup> He was “the ultimate man’s and woman’s man.”<sup>17</sup> The first depiction of the Marlboro Man, depicted in Fig. 17, from 1955, invokes numerous tropes of the Myth of the Frontier.<sup>18</sup> The cowboy in the advertisement has an Eastwood-esque squint staring off into the distance (or surveying his domain), the corners of his eyes and his cheeks marked with wrinkles suggesting a hard life.<sup>19</sup> He does not bear a smile on his face, or any other traces of warmth. He is solitary, stoic and tough. While he does not have the tattoo that would become standard for the Marlboro Men of the 1950s, he still suggests someone on the fringe of society. He wears a cowboy hat, a neckerchief and a thick shirt with a loose thread coming off the collar; he is clearly not intended to be a B Western cowboy like Autry, dressed to the nines, but rather someone who does hard work under the sun.

The language employed by the advertisement matches his appearance; it uses sentences that are short, to the point, and practical. The cigarette is portrayed as “deliver[ing] the goods on flavor,” maintaining a colloquial tone by contrast to the luxurious bourgeois imagery evoked by the “Mild as May” campaign. An alternative version of the ad, depicted in Fig. 18, has the same general language but includes the phrase “long size,” which is both a declaration of fact (i.e. more cigarette for one’s money) and suggests phallic implications. Gone are the declarations of ivory tips and beauty products, in favor of basic facts: it’s popular, it’s inexpensive, and it has got great flavor.

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<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>17</sup> Barry, *Visual Intelligence*, p. 278.

<sup>18</sup> Digital reproduction accessed Feb. 5, 2016. <http://i.imgur.com/QAcDZot.jpg>

<sup>19</sup> No Marlboro Man was an *actual* cowboy up until the 1960s, however.

The suggestion of a “hard-working filter” also turns the narrative of “sissy” filters on its head. Rather than being a handicap for men who could not handle stronger fare, the filter becomes itself personified as having working-class associations. It also “doesn’t get between you and the flavor,” suggesting a very practical-minded approach to cigarettes. They become, effectively, delivery mechanisms for flavor. Even the box is portrayed as part of a tradition of manual labor: it is “firm to keep cigarettes from crushing” under the pressure of assumed masculine-associated hard work. In so doing, the advertisement transforms every aspect of the cigarette into a fantasy of hard manual labor and cowboy Frontier-isms, and like Levi’s advertisements this fantasy was principally sold to middle-class audiences (as Burnett claimed).

This, then, is a product for the cowboy, a practical man with a Marlboro in his mouth standing alone in a world full of over-marketed cigarettes. But it is also the product of a man who stands alone even despite reason. He does not care about scientific studies suggesting that cigarettes significantly contribute to cancer. He cares about the flavor, the size, and the *feeling*. Despite being stoic and tough, the Marlboro Man demonstrably feels, but only in the context of his cigarette. In this regard, he might be interpreted as representative of escape from society’s rules.<sup>20</sup> He lives in the moment, and raises a big middle finger to society’s rules. The image of the cowboy-as-rebel that Burnett noted as his primary selling point comes to life in his pursuit of feeling instead of scientific consensus.

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<sup>20</sup> Savage, *The Cowboy Hero*, p. 118.



**Figure 19:** Marlboro, “Only a baby... but BIG!” Print advertisement, 1955. Digital reproduction. <http://i.imgur.com/WzL2tNr.jpg>

Although Philip Morris also put out non-cowboy themed advertisements in the 1950s, like Fig 19, from 1955, which attempted to target mothers (with the tagline “only a baby... but BIG!”) the Marlboro Man as a cowboy was a resounding success.<sup>21</sup> Fig. 20, from 1956, and Fig. 21, from 1957, continue the trend, depicting hard-looking men dressed in a cowboy hat and Western shirt. Their eyes are wrinkled, squinting away from the camera, suggesting mystery and power over their domains. Tattoos mark their hands: Fig. 20’s tattoo depicts an eagle and stars, suggests military leanings, and Fig. 21’s depicts an anchor and stars, suggesting work in the navy. This serves to both draw attention to his hand (with the cigarette in it) and tie him to American military tradition.<sup>22</sup> This clearly imbues the Marlboro Man with the suggestion of

<sup>21</sup> Digital reproduction accessed Feb. 5, 2016. <http://i.imgur.com/WzL2tNr.jpg>

<sup>22</sup> Quay, *Westward Expansion*, pp. 60-1.

martial power. He is not simply a cattle-rancher, but also a warrior, a strong fighter who supports his country in times of duress; but at the same time this makes him a more threatening figure than a benign cowboy hero like Autry. He is a man who, in the words of OASIS, “could go either way: a potential killer or a violent hero who can save the day.”<sup>23</sup> He is an ambiguous character with a mysterious, unelaborated past as symbolized by his tattoos, and in so being he draws upon romantic heroic tropes.



*From left to right:*

**Figure 20:** Marlboro, “You Get a Lot to Like.” Print advertisement, 1956. Digital reproduction. <http://i.imgur.com/DGMbEMr.jpg>

**Figure 21:** Marlboro, “You Get a Lot to Like.” Print advertisement, 1957. Digital reproduction. <http://i.imgur.com/WMzRmtS.jpg>

<sup>23</sup> Dick Hughes, John Lapham, Walter Locke, Michael Markovits, and Michael Weiskoff. *Stale Roles and Tight Buns*, 1:52. I should note that OASIS was not directly referring to this advertisement at this point in the film, but it is the perfect descriptor, hence its use in the title of this work.

The inclusion of tattoos also suggests a change in tone. Compared to the aristocratic, bourgeois themes of Marlboro's 1930-1950 marketing to women, this implied a much more proletarian protagonist. Prior to the 1950s, tattoos carried a working-class connotation as markers of inclusion in various in-groups. The 1950s and 1960s, however, are described by commentator Michael Atkinson as being the "dark age" of tattooing in North America, where they were adapted by criminals, gangs and protestors as part of a "process of outwardly representing feelings of discontent with society."<sup>24</sup> Here we return to images of the cowboy-as-rebel against an other-directed Organization society; the Marlboro Men are visually coded quite distinctly as being somehow edgy or deviant, upsetting the social order in a way that suggests badassery and individualism, and infuses the advertisements with romance.

The language used in Figs. 20 and 21 is a refinement of that which was used in the 1955 ads in Figs. 17 and 18, painting a folksy, relaxed image: "the easy-drawing filter *feels right* in your mouth. It works but *doesn't get in the way*. You get the *man-sized* flavor of *honest* tobacco."<sup>25</sup> Here we can observe several essential characteristics to this advertising: a focus on *feel* rather than thought, an implicit assertion that the cigarette doesn't obstruct honest work, and the idea that this is a cigarette for "real men," developed in turn by people like them, who produce "honest tobacco."<sup>26</sup> Like in Levi's advertising, this is working-class rhetoric sold to the middle-class in an attempt to sell a masculine self-identity. It makes it very clear that this is a product that allows the buyer to take part in a mythic dignity of hard, honest "real" work that masculine men like the cowboy did. In this sense, like jeans, the cigarette becomes part of a system of symbols of rebellion against a mainstream world, which is discursively constructed as

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<sup>24</sup> Michael Atkinson, *Tattooed: The Sociogenesis of a Body Art* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2003), pp. 42-3.

<sup>25</sup> This language comes from 4.3, but 4.4's is the same, only with the lines switched around a bit. Emphases are mine.

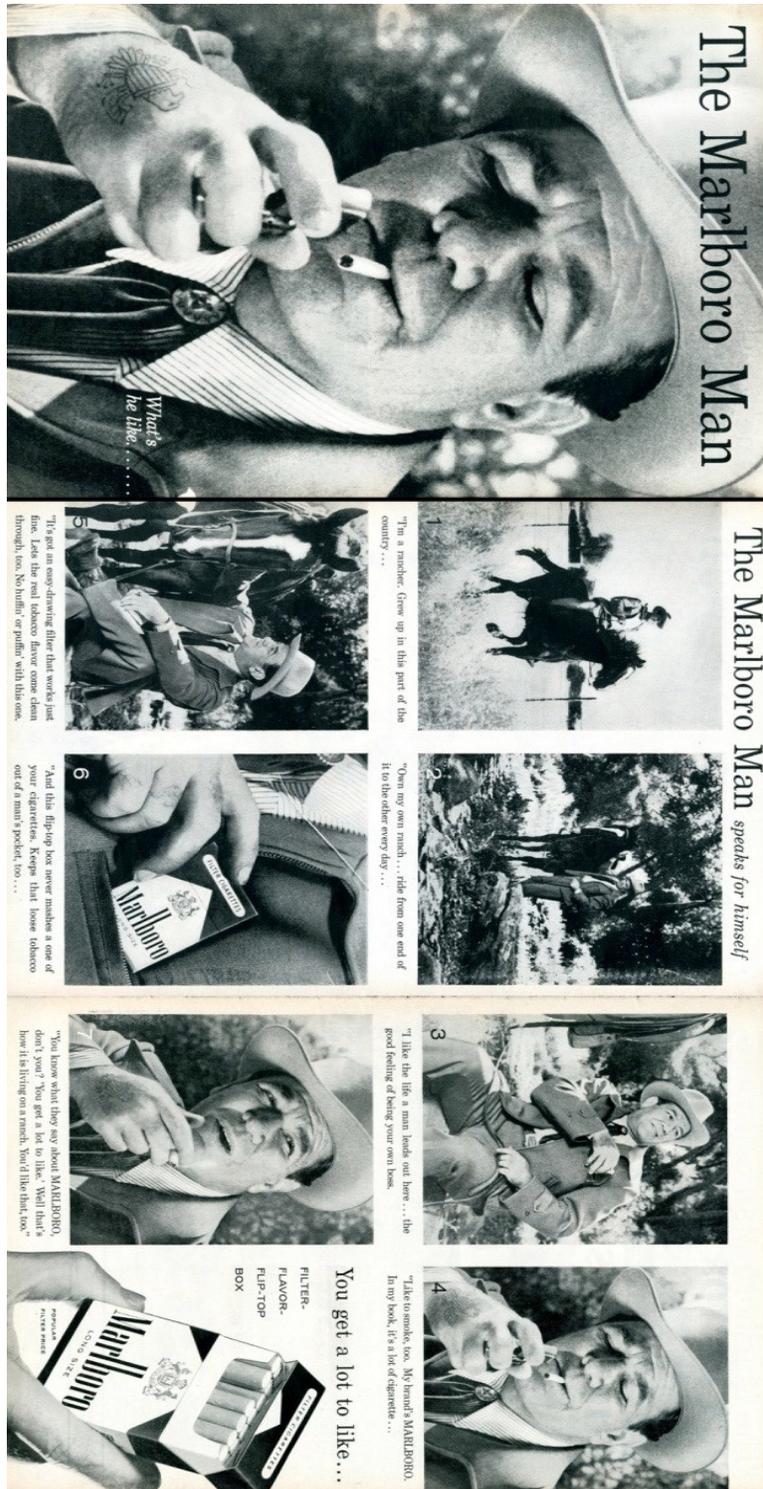
<sup>26</sup> As opposed to *dishonest* tobacco? Is that what the villains in cowboy films smoke?

being less honest and more obstructive. The idea of “man-sized flavor,” too, suggests that Marlboro cigarettes can only be handled by sufficiently masculine men – the exact opposite of their initial association – and that the men who smoke them in some way enhance their masculinity through doing so.

Fig. 22’s depiction of the Marlboro Man in 1957 is perhaps the most ambitious and most telling depiction of him, coming in the form of a three-page spread telling his “myth.” This particular advertisement was published in the January 1957 issue of *Life* magazine - an extremely popular photographic American news magazine that appealed to the suburban middle class – and served to reintroduce the public to the Marlboro Man (and reinforce the cowboy as the sole Marlboro Man).<sup>27</sup> This depiction is somewhat different to previous ones, which carries some interesting implications. While he is still tough-looking, square-jawed and wrinkled, he is more dressed up than previous depictions, with a starched-looking pinstriped shirt, a bolo tie, pleated trousers and a thick zippered overshirt in addition to his cowboy hat and boots. Physically, he is stouter and overall bigger than in previous depictions. His portrayal here is far more overtly middle-class, white-collar and domestic by comparison to previous ads; these are not the clothes of cattle ranchers or rough-riding gunslingers. His hand tattoo, however, is more militaristic than ever, with an eagle behind a shield crest with stars beneath.

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<sup>27</sup> Quay, *Westward Expansion*, p. 61.



**Figure 22:** Marlboro, "What's He Like..." Print advertisement, 1957. Digital reproduction. <http://i.imgur.com/sFKSQJ5.jpg>

The story of the Marlboro Man, as expressed in this advertisement, suggests a rags-to-riches story with the phrase “I’m a rancher [...] grew up in this part of the country” beneath a picture of him riding a horse. The advertisement also suggests that he has freedom and power as a result of his success in business and his individuality: “own my own ranch... ride from one end of it to the other every day. I like the life a man leads out here. The good feeling of being your own boss.” In this way the advertisement establishes a powerful and overt link between the cowboy and the businessman of the 1950s. It communicates a message that if you have an inner-directed, pioneer spirit, you will have the success and the freedom to rule your own domain and not be beholden to the opinions of Organizational structure or its operational hierarchy. It provides an alternative to the perceived problems of the Organization Man; the cowboy can be economically successful and still maintain their individuality even in the business world. They can afford to indulge a little in clothing without losing their hardness (note the Marlboro Man fording a stream with his horse).

Sara Quay observes that the language employed in this advertising harkens back to “some of the early promotional literature aimed at drawing settlers to the West where they could be in charge of their own lives, live on their land, and be their own person.”<sup>28</sup> This establishes a very coherent link to the Myth of the Frontier, in the sense that Philip Morris is essentially selling a lifestyle. That is, it communicates the idea that if you buy and use our product, then you are part of the same tradition as the cowboys and frontiersmen of the Old West. It is not especially subtle about this particular impetus, asking the reader “you know what they say about MARLBORO, don’t you? ‘You get a lot to like.’ Well that’s how it is living on a ranch. You’d like that, too.” This establishes a firm link between dude-ranch life and Marlboro cigarettes, which allow men by association to “live the adventure of the frontier [and] indulge in the basic values that the

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<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*

West had always represented.”<sup>29</sup> You too can be a player in the Myth of the Frontier, if you only buy their cigarettes!

But what accounts for his change in attire and his stouter looks? Marlboro Man advertisements from after this year return to more humble, more blue-collar clothing. There are a number of possible explanations for this, with no definitive explanation. I argue that there is some probability that this was an attempt to rebrand the Marlboro Man not so much as an icon for adolescents looking to declare their independence and more an icon of middle-aged men like the one depicted in the image.<sup>30</sup> Medium may have been an important consideration here. *Life* magazine, according to the Times Inc. *Life's Continuing Study of Magazine Audiences*, was a magazine most often read by adults in the middle-class and in affluent markets, with thirty-seven percent of people in the top income group reading the magazine (including “executives, ‘well-to-do merchants, professional men, [and] prosperous farmers”).<sup>31</sup> With this in mind, Marlboro could have been focusing on that market specifically (and dispensing with the blue-collar images that might also draw in working-class buyers). Another consideration is context, since Whyte’s *Organization Man* was released in 1956. It may have been an attempt to directly appeal to the part of the market most prone to discussing the fear of the Organization. Without being able to actually find statistics from Marlboro or Philip Morris (or primary sources on this ad in particular), it is difficult to say whether this was an intentional effort to rope middle-aged men into the fold of the Marlboro Man. It does, however illustrate some of the diverse demographics to which the Marlboro Man advertised.

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<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>30</sup> Meyers, *The Image-Makers*, p. 70. Referenced in Barry, *Visual Intelligence*, p. 278.

<sup>31</sup> James L. Baughman, *Henry R. Luce and the Rise of the American News Media* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001, reprint of 1987 original), p. 94-5. This study was from 1938, but the magazine’s audience did not appear to change much, according to Baughman (see p. 170).



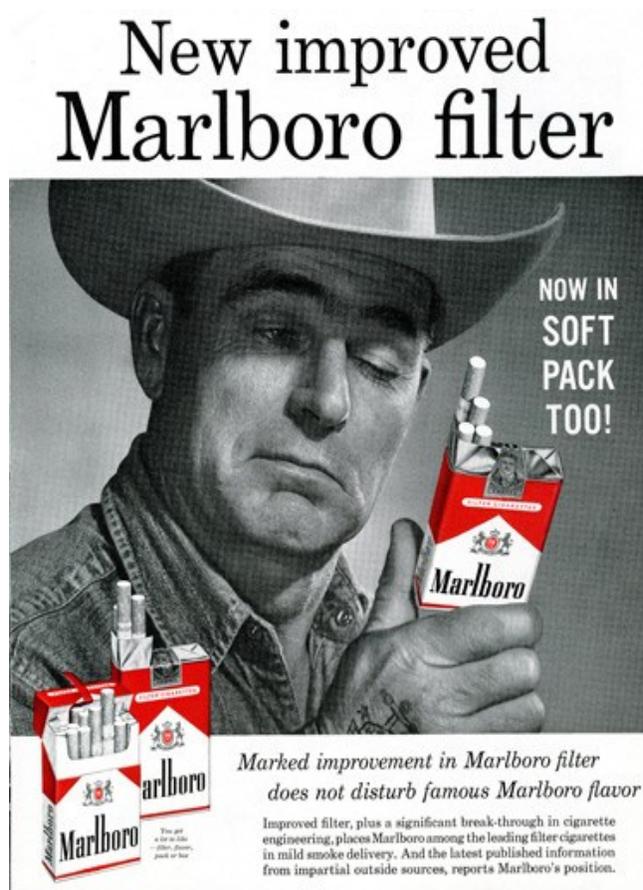
**Figure 23:** Marlboro, “Flavor/Flip-Top Box/Filter.” Print advertisement, 1958. Digital reproductions. <http://i.imgur.com/4dzXwr0.jpg> & <http://i.imgur.com/j3mdDGm.jpg> & <http://i.imgur.com/xUbRwFO.jpg>

Fig. 23, a three-page ad from 1958, returns to the basic pattern of a cowboy hat, a Western shirt, and a militarized tattoo (this time actually reading “USN,” for “United States Navy”), making the association into a concrete and overt reality. The Marlboro Man’s facial expressions appear to evoke connotations of relief and release, which might be read as selling a leisure product. The focus on *feeling* over logic or reason remains powerful in these advertisements, with the headline Flavor being a textual representation of the imagery presented by the pair of ads: the Marlboro Man is plainly enjoying his cigarette, regarding it with surprise after a long draw.

While previous advertisements suggested a certain focus on feeling, it becomes apparent here that the Marlboro Man is not simply an image of emotionless and stoic masculinity. He, as William Savage asserts, is involved in the selling of “escape.”<sup>32</sup> The cowboy’s manual-labor

<sup>32</sup> Savage, *The Cowboy Hero*, pp. 117-8.

associations are here used to convey a sense that the cigarette has a capacity for relief from the daily grind, analogizing the purchaser to a tradition of masculine manual labor. Aside from this, the only notable changes from previous advertisements are less text and a new tagline stating, “It’s a mistake to think that Marlboros cost more. They don’t. / People expect Marlboros to cost more. They don’t.” The tone is somewhat more confrontational and might be taken to suggest a contrarian atmosphere, but I would shy away from this being a definitive analysis.<sup>33</sup>



**Figure 24:** Marlboro, “New Improved Marlboro Filter.” Print advertisement, 1958.

<sup>33</sup> Again, sometimes a cigarette advertisement is just a cigarette advertisement. There does not seem to be a culture of aggressive, commanding confrontation in cigarette advertisements in this period. “Angry man” campaigns like Winston Long’s “Don’t ask me why I smoke. Ask me why I smoke Winston Longs,” advertisements only seem to appear in the 1970s. By comparison even the Marlboro Man seems like a positively approachable guy!

Fig. 24, also from 1958, presents another slightly anomalous Marlboro Man. The same Marlboro Man from Fig. 23 appears, wearing the same clothes, but for the first time he shows an emotion aside from vague relief, with an appreciative stare and a wink, so to communicate a “wow” factor. Additionally, the advertising extolls the values of an “improved filter” and a new “soft pack.” These contrast with some of the harder-edged imagery of previous advertisements, which extolled the crush resistance of firm boxes. The cigarette itself is portrayed as having “mild smoke delivery,” seeming more part of the 1940s feminine advertising than the tougher images of Marlboro Man ads. Additionally, for the first time since the 1940s, the advertisement stresses a more scientific masculinity with terms like “cigarette engineering” and stress on “the latest published information from impartial outside sources.” Advertisements from the 1960s return to more familiar images of the Marlboro Man, so what accounts for this?

The answer is more nebulous than the previous outlier in Fig. 22, but we might still use it to draw an analogy. I could not find information on the publication of this advertisement, but it clearly tries to appeal to a different market to previous Marlboro Man ads. Marlboro advertisements from the early 1960s re-democratized the image of the Marlboro Man, with marketing dedicated to a variety of demographics including women and non-white men alongside the new Marlboro Country program, which launched in 1963.<sup>34</sup> Fig. 22 might be viewed as a prelude to these new images and an attempt to bring the Marlboro Man to a broader audience. Again, this is a nebulous prospect without insider information, but this certainly demonstrates the Marlboro Man as a figure of flux rather than a constant image.

The Marlboro Man is an exercise in tropes. With few deviations, he is a tough cowboy with a military-themed tattoo, clad in a cowboy hat and a denim shirt, smoking a “man-sized”

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<sup>34</sup> A search of the Stanford Tobacco Advertising Database ([http://tobacco.stanford.edu/tobacco\\_main/search\\_adv.php?-link=Find](http://tobacco.stanford.edu/tobacco_main/search_adv.php?-link=Find)) adequately demonstrates this shift in literature.

cigarette that he quietly enjoys while looking away from the camera, evoking themes of the Myth of the Frontier and rebellion against a system of conformity. Of course, image is nothing without understanding how it has been received. Marlboro attained the position of largest cigarette company in the world, with the Marlboro Man being so powerful a symbol that he was exported elsewhere to serve as an image of Americanized rebellion. As Ann Marie Barry observes, “in Nigeria, the cowboy is black; in Australia, he is in the outback; in Hong Kong, he is a ranch owner, but everywhere in the world the Marlboro Man has retained the same look, personality, and the same profound archetypal appeal.”<sup>35</sup>

His archetypal appeal, then, was a result of not being confined exclusively to a single demographic. Like Levi’s jeans, the power of the Marlboro Man lies in his ability to appeal to multiple demographics and to allow all of them to imagine themselves as him. In both cases, the conceit of the marketing lies in the idea of marketing lifestyles; that is, “you can *be* the cowboy if you smoke our cigarettes.” In this regard, the Marlboro Man -- and the cowboy by extension -- reflects differing masculinities. He was a rebel to adolescents and young men breaking away from home, bravely disregarding scientific studies and a standard of scientific masculinity to focus instead on the *feeling* of a cigarette. To middle-aged, more affluent men, the Marlboro Man was a somewhat more domesticated image of power over one’s own land and a desire to be one’s own boss; he is less the blue-collared worker and more the white-collared boss. And by the end of the 1950s, he comes into flux once again as a symbol with a somewhat more democratic appeal, equally able to play the tough role of the hard Marlboro Man but also a more fun and scientific image. But all of these images of the Marlboro Man attached cigarettes to the cowboy to the Myth of the Frontier in both the public consciousness, sandwiching themes together and disseminating them at home and abroad, furthering existing narratives of Americanness.

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<sup>35</sup> Barry, *Visual Intelligence*, p. 278.

## Chapter VI: Hunting the Beast

Who is the cowboy? When I set out to write this work, I came in with the expectation that the cowboy would be a single image; a single meaning that encompassed the spirit of masculinity in an entire era. I expected, too, a clear dichotomy between the cowboy and the Organization Man, based on Riesman's words and on a corpus of historical literature that reproduced that logic.<sup>1</sup> As I delved more and more into my sources, though, the conclusion I had hoped to find had disappeared behind a wall of ambiguous representations. I had been under the impression that the cowboy was necessarily opposed to domesticity, that he always opposed women's authority, that he always fought off people of other races, that he was always stoic and strong, and that he was, for all these reasons, a means of enforcing a domestic-containment ideal of masculine behavior, in a kind of bleakly hegemonic way.<sup>2</sup>

Of course, ambiguity is always present in historical work—history is, after all, a big mess—but the results of my research continually turned up ten counter-examples to this apparent dichotomy for each one I found in favor of it. Roderick McGillis, on the very first page of *He Was Some Kind of Man*, asks readers if cowboys “could [...] have contributed to a sense of masculinity that challenges the very hegemonic masculinity they most obviously promote,” and goes on to discuss a number of images of the cowboy that differed to the typical hyper-masculine depiction.<sup>3</sup> I dismissed this on first read, admittedly, but as I looked at more and more other sources, his point became clearer. Why was Kane in *High Noon* being saved by a woman and admonished by a woman of color? Why was Chance in *Rio Bravo* consciously written to oppose

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<sup>1</sup> Riesman, *Lonely Crowd*, pp. xxix-xxx.

<sup>2</sup> “Hegemonic masculinity can be defined as the configuration of gender practice which embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of the legitimacy of patriarchy, which guarantees (or is taken to guarantee) the dominant position of men and the subordination of women.” R.W. Connell, *Masculinities* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1995), p. 77.

<sup>3</sup> McGillis, *He Was Some Kind of Man*, pp. 1 & 23.

Kane's cowboy image? Why was Ethan in *The Searchers* a racist sociopath, abandoned by family and the world? Why did Levi's advertising in the 1950s start to present iterations of the cowboy at home or in domestic roles? Why did the Marlboro Man, one of the greatest bastions of the "traditional" cowboy, appear as a middle-class man with a pressed shirt and a bolo tie in some depictions?

The first draft of this work had a strange character to it: it began with the promise of clear answers, and as it went on, the answers I could provide were nebulous and messy.<sup>4</sup> I tend to research as I write and put things together on the fly, in early drafts, so my argument changed a few times throughout as I tried to make sense of these different images. By the end, in addition to the regular cynicism that goes with delving deeply into a particular subject, I had concluded that the cowboy did not really have a meaning because he didn't fit any particular mold, and that perhaps I had made a terrible decision looking at the cowboy as an image. I felt like I would be forced to choose between (1) constant unnavigable ambiguity with no powerful meanings to draw upon and (2) a trite narrative that simplified the story in the interests of getting it on paper. This, of course, was a false dichotomy. The cowboy *does* have a meaning; just one that is much messier than is immediately apparent even to someone reading literature on the cowboy image.

So, again, who is the cowboy? Metaphorically speaking, he is less a word, with singular and defined meaning, and more a language through which many different and conflicting perceptions of idealized masculinity might be expressed. He is accordingly a collection of different identities, all subsumed under the same individual title of "cowboy." His "meaning," as it were, lies more in the question than any particular answer. He is a literary device upon which men could project a range of emotions: self-assured, powerful masculinity, and tenuous, fragile

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<sup>4</sup> Some of the transition from enthusiastic research to nihilistic cries of "*nothing has any meaning*" is probably normal when working on a work of this size, but the subject matter is the majority of this sentiment here.

masculinity alike. He is a figure of myth, both in the regards that he was tied to existing mythologies like the Myth of the Frontier, and that he filled a mythological function of passing down particular values deemed “correct” in a culturally-significant way, as a codeword for American values.<sup>5</sup> But what values were these?

Like the American flag, he represented different things to different people. For men that feared a perceived “crisis of masculinity” brought on by the forces of Organizational consumerism and changing negotiations of gender, race, and sexuality, the cowboy could represent a means of enforcing the borders of an imagined “real America” and inner-directed “real men.” For men concerned with appearing classless and “down with the Joneses,” the cowboy’s classless and practical connotations could cast him as an image of domestic practicality. For men setting out from home to establish their own homes in suburbia, the cowboy could represent rebellion: a breaking point between the old world and the new that dispensed with the technoscientific-rational old world in favor of a world of feeling and escape.<sup>6</sup> For men interested in “dude ranch” fetishization of the folk and the romanticization of hard labor, the cowboy could represent an Americanized uniform of nationalism.<sup>7</sup> And for young men and male children, the cowboy could represent rambunctiousness and adventure in a domestic context, with the cowboy being used to advertise conformity rather than the opposite. Even this is a simplification for historical convenience, since these masculinities were not necessarily distinct categories, and cross-pollination between different ideals is a definite possibility. For example, an older man might see an image of youthful virility in an advertisement depicting

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<sup>5</sup> Slotkin, *The Fatal Environment*, p. 16.

<sup>6</sup> White, Oliffe & Bottorff, “From the Physician to the Marlboro Man,” pp. 527-8, and Downey, *Levi Strauss & Co.*, p. 82.

<sup>7</sup> “What turbans are to Hindus, kimonos to Japanese or bowler hats to Englishmen, western clothes are to Americans.” “Channel: Clothing,” *California Men’s and Boys’ Stylist*, Vol. 10, No. 6, Dec. 1951, p. 57, quoted in Scott, *Dressing Down*, p.126.

younger men, and a younger man might see an image of established strength in idealizations of older men. While the associations attached to the cowboy are largely the same—some degree of inner-direction, rugged toughness, martial power, etc.—these tropes are used in different ways to communicate diverse ideas of American masculinity.

In film, the cowboy is a conscious part of a dialog, playing with established tropes to portray different ideals of masculine behavior. For men like Fred Zinnemann, director of *High Noon*, and Carl Foreman, its writer, the cowboy was part of a left-wing fantasy of fighting off McCarthyist persecution in a “democracy gone soft.”<sup>8</sup> For men like John Wayne, director and star of *Rio Bravo*, the cowboy was part of a right-ring fantasy of invincible heroes saving the day and enforcing order against Others to sell America to a population that he felt had become weak and complacent.<sup>9</sup> Even John Ford, the director of *The Searchers*, used the cowboy to explore racial themes, cursing John Wayne’s racist Ethan to “wander forever between the winds,” a relic of an old world that was no longer relevant.<sup>10</sup> The cowboy, a true mercenary at heart, fights on all sides of each question.

In the realm of advertising, the cowboy is a spokesman for just about everything. Although a sustained historical analysis of the most ridiculous ways the cowboy has ever been used to sell product would absolutely be amusing (how about those catheters?), it would almost be unnecessary. The cowboy’s polymorphic image makes him a natural at selling things and investing them with some standard of masculinity and Americanness. As William Savage points out, “as any effective salesman tries to be, the cowboy in advertising is all things to all people. That is a difficult job of work, and of all American characters only the cowboy could be up to

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<sup>8</sup> Zinnemann, *A Life in the Movies*, p. 96.

<sup>9</sup> Levy, *John Wayne*, p. 314.

<sup>10</sup> *The Searchers*, 26:55.

it.”<sup>11</sup> This invests him with a cultural cachet that lets him sell product to all kinds of men, as can be seen in my analysis of Levi’s and Marlboro advertising in Chapters 4 and 5.

It is my belief that from the research presented here, we can extend this beyond advertising to film and to the cowboy in general. He is many things to many American men in this period; the varying mythologies of the cowboy are such that he acts as a surrogate for many white middle-class American masculinities which each parsed the societal conditions of the early Cold War in their own way. So while the cowboy himself might be a single archetype that appealed to men in the 1950s, it was not that he responded to any one anxiety or fear or opinion. He instead responded to many of them from different perspectives.

It is not my intention, however, to present a particular scholar in the field as *wrong* or *invalid*, and for most purposes the narrative of “cowboys vs. domesticity” is a useful heuristic. But just as Gilbert warned us that the idea of a “crisis of masculinity,” where unquestioned, inevitably reproduces a history of itself, presenting a binary of “the cowboy” and “the Organization Man” may also reproduce itself and warp our historical expectations of cowboy images.<sup>12</sup> Refiguring the cowboy as a mechanism of *difference* and *contradiction*, as in McGillis or Savage, seems like a more accurate way of framing his image than one of simple conformity and anticonformity, for the cowboy is a creature of contradictions. He is fashionable anti-fashion, he is conformist anticonformity, and he is domestic anti-domesticity. If viewed as one singular image, the cowboy becomes a walking paradox; but where expanded to understand his multiple meanings, he begins to make more sense as a whole.

This collection of contradictions, I feel, is necessary for both understanding the cowboy and for attaining a nuanced understanding of history in general. The recognition that the cowboy

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<sup>11</sup> Savage, *The Cowboy Hero*, p. 120.

<sup>12</sup> Gilbert, *Men in the Middle*, p. 9.

is a mixed symbol makes for a more interesting discourse than the idea of him as merely one part of an established binary. Recognizing, and accepting, this ambiguity is a better key to truth. Just as it is difficult to characterize the 2010s (least of all because they are not even finished yet!) as conveying a specific mood or sentiment, doing the same for the 1950s might be wrong-headed; like any other decade, it was a time of discourse and negotiation. This discourse was accelerated by the end of the Cold War, but it was a more dynamic shift than merely “the age of domestic containment” might indicate.

As much as I wish otherwise, this analysis is imperfect, and can be expanded upon in future efforts. Speaking of what the public *actually* believes is a difficult venture; I chose to analyze films and advertising because they cater to what the public wants, allowing them to be used as rough indicators of interest and anxiety. They are able to be read as a hidden script of what American men in the 1950s are presumed to have felt or thought. But the problem here lies in what draws them to that particular image. It is doubtless that the cowboy was a popular image to people, but trying to delve down into the psychological core of *why* they care about a product or image is a somewhat different story. Even being able to interview a cross-section of individuals who lived through that time period would be futile; we are too far removed from historical context to get answers that have not been modified over time with human projection, and even if I were to have a time machine I doubt I would find a coherent reason. If you asked people today, for instance, “why do you watch superhero movies?” their answers would likely rarely expose ideological depictions of manhood; “because they’re fun” or “because they’re cool” would be more likely. In the same sense, there is a certain amount of caution that must be exercised with the cowboy. Perhaps, as Ann Marie Barry suggests, the appeal is unknowable: it

plays on a Jungian “black box” of deep meanings and cultural zeitgeists.<sup>13</sup> This particular dilemma is unlikely to be solved by anything other than even more efforts to explore the cowboy image in media, which might draw us closer to a more accurate approximation.

Further analysis of a broader range of print advertisements might also contribute to our understanding of the American cowboy in the 1950s, as well. While print advertising plays a strong role in this paper to demonstrate the many ways the cowboy was used, being able to situate them in specific magazines or newspapers or cities or neighborhoods would allow us to situate these cowboy masculinities more specifically in their contexts. The central difficulty with this is accession. Much of the publication data for print advertisements from the 1950s has either been lost or is sequestered in company archives not open to the public or external researchers. This data could serve as an excellent means of situating different cowboy images in historical contexts along lines of race, gender, sexuality, and class.

Whether an advertisement was published in *Man’s Life* or *Ebony* or *Look* very much affects its messaging: to whom is a particular lifestyle being sold? Who purchased that magazine or newspaper? Did it *actually* make them buy a particular product? What raw statistics can be employed to determine these metrics? Do such metrics even exist at all? Some brand historians, paid to maintain the archives of specific companies, might be able to provide a rough estimate, but what of the companies whose histories now largely exist only in memories that are rapidly being lost? Even those we do have are often devoid of context, compiled at great effort by external researchers whose information, or even analysis, is incomplete, or their focus is not specifically on historical analysis.

The Stanford archives I drew upon for my analysis of the Marlboro Man, for instance, were part of their School of Medicine’s study of attitudes towards tobacco in advertising rather

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<sup>13</sup> Barry, *Visual Intelligence*, p. 278.

than a purely historical venture. While they do indeed present a wide range of sources, they are unfortunately lacking in publication information and information on distribution and purchases. Having information on the publication in which an advertisement was disseminated, as well as the distribution of that publication (as well as the product) could be a powerful means of tracking the appeal of each cowboy image across intersections of race, gender, sexuality, class, and other such factors. Knowing whether a particular newspaper in which cowboy-themed advertisements were printed was more a working-class paper or an upper-class one recontextualizes it in a powerful way. I addressed some of this previously, where information permitted, but being able to apply this to all advertisements might paint a more nuanced picture.

Other mediums, like television and radio advertising, would be an excellent means of further exploring the cowboy's depictions in the 1950s. Television in particular represented a democratization of shopping, with television in particular "emerg[ing] as a lightning rod of passion and conflict, electrifying politics, the legal system, and of course, everyday life in America."<sup>14</sup> They are thus a very important piece of understanding cultural shifts in the 1950s; they have their own specific logics, but also reflect society in the same way that print advertisements do. There are a couple issues with inclusion that excluded them from this analysis. The first issue is that of immediacy; until paper supports embedded video clips, a static visual image gets the point across in a printed work in a more visually immediate way (i.e. I can reproduce a printed image on a page to allow the reader to interpret the image themselves). The other issue here lies in sourcing. Large volumes of print advertising can be tricky to obtain, especially freely, but television and radio advertisements seem harder to obtain (although

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<sup>14</sup> Lawrence R. Samuel, *Brought to You By: Postwar Television Advertising and the American Dream* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2001), p. 3.

resources remain available!).<sup>15</sup> While copies of films and television shows can be found on YouTube and other resources, and copies of print advertisements can be found in books or online repositories (based on scans of the original documents, which persist to this day), radio and television advertising seem generally less preserved, which make it harder to analyze them in a way that does not rely on secondary-source commentaries.

Television shows, too, are another venue where the cowboy held a great deal of sway. B Westerns vanished from the big screen in the 1950s thanks to competition from television serials, which churned out a consistent stream of Western narratives featuring cowboy archetypes.<sup>16</sup> I focus a good deal on filmic depictions of the cowboy here, because they provided a more interesting venue (in my opinion) to explore different high-level depictions of cowboy masculinity. A more nuanced analysis of the television Western might illustrate a new facet of the cowboy or complicate his narrative, however. In particular, the cowboy-as-homemaker slips under my radar thanks to my focus on more anxieties of masculinity, which were better addressed in A Westerns than in Bs (which tended to have less problematized cowboy depictions). Television, however, was not the exclusive domain of B Westerns, and adult-oriented Western dramas presented new visions of the West in the mid-1950s, most notably *Gunsmoke*, which ran for an unprecedented twenty seasons, from 1952 to 1961.<sup>17</sup>

The most obvious venue for expansion, however, lies simply in demographics. I focus here on white, heterosexual, middle-class, suburban masculinity and how it was depicted through cowboy representations vis-à-vis Others. I admit that this is already a rather crowded field; much has been said of the Myth of the Frontier, or the Marlboro Man, or the cowboy in film, or the

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<sup>15</sup> *Ibid*, p. xx.

<sup>16</sup> Moss, *The Media and the Models of Masculinity*, p. 86.

<sup>17</sup> Alvin H. Marill, *Television Westerns: Six Decades of Sagebrush Sheriffs, Scalawags, and Sidewinders* (Plymouth: Scarecrow Press, 2011), p. 37.

cowboy in advertising, but rarely at the same time. But what did the cowboy represent to people of color? Fig. 10's Asian baker bears some hints: he is an antagonist to the mischievous boys, nominally speaking, but he still wears jeans and cowboy boots and has a shop of his own.<sup>18</sup> Although he wears no cowboy hat, he is part of the mythological Old West, rendered as part of the Frontier. I suggested in chapter 4 that this could be viewed as reflective of change in suburban demographics; being able to cross-reference the suburban population's demographics with representations in advertising would help in this venture. This might require an expansion in the advertisements studied, however; both Marlboro and Levi's advertising from the 1950s are very heavily whitewashed up until about the mid-1960s.

Women, too, are an intriguing site of analysis of the early Cold War cowboy. I have mentioned at some length that advertising is meant to appeal to a variety of markets, and women are certainly included in this too. Levi's marketing, for instance, began to target women in the 1920s, and the Lady Levi's line had emerged by 1934 with Western-themed imagery.<sup>19</sup> This Western-themed association in womenswear, and its classless/practical connotations, was indeed a major part of denim jeans' initial popularity.<sup>20</sup> Women appear as well in Levi's advertisements like Fig. 2, equal in presentation to the men.<sup>21</sup> The marketing of femininity in the cowboy context adds an interesting angle to the study of cowboys, who are often assumed to be only a masculine image; what, then, of masculine femininities and vice versa? In some respects I have looked at only one part of a larger puzzle, as many of these masculinities are defined exclusively by their opposition to femininities.

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<sup>18</sup> Levi's. "Pies."

<sup>19</sup> Downey, *Levi Strauss & Co.*, pp. 52 & 62.

<sup>20</sup> Comstock, "The Making of an American Icon," p. 26.

<sup>21</sup> Levi Strauss & Co. "Wheeeee."

And what did people of color, or non-heterosexuals, or people of the non-middle class, see in these depictions of white masculinity in the cowboy? What of people outside America? I began the introduction of this work with an anecdote of my grandfather, watching strong white men fight off Natives and bandits, despite the fact that this image did not generally include him in any notable way. Who sees themselves as being part of the cowboy mythology? The phenomenon of Native American children rooting for white, sympathetic cowboy protagonists over the Natives they fight, for example, is a documented vision.<sup>22</sup> What implications do this hold? The meaning of the cowboy has proliferated abroad as well.<sup>23</sup> In India, for example, the cowboy and jeans are a potent symbol of Americanness.<sup>24</sup> Japan, in particular, has an interesting take on Americana, including cowboy images.<sup>25</sup> How do these representations differ? How do the images of cowboy masculinity used to sell products outside America differ to domestic presentations? What of Westerns produced elsewhere? The “Spaghetti Westerns” of the 1960s and 70s come to mind as presenting a rather different cowboy to that of previous eras.

But one of the most important questions, to me, comes in the form of applicability to the present. I am a frequent advocate of history being usable in some way in the present, and not merely in the form of references for similar academic works. Ideally, this history should also serve as a means of critically addressing the present by way of analogy. The present has no fewer masculinities represented through idealized depictions of men than the 1950s. Male archetypes are everywhere deployed in film and advertising to present idealized visions of masculinity and

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<sup>22</sup> Carole Gerster, “Native Resistance to Hollywood’s Persistence of Vision: Teaching Films about Contemporary American Indians,” in *Native Americans on Film: Conversations, Teaching, and Theory*, eds. M. Elise Marubbio & Eric L. Buffalohead (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2013), p. 157.

<sup>23</sup> Barry, *Visual Intelligence*, p. 278.

<sup>24</sup> Udita Das, “What Does America Symbolize to the Urban, Educated Youth in India?” in *Images of the U.S. Around the World: A Multicultural Perspective*, ed. Yahya R. Kamalipour (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1999), p. 214.

<sup>25</sup> Indeed, much of the recent resurgence of workwear in American men’s fashion is a reappropriation of Japanese adaptations of American workwear and sportswear. An intriguing analysis of this can be found in W. David Marx, *Ametora: How Japan Saved American Style* (New York: Basic Books, 2015).

to sell products. The latter in particular is very important to me. Marketing for thousands of products in different genres—food, cars, fashion, et cetera—all depend on the same type of masculine lifestyle marketing. I mentioned in the introductory chapter that some of my interest in the cowboy sprung from looking at old Levi’s advertisements, but much of this interest springs from its apparent likeness to modern day advertising. Consider Ford’s most recent Super Duty truck ad, for instance: it has extra-bassy slamming noises, a generic hard rock soundtrack, and a litany of tough-sounding technical specifications (e.g. “the weight savings from the high strength, military-grade, aluminum-alloyed body have been re-invested in the places that matter most [...] [with] the strongest, toughest Super Duty backbone *ever!*”<sup>26</sup>), all used to sell products to an assumed masculine audience. Ford Truck ads do what Levi’s did – they focus on strength, durability and toughness, where a “high strength, military-grade, aluminum-alloyed body” replaces “real Copper Rivets”<sup>27</sup> in technical specification fetishism. A million other ads do what Marlboro does: they sell a particular lifestyle and allow their viewers to imagine themselves in the roles of their protagonists. “What’s He Like?” indeed!<sup>28</sup>

Consider, as well, the idealized imagery of masculinity in the field of men’s fashion. Workwear fetishism reigns supreme, with old American brands serving as the uniform for fashionable men with beards, lumberjack plaid shirts, and styled hair. Red Wing advertises their boots’ century-plus heritage with videos of craftspeople operating vintage Puritan sewing machines laying a steady stream of their signature black-white-black triple stitches into tough-looking leather boots. Filson advertises with rugged outdoorsmen in waxed tin cloth jackets and bags with thick leather straps and vintage labels. Wolverine sells their 1000 Mile line of footwear

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<sup>26</sup> “Introducing the all-new 2017 Ford Super Duty,” YouTube, Sept. 24, 2015, 0:27. Accessed Feb. 29, 2016. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3dzmMo5h9zo>

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid* and Levi’s. “Cut for the Cowboy!”

<sup>28</sup> Marlboro. “What’s He Like...”

under elegant lighting on old wooden tables, the varnish long worn away, so as to suggest an image of hard masculine craftsmanship (juxtaposed with “fashion boots,” of which these, at their core, *are*). Brands like LL Bean and Land’s End and Timberland do the same. A whole slew of start-up brands style themselves on Kickstarter and Indiegogo as small-volume made-in-American operations, with Instagram-filtered footage of bearded men quietly sewing tight selvedge jeans on old Union Special sewing machines in workspaces that looked (suspiciously) like Seattle coffee shops. They speak of bringing jobs back to America, respecting heritage, craftsmanship and style, and wearing timeless clothes that their grandfather might have worn.<sup>29</sup>

In none of these advertising campaigns is there a suggestion of being “fashionable,” even though to many of their consumers that is the unspoken appeal. In line with the recent idea of negligence of fashion being itself a form of masculine fashion, all these examples stress the same bywords of heritage, quality, durability, authenticity, and so forth. There is nary a hint of fashion or anything that could be perceived, in a high-school bully kind of way, as feminine, refined, or suggestive of non-heterosexuality. They are sold as products that *enhance* a rugged, tough masculinity by allowing consumers to imagine themselves as their grandfathers, or as lumberjacks, or as cowboys. They let consumers “perform” the roles of hard men on their daily commutes, wearing moccasin-toe work boots (originally designed to reduce the potential for laces to be caught on machinery and, of course, to give workmen a more flexible fit). This kind of hyper-masculine marketing still works, as Mark Tungate notes in the introduction to *Branded Male: Marketing to Men*, in which he describes how a saleswoman sold him on a shirt with too-

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<sup>29</sup> Of course, the jeans they sell are generally more tapered and slim in cut than those of their grandparents, although that’s neither here nor there. I do own a couple pairs of Red Wing boots, and several pairs of selvedge denim, but the marketing gets pretty blatant.

long sleeves by calling it a “motorcycle cut;” it allowed him to imagine himself as a biker, yet another masculine identity in which to insert oneself.<sup>30</sup>

Much like the initially feminine connotations of Marlboro’s filters, fashion in our present world has a generally feminine and/or non-heterosexual connotation in stereotypes. And, also like Marlboro, imagery of idealized masculinity is being drawn upon to sell products: lumberjacks, mountain men, dockworkers, *Mad Men*-like gentlemen, and other paragons of “real” manhood, including even the cowboy. This presentation bears numerous resemblances to the cowboy image: it involves a kind of middle-class fetishization of the working-class as a role to be played to signify a conventionalized masculinity, it uses the same rhetoric of heritage and durability to sell product, and the original purposes to which those workingman developments were directed have been decontextualized and used to sell product to people who will almost certainly not actually use them in any notable way.

So what can we apply here? Works like Mary Rizzo’s *Class Acts*, studying the rise of lifestyle marketing from the 1960s till the 1990s, might be used as a bridge between my analysis here and the modern day.<sup>31</sup> But we might also apply the same style of critique as in this work: we can begin from the premise of these idealized masculinities not merely presenting a single image of manhood, but rather a multiplicity. We can explore the background of the present in search of potential causes for the emergence of these ideals of masculinity. We can examine those depictions for the mediums in which they feature most prominently, then study them for their presentations of those images. The same general analysis, with its associated caveats, might be transplanted onto the present. But we must also be mindful of assuming that the factors which led to the ubiquity of the cowboy do the same for idealized masculinities in the present. At the

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<sup>30</sup> Mark Tungate, *Branded Male: Marketing to Men* (London: Kogan, 2008), p.1.

<sup>31</sup> Mary Rizzo, *Class Acts: Young Men and the Rise of Lifestyle* (Reno: University of Nevada Press, 2015).

very least, we must recognize the varied character of masculinity; just as the cowboy represented anti-conformity and conformity, invincibility and vulnerability, the political left and right, et cetera, the masculinities of the present are also diverse standards and must be treated as such.

The cowboy's image, too, persists into the modern day, although he also carries some negative connotations now as part of his mixed legacy. Nonetheless, he is a powerful symbol of American manhood, representing different things to different people. Whether his boots are deployed as markers of masculinity in Presidential campaigns, or his image subverted in contemporary depictions like *The Hateful Eight* (2015), he is a fixture of American society.<sup>32</sup> His depictions in the 1950s were an interesting midpoint between the more idealized cowboys of the 1930s and the more cynical anti-Western ones of the 1960s and beyond. His character, observed in context, is consequently one of flux and change, the products of the negotiation of shifting circumstances. But in all of these varied depictions, the cowboy represented something important: he served as a means of communication of fears, anxieties, and deeply held beliefs about manhood and American civilization. The cowboy, then, becomes a symbol of Cold War American masculinity, pushed and pulled into different formulations to reflect the whims of his creators. He says something more than just narratives of the Old West: he says something about men, in general, whether he is deployed to fight McCarthyists or Communists. The cowboy is a battlefield. He is more the medium than the message, in a certain regard, and can accordingly be used to tell a diverse array of stories with often-conflicting messages. And therein lays his enduring power.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Seriously, go watch that film.

<sup>33</sup> Tired of reading the word "cowboy" yet? Me too!

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