

SCREENING INSURRECTION: THE CONTAINMENT OF WORKING-CLASS  
REBELLION IN NEW DEAL ERA HOLLYWOOD CINEMA

A Dissertation

by

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## ABSTRACT

In my dissertation I explore the ways in which New Deal era Hollywood cinema represented the growing spirit of collective action that defined the 1930s. Specifically, I examine the ways film redirected the collective impulse of the radical left by positioning a strengthened heteronormative family as the path to national economic renewal. Drawing upon archival sources as well as cultural historians such as Richard Pells and Michael Denning and scholars of masculinity such as Michael Kimmel and R.W. Connell, I contend that the cinema of this era reinforced the national myth of the couple as the “proper” American path to economic renewal and represented collective action as being in direct conflict with the family.

Beginning with Hollywood’s representation of radical collectives in the 1930s, I argue that the film industry vilified working-class collective action by equating it with mob justice and suggesting that masculine collectivity was inherently destructive to the heteronormative couple. Rather than reflecting the spirit of economic empowerment through collective action, these films, like the New Deal Administration itself, suggested that the proper path to national economic renewal was through a renewal of masculinity and the heteronormative family.

I explore figures associated with subversive masculinity and collectivity during the New Deal era: the hobo and the outlaw, and explores the ways in which these figures’ subversiveness was contained and assimilated to the New Deal capitalist state. Tramping, long associated with a radical break from industrial capitalism and heteronormativity, became redefined as a temporary right of passage during which the masculine individualist reestablished his manhood before restoring his economic fortunes and establishing a stable romantic couple. Similarly the outlaw figure shifted from the working-class gangster rebelling against capitalism to the aristocratic outlaw, seeking merely to restore the proper capitalist system.

Finally, I examine the ultimate containment of the nascent working-class collectives of the 1930s and 1940s by analyzing Hollywood's World War II era production. By looking at these films it is possible to see the ways in which the spirit of radical collective action was finally reincorporated into the capitalist hegemony to preserve rather than overthrow the system.

## DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my partner, Cara, who has ended up watching more films about U.S. labor conflict than she ever wanted to. Her support has made the long days and longer nights of research much more bearable.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION: DECLARATIONS OF INTERDEPENDENCE

“We were challenged with a peace-time choice between the American system of rugged individualism and a European philosophy of diametrically opposed doctrines—doctrines of paternalism and state socialism. The acceptance of these ideas would have meant the destruction of self-government through centralization of government. It would have meant the undermining of the individual initiative and enterprise through which our people have grown to unparalleled greatness.”

—Herbert Hoover, “Principles and Ideals of the United States Government,” 1928

“The adjustment we seek calls first of all for a mental adjustment, a willing reversal of driving, pioneer opportunism and ungoverned laissez-faire. The ungoverned push of rugged individualism perhaps had an economic justification in the days when we had all the West to surge upon and conquer; but this country has filled up now.”

—Henry Wallace, “A Declaration of Interdependence,” 1933

One year before the Stock Market Crash of 1929, Herbert Hoover demonstrates the still strong adherence to rugged individualism and self-sufficiency that had long defined the American character; five years later, at the beginning of the New Deal era, then Secretary of Agriculture (and future Vice President) Henry Wallace demonstrates what constituted the beginnings of a potential break from that tradition. For Wallace and many within the Roosevelt Administration and American society at large, the future economic renewal depended upon planned economies and the collectivization of economic and political forces in groups such as trade unions and government agencies. The economic crisis of the 1930s did not, of course, introduce the concept of collective action to American society; unionization and radical labor action had occurred within the industrial landscape since the late-1800s, but never on the scale witnessed during the years between 1932 and 1947. Whether it was tens of thousands of WWI veterans descending upon Washington D.C. in the spring of 1932, longshoremen laying siege to San Francisco in the West and textile workers spreading industrial rebellion up and down the

East Coast in 1934, or autoworkers seizing the means of production in Flint, Michigan in 1936, during these years the working-classes proved themselves willing to organize and take radical collective action on a scale never before seen in American history.

While the working classes were organizing like never before, the above epigrams illustrate the tension created by this shift in the zeitgeist. Even in the words of a supporter of collectivization like Wallace the acknowledgement of the nation's pioneer past suggested something had been lost; moreover, the rhetoric of "driving," "rugged," "surge," and "conquer" suggests an active, masculine past in contrast to a more passive present. It was this long history of linking masculinity with capitalism and self-made manhood that, perhaps more than anything else, made it so difficult for the nation's nascent collectivism to grow. If American manhood had long been defined in terms of one's ability to make a life for himself and his family, where did that leave the workers economically dependant upon *collective* actions such as strikes? Perhaps partially due to this conflict with traditional concepts of American masculinity, by 1947 the radical class-based collective spirit would largely disappear, replaced by a post-war economic individualism supported by a largely de-radicalized labor movement.

My central purpose in writing this dissertation has been to explore the ways in which the rise and fall of the working-class collectivist spirit of the New Deal era is demonstrated by the Hollywood cinema. Specifically, I am interested in how the nascent radical collectives of the era were either vilified or de-radicalized in their cinematic representations and thus made safe for public consumption. Cultural historians such as Richard Pells and Michael Denning have explored the ways in which the 1930s temporarily fostered a break from the pioneer spirit of self-made manhood that had long defined patriarchal capitalism. Pells' and Denning's historical analyses of the Depression decade, *Radical Visions and American Dreams: Culture and Social Thought in the Depression Years* and *The Cultural Front: The Laboring of American Culture*,



serve as important background for the beginning of my research, as does Michael Kimmel's history of American masculinity, *Manhood in America: A Cultural History*.

Building on the works of these historians I examined a broad selection of Hollywood's output for the years 1931-1947 and have found that the collectivist spirit was largely contained within these films via an appeal to strengthening traditional gender roles and the patriarchal couple. Put another way, class-based frustrations were represented onscreen as primarily gender-based frustrations, and thus redirected masculine energies from a focus upon a corrupt capitalist system to a perceived loss of masculinity and a related decline of the family. The decline in marriage and birth rates since the late-1920s, widely remarked upon in the press,<sup>1</sup> was suggested as the cause of the current economic crisis more than once. In a 1930 article for the *Science News-Letter*, demographer Warren Thompson (who would go on to work directly for the Roosevelt Administration) argued that the decrease in the number of families would lead to the general population getting older and, if not adjusted for, could result in future economic stagnation and even radicalization. He writes that such a demographic shift would result in an "increase in various types of radicalism, since it is undoubtedly the relatively good opportunities for young men to rise to a higher economic status which have prevented the formation of strong radical groups in this country in the past" (219).

Because the cause of the Depression was located partially in the collapse of traditional gender roles and the patriarchal family, any solution to the Depression was thought to require a renewal of the traditional family. Several New Deal programs, such as the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) and the Works Progress Administration (WPA), were designed to instill the values of rugged masculinity as much as they were meant to provide temporary employment. Speaking on the third anniversary of the CCC, FDR celebrated not only the successful conservation and employment records of the program, but also the ways in which the program "develop[ed] sturdy

manhood” (“Radio” n. pag.). Other programs, such as the Farm Security Administration (FSA) and the Resettlement Administration (RA), placed the family unit at the center of the economic renewal effort. In her analysis of FSA and RA photography, Wendy Kozol writes, “Scenes of multiple families, several generations together, or adult children are rare [in these photographs]. The absence of these features more easily facilitates the identification of the adults as the parents of the children. *Empathy is elicited within a concept of the nuclear family* [emphasis mine]” (Kozol 10). The patriarch and the family, in other words, became the site of economic renewal. Scholars such as Michael Kimmel and R.W. Connell have explored the link between economic crises and crises of masculinity in depth, and the ways in which such gender crises have been used by the culture in order to contain and redirect working-class frustrations. In this study it is my goal to examine the ways in which the perceived crisis of the patriarchal family was used during the New Deal era in order to contain nascent working-class revolution.

My decision to focus upon Hollywood’s representation of collective versus individual action is a product of the medium’s growing importance during the era. As Giuliana Muscio has pointed out, “The American cinema of the thirties could be productively re-interpreted as a *national* cinema [emphasis in original], in that it performed a crucial role in the national organization of cultural distribution, and in the re-elaboration and articulation of national identity” and that “aware of its social function, the cinema transformed the audience into a public, proposing itself not only as a product but also as a service” (2, 71). Film-going constituted a national mass culture, a nearly ritualistic experience in which societal values were reflected and reinforced; Thomas Doherty writes that “in the late 1930s exhibitors had begun adding ‘The Star Spangled Banner’ to the top of the staple program. . . . Soldiers and small boys came to attention, women put their hands over their hearts, most sang along, and everyone stood” (84), and by the 1940s theaters would frequently include scenes where “managers-turned-

deacons led audiences-turned-congregations in recitations of the Twenty-third Psalm or the Lord's Prayer. In victory or crisis, the moviehouse [*sic*] provided a ritual space for remembrance and celebration, medleys of hymns and patriotic songs, even moments of prayer and silent contemplation" after important events such as the D-Day invasion and the death of FDR (84).

The potential for film going as a national ritual reinforcing cultural values was not lost on the Roosevelts, perhaps the first mass media savvy President and First Lady. Eleanor Roosevelt, writing in a 1938 issue of *Photoplay* (an act which in itself acknowledged the importance of cinema), argued, "it is not only as an amusement that the movies are important. Here is something which may be used to shape public opinion, to bring before a tremendously wide audience a great variety of facts and thoughts which can be a powerful imaginative stimulus" (17). The belief that film could be used as a force to shift public opinion was implemented in policy as well. Anna Siomopoulos writes that a 1935 budget study on American families conducted by the Works Progress Administration (WPA) "allotted special funds to allow each family member to attend the movies once a month in its 'emergency budget' and once a week in its slightly more generous 'maintenance budget,'" recognizing that "the rhetoric of many types of consumption, especially the consumption of mass culture, could help unite the nation behind welfare state programs" (*Hollywood* 44-45). The dawn of World War II would even see the Roosevelt Administration create the Office of War Information (OWI) and the Bureau of Motion Pictures (BMP) in an attempt to persuade studios to create films that adhered to Wartime policy. Despite the studio heads' and Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA) President Will Hays' aversion to admitting any political stance in Hollywood's films, it is clear that the government recognized the important function the industry served in cultivating national opinions and values.

Hollywood's de facto conservatism towards social issues was not an inevitability, as Steven Ross has pointed out in his extensive research regarding the foundation of the Hollywood hegemony. As he has argued, the labor-capital genre (i.e. those films which dealt in some way with labor unrest and class conflict) was thriving prior to 1923; Ross points out that between 1917-1922 an average of 31 labor-capital films were released every year, but between 1923-1929 that number would plummet to the average of only six per year (44). Furthermore, a number of the films released before U.S. involvement in World War I were pro-labor; Ross argues that prior to 1917 "44 percent of all labor-capital productions were liberal and 36 percent were conservative," but between 1917-1922 65% were conservative and only 27% liberal (41).

For Ross this shift in political attitude can be attributed to a number of factors. First of all, prior to 1917 the film industry witnessed very little in the way of labor disputes or union organizing of its own, and, as a result, made it "easy for producers to be tolerant of unions on the screen when they did not have to battle them off the screen" (Ross 33); by 1916, however, the first efforts to unionize the various film trades had begun (Ross 40). Additionally, the years before film production became centralized in Hollywood, and finances centralized on Wall Street, created an environment wherein a broader, and more liberal, group of voices could produce films (Ross 36). Finally, and perhaps most significantly, in 1917 the formation of the War Cooperation Board (WCB) led to a certain hesitancy to portray labor disputes and class conflict on film. Ross writes that the WCB sought "to promote particular visions of class relations in American society" (37). While the WCB had no real censorship authority, it wielded a powerful economic incentive in its ability to control export licenses for films and the promise of declaring the film industry an essential industry and thus immune to the draft; not surprisingly, "movies showing strikes and labor riots, hunger and poverty, or ghetto slum conditions were repeatedly rejected" (Ross 37-38).

As Ross notes, the study of the emergence of an ideological imperative alongside institutional changes illustrates the ways in which “the establishment of ideological hegemony . . . is not an event but a process” (47). As such, the institutional structure of Hollywood in the 1930s provides a unique arena in which to view how the rising spirit of collectivism was being contained by American culture at large. While other cultural products portrayed the conflict between individualism and collectivism during the era as well, film was unique in that rather than portraying an individual artist’s response to the era the film industry involved numerous politically heterogeneous artists and producers creating a single work together. As such, a study of Hollywood’s output during the New Deal era can not only provide us with valuable cultural representations of working-class collectives during the era and how these representations might have affected popular opinion, but also provides a real-world cultural arena in which ideology is being shifted and contained by an institutional process.

On the one hand the industry was led by conservative studio bosses and industry leaders (particularly Production Code Administration (PCA) leaders Will Hays and Joseph Breen) who were extremely anti-labor, and on the other there were numerous radicals in the ranks of talent, from writers such as Dalton Trumbo to actors such as Edward G. Robinson. In this way leftist, sometimes radical, artists may produce sympathetic representations of collective action, while the studio heads and the Motion Picture Producers and Distributors of America (MPPDA) would work to contain any radical intent through re-writes and re-shoots. Hollywood’s institutional and creative structures, such as the star system, genre formation, and the nearly ubiquitous romantic subplot, combined to reinforce the concept of the rugged individualist, allowing the figure to survive during an era in which he was in danger of being replaced by the collective. This containment did not function as a simple denunciation of the rising collectivist spirit, but rather as a redirection of these collectivist impulses into a drive to renew the patriarchal family.

It is not my claim that Hollywood was responsible for the shift back to rugged individualism from the nascent collectivism we saw in the 1930s; nor is it my intention to view the Hollywood cinema of the era as purely a reflection of cultural attitudes of the New Deal era. As Raymond Williams points out, “The most damaging consequence of any theory of art as reflection is that, through its persuasive physical metaphor . . . it succeeds in suppressing the actual work on material—in a final sense the material social process—which is the making of any art work” (97); the study of a piece of art as mere reflection of cultural attitudes, in other words, alienates both the *process* of artistic production and the process of the production of hegemony. He goes on to add that hegemony “does not just passively exist as a form of dominance. It has to continually be renewed, recreated, defended, and modified. It is also continually resisted, limited, altered, challenged by pressures not at all its own” (112). The Hollywood cinema of the 1930s and 1940s was not a totalitarian system by which the dominant culture was reproduced and legitimated for the masses, but rather a contested battleground wherein resistant modes of representation appeared to challenge, and were ultimately assimilated into, the dominant culture of both the industry and the nation as a whole.

The negotiation between America’s rugged individualist past and the collectivist present of the New Deal era can best be understood through Williams’ formulation of the dominant, emergent, and residual. For Williams, while the dominant controls the cultural landscape to a certain degree, it never does so in totality; there is, in other words, always space for alternative and oppositional elements. The residual constitutes an element that “has been effectively formed in the past, but is still active in the cultural process, not only and often not at all as an element of the past, but as an effective element of the present” (Williams 122). The residual, in turn, can exist as either an oppositional or “active manifestation . . . which has been wholly or largely incorporated into the dominant culture” (Williams 122). For the purposes of this study, the

frontier myth in American culture constitutes an element of the residual, in that it was formulated in America's past, but elements remain active within the post-industrial capitalist landscape of early twentieth-century America; for example, the celebration of rugged individualism and self-sufficiency are very much products of the pioneer myth that were appropriated by industrial capitalism.<sup>2</sup>

During the New Deal era we also see elements of the emergent, those “new meanings and values, new practices, new relationships and kinds of relationships [that] are continually being created” (Williams 123). In the 1930s the rise in collective action among labor could be said to constitute the workers' awakening consciousness as a class. As Williams points out, “the formation of a new class, the coming to consciousness of a new class, and within this, in actual process, the (often uneven) emergence of elements of a new cultural formation . . . is always a source of emergent cultural practice” (124). While immediate economic issues of the 1930s were naturally the impetus for labor unrest, a number of the strikes and cases of collective activism occurring during the era were focused not primarily upon better wages and working conditions but upon the right to be recognized *as a class*. As Richard Pells points out, this beginning of working-class radicalism was fueled in large part by the rise of the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO), led by John L. Lewis. The appearance of the CIO “heralded the rise of a politically conscious proletariat committed to overhauling the profit system, imbued with a passion for community and social control, devoted to the principles of planning and production-for-use” rather than merely the improvement of conditions at any one particular workplace (Pells 303). If, as Georg Lukács argued, the “separation of the economic struggle from the political one” was one of the predominant obstacles to overturning the capitalist system (71), the 1930s initially appeared to be a time in which a true workers' revolution was finally coming to fruition. Yet, as we will see, during the New Deal era the emergent class

consciousness of labor was systematically contained; the militant spirit of the labor movement, fueled in no small part by masculine frustrations, was redirected into the New Deal's project of saving capitalism. By the end of World War II the radical motivations of unions to be recognized as a class would be replaced by short-term economic goals such as higher wages; workers' collectives became more interested in facilitating the workers' ability to participate fully within the capitalist system as consumers than in overthrowing the system itself. To put it in Lukács' terms, the economic struggle had once again taken precedence over the political struggle and contained the nascent working-class revolution in the process.

In turning to Hollywood cinema I wish to explore the ways in which the negotiations between emergent collectivism and residual individualism were played out on screen resulting in the containment of working-class collectivism in a form more easily assimilated into capitalism. Because of the tension between conservative finance and management on the one hand and liberal talent on the other within the studio system, an examination of the films, trends, and production histories of the era can serve to illuminate the ways in which these cultural values were being reconciled during the 1930s and 1940s.

I begin my examination with Hollywood's obsession with mobs during the 1930s and 1940s and how these representations of working-class collectives were related to the growing collective spirit of the New Deal era. In 1934 Roosevelt's Attorney General Homer Cummings laid out a new vision for American social policy in *Liberty Under Law and Administration* where he argued for collectivization of the public will, redefining liberty as a collective rather than individual concept. He writes:

The aim of the "new deal" is conceived in terms of individual freedom. Its aim is not to cast new fetters but to cast off old ones; to free society from some of the accumulated tyrannies of vested ignorance and selfishness, of entrenched privilege and power, of bad



law, bad economics, and bad politics, and, thus, to create conditions in which a finer and more complete personal freedom may flourish. Its object is not to usurp economic power or to dominate and direct its forces, but to release them. It is not a matter of control in its larger sense—it is, rather, a matter of co-operation and service. If, in the process, freedom seems to be abridged individually, it is ultimately increased by being enlarged collectively. The individual gives up his lesser for a larger freedom. (19-20)

He goes on to add, “Is it not possible that a larger measure of liberty is attainable for the individual if he sacrifice some of his rights of self-assertion in the interest of society as a whole?” (85). Here Cummings perhaps best captures the rather unique moment of the New Deal era, a time in which the long-held notions of rugged individualism and self-made manhood were being questioned and many, from politicians such as Cummings and Wallace, to labor leaders such as CIO head John Lewis, to religious figures such as Father Charles Coughlin were suggesting that America’s cult of the individual was responsible for the economic collapse beginning in 1929. While these radical voices differed greatly in their politics, from the left-wing Wallace to the pseudo-fascist Coughlin, all of them suggested the need for a collectivization of American society; the individual was no longer sufficient for solving the nation’s problems, only the collective could assure the nation’s survival through the current crisis.

This was, of course, very much at odds with the tradition of rugged individualism upon which American identity, particularly masculine identity, had been built. For many collectivism and the expansion of social programs would signal the emasculation of society and the surrender of individual liberty to the will of the mob. In Hollywood film, genres as diverse as the social problem film, musicals, and horror films contained scenes illustrating the inherent violence of mobs. While numerous critics, such as Peter Roffman and Jim Purdy, argue that these scenes

illustrate a cultural anxiety concerning the rise of fascism in Europe and various right-wing movements at home, I argue that this is only part of their *raison d'être*. Indeed, in this chapter I find that the mobs in these films are discretely coded as representative of the various *left-wing* collectives of the era, suggesting that the filmmakers are concerned as much with the radical labor movement as they are with fascism. While collectives such as unions are not uniformly depicted as negative within these films, in films such as *Modern Times* (1936) and *Black Fury* (1935) such groups are represented as potentially emasculating and generally threaten to disrupt the stability of the heteronormative couple. In films such as *They Won't Forget* (1937) and *Fury* (1936) the collective erupts into violence, evoking lynching imagery that equates the collective with mob justice. By portraying the working-class collective as disruptive towards the romantic couple these films position the class-based activism as mutually exclusive to the traditional family.

The economic crisis of the Great Depression was partially responsible for the perceived weakening of the family and the coinciding crisis of masculinity. The definition of masculinity along the lines of self-made manhood meant that American masculinity became inseparable from *laissez-faire* capitalism and that economic crises inevitably spawned crises of masculinity. As Kimmel puts it, “Never before [the Depression] had American men experienced such a system-wide shock to their ability to prove manhood by providing for their families” (192); because collectivism challenged long-held notions of self-made manhood, the relationship between masculinity and the Depression becomes a bit muddled. On the one hand, rugged individualism in the form of capital was seen as causing the economic crisis and the perceived emasculation that followed it, but on the other the solution to working-class economic hardships, i.e. unionization, embraced a collective spirit antithetical to the tradition of self-made manhood. Many of the films of the New Deal era represent these conflicting positions by depicting figures

that straddle the line between individualism and collectivism, ultimately depicting a temporary collective deprived of much of its working-class subversiveness in the process.

My second and third chapters explore how subversive figures linked to collective action during the New Deal era were contained and made safe for public consumption by Hollywood. Here I take a look at the ways in which production cycles and genres during the New Deal era shifted in order to participate in this containment of radical impulses. In the second chapter I consider the ways in which the hobo may be considered a displaced frontier hero, and the hobo film as an extension of the Western genre, which was itself largely absent from A-unit production during the 1930s. In many ways the hobo served as a liminal figure between collectivism and rugged individualism. On the one hand, he is defined by his displacement from society and his self-sufficient existence, on the other hand hobo society was highly collectivized historically, gathering in the thousands along “main stems” in nearly every major city in the country,<sup>3</sup> occasionally even marching in “armies,” such as when “General” Charles T. Kelly led 1,500 unemployed men to Washington, D.C. in 1894 in order to demand unemployment relief from Congress (DePastino 59). Additionally, the homosocial sphere of Hobohemia was simultaneously celebrated for its freedom from the feminizing influence of women while it was feared for the resultant implications of homosexuality. Hollywood cinema of the era built upon the liminality of the hobo figure by constructing a narrative that embraced his individualism while downplaying his economic and sexual subversiveness as well as the figure’s status as a member of a *permanent* underclass. Building on Richard Slotkin’s work on the frontier hero in American history and Todd DePastino’s *Citizen Hobo: How a Century of Homelessness Shaped America*, I argue that films such as *It Happened One Night* (1934), *Riffraff* (1936), and *Sullivan’s Travels* (1941) recast tramping as a temporary masculine rite of passage to be concluded with the

formation of a couple and the end of economic hardship, in this way re-casting the hobo as a modern-day pioneer.

My third chapter turns to another masculine figure liminal to the spirits of individualism and collectivism: the outlaw. The outlaw, whether bootleggers such as Al Capone or rural bandits such as Pretty Boy Floyd, were as much in the public eye during the New Deal era as the hobo. And, similar to the hobo, on the one hand the outlaw by his very nature exists independently from the broader social structure, while at the same time he is frequently associated with a group of fellow outlaws, whether it be the gang of the Prohibition years or the band of noble bandits from the past. Drawing on films from the classic gangster cycle (*Little Caesar* (1931) and *Scarface* (1932)) to the period outlaw films (*The Adventures of Robin Hood* (1938) and *The Mark of Zorro* (1940)) of the latter half of the decade, I argue that outlawry during the 1930s became redefined as a temporary status much like tramping, a masculine rite of passage that would naturally conclude with the disbanding of the outlaw collective and the formation of a couple that would return to the reestablished economic status quo. By moving from the largely working-class gangsters of the early 1930s gangster cycle to the aristocratic period bandits of the latter half of the decade, it is my contention that the outlaw was deprived of the class conflict inherent in the figure, becoming instead a figure identified with the restoration of meritocratic capitalism rather than the overthrow of the capitalist system as a whole.

It is the temporary nature of these bands, I argue, that is most significant, for it links cinematic representations of bands such as Captain Blood's pirates and Robin Hood's Merry Men with the temporary labor collectives established by the New Deal administration, such as the CCC and the WPA. For this analysis I consider Marxist historian Eric Hobsbawm's important work on the social bandit, particularly the ways in which the outlaw can be understood as a "primitive rebel," that is, a rebel produced by a marginalized group before it has achieved

class-consciousness. The outlaw films of this era, much like the hobo films, functioned as a means of containment for the subversive collectivist impulses of the decade by depriving such collectives of their inherent working-class roots and depicting them as temporary measures needed to restore rather than subvert the capitalist system.

By the passage of the Taft-Hartley Act and the beginning of the Cold War in 1947, the collective spirit that had defined the New Deal era was largely gone, and in its place would stand a renewed importance on the masculine individualist and his family. In my final chapter I argue that during World War II the collectivist impulses of the previous decade were redirected into the nationalist, patriotic collectives of the war effort, guided in part by the oversight of the OWI and BMP. Looking at the combat unit and home front films that encouraged collectives of men (overseas) and women (at home and in the factories) to work together for the good of the nation, I argue that by the war years the rhetoric and symbolism of the working-class collective were being deployed to defend rather than threaten the capitalist status quo. In the process working-class labor collectives were once again represented in such a way as to remove their inherent class antagonisms and depicted as temporary groups (as opposed to a permanent class) that must dissolve at the end of the war to make way for the family. Films such as *Destination: Tokyo!* (1943) and *Since You Went Away* (1944), while encouraging sacrifice and communal effort for the duration of the war, were equally adamant that at war's end the collective would dissolve and the two sexes would be reunited. In this chapter I rely upon Jeanine Basinger's extensive analysis of the World War II combat unit film, Clayton R. Koppes and Gregory D. Black's examination of the Office of War Information's relationship with and influence on the film industry during the war, and Thomas Schatz's historical analysis of World War II Hollywood.

Throughout the years of the New Deal we witness a steady shift in the ways Hollywood represents collective action on screen. From violent, working-class mobs that challenged both

capitalism and traditional masculinity to the temporarily gender-segregated, classless nationalist collectives of the World War II years, the collective became something that, once purged of its radical elements, could be utilized to stabilize patriarchal capitalism. While radical mass movements would form later in the century, these would be defined primarily by gender and racial solidarity rather than by class identification. It is the project of this dissertation to examine the ways in which Hollywood film illustrated and facilitated the containment of such potentially subversive class politics within its own system of production.

#### Notes

1. From 1929-1930, the decline in marriage rates were reported in the newspapers of numerous major cities such as Boston (“June”), New York (“Brooklyn”), and Chicago (“Marriages Lag”).
2. This appropriation of frontier masculinity included the celebration of muscular blue-collar laborers seen within much of the labor movement’s art as well as in descriptions of white-collar labor, such as salesmanship and finance, in terms of the masculine fighting virtues. Michael Kimmel writes that, “One sales manual [in the 1920s] urged readers to develop ‘the faculty of combativeness’ by exercising each morning before going out to sell” (193).
3. More disparagingly referred to as “Skid Row,” main stems were “districts inhabited almost exclusively by ever-changing populations of homeless men [who] anchored the circulation of labor within metropolitan regions” (DePastino 72).

## CHAPTER II

### “YOU CAN’T REASON WITH A MOB”: THE RISE OF RADICAL COLLECTIVISM IN AMERICA AND ON SCREEN

Central to the crisis of the Great Depression was a questioning of the American identity. While the dominant American myths, from that of the Yeoman Farmer to the frontier hero, focused upon self-made manhood and self-reliance, the financial disaster of the 1930s was seen as the result of this same individualism run amok. As Richard H. Pells observes in *Radical Visions and American Dreams: Culture and Social Thought in the Depression Years*, numerous social critics of the era “diagnosed the central disease of American civilization as an insane individualism. This historic obsession with self-reliance and personal achievement not only distorted economic practice but made it impossible for the nation to develop the spiritual and emotional resources necessary for a truly healthy society” (Pells 7). For many, a shift from the long-standing tradition of rugged individualism to a more collectivist society based on communal good was deemed necessary; taking forms as diverse as socialism, communism, Southern Agrarianism and populism, a more community-oriented social philosophy was desired by many social thinkers of the New Deal Era.<sup>1</sup> However, the collectivist impulse seizing the nation, particularly among the working- and underclasses, would eventually inspire anxiety as a result of systematic vilification by the media, politicians, and popular culture. Eventually the drive towards collectivization would be contained and redirected toward a new model of individualism based on consumption, and the collectives built around radical social change, such as the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO), would redirect their efforts into empowering their members as consumers. While political rhetoric (largely in the form of FDR’s speeches and fireside chats) and New Deal policies played a large role in safely containing these

subversive elements, the cinema's growing importance to American myth creation meant that public attitudes towards collective action and individualism were also shaped by film in significant ways.

Hollywood, with its focus upon individualist protagonists played by individualist stars, would seem an odd place to find examples of the collectivist spirit arising in New Deal America. As Peter Roffman and Jim Purdy argue in *The Hollywood Social Problem Film: Madness, Despair, and Politics From the Depression to the Fifties*, "the narrative [of the classical Hollywood film] must also be centered on the individual with whom the audience could identify. No Hollywood filmmaker could, as Eisenstein did, have the masses as hero" (4). Classical Hollywood narrative relied upon an individual protagonist, a romantic subplot,<sup>2</sup> and, after the Production Code, the rewarding of virtue and punishment of crime and injustice was institutionalized in the Hollywood mode of production.<sup>3</sup> Because of its stylistic imperatives, Hollywood cinema became the perfect site in which to reinforce the containment and deradicalization of these new collectivist impulses within a conservative, individualist framework.

While the spirit of rugged individualism stretches back to Emerson and Jefferson, in the twentieth century the spirit was still alive and well and had adapted itself to the industrialized world in the guise of modern liberalism. As Pells writes, "in its present incarnation liberalism had come to mean rugged individualism, free enterprise, strict reliance on the 'laws' of the marketplace, and voluntary agreements among industrialists rather than government regulation" (54). While there had been a slow shift toward collectivism in the early decades of the twentieth century, perhaps no single event shook the population's belief in the cult of the individual as much as the stock-market crash of 1929. An article written by historian Charles A. Beard for a 1931 issue of *Harper's Magazine* illustrates a not uncommon attitude toward the phenomenon:



“Jefferson wanted America to be a land of free, upstanding farmers with just enough government to keep order among them; his creed was an agrarian creed nicely fitted to a civilization of sailing ships, ox carts, stagecoaches, wooden plows, tallow dips, and homemade bacon and sausages” (20). The message was clear: at its best rugged individualism was an archaic artifact of a preindustrial era that had no place in an industrialized world of cities, factories, and finance capitalism. Sociologist Robert MacIver echoed the sentiment that rugged individualism belonged to the American past, not its present: “the frontier in American history has disappeared. The alternative of homesteading has no longer any meaning to the city worker. The social mobility of the population has ceased to keep pace with their physical mobility. The proportion of important executive positions which fall to the sons of business men, as compared with those which other groups obtain, has increased” (MacIver 60). Not only were the foundations of individualism gone, but so was the possibility of personal advancement through self-reliance due to the collusion of a growing aristocratic class. At its worst, the philosophy of individualism even encouraged modern criminality; Beard continues by listing a long list of corrupt “individualists” before arguing that Al Capone, “with his private enterprise in racketeering, is a supreme individualist: he wants no government interference with his business, not even the collection of income taxes; if he is ‘let alone’ he will take care of himself and give some money to soup kitchens besides” (22). According to this argument, rugged individualism led to the same racketeering and corruption that caused the economic crisis in the first place, and by implication it would only be through a shift towards a greater collectivism that the nation could be renewed.

The turn towards the collective was in some ways the foundational belief of the New Deal coalition. While serving as Roosevelt’s Secretary of Agriculture, Henry Wallace wrote a piece arguing for the need for what he called a “Declaration of Interdependence”; in it he argued,

There is as much need today for a declaration of interdependence as there was for a declaration of independence in 1776. . . . The modern emphasis has to be on the interdependence not only of individuals, but of large economic groups. . . . Can these modern groups subordinate themselves to the necessity of forming a more perfect union, of securing justice, of providing for the general welfare, of securing the blessings of liberty? (Wallace, "We" 74)

The only means of preserving the American tradition of liberty was to organize into collectives and large groups, a belief that on its face seemed contradictory.

For many the swelling numbers of those embracing the collectivist worldview represented a threat to the established, capitalist order. Without a focus on the individual, what would American society look like? Many looked overseas to the growing collectivist movements of fascism (in Italy and Germany) and communism (in the Soviet Union) with a mixture of fear and hope. Thurman Arnold (who would go on to head Roosevelt's Anti-trust Division of the Department of Justice in 1938) exemplifies the mixed feelings associated with this shift in the national character in 1935:

In all of these countries [Soviet Russia, Nazi Germany, and Fascist Italy] the axiom that the normal man in the long run works only for his own profit is put down as dangerous radicalism. Fanatical devotion to this single ideal is such that it makes human liberty an unimportant value, and even kindness is stifled for purely humanitarian motives. There are explosive dangers to world peace and security in such fanaticism. Nevertheless out of this creed has come a certain moral order, to take the place of former discouragement and anarchy. For better or for worse, a new abstract economic man who does not work for his own selfish interest, but only for others, has appeared on the mental horizon of the world. (37)

So while the new models of collective societies offered order and structure to a society that had recently experienced chaos and near-collapse due to economic turmoil, the fanaticism and implicit violence directed against the established order that such societies carried with them was a cause for great anxiety as well. If the common good of society was prioritized, where would that leave the liberty of the individual?

As mentioned above, the celebration of the individual was at the very heart of Hollywood cinema. Indeed, even when Hollywood films engaged with social problems, they often “responded to the craving for comradeship with a portrait of the individual struggling against the mass” and reduced “complex social ills to instances of personal evil” (Pells 281; Bergman 103). However, despite its investment in the rugged individualist tradition, in the 1930s Hollywood on occasion embraced the collectivist spirit seizing the nation. Before looking at the ways in which Hollywood redirected the emergent collectivist culture into the dominant tradition of rugged individualism, it is important to look at the cinema’s false starts, those films that nearly inaugurated an American collectivist cinema in the Eisensteinian tradition.

Of the films constituting a proto-collectivist Hollywood cinema King Vidor’s *Our Daily Bread* (1934), came closest to representing what could be expected from a truly collectivist cinema. In the film a couple, John and Mary, move from the city to an abandoned farm in order to escape the mass unemployment of the industrialized world. While there is certainly a radical aspect to the policy of rural resettlement,<sup>4</sup> the film goes even further in suggesting that not only must America return to the land, but that the land can only be reclaimed via collective, rather than individual, action. Far from the established tradition of the self-sufficient yeoman farmer, Vidor points towards the commune as the proper vehicle for national renewal. While the couple begins life on the farm with enthusiasm, and is more than willing to put in the work necessary to succeed, they lack the manpower and skills to succeed on their own. It is only when John meets

a Swedish migrant and begins to attract more unemployed workers to the farm that it truly begins to succeed. Throughout the film success is marked by the group acting together, whether it be by trading services with one another (as one example, a stone mason offers to build a chimney for a carpenter's home if the carpenter will do the wood working for his), working in unison to plant crops, or, in the final sequence, digging an irrigation ditch to alleviate drought conditions. Individualistic actions, on the other hand, are treated as not only selfish but self-destructive; the film is especially critical of Sally, a "city woman" stereotype who does no work herself and proceeds to seduce John. While the extent of their affair is left ambiguous, she does slowly convince him to want "something more" from his life, instilling a sense of individual entitlement in contrast to the collectivist spirit that had caused him to begin the commune in the first place. She eventually convinces him to leave the farm, but while driving he is struck with guilt for abandoning his fellow farmers. He then decides to return to the farm and help the commune build an irrigation ditch to alleviate the drought.

Beyond the narrative's support for collectivism, the film's cinematography and editing further idealizes the collective over the individual. The first act of farm labor portrayed on screen is John struggling to dig up a piece of earth. The shot composition consists of a long shot of John in the center of the frame struggling in vain to dig the earth with a hoe, his frustration mounting. The long shot and John's placement within the frame emphasizes the empty space of the farmland and John's isolation within it; the implication here is that he is occupying this space alone when he should be in a community. Once the commune is assembled, the shots of farm labor become more crowded; several workers march and sing across the farmland and there are more close-ups of the labor itself, such as hoes and pickaxes digging the earth, which fill up the frame that had been empty when John had been working alone. Furthermore, whereas the earlier shot of John had shown his face, these sequences of communal labor are typically faceless, shot

from behind, just below chin level, or are from too great a distance to make out facial characteristics, subsuming the individuality of the characters into the mass effort.

The scene that best exemplifies the collectivist spirit of the film is the final irrigation ditch sequence after John rejoins the group in order to lead them in saving the community from a drought. The sequence is edited similarly to an Eisenstein mass montage sequence. Once again, the laborers are mostly anonymous, Vidor shows them from below the neck and frequently cuts to close-ups of several pickaxes striking the earth in unison. Additionally, while the audience can hear the voices of several of the men giving orders and discussing their labor, the speakers are never shown on screen. By not privileging the speaker the sequence encourages the audience to think of the mass of laborers as a unit with a collective will rather than a group of separate individuals. The only time the speakers are shown is in the final moments of the sequence when Vidor shows a fast succession of close-ups of several members of the commune shouting to let the water go; again, while the speakers' faces are shown here, their repetition of the same words expressing the same command emphasizes their collectivity.

Elements of the film's production speak to its collectivist spirit as well. Rather than relying on the studios and their star machines, Vidor financed the project largely by himself and assembled a "cast composed almost entirely of unknown players" (Sennwald, "King" X5), and, just as the commune in the film consists of the urban unemployed, many of his cast members were "picked from unemployed men and women in the streets" (Sennwald, "King" X5). While this was done largely for the pragmatic purposes of saving money by avoiding dealing with casting offices, the lack of star power helped to emphasize the collective over the individual in the film, a fact many reviewers picked up on when praising the film's authenticity. Andre Sennwald, a champion of the film, put it most directly in his *New York Times* review: "the actors in 'Our Human Bread' [*sic*] are submerged in Mr. Vidor's theme, like the actors in the best

products of the Russian cinema, which has obviously influenced this profoundly moving photoplay” (Sennwald, “Screen” 25).

While the film’s poor box office could explain why *Our Daily Bread* did not herald in an era of American collectivist filmmaking,<sup>5</sup> those who focused upon the film’s celebration of the commune ignore the ways in which it still adheres to the spirit of classical Hollywood and rugged individualism. While the romance of John and Mary differs somewhat from the norm of Hollywood cinema in that the couple is already established at the beginning of the film, the success of the couple is very much central to the plot and even connected to the success of the commune. As mentioned above, Sally the city girl moves in to the commune halfway through the film and seduces John from not only Mary, but also from the unselfish collectivism he had embraced previously. Sally’s urban individualism symbolizes the individualism of industrial America in contrast to Mary’s communal motherhood. On the road while running away from his responsibilities with Sally, John is struck by inspiration for saving the community from its drought, causing him to leave Sally and return to Mary and the farm. Placing John’s epiphany for saving the commune at the same moment as his rejection of Sally links his victory as the responsible patriarch of a couple with his victory as the patriarch of a collective. While on some level these representations reinforce the valorization of the collective over the individual, the structure here plays into the individualism of classical Hollywood; the romance of two individuals is used as shorthand for broader social issues.

Furthermore, visually the film ends by reducing the trials and triumphs of the collective to the personal success of John and Mary. While the extended irrigation sequence privileges the collective for the vast majority of its running time, in the final moments the camera frames the entire commune celebrating their salvation as John and Mary ride in a cart through the farm. The *mise-en-scène* here places John and Mary on top of the cart, above the rest of the commune,

and the camera proceeds to pull in until the couple is framed together in a tight shot including only the two of them. The privileging of the couple as leaders here calls back to an earlier moment when the collective is discussing what form of government it will have. While one argues for democracy, and another for socialism, the Swedish farmer responds, “All I know is we got a big job here, and we need a big boss.” This comment coupled with the final shot of the film suggests that the story is about individual leadership and struggle as much as it is about communal strength.

An equally strong case for individualism comes from the sacrifice of one of the commune’s members in order to keep the farm going. When the commune is in danger of running out of money for food prior to their first harvest, a member of the collective reveals that he has a \$500 reward for his capture and is willing to let them turn him in to save the group. While at first the other member he tells of his plan refuses to do so, he eventually convinces Sally to turn him in. On the one hand, the narrative elements here suggest the nobility of sacrificing the self for the greater good of the group. However, as a former bank robber, Louie recalls the genre most representative of rugged individualism in the 1930s: the gangster film. While there is a degree of subversion in making a traditionally individualist figure sacrifice himself for the group, the focus upon individual sacrifice and its necessity in keeping the collective alive suggests the ties to the rugged individualist tradition are still intact here. Whether it is Louie turning himself in or John rallying the despondent farmers after the drought arrives, the collective is shown as only being possible through the decisive actions of individuals. This is not to say that collectivist impulses within the film are not present, but rather that even at its most pro-collective Hollywood’s cinematic tradition prevented filmmakers working in the tradition from casting off those individualist patterns entirely. Even in the early 1930s when radical leftism was at its peak, the dominant mythology of American society was already

beginning to incorporate the emergent collectivist spirit into a new mythological hegemony. The year of *Our Daily Bread*, 1934, would see the collectivist spirit reach its height with the largest and most violent labor uprisings in American history, and it would be the start of Hollywood's redefining the collective to a purpose that would best serve the capitalist hegemony of the nation.

Implicit in the promise of collectivization was a threat: the working classes, once collectivized, may revolt. Mass organizations of resistance such as the Bonus March of 1932 and the violent strike wave of 1934 led many to believe that there was little difference between collectivized activism and armed revolt. For those on the Right the move to an interdependent society meant that a communist or socialist revolution was imminent. Roffman and Purdy note, "many intelligent observers predicted that there would be a revolution; Hoover's Secretary of War, Patrick J. Hurley, concentrated armed units around big cities in anticipation of Communist attacks" (65).

And while one might expect the Right to fear collectivist ideas such as labor unions, planned economies, and mass protest movements, anxiety towards men gathering in groups was felt by those on the Left as well. Pells states that even those sympathetic towards the proletariat feared that the people "were not incipient socialists but potential brownshirts who might come together solely for an orgy of looting and arson" (225). And, indeed, many contemporary articles focused upon the dangers of a looming fascism precipitated by the growth of corporate collectives, particularly as the threat from fascist states overseas grew throughout the decade; two newspaper articles from 1937 illustrate this fear. One comment on the fears of corporate collectivism constituting a threat to the individual reads as follows:

Our State and Federal Constitutions have been construed by the courts so as to safeguard the rights of the largest corporation in its relation to the government as if it were a mere individual. But our State and Federal Constitutions are woefully inadequate to safeguard



the ordinary citizen in his relation to a great corporation which may control his investments, his labor, his business opportunities and even his rights and liberties.

("Drive" 20)

Another article expresses the fear of these corporations' new armies, used to combat the growing labor movement: "Such private armies are merely the beginning and the first step for the Fascist armies which may be desired by some of the industrialists of this country" ("Murray" 3). For the writers here, the threat of the incorporation, or collectivization, of big business was primarily a threat to the individual. Like those on the Right, these men were arguing that the individual's freedoms, rights, and property were being threatened by the collectivization of society.

Both Right and Left adhered to the tradition of rugged individualism and viewed with skepticism any attempt to organize men into groups. It is not surprising then that so many Hollywood films from the 1930s portray acts of mob violence; the fear that groups of men and women were always incipient mobs waiting to explode into a riot was prevalent. Films as varied as *American Madness* (1932), *Frankenstein* (1931), and *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* (1939) had at least one mob scene. In *American Madness* the mob takes one of its common forms in the early 1930s: the bank run. As the mob builds within the bank, Capra provides multiple crane shots that emphasize the size of the mob and, as in *Our Daily Bread*, these long shots deprive the members of the mob of individuality; again they are portrayed as a mass. Dickson, the president of the bank, laments, "You can't reason with a mob" as he tries to round up enough investors to slow the run. The mob here is destructive, threatening to cause the very collapse of the bank that they fear; as Dickson comments, "Oh, the fools, if they only knew they're making it worse for themselves." Importantly, the bank is in no real danger if it weren't for the mob. The mob in *Frankenstein* is responding to a more tangible threat, and a direct grievance (the killing of a young girl), but the construction of the sequence very much evokes the same criticism of the

mob as *American Madness*. In this film the mob is made up of uneducated villagers that gather mostly out of prejudicial fear of the Other, and is gathered by the Burgermeister, a representation of populist democracy as opposed to the aristocratic nobility of the Frankensteins. In this case populist, democratic action is equated with the whims and prejudices of the mob. For all their many differences and their radically different genres, both of these films portray the mob as coalescing based on fear and destructive in its goals.

*The Hunchback of Notre Dame* also portrays mobs as a destructive force, but here their intentions are a bit more varied. There are mobs in the beginning that pursue Quasimodo out of fear, and those that harass the city's ethnic outcasts, but there are also the mobs that gather outside the King's palace to protest the injustice of Esmeralda's imprisonment and death sentence and the mob that attacks Notre Dame at the end of the film in a misguided attempt to save her. These mobs, formed due to populist sentiment fostered by a pamphlet circulated throughout the city,<sup>6</sup> are shown as being aggressive and destructive even though their motives are just. The mob at the end in particular, formed to "save" Esmeralda from a Notre Dame and Quasimodo who they do not believe can keep her safe, is portrayed as particularly aggressive. Again we have multiple crane shots portraying the mob from above, emphasizing it as a single entity. Furthermore, the mob is arranged in an arrow formation pointing directly at the cathedral, suggesting the threat that it will pierce the doors of Notre Dame. Ultimately, despite the fact that the mob formed to save Esmeralda, it nearly causes her death and the death of Quasimodo, suggesting that the gathering of the people into a mob carries a threat regardless of motive; once formed the mob cannot be controlled or contained, only survived. More significant are the class dynamics of the mobs in both *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* and *Frankenstein*; in both cases a group of men and women from the lower classes are whipped into a mob via populist sentiment

(in the former this is done via the mass media of the era, in the latter by a populist demagogue, both contemporary anxieties of the 1930s, as we will see later in the chapter).

This very brief look at these disparate representations of the mob emphasizes the fear of collectivized violence and how that fear transcended genre and narrative in the Hollywood of the 1930s. The mythology of Hollywood viewed collectives with skepticism, and even the “pro-collective” films of the era problematized the phenomenon and in the process discouraged it as a viable political alternative. It is my contention that this anti-collectivist sentiment in Hollywood goes beyond incipient anti-fascism and instead positions the Hollywood culture industry as upholding the traditional values of American rugged individualism against the rising spirit of collectivism. The most common manifestation of the collective in 1930s America was labor activism, so it is to Hollywood’s representation of the labor movement that I turn next.

During the 1930s radical mass labor movements were active as never before. As Kirk Fuoss points out in *Striking Performances/Performing Strikes*, “Between 1932 and 1938, there were a startling 13,836 labor strikes with 4,740 of them in 1937 alone” (11). More and more working-class men and women gathered together in labor unions in order to take radical action against their employers and even the government itself; this radicalization of the work force owed no small debt to the formation of the CIO in 1935, but it was the National Industrial Recovery Act (NIRA), a key component of Roosevelt’s First New Deal, which allowed the radicalization of labor activism to take place. The NIRA was an attempt to reorganize the nation’s business interests, to ensure fair competition, prevent monopolies, and foster greater economic development; most important to the labor movement was the Act’s Section 7(a).

Dealing with labor’s right to act as a collective, the section reads as follows:

Every code of fair competition, agreement, and license approved, prescribed, or issued under this title shall contain the following conditions: (1) That employees shall have the

right to organize and bargain collectively through representatives of their own choosing, and shall be free from the interference restraint [*sic*], or coercion of employers of labor, or their agents, in the designation of such representatives or in self-organization or in other concerted activities for the purpose of collective bargaining or other mutual aid or protection; (2) that no employee and no one seeking employment shall be required as a condition of employment to join any company union or to refrain from joining, organizing, or assisting a labor organization of his own choosing; and (3) that employers shall comply with the maximum hours of labor, minimum rates of pay, and other conditions of employment, approved or prescribed by the President. (n.pag.)

The passage of the NIRA, especially Section 7(a), in June of 1933 led to a greater sense of militancy in the movement. Jeremy Brecher writes in his labor study, *Strike!*, “with Section 7A guaranteeing the right to organize and appearing to make trade unionism part of the president's plan for economic recovery, workers throughout the country rushed to join unions, with high hopes that Roosevelt and the AFL would cure their ills” (166).

The mass collectivization and radicalization of the nation's work force began while the bill was still being debated. In *A History of the American Worker 1933-1941: Turbulent Years*, Irving Bernstein chronicles the rapid organization that took place beginning in May of 1933: “Section 7(a) hit Akron like a bolt of lightning. Late in May 1933 five of the town's trade unionists had met to discuss the prospective legislation and the hope of forming a rubber union” (99), and led to the swelling in the ranks of the Mine, Mill and Smelter Workers in Butte, where “the Mine, Mill officials, the AFL crafts, the IWW, and the Communists combined to revive Butte Miners Union No. 1. The results were extraordinary. In a mass demonstration 2300 men joined up. Within a month after the enactment of 7(a) the local had 3500 members” (106). Similar increases in membership occurred throughout the country in various industries. And,

with increased union membership, one of the most violent strike waves in the nation's history took place: "The rise in union militancy led to a rash of strikes as the unions tested the limits of their power. In the spring and summer of 1934 the number of strikes was the highest since 1922. In nineteen states the militia had to be called out" (Shindler 36).

Especially noteworthy is the radically violent and militant nature of many of these strikes, which were often described in terms of military-style combat rather than labor action.<sup>7</sup> Of the multiple labor battles fought during that year, the three largest and most violent were the Electric Auto-Lite Strike of Toledo, Ohio, the West Coast Waterfront Strike, and the United Textile Workers Strike. One of the elements that made these strikes different from those prior to the passage of the NIRA was that while various issues such as working conditions and wage increases were still at play, they were now predominately focused on forcing the company to recognize the unions. While "in 1932 union recognition was the cause of less than a fifth of official strikes . . . in 1934 it was the overriding concern in half the quarrels" (Shindler 37). In other words, strikes in 1934 had become radically politicized in that now they sought not only better conditions and wages, but to challenge the employer-employee hierarchy that was at the very heart of industrial capitalism. In *History and Class Consciousness* Georg Lukács argues, "The most striking division in proletarian class consciousness and the one most fraught with consequences is the separation of the economic struggle from the political one. Marx repeatedly exposed the fallacy of this split and demonstrated that it is in the nature of every economic struggle to develop into a political one (and vice versa)" (71). In this moment in the 1930s the political struggle seemed to be gaining precedence over short-term economic struggles, suggesting that the American working classes were on the cusp of class-consciousness.

It is worth looking at the facts of these three strikes in detail in order to gauge a sense of the militancy of labor collectivism at the time, and, perhaps more importantly, the press's

response to these uprisings, before exploring the ways in which Hollywood reinforced a mythology containing this militant spirit. The Toledo Auto-Lite strike was based almost entirely around the union's desire for recognition. Up until the passage of the NIRA, the auto industry had been resistant to unionization and the American Federation of Labor (AFL) saw this as an opportunity to organize this marginalized group of workers. The local Toledo Federal Labor Union 18384 had been striking off and on since the early part of 1934 in an attempt to win increased wages and union recognition from Electric Auto-Lite, one of the few remaining employers in Depression-ravaged Toledo after the town's largest employer, the Willys-Overland automobile company, was forced to declare bankruptcy. From February until May of 1934 the unrest was marked by a cycle of employees striking, the company promising to negotiate and later breaking those promises, followed by renewed striking (I. Bernstein 218-22).

Eventually tensions exploded in a clash between picketers, strikebreakers, and local law enforcement that came to be known as "The Battle of Toledo": a crowd of picketers outside Auto-Lite had grown to 10,000 when the attack on an old man by a deputy "triggered 'the Battle of Toledo'" (I. Bernstein 222). The fighting which consisted of deputies on the roof of the factory shooting at and dropping tear gas on the strikers below, who responded with rocks and bricks, lasted for several hours. During the conflict the shipping room and several cars were set on fire and occasional hand-to-hand combat broke out between the forces. Finally, at dawn of the next day, "900 men arrived—8 rifle companies, 3 machine gun companies, and a medical unit . . . the guardsmen lifted the siege of the 1500 weary people inside the plant and peacefully evacuated them to their homes" (I. Bernstein 222-223). This led to the guards fighting the strikers in a bayonet charge and a volley of gunfire, killing two and injuring fifteen (Brecher 177). An article from the *Hartford Courant* illustrates how these strikes were frequently treated in the press, sensationalized as industrial warfare with the strikers often cast as revolutionaries:

“The rioting followed a day of savage fighting through the streets of the battle area. . . . A crowd of 2000 remained there [in the Memorial Hall of Toledo, OH] during the evening and when darkness fell began a systematic attack on all street lights in the neighborhood” when the protestors were broken up by police they ran away threatening, “We’re going back to get help and we’ll come back here and strip you” (“Riots” 1).

While the articles do not avoid discussing the violence undertaken by the police and national guardsmen, they tend to use more aggressive language (“savage fighting,” “systematic attack,” etc.) when discussing the actions of the strikers than when discussing those of the guards and police. The same article comments, “the fourth successive day of fighting found the guardsmen, in steel helmets, taking the barrage of missiles head down. They fixed their bayonets and guarded the strike torn area with machine gun nests. Whenever the crowd became too large or unruly, the troops hurled tear bombs” (1). While the potential violence of the guards is not ignored (the placing of bayonets and the hurling of bombs), it is generally portrayed as passive. The guards sit and wait, protecting themselves and the area from the mob, whereas the strikers are violently pursuing their targets through the streets.

The West Coast Longshoreman’s Strike was even more violent than the Auto-Lite strike. This strike was, once again, focused mainly upon recognition; the employers wanted to maintain an open shop where non-union members and those who belonged to a company union could work; the longshoremen wanted a closed shop. The strike began shortly after negotiations broke down and employees of every West Coast port walked out. While the Toledo strike consisted of months of building tensions, the West Coast strike erupted in violence almost immediately: “On the first day of the strike, police broke up a 500-strong picket line. On May 28, pickets armed with brickbats fought police, who ended the battle by firing directly into the pickets with sawed-off shotguns after failing to quell them with billy clubs and tear gas” (Brecher 169). After a

month and a half of striking, the economy of San Francisco was in turmoil and the business community, led by the San Francisco Chamber of Commerce, moved to break the strike. On July 3 strikebreakers and the police were sent in to open the port. On July 5 the National Guard arrived to oversee the movement of freight, leading to clashes in which “Two strikers and a bystander were killed and 115 people were hospitalized. . . . 1,700 National Guard soldiers, who enclosed the Embarcadero with barbed wire and machine gun nests, patrolled the area with armored cars, and were given orders to shoot to kill” (Brecher 170).

The violence led to a General Strike in which the Teamsters picketed the city’s roads and stopped all transport of goods into San Francisco that were not approved by the union (exempted goods included bread and milk, as well as goods needed for hospitals and charities), effectively shutting down the city and causing many in the press to fear the city would begin to starve. Articles commented that the “Famine Threat Is Called Situation Worse Than 1906 Quake” (“Hoodlums” 1), and began to refer to the strike in terms of siege warfare: "Surrounded on three sides by water, San Francisco itself, with a population of more than 600,000, stood in imminent danger of complete isolation if the fast spreading strikes extend to ferry transportation agencies, already highways leading into the city from the south were blockaded by pickets determined to stop commercial activity" ("Food" 1).

Much of the blame for the General Strike was placed at the feet not of the business community who had resorted to violence, but to “Communists” believed to be secretly provoking the workers. As one article put it, "The threat of a general strike was not of as much immediate concern tonight as was the campaign, laid to Communists, which sought to separate the metropolitan area from food sources" ("General" 1), and another dealing with looting associated with the strike remarked, “‘The prowlers might have been "Reds" or Communists,' a guard declared. 'Our men have been instructed to act quickly if their commands to halt are ignored"



("Hoodlums" 1-2). The implied concern behind such statements was that the striking was an illegal act of insurrection rather than a labor dispute, and that it was a front for an impending Communist takeover. Furthermore, because the allegations always pointed to a few communist infiltrators rather than implying that all strikers were communists, the implication was that the rank-and-file were puppets manipulated by a subversive organization. The collective was portrayed as eliminating the individual's capacity to resist such manipulation.

With its focus upon the individual protagonist, Hollywood became the ideal space in which such anxieties concerning the collectivization of workers into a radical, unthinking mass could be reinforced. Lloyd Bacon's *Racket Busters* (1938), as one example, closely parallels the specific concerns raised by the San Francisco Waterfront "siege," and, just as the Waterfront strikes were blamed on outside "agitators," the film places the blame for radical labor action on a few individual criminals rather than politicized workers. In the film mob boss Martin (Humphrey Bogart) builds his criminal empire by taking over unions, installing his own men, and fomenting labor unrest, after which he extorts money from the business owners to end the strike. These strikes create no tangible benefits for the employees, but allow the racketeers to use the collective to further their own agendas while the rank-and-file union membership suffers. Denny (George Brent), a truck driver and the film's protagonist, emphasizes this ambivalence towards collectivization when he tells a fellow truck driver

Aw—don't give me that stick together stuff. I been around too long for that. When the checks are drawn it's every man for himself—like it's always been and like it always will be. Me and Horse here—we been partners for ten years, before we even dreamed about an association. We got four trucks goin' in that time, we expect to have more—we got those trucks by ourselves—we'll take care of 'em by ourselves. (Duff and Rossen 23)

Martin eventually moves in and uses the truck drivers' union to pursue his own agenda. While initially Martin only wants to use the union as a means of collecting dues, he eventually uses the truck drivers to shut down the city's food supply in a manner evocative of the fears generated by the San Francisco Waterfront strike. Once Martin calls the strike a series of overlapping newspaper headlines appear on screen, reading "Trucks Threaten Produce Strike, Commission Merchants Given Forty-Eight Hours to Accede to Demands," and "Food Shortage Threatened! Trucks Not to Move Into Market Unless Agreement Is Reached Before Five-Thirty" (114). Horse, Denny's former partner and friend, addresses the group of striking truck drivers and evokes the sense of collectivized labor being an army; he tells them "You're a regiment. You're a whole army, with the wrong general. A general who steals from you—lies to you—and keeps you poor" (122). This quotation emphasizes the central paradox of the film, and indeed of most films of the era that touched upon organized labor. On the one hand, collectivized labor easily (and almost always) turns into a criminal or politically radical mob bent on mindless, irrational destruction rather than reasonable self-interest; the strikes in all of these films not only fail to benefit the employees but are actively detrimental to their interests. At the same time, these films nominally suggest that the workers must work together, seeking to redirect the collectivist impulse to conservative ends rather than to curtail it entirely.

While the above conflicts were large in scale, by far the biggest labor conflict in the history of the United States was the United Textile Workers (UTW) Strike of 1934; a series of strikes and riots that would spread throughout the South and East Coast for much of the year. Unlike the strikes in Toledo or on the West Coast, the Textile Strike resulted not from union organization but from a more organic, spontaneous organization responding to frustration with official union representation. George Sloan, the leader of the NRA's Cotton Textile Industry Committee, was also the chief spokesman for the textile industry itself, so when the NRA set

conditions unfavorable to the workers, the UTW threatened to strike. Eventually, however, the Union renounced its threat and advised local unions not to strike in exchange for a seat on the Cotton Textile Industrial Relations Board, igniting a firestorm of rebellion among the Union's rank and file, leading to "forty of forty-two UTW locals [in Alabama] vot[ing] to strike, and 20,000 workers walk[ing] out on July 16, 1934" (Brecher 184-85).

Even without official union approval, the strike was maintained for months and by September had begun to spread up the East Coast; on Labor Day 65,000 workers walked out in the state of North Carolina and the next day workers were striking in South Carolina and Georgia as well. Brecher records, "The strike spread rapidly throughout the East Coast. Newspaper surveys reported 200,000 out on September 4 and 325,000 out the next day" (185). The deployment of "flying squadrons" of striking workers enabled the strike to spread rapidly throughout the region; they "moved through the area, closing non-striking mills" (Brecher 185). A number of newspaper articles picked up on the use of these squadrons and represented them as reflecting an insurrectionary spirit growing among the workers; a *New York Times* article typical of such reporting states:

Moving with the speed and force of a mechanized army, thousands of pickets in trucks and automobiles scurried about the countryside in the Carolinas, visiting mill towns and villages and compelling the closing of plants. . . . The speed of the pickets in their motor cavalcades and their surprise descent on point after point makes it difficult to follow their movements and makes impossible any adequate preparation by mill owners or local authorities to meet them. (Shaplen, "Pickets" 1-2)

Just as the Toledo strike was portrayed as a pitched battle, and the West Coast strike was portrayed as a military siege, the UTW strike was seen as a rapidly spreading rebel army. Another article worried that:

The growing mass character of the picketing operations is rapidly assuming the appearance of military efficiency and precision and is something entirely new in the history of American labor struggles. Observers here tonight declared that if the mass drive continued to gain momentum at the speed at which it was moving today, it will be well nigh impossible to stop it without a similarly organized opposition with all the implications such an attempt would entail. (Shaplen, "Pickets" 2)

Even before violence erupted the strike was being portrayed as an incipient civil war; the mere gathering of labor into a collective was seen as threatening and rebellious.

The governors of the striking states responded as though the strikes were open rebellion. The governor of North Carolina almost immediately called out the National Guard, "declaring, 'The power of the State has been definitely challenged'" (Brecher 187), and the governor of South Carolina responded shortly thereafter by declaring martial law on the grounds that a "state of insurrection" existed (Brecher 187). National Guardsmen were given orders to shoot to kill, and the press began to comment that "the situation was rapidly assuming the character of industrial civil war" (Shaplen, "Troops" 3); "On September 5, a striker and a special deputy were killed in a two-hour battle at a mill in Trion, Georgia (population 2,000); a policeman shot three pickets, one fatally, in Augusta; 2,500 textile workers rioted in Lowell, Massachusetts; and mill officials' cars were attacked in Danielson, Connecticut; Macon, Georgia; and other points" (Brecher 187). When the strike spread to Rhode Island the violence followed it; in Saylesville 600 strikers clashed with a group of state troopers armed with machine guns. Eventually, as the crowd swelled to over 3,000, they captured the plant and a group of deputy sheriffs and nearly 300 National Guardsmen responded with buckshot and clubs (Brecher 188). The strike continued to spread into New England and the government response became more and more aggressive.

In Rhode Island these conflicts culminated in the confrontation in Woonsocket between 8,000 strikers and three companies of National Guardsmen, the latter of which eventually succeeded in putting the entire city under military rule. Governor T.F. Green declared, “there is a Communist uprising, not a textile strike in Rhode Island” and proceeded to call an emergency session of the legislature “to declare a state of insurrection and request federal troops. Acting under secret orders from Washington, detachments of regular Army troops began mobilizing at strategic points” (Brecher 190); even “the union leadership agreed with the governor’s assessment of the riots” as Communist uprisings (Brecher 190). By mid-September the South had organized a similar response to what it also viewed as insurrection; “An army of 10,000 National Guardsmen was mobilized in Georgia, South Carolina, North Carolina, Alabama, and Mississippi, supplemented by 15,000 armed deputies” (Brecher 190-91). Georgia Governor Eugene Talmadge’s response was perhaps the most indicative of the national mood concerning these strikes. In addition to declaring a state of martial law he ordered National Guardsmen to begin mass arrests of flying squadrons and “incarcerated them without charges in what was described as a concentration camp near the spot where Germans had been interned during World War I” (Brecher 191). By the end of the month the Board of Inquiry for the Cotton Textile Industry, appointed by Roosevelt, ordered the establishment of “a new Textile Labor Relations Board of ‘neutral’ members” to study the industry which, combined with the brutal response of employers and the states, effectively ended the strike with no real benefits being granted to the strikers themselves; many of them were not even re-hired and many of those who were suffered intimidation to not re-join the union (Brecher 191-92). The workers’ collectivization, while violent, ended without providing any true benefits to the strikers themselves; the collective failed the workers and, in many ways, made matters worse.

Strikes were viewed not as a matter of labor disputes over wages, conditions, and union recognition, so much as they were feared as an attempt to overthrow America's capitalist democracy and replace it with a Communist-style dictatorship of the proletariat. In many of its labor films from the mid- to late-1930s Hollywood represented radical labor activism as a manifestation of political corruption and subversion. In films such as *Racket Busters* (1937), *Fury Below* (1936), *Black Fury* (1936), and *Riffraff* (1936) union officials are portrayed as honorable, reasonable men who are driven by a sincere desire to do what is best for their rank-and-file (not coincidentally, doing what is best for the rank-and-file typically means not going out on strike). These films suggest that labor violence comes not from the union leadership or from unfair corporate practices, but rather from agitators, young "hotheads," and outsiders who seek to foment unrest for their own personal gain (financial profit, personal glory, or revenge). Just as employers, government officials, the press, and even union leadership were portraying the actual strike waves as being fomented by agitators and political radicals, these films reinforced the belief that militant labor was a front for political revolution. In this way these films critiqued the nature of the working-class collective itself while avoiding the political fallout of critiquing unionism. Instead, these films implied that collectives were dangerous because they removed individual will and created a mob easily manipulated by any who would seek to use it for subversive ends.

In *Black Fury*, the union is portrayed as a useful organization that helped to ensure the welfare of the workers until a racketeering organization manipulates them into going against their best interests. The film centers on Joe Radek (Paul Muni), a miner who is used by a strike-breaking organization to instigate a mutiny of the local union leadership in order to cause a strike and force the mine's owner to hire the agency to end it. The union officials in the film are presented as reasonable men who legitimately care for their workers' wellbeing. When the

workers threaten to strike the union vice president arranges a meeting with the local union where he warns them that a strike is not in their best interests and that someone (the racketeering organization), “is stirring things up . . . don’t let anyone talk you into anything you’ll be sorry for” and that they should “remember that half a loaf is better than none . . . we’ve got conditions so that we think they’re pretty good . . . if you’re crazy enough to break away from the FMW [Federated Mine Workers], you’ll lose; we’ll all lose.” Discussing the Shalerville Agreement (the last deal the union negotiated with the mine owners) he comments that

Naturally we didn’t get all we wanted, but it was a good start. In return for a higher wage and better working conditions, we promised them they’d have no labor trouble during the period of the agreement. We made that promise in good faith because we knew that you were honest men and you’d back us up. Remember, men, we gave our word of honor. Your word of honor. Are you gonna stand by it like men, or run away from it like a bunch of yella’ skunks? If we go back on our word they’ll throw us all out, and they’ll be right.

As with the representation of union leadership in the press during the strikes discussed above, leadership here is portrayed as calm, reasonable, and understanding. The vice-president emphasizes that the point of unionism is to get better wages and working conditions in exchange for providing stability for the employers; those who attempt to radicalize and overthrow the existing order are agitators who don’t have the best interests of the men or society at heart. But this sequence goes beyond simply excusing the union from blame for the violence the film later goes on to portray. The staging of the sequence emphasizes a conflict between individual, rational leaders and the irrational mass. The union president is shot above the workers, in the center of the frame; in some shots he is in medium shot alone in the frame, in others he is shot in a longer shot standing between two seated local union officials, but in either case his position of

individual authority is emphasized visually. The miners, on the other hand, are shot at a high angle as a group, emphasizing their collective status, as they shout angrily at the president and chant in unison “It mus’ be strike! It mus’ be strike!” pounding their feet on the floor. The calm rational arguments of the individual (the union president) are set up in contrast to the irrationality of the enraged collective. The shooting script’s language reveals this difference in even starker contrast, commenting in the stage directions that none of the men “know what the meeting is all about, but they do know— . . . ’It mus’ be strike! . . . which they shout with a dumb, childlike insistence, stamping their feet” (Finkel 64). The union is a functioning, rational force only when a rational individual leads it; its danger lies in it succumbing to the will of a mindless collective, robbed of individuality and even of intellect, becoming an unthinking, potentially destructive force.

Joe’s relationship with the union in the film is indicative of another fear concerning collective action: the idea that collective action is linked with emasculation. As mentioned above, the move away from rugged individualism toward a communal solidarity signified a threat towards a national masculinity that had traditionally been defined in terms of individual freedom and self-sufficiency; dependency upon the mass threatened to undercut this construction. Joe only becomes politically active after Anna, the woman he planned to marry, leaves him for a company policeman. While he had previously turned down an invitation to attend the mine workers’ union meeting in order to make a date he had planned with Anna, that night he finds she has left him and he ends up drunkenly stumbling into the meeting hall, where members of the strike-breaking organization who plan to infiltrate the union decide he will be easy to manipulate. Prior to this Joe had discussed his plans to leave the mine town with Anna and buy a farm, suggesting a dream not only of domesticity via a New Deal-sanctioned return to the land, but also of a desire to return to an era of masculine self-sufficiency; rather than being



subject to the whims of an employer Joe would become his own man, in charge of his own property and his own labor. When Anna leaves him, Joe's dreams of such rugged individualism are destroyed along with his hopes for marriage. Because Joe becomes a militant after Anna leaves him, his domestic failures become inextricably linked with his militant labor activism. Whereas in *Our Daily Bread* the success of John's marriage is linked with his commitment to the collective, in *Black Fury* Joe joins the radical mob as a means of escape and as a *replacement* for his individual plans for economic and domestic success. Additionally, because Anna left him for a company policeman, becoming a militant and agitating for a strike allows him to exact revenge by attacking the company of which the policeman was the face. In other words, Joe transfers his personal anger at the individual policeman to a collective activism targeting the company itself; in this way personal grievances become petty excuses for violent collective action. Put another way, the mob is manipulated by Joe (though he is manipulated as well) in order to resolve a personal vendetta.

The collective's violence hurts not only the company it targets but also the individual members of the collective itself. The strike results in the dissolution of the Shalerville Agreement, the previous labor contract that had been dubbed "pretty good" by the union leadership. After the strike the miners must work for lower wages and the workers still striking are evicted from their homes for failure to pay rent. While the early scenes of the film do not represent the miners as living in luxury, the post-strike scenes go much further in emphasizing their poverty and containment. Domestic tranquility is the norm in the film's opening scenes, with Joe's illustrating the comforts of home, including a peaceful family and a loving dog. As Joe joins the miners walking to work he stops to talk with Anna; in this sequence the camera is behind and above Anna, as though it is looking at the street from the porch from which she stands. Looking down at Joe the camera sees the town's domestic peace; a woman behind Joe is

hanging a blanket on a fence, and as he talks with Anna a milk cart rides down the street behind him.

This shot composition is almost directly paralleled in a post-strike sequence. Once again the camera is placed behind fence posts and porch steps, giving the viewer a sense of identification with the community by implying placement on the houses' front porches. This time, however, instead of scenes of tranquil domesticity the viewer sees signs of the poverty and suffering undertaking the town. Armed guards patrol the streets on horseback, and instead of the milk cart a wagon loaded down with the goods of workers being evicted from their homes passes by, instead of workers joking with each other on their way to work, the streets are filled with the newly homeless carrying furniture from their homes over their heads, marching sullenly down the street. The visual implication of this parallelism is clear: while the miners' lives may not have been ideal prior to the strike, collective action has made their lives much more difficult. Furthermore, the strike has emasculated the workers by disrupting the domestic sphere through the evictions and removing their capacity for providing shelter for their families. In his analysis of one of the most popular film series of the 1930s, Busby Berkeley musicals, Martin Rubin points out that the financial chaos of the Depression era led to a conflation between loss of earning power and sexual impotence, noting that "What Blondell and the other women in the ['Remember My Forgotten Man' number from *Gold Diggers of 1933* (1933)] are saying is: because my man can't get a job, he has lost his virility-he can't love me the way he used to" (73). But in films such as *Black Fury* this connection goes even further: loss of earning power and loss of masculine power in the patriarchal couple are both linked to the male's involvement in radical labor activism.

The solution to the suffering caused by militant collective action is shown to be a return to the rugged individualism that was forsaken in the first place. As Joe sits in a hospital bed,

recovering from an altercation with company police, he hears that the workers, now starving and evicted from their homes, are willing to go back to work for pre-Shalerville Agreement conditions far better for management than for the miners. Upon hearing this he acknowledges his part in making the lives of the miners worse and resolves to fix the problem himself. Sitting up in his bed he yells out, “It’s no good to go back. . . . They [the strikers] got to win. It’s my fault; I got to fix.” Here Joe accepts personal, individual responsibility for a collective action (the strike), and accepts the need for him to solve the problem through individual action rather than by using the collective might of the workers.

The two scenes following Joe’s escape from the hospital juxtapose the modes of collective versus individual action. In the first, the union is in the meeting hall; shot mostly from a high-angle long shot, the composition emphasizes the union as a mass, visually reinforcing the weakness of the collective with the high camera angle. Later, when the union is voting on whether or not to end the strike, the camera is placed behind one of the rows of chairs and tracks down the meeting hall, showing the vast majority of the miners from behind; as in *Our Daily Bread*, this composition has the effect of dehumanizing the actors playing the miners, representing them as a collective mass rather than as individuals. The other sequence features Joe as he steals supplies for his planned one-man sit-in of the mine; in these shots he is completely alone in the frame, emphasizing that he acts as an individual rather than as part of a group. The juxtaposition of this scene with the union meeting establishes the alternatives of collective action (in this case, inaction) versus individual initiative. It is also significant that this is the sequence in which Anna and Joe reignite their romance; Joe’s leaving of the collective to pursue an individualized solution to the town’s economic problems implies his re-masculinization as the head of the heteronormative couple.

The fact that Joe's decision to dynamite the entrances to the mine, effectively shutting down (and destroying part of) company property is ultimately effective can obviously not be read as a critique of radical action against corporate authority. Indeed, these actions are easily as radical as anything actual strikers engaged in during the 1934 strike wave. The difference here lies in collective versus individual action; when a collective, such as a union or an unofficial gathering of workers engages in radical activism, it carries with it the implied threat of insurrection; when a Joe Radek engages in the same action, he becomes a symbol of the virtues of rugged individualism, perhaps even achieving the status of outlaw, but he is not seen as a threat to the established capitalist order. Joe's individual action corrects the collective failure of the strike by returning the town to the status quo.

Anna captures the spirit best, "This is Joe's fight and he has to fight it in his own way." It is no longer the union's fight, or the miner's fight, but Joe's. While the workers, because of Joe, are able to "win" the strike, because the outcome reinstates the terms of the Shalerville Agreement in place at the beginning of the film it could be argued that, much like the UTW Strike mentioned above, nothing tangible was gained in exchange for the workers' suffering; collective action did more harm than good. And in the end the most positive outcome of the strike is not improvement in the conditions of the workers but the restoration of Joe and Anna's relationship, a personal victory. The two are hoisted above the crowd as the workers celebrate the victory, and the shot frames the couple in a tight two shot as they embrace; one of the workers tells Joe, "now you can raise them pigs and kids," echoing Joe's early desire to become a land-owning farmer and bringing a narrative that had the veneer of a labor picture back to the dream of masculine self-sufficiency, a dream which the collective was incapable of fulfilling.

The emphasis placed upon the reunion of the couple was of course serving the Hollywood imperative to reduce complex social problem narratives to tales of personal failure

and triumph. To that end Joseph Breen and the Production Code Administration were instrumental in purging the more radical elements from *Black Fury*'s script; citing "industry policy" Breen attacked the first script, which was highly critical of the coal industry and told a very different tale than the film eventually shot by Michael Curtiz.<sup>8</sup> Francis Walsh explains that "[Judge Michael A.] Musmano's first script was a hard-hitting indictment of the coal mining industry" (565),<sup>9</sup> wherein the miner owners were responsible for tricking their workers into breaking the Shalerville agreement. Once the workers go out on strike they hire strikebreakers who end up killing 35 people, including a young boy, in a confrontation. Ultimately the hero of this script, Jan Volkanik, would gain sympathy for the union and use his influence to persuade a government committee to force the mine company to give in to the union's demands (565-66). Rather than placing the blame for the strike on a third party (the strike-breaking company) who manipulates the sheepish collective formed within the union, the fault of the strike is placed on dishonest management and poor working conditions. This original script celebrates Jan as a leader of the strikers but emphasizes the necessity of collective action to solve labor disputes. It is only through the action of striking, for example, that Jan is offered a meeting with the President and NRA intervention to end the strike; in the revised script, he receives NRA intervention by defying the union and acting as a rugged individualist.

In addition to changing the motivation behind the strike, Breen insisted that lines of dialogue be inserted to make the conditions in the mines and town seem less unpleasant and the official representatives of both sides (the union vice president and the owner of the mines) seem more reasonable. In addition to inspiring the union vice president's lines concerning things being "pretty good" and "half a loaf is better than none," Breen wanted the script to include speeches showing that the owner of the mine was hiring strike-breakers "very much against his will" and that "under no circumstances were they [the strike-breakers] to use violence against his

workers (Black, "Hollywood" 185). The shooting script follows these suggestions almost exactly; while hiring the strike-breaking organization the mine owner tells them "I don't like this business of hiring outside men [and] we will not countenance any violence on your part." The fact that ownership has been pushed into the corner by the strikers is stated even more explicitly when the owner says, "We tried to play ball with our men by granting them everything we reasonably could, but when they double cross us we're through!" The point is made that ownership has made every effort to be fair and reasonable and that tough action is a result of the strike-breaking agency exploiting the sheepishness of the collective; once robbed of their individuality the men lose the capacity to act reasonably.

The shifting of blame away from the employers and unions and onto a third party did not go unnoticed by the critical press. The trade press, such as *The Hollywood Reporter*, praised the film for avoiding taking sides in its portrayal of a labor conflict, stating, "The writers of the screen play have been most circumspect in avoiding any major issues between capital and labor and have blamed all the troubles on out-and-out racketeering. In doing it this way, Finkel and Erickson take off the odious 'propaganda' label" ("Warner's" 3). The *Motion Picture Daily* similarly praised the film because "without siding with men or management, [it] reflects all the smeary dreariness of Polish home and mine life in graphic expanse and artistic correctness" ("Motion" 8). A few of the leftist magazines criticized the film for deliberately obfuscating the reality of labor conflicts, of these *New Masses* is the harshest:

While pretending to expose police brutality in a mine strike, *Black Fury* emerges as a calculated attack upon the rank and file movement; it portrays radicals (Communists) as agents provocateurs in the employ of strike-breaking detective agencies; in addition, it is so constructed as further to confuse millions of workers and middle-class people who are already confused about the real social and political issues of today. (Ellis 29)

The film was seen as reducing a collective struggle to an individualized story, which many felt brought the story a greater sense of realism. Otis Ferguson of the *New Republic* praised the film on just these grounds:

it is the most powerful strike picture that has yet been made—so far as I am aware, and I am aware of the better known Soviet jobs in the field. Pudovkin has produced the most massive and beautiful works of this kind; but even his best film, 'Mother,' was lacking in the suppleness of personal development, the direct and hard-hitting action where action is needed, that are required to give a picture its air of easy continuous motion and real life, and to sway its audiences. ("Men" 313)

Put another way, Ferguson is praising the film for personalizing its story, for telling a tale with individualized protagonists rather than the mass heroes present in the Soviet films that covered the same basic ground. If Hollywood's individualized stories seemed more real than their Soviet counterparts, even while obscuring the causes of real labor conflict, it was because the Hollywood cinema had long ago naturalized the individual rather than mass protagonist, as Roffman and Purdy observe (16).

*Racket Busters* and *Black Fury* were far from the only examples of Hollywood strike narratives being reduced to an individual resisting the collective conformity of unionization. In *Riffraff* the protagonist, Dutch, is manipulated into causing a strike in much the same way as Joe Radek is in *Black Fury*. In this film Communist agitators are responsible for instigating a waterfront strike, secretly desired by the company's owner. Again, the strike ends up hurting the union rank-and-file by allowing the employer to renege on his previous contract and hire strikebreakers at lower wages. Once more the film is careful to criticize not the individual union membership but rather the mass collective action (i.e. the strike) that they engage in.<sup>10</sup> *Fury Below* places the blame for its strike on a collusion between one of the mine's middle managers

and one of the miners who cause a walkout in an attempt to force the owner to sell the mine; again, labor unrest is the fault not of capital or of the official unions but rather of a group of corrupt individuals who manipulate the mass of workers for their own benefit. Furthermore, according to the Hollywood mythology of labor unrest, collectivization profits only those who seek to manipulate the union, not the workers themselves.

In a sense, the collective is being tamed in these films; rather than completely discrediting the possibilities of group action, the films suggest that such groups are incapable of making rational decisions on their own, and instead argue that they need strong, responsible and, most importantly, paternal leadership for their own good. In essence, collectivization gets redefined from a mass, nonhierarchical movement to a group that succeeds based upon the rugged individualism and patriarchal masculinity of its leader. Before further exploring how this containment functioned, it is important to look at another cycle of films that delegitimized collective action by equating it with criminality; the anti-lynching film.

Three social problem films that portrayed lynching in the late 1930s, *Black Legion* (1937), *They Won't Forget* (1937), and *Fury* (1936), seem to have little to do with the labor conflicts of the New Deal Era. Indeed, if anything the films would seem to be an invective against right-wing mobs, whether as a literal critique of mob justice or as an allegorical critique of the rising threat of fascism. It is not my intent to argue that these elements are not present, but a closer look at these films demonstrates that the class anxieties inherent in the labor movement are very much in the subtext of these films, which suggests that on some level mob justice and labor activism were equated in peoples' minds. Indeed, Hollywood would not be alone in making these connections; the judicial system, law enforcement and the press would eventually follow their lead in equating mass labor action with the lynch mob. In 1937 in Covington, Virginia the courts tried a group of strikers who attacked a scab under an anti-lynching law:



Instead of preferring assault and battery charges against the strikers, which would have subjected them to a maximum penalty of twelve months in jail, warrants were sworn out under the Anti-Lynching Law, passed in 1928. This act provides that “any and every person composing a mob which shall commit an assault and/or battery on any person without authority of law, shall be guilty of a felony and, upon conviction, shall be confined in the penitentiary for not less than one year nor more than ten years.”

(Dabney, “Anti-Lynch” 62)<sup>11</sup>

Later, in 1939, while arguing before the U.S. Supreme Court, the Fansteel Metallurgical Corporation of Chicago echoed these sentiments by arguing that “the National Labor Relations Board had approved ‘Lynch Law’ in ordering reinstatement of sit-down strikers” (“Lynch” 2).<sup>12</sup> While it would grant far too much authority to Hollywood to suggest that such films directly led to such rulings, the films suggest that a national mood was being created that equated labor collectives with lynch mobs, and that Hollywood provided a ritualized mythological framework in which to reinforce this sentiment.

Of these examples, *Black Legion* is the film most directly connected to the labor movement. In the film Humphrey Bogart plays Frank Taylor, a machinist who is passed over for promotion in favor of a Polish immigrant, Joe Dombrowski. The film is careful to emphasize that the promotion is given to Dombrowski based on merit (he studies at night school, reads during his lunch break, and had previously invented an oiling system that saved the company money), but nevertheless Taylor sees Dombrowski’s foreignness as suspect and joins the Black Legion, a Ku Klux Klan-style organization that uses fear and lynch-mob tactics in order to intimidate ethnic minorities who it views as invaders threatening white male workers’ way of life.<sup>13</sup>

The Black Legion is, of course, not a union in the film, but it is portrayed in a way similar to the corrupt unions seen in films such as *Racket Busters*. For Taylor the organization is a means of improving his socioeconomic status; he joins because he feels slighted by his employers; once he is a member the group intimidates Dombrowski by assaulting him and setting fire to his father's farm. When the two immigrants flee, Taylor is rewarded with the promotion he felt was rightfully his to begin with. While it may not be the organization's primary focus, Taylor is only a member because he sees it as furthering his economic interests, and when he begins to recruit for the Black Legion he does so among his co-workers in the factory and utilizes a rhetoric of economic self-interest to do so. When he asks his former foreman, Ed "You ever think of joining any organization," Ed's response is, "Sure, I'm a union man," linking the two types of organizations. Later, Frank pulls one of his new employees aside while at work, telling him "You like your job here? . . . I suppose you'd like to keep it then? . . . Well I want to keep you; you've been doing good work here, but nowadays that ain't always enough . . . are you willing to protect your job? . . . [this state] is all full of foreigners trying to chisel jobs from Americans. . . . An American alone ain't got a chance." He then proceeds to tell the employee that meeting with the Black Legion is the only way he can protect his job; in many ways this argument can be seen as paralleling the argument for collective action that any labor union might make.

The structure of the film closely follows that of the racket-busting cycle that was also used in several of the labor unrest films covered previously. When Taylor is first initiated into the group, after undergoing a ritualized initiation ceremony he is told "We will issue to you your Black Legion uniform, for the nominal sum of \$6.50. Those of you who do not own a revolver will place your order with the officer of ordinance for the Black Legion Special, a regular \$30 revolver for the small sum of \$14.95." Placing the subject of fees and dues immediately after the

initiation emphasizes the organization's status as a racket, and almost directly parallels a scene from *Racket Busters*; immediately after Martin's gang overthrows the legitimate union, one of his men informs the group that "The name of it [the new union] will be the Manhattan Trucking Association. Every man operating a truck will be a member. The initiation fee will be five hundred dollars. We'll take notes if you haven't got the cash . . . the monthly dues will be twenty five and fifty dollars, depending upon how much business you do" (Duff and Rossen 55-56).

A later scene with the founders of the Legion further emphasizes the importance of dues collection to the organization's cause. The group's accountant runs over the group's receipts for the month: "7,163 members at ten cents a month, \$716.30 . . . total income from all brigades, \$5,891.10 . . . Sale of uniforms and regalia after deducting regional commanders' commissions, sale of Black Legion Special Revolvers with ammunition making a grand total of \$221,499.58." The leader of the Legion then goes on to complain that their profits still aren't large enough, and suggests they should make a push to expand their operation. He tells the other men in the room, "We gotta get this thing set up on a national basis so we can really go to town." Dues collection is the organization's *raison d'être*, much as it was with the Ku Klux Klan of the era. In his investigation of the Klan written in 1922, Ezra Cook exposes the ways in which the organization functioned as a financial con to enrich those at the top of the organization. A scheme that included a \$10 initiation fee and "\$6.50 for a mask, or helmet, and a robe. This he must purchase from the Gate City Manufacturing Company of Atlanta, owned by [Imperial Wizard Edward] Clarke. . . . If the Klansmen rides a horse in ceremonies he must buy a robe for \$14 also from Clarke's company" (40).

Apart from its connection with actual racist organizations of the era, however, we see the same type of racketeering employed by labor organizations in other films. In *Black Fury*, shortly

after the union splits, the leaders of the organization fomenting labor unrest are shown together in a similar office to the one we see in *Black Legion*. The two men discuss the numerous unions they have successfully usurped in a similar fashion to how the leaders of the Black Legion discuss their plans to expand nationally. Declaring that “there’s a coupla’ hundred grand in” their plans, the leaders in *Black Fury* are linking the fomentation of labor unrest to the accumulation of profit for racketeering groups, just like those in *Black Legion*. In this way the film can be seen as indirectly critiquing labor unrest as a tool used by criminals in order to create illegitimate profits.

The film moves from a racket-busting to a lynching narrative when a drunken Taylor accidentally tells Ed about the existence of the Black Legion. The Legion proceeds to kidnap Ed in order to intimidate him into silence, but when he refuses and attempts to escape Taylor shoots and kills him. This sequence implies the violence of labor unrest in that an organization Taylor joined to further his own economic interests facilitates the murdering of his foreman, an implication of union violence targeting fair and well-intentioned managers. This plot development again parallels a similar one in *Racket Busters*. In that film, Denny’s friend Horse becomes a merchant who resists Martin’s union’s demands; as he does so Denny confronts him, telling him “I asked Martin to lay off you. . . . I don’t think I can hold him off much longer. Horse, don’t be a chump. . . . You’re letting yourself in for a lot of grief” (Duff and Rossen 93). Shortly thereafter Horse’s merchandise (several crates of tomatoes) is destroyed by some of Martin’s men; later in the film, Horse is shot during Martin’s strike. In both of these films, the protagonist’s joining of a collective for their own economic self-interest results in unrest and violence that hurts not those responsible for their hardships, but their co-workers and friends. The collective again becomes a mob to be used by unscrupulous leaders.

This reading of *Black Legion* as a narrative of labor unrest was actively endorsed by some elements of the industry press. The *Hollywood Spectator's* review of the film made the parallel between xenophobic, proto-fascist right-wing organizations such as the Black Legion and labor unions the most explicit; the reviewer argues that *Black Legion* is a “Powerful propaganda film, a dramatic indictment of social fanaticism, [with] violent industrial unrest depicted graphically to teach the wisdom of industrial peace” (“In” 8). In other words, the violence and racketeering illustrated in *Black Legion* extends beyond the fascist organization we see on screen to all forms of industrial “civil war,” including the strike waves of the 1930s; labor unrest fostered by a collective becomes linked with criminality.

Other social problem films, such as *They Won't Forget* and *Fury*, while less obviously connecting lynching with radical labor activism, nevertheless illustrate repressed class anxieties concerning collective action. *They Won't Forget* was based upon the Leo Frank lynching that occurred in Georgia in 1915. Frank, a Jewish-American from the North who worked as a superintendent at the National Pencil Company in Atlanta, was accused of murdering 14-year-old Mary Phagan, a girl who worked at the factory and came from a family of poor tenant farmers. Working-class resentments against management played a pivotal role in the hysteria to punish Frank. David P. Duckworth writes,

As a factory manager and the supervisor of a teenage white girl, Frank's position antagonized class distinctions in the death of Mary Phagan. Phagan symbolized the purity of a poverty-stricken working class damned in swelling numbers to wretched, unsanitary living conditions in the city of Atlanta. For one Atlanta newspaper, Phagan was a “martyr to the greed for gain . . . which sees in girls and children merely a source of exploitation in the shape of cheap labor that more money can be made or the product may be disposed at a cheaper price.” (8)

The class anxieties reached a climax during the trial when William J. Burns, a detective from the North who would be represented by Detective Pinder in the film, “was slapped, chased by a mob, and nearly lynched . . . mostly for being a Yankee working in Frank’s support, but he was already extremely unpopular for his earlier union-busting investigations of Atlanta factory workers” (M. Bernstein, “Phagan-Frank” 65). Thus, in a trial sensationalized by the press and fueled by anti-Semitism and class resentment, Frank was convicted and sentenced to death. Eventually the governor commuted his sentence to life imprisonment, but shortly thereafter a lynch mob succeeded in kidnapping and hanging Frank.

While the film eliminates some of the direct class-resentment present in the case, much still remains in the subtext. Instead of a Jewish factory foreman Frank becomes Robert Hale (Edward Norris), a Northern schoolteacher teaching stenography to young women at a small-town business college; Mary Clay (Lana Turner), the film’s Mary Phagan analogue, is one of his students. The hint of working-class resentment towards the management class remains present in the Clay family and the brothers’ response to Mary’s murder. Matthew Bernstein writes, “The lower-class aspect of this alliance against Hale is even more clearly established. Mary Clay’s very name is redolent of her family’s impoverished background as well as Georgia’s famous red soil. Mary’s brothers are clearly working class (their home is ‘across the tracks’ and by ‘the mill’)” (“Phagan-Frank” 103). When the brothers arrive at the office of Andy Griffin, the town’s district attorney, they are dressed in disheveled, unkempt suits set up in stark contrast to Griffin’s clean, neatly pressed attire. They further emphasize the family’s working-class status by telling Griffin, “Us Clays ain’t ever had much ‘ceptin’ her . . . it was nice to come home at night from the mills and hear the laugh of her, and see her smiling’.”

Matthew Bernstein goes on to add that the film illustrates the role class resentments played in the lynching because “Mary is murdered in a business college rather than a factory—a

setting that shifts the class locale from blue-collar to white-collar labor yet retains overtones of industrialization” (“Phagan-Frank” 105), yet I would argue that the implications here run even deeper. The brother’s declaration that they never had much except for Mary indicates not only brotherly affection but hints at ambitions of class mobility. Mary’s brothers are poor, working-class factory workers; Mary herself attends a business college to gather the skills necessary for her, and by association her family’s, advancement. Her murder represents not only the loss of a sister but a promise of class mobility betrayed; just as the Depression had led many workers to feel that they were cheated of their piece of the American Dream, Mary’s death ends the Clay family’s hopes of social advancement. Furthermore, just as many aggrieved workers would turn to collective action in the form of labor unions and strikes to see justice done, the Clay brothers seek the collective action of the lynch mob. That the mob targets the wrong person and is vindictive rather than remunerative (after all, lynching Hale cannot return Mary or her promise of economic advancement to the Clays) can again be read as an indictment of working-class collective action.

During the investigation and trial, Griffin also whips up class resentment in his attempts to convict Hale. The witnesses against Hale are largely working class, such as the janitor of the business college.<sup>14</sup> When Detective Pinder (Granville Bates) arrives to investigate on Hale’s behalf, he is greeted by Hale’s wife Sybil (Gloria Dickson) as well as Mary Clay’s brothers and a group of working-class men. The shot frames Pinder and Sybil in the foreground, each on either side of the frame with the brothers and mill workers between them in the background. They say little to Pinder, but their positioning between the two indicates their aggressiveness, and visually foreshadows the fact that the townspeople will eventually separate Sybil from her potential savior by intimidating him into leaving. Later, Griffin meets with the town elders concerning the unrest; they tell him, “you have to put a stop to it [the mob violence] . . . we don’t want any riots;

you know the powder keg we're sitting on"; Griffin responds by making the class differences between the elite in his office and the mob he represents explicit,

you mean [you're concerned for] the property you own in that community. . . . you should have thought of all this before you flashed front page headlines in the papers you own. . . . you, Mr. Wimple, the leading banker in this town, a man who owns public opinion should have thought of all this before you came out with a public statement that in your opinion Hale *was* the guilty man. And you, Mr. Pitt, the leading merchant in this town, should have thought of all this before you announced that if I couldn't solve this crime you'd see to it that a man was placed in office who could. Well I'm that man, and I'll solve it. . . . now you're frightened; it's grown too big for you. Well, it's not grown too big for me. You started it, my aristocratic friends, but I'll finish it!

In this scene Griffin positions himself as a champion of the masses, interested in delivering justice to the town.

Griffin's introductory scene establishes him as a populist as opposed to the old aristocratic powers of the South. While riding in the Confederate Memorial Day parade, Griffin establishes his desire to be a populist politician when he complains that the crowds "applaud much louder for the governor . . . applause means votes." Meanwhile the governor comes from the established aristocratic tradition, "his name is Mountford, his father was a judge and his grandfather was a general. His name's been in the public eye for three generations." Griffin is clearly set up in the model of a populist demagogue, whipping up and manipulating the working-class masses for his own political gains. Indeed, with his suspenders and straw hat, Claude Rains' portrayal of Griffin evokes Huey Long, the most well-known working-class populist of the 1930s. Like Long, Griffin sees himself as a self-made man being attacked by the established aristocracy. And, just as Long "cultivate[d] a reputation as a country bumpkin" in order to gain



favor as a common man mocked by political elites, Griffin portrays himself as a communal leader seeking justice against the distant, aristocratic governor hidden away in his mansion. Nowhere is the comparison to Long more apt than during the closing statements of the trial, when he, in shirt and suspenders, covered in sweat, vociferously presses the jury to convict. As a member of the working-class mob watching the trial from the window of the courthouse puts it, “Look at Griffin! He’s wavin’ his arms, he’s shoutin’! Boy, Little Andy is sure goin’ to town now!”

After the trial the Governor considers whether or not to commute Hale’s sentence while an angry mob waits outside the governor’s mansion. Eventually he decides to sacrifice his political future in order to avoid punishing an innocent man; this selfless act contrasted with Griffin’s grandstanding implies inherent nobility in the aristocratic classes, and an inherent danger in manipulating working-class resentments for political ends as Long and others of the era tried to do. The scene also encompasses the anxiety of working-class collectives’ capacity for insurrection when a member of the mob looks at the national guardsmen (who, significantly, were the predominant strike-breaking force of the 1930s) standing guard and says, “Gotta be careful. Them there’s soldiers” to which another replies, “they better be careful of us!” The working-class nature of the mob set up against the aristocratic nobility of the governor emphasizes the fear of working-class collectives challenging established, moneyed power. Griffin is a warning against the dangers of working-class collectivism; once whipped up, the mob cannot be controlled and it will attack the established, honorable men who are the rightful leaders.

Fritz Lang’s *Fury* similarly illustrates the anxieties of class conflict and feelings of resentment concerning the betrayal of the American promise of upward mobility. The film opens with Joe and his fiancée Katherine walking down a street together on a date. The couple

approaches a rug store window and admires the bedroom suite displayed inside; the suite, a symbol of both middle-class economic and domestic success, becomes shorthand for the characters' hopes. As we later learn, Joe is leaving town for a job that he hopes will eventually earn him enough money to get married. The scene is reminiscent of the overall New Deal mythos that equated success as a consumer with success in traditional gender roles as represented by marriage. As Anna Siomopoulos puts it, the Roosevelt administration initiated a "campaign to promote consumption not for personal pleasure but for the sake of the family and the national economy" ("I" 3), and we see that mythology perpetuated here in Hollywood film. The cinematography emphasizes the current distance between the couple and this reality, however, for as they role-play how they will act in their ideal bedroom setting Lang establishes the geographical relationship between the couple and the bedroom with a shot-reverse shot. Eventually he does show the couple in the same shot as the bedroom by placing the camera behind the couple looking in the store window, but even here their distance from the object of their desire is emphasized by the "Carpets-Rugs" lettering printed on the store window. The presence of these letters reminds the viewer of the glass standing between the couple and the bedroom and symbolizes the metaphorical glass barrier that stands between them and their goal.

At first, as Joe leaves for his new job at a factory, the couple seems to be edging closer to their goal of economic freedom and, in the process, domestic bliss. As he leaves he tells Katherine, "I'll come for you the minute I get the old bank balance up as far as the third floor—and a kitchenette." Later we see him accomplish his goal of earning enough money to get married and establish a family. The scene features Katherine surrounded by images of domestic bliss, sitting in a comfortable home complete with the furnishings of a comfortable, middle-class domesticity, juxtaposed with several shots of a neighbor woman hanging laundry. In this atmosphere of feminine domesticity Katherine reads several letters from Joe chronicling his

ascendance of the socioeconomic ladder. While at first he was working at a factory to save money, a letter tells her

I was saving so little I had to do something so we could get married sooner. We got the big idea right after Christmas and I quit my job at the factory! We put together all we had and bought an option on [here the camera cuts away from the letter to a picture of an old, abandoned gas station the brothers bought] . . . and in March Santa Claus came, but not with reindeers—ponies! [after which the camera cuts away again to an image of a race track with an arrow pointing to “our garage”]. . . Well, right away we got so busy. The camera cuts back to a picture of the service station in perfect, newly painted condition, indicating that the brothers have successfully renovated it. A later letter (typed now rather than handwritten to emphasize Joe’s rise in class, but filled with errors to emphasize his uneducated, working-class roots) tells her, “The bank account is going up like a July thermometer,” and as the scene with Katherine ends she is given a letter “by special delivery this time” telling her that Joe is coming home to marry her, and that he bought a car. The letter-reading sequence shown onscreen encapsulates the concept of social mobility and the American Dream in brief. Joe, an uneducated laborer from a poor background, through hard, honest work, manages to save up money, buy a business, become an entrepreneur and successful consumer, and, as a result, fulfill his masculine domestic obligations of taking care of a woman.

The shooting script includes elements cut from the final film that would have emphasized this journey even further; in the script an additional letter tells Katherine, “Honey, hooray! We paid off for [*sic*] the garage today and are capitalists,” which would have been written on letterhead giving the name of the garage as “Square Deal Service Station” (Lang and Cormack 12). This addition would have further emphasized the socioeconomic mobility of Joe’s character, and the name of the service station clearly evokes the “Square Deal” and “New Deal”

policies of the Teddy and Franklin Roosevelt Administrations respectively. The idea conveyed here is that through hard, individual work any American can achieve social mobility.

However, just as the Clays feel cheated out of their chance for social uplift through their sister Mary in *They Won't Forget*, Joe is cheated out of this same American contract in *Fury*, and again it is the collective that betrays him. While driving home to marry Katherine, he is stopped by a small-town policeman who mistakes him for a local kidnapper. On extremely circumstantial evidence Joe is kept in the local jail for questioning and investigation. Eventually, as rumor and anger spread amongst the townsfolk, a mob attacks the jail, sets it on fire and throws dynamite through the windows until Joe is presumed killed. In other words, Joe's economic and domestic successes are rendered irrelevant due to the actions of a mob; he has been cheated out of his "square deal." While the film is an indictment against mob justice, and Lang's status as an émigré from Nazi Germany suggests there is more than a little anti-fascism at play as well,<sup>15</sup> several interviews conducted with Lang suggest that he was also concerned about the effect of society's collectivization upon the individual. He told *Cinéma* in 1962 (and would later repeat to *Cahiers du cinema* in 1965), "Someone said that there is no place today for individualism" and that the "struggle [between the individual and society] appears throughout my work, and is an essential part of it" (Lang, "Fritz Lang Speaks" 28). While the right-wing collectives of fascism or the lynch mob may have been at the forefront of Lang's mind in this case, such a statement indicates that he viewed the very nature of collectives themselves as harmful to the individual, and many in the United States at the time would say the same about unions and radical labor collectivization. Indeed, "Although Lang often insisted that *Fury* was his attempt to address the peculiarly American problem of lynching, he also at times characterized the film as an examination of a universal mob psychology" (Wood 238), and as Nick Smedley points out in his analysis of the film,

His other main theme was the issue of collective or individual responsibility. . . . In the script conferences, as he groped his way towards the film's condemnation of American populist excesses, he conflated mob rule with "collective" thought. At times, he appeared to see the conflict as one of socialism versus individualism. Lang could see that the mob was a collective unit, with no one person responsible for its actions. (7)

The violence of the labor collective would, in other words, be made explicit just as we saw above in the equating of labor unrest to "lynch law" in the Covington, Virginia case.

While the film does not directly link the mob to strike action, there is a subtext connecting it to labor unrest throughout the film. Even before the formation of the mob there are hints of economic unrest percolating in the town. Class resentments are implied when a group of townspeople meet with the sheriff shortly after Joe's arrest. After the respected town elders leave the meeting, Dawson (who will go on to be one of the leaders of the lynch mob) tells the sheriff, "I'll tell you one thing, Hummel! My friends won't be satisfied with what—(*pointing after Burmeister and Pippen*)—*those*[emphasis in script] pillars o' society tell 'em! . . . An attack on a girl hits us ordinary people where we live!" (Lang and Cormack 22). The sheriff responds, "Now high-tail out o' here! And behave yourself. Or I'll have the County take you—and all your relatives—off the dole!" (Lang and Cormack 23). As in *They Won't Forget*, the nascent mob is coded as working class, and Dawson's status as being on relief implies a connection between the mob and the economic crisis, and perhaps to labor unrest more generally.

The class-resentment implied by the growing unrest in the town becomes even more pronounced when the mob is formed. Initially the mob forms in a bar as a crowd becomes increasingly agitated at the possibility the sheriff will let Joe leave town without pressing charges. However, it is a stranger who pushes the town over the edge; he tells them: "I'll tell y', if I lived in this town, I'd make it my business. What are you eggs? Soft-boiled, that you don't

stick up for a kidnapped girl?” He then proceeds to lead the mob through the streets to the jail, and when they approach the jail it is he who speaks to the sheriff, demanding to “talk t’ this Wheeler [i.e. Joe Wilson] guy.” When asked by the townspeople who he is he replies that he’s “just passin’ through. I been up at Capital City strike-breakin’ for the street-car company. Maybe y’ need some help here, too.” The man who finally pushes the mob over the edge and leads them to the police station is identified primarily with labor unrest. Furthermore, while his status as a strikebreaker places him in opposition to labor collectivism in theory, as mentioned previously this work aligns him closely with the source of labor unrest in the Hollywood labor representation of the era. Just as in films such as *Black Fury*, *Fury Below*, and *Racket Busters* strikes are caused by strikebreakers seeking to foment labor unrest in order to make a profit, here the stranger whips up the lynch mob in a subtextual parallel to labor violence. Furthermore, just as in *They Won’t Forget*, the use of the National Guard in the film as a potential challenge to the mob echoes the Guard’s role as the predominant strikebreaking force of the 1930s. Otis Ferguson picked up on this connection in his *New Republic* review of the film when he called it “that strike-riot squad sometimes referred to as the National Guard” (“Hollywood’s” 130).

Meanwhile race, the most important component of the lynching epidemic, is almost completely absent from these films, which came on the heels of growing national sentiment, driven by the Popular Front, to eliminate lynching. Roffman and Purdy point out that “The number of lynchings had reached a peak during the first half of the decade (sixty between 1930 and 1934), provoking an all-out campaign to stop them” leading to the introduction of the Wagner-Costigan Bill in 1934; “So, with the appearance of *Fury* in 1936 and *They Won’t Forget* in 1937, Hollywood joined the attack on mob violence at a time when it was still in the forefront of the public’s consciousness” (166). Yet while Hollywood was willing to condemn lynching (although, considering the frequency of lynchings had dropped dramatically by 1936, only when

it was already in decline and national sentiment had turned decidedly against it), the studio heads and the Production Code Administration were not willing to deal with the obvious racial tensions inherent in the mob violence epidemic head on.<sup>16</sup>

In the case of *Fury* at least, much of the left-leaning, Popular Front press noticed the relative absence of race as a deficiency in the film's social project. Ferguson writes in his *New Republic* review, "Even in its powerful moments this is not the story of a typical lynching—there is no race angle" ("Hollywood's" 130), and *New Masses* echoed these sentiments when they argued, "If you think of the story as ending there [at the burning of the jail and the presumed death of Joe], where it always does end in fact and if you also imagine the victim to be Negro, as he usually is and not white, then this film will haunt your dreams for many a night" (28). Fritz Lang in later years would recount that he felt the film failed in its elision of racism, telling an interviewer that he had originally desired to tell the story of an African-American being lynched by a racist mob (Roffman and Purdy 172).

According to Lang, Louis B. Mayer and Joseph Breen were both critical of this original treatment; "when Breen read the first script he informed MGM that *Fury* could not deal with racial prejudice, criticize Southern law enforcement officials, or be 'a travesty of justice' story," demanding several rewrites before accepting the script (Black, "Hollywood" 185). Mayer, in Lang's account, went even further; as a compromised nod to the racial issues inherent in lynching, Lang wrote a scene in one of the versions of the script that showed a group of African Americans sitting in a car listening to a radio broadcast of the lynching trial. When the state attorney spoke about the number of lynchings in the United States every year, the old man in the car nodded his head silently in response. In Lang's estimation, "Mayer had this scene, and others like it, removed because at the time I think even he was convinced that Negroes should be shown only as bootblacks, or carhops, or menials of some description" (qtd. in Roffman and

Purdy 171). While there is some debate as to whether or not Lang is exaggerating this claim,<sup>17</sup> the fact that he recognizes the deficiencies inherent in ignoring the racial dynamics of lynching illustrates what he feels was missing from the original film. Still, Lang managed to include at least one subtle reference to the predominately black victims of mob violence. As the mob agitates inside the local bar and prepares to storm the jail, a black man is shown waiting outside, listening to the conversation. As the mob runs out he quickly jumps out of the way of the door and onto a shoeshine chair to stay clear of their aggression. His initial position of listening in emphasizes both his status as outsider and the lynch mob as an inherently white phenomenon. Additionally, his running out of their path in fear hints at the fact that his race makes him the usual target for such a mob and underscores the racist potential of such a gathering.

Likewise, the predominant prejudicial component of the Leo Frank case, anti-Semitism, is completely absent from *They Won't Forget*. As David Duckworth points out in his analysis, Jews were blamed for the immoral chaos of the city [of Atlanta]. Their ownership of Negro saloons was assumed to criminalize the Negro; "dope dives," gambling dens, and brothels were claimed to be under their control. Frank lived during a time when respected historians, sociologists and progressives characterized the Jew as a successful businessman, with avarice for property and excessive money to lend, lusting for Gentile girls. (8)

Additionally, anti-Semitism was frequently linked to fears that the Jewish community was plotting radicalized attacks upon the WASP hegemony; these fears included the belief Jews were prodding African-Americans into starting a race war in the South to the belief that Jews had started the Communist party in Russia in order "to overthrow all the Gentile Governments of the world" (Cook 44). Whereas in the original case Frank's Jewishness made him a likely target for those filled with paranoid delusions of political and sexual subversion, in the film Hale is never



declared or implied to be Jewish, eliding the ethnic overtones of the mass anger and hatred stirred up by the original case. While part of this was no doubt due to a squeamishness on the part of studio executives to tackle controversial issues, specifically Southern anti-Semitism and racism, on screen, Frank's Jewishness was also ignored in Ward Greene's fictionalized account of the lynching, *Death in the Deep South*, upon which *They Won't Forget* was based (M. Bernstein, "Phagan-Frank" 73). In any event, the core element of the lynching epidemic, racial animosity, is brushed aside.

Still, there are hints of the racial component of mob violence within this film as well. When Redwine, the business college's janitor, finds the body of Mary Clay, he continuously, and hysterically cries, "I didn't do it; I didn't do it" repeatedly, clearly acknowledging his fear that he, as a black man, would be the likely target for a group of white police officers to blame for harm done to a white girl. The cinematography of the sequences of Redwine's interrogation emphasizes his vulnerability. In the first shot the camera is placed behind Redwine's head as he lies on a cot, four white police officers looming over him, the shot composition making it appear as though they are pressing down, symbolically crushing him. The next shot is looking down at Redwine on the cot as the officers surround him, hovering over him in an attempt to force a confession out of him as he continues to exclaim, "I didn't do it; I didn't do it!" Even Griffin indicates Redwine's vulnerability when he refuses to press charges, exclaiming, "Wash! Any fool can ride to glory on a helpless Negro janitor. I'm out for bigger game!" Later, Buxton hires a lawyer to convince Redwine to lie in order to condemn Hale, and uses the fear of the lynch mob in order to do it. The lawyer tells the janitor, "They might try to pin it on you. They're out to get you Tump. Your story's got to be a better one than you've told up till now if you don't want to get electrocuted . . . or maybe if Hale goes free that crowd won't wait for no trial; they'll

come and get you no matter how far you run or where you hide, and that'll be worse." Even though these films dislocate mob violence from its racial motivations, the subtext remains.

And this racial subtext is very much connected to the class anxieties and fears of labor collectivization at the heart of these films. As Wood points out, mob violence revolved largely around a group solidarity that was specifically white, but also working class. She writes, "Nevertheless, their [the white perpetrators'] very presence in the crowd helped constitute a white public that lent legitimacy to the lynch mob's claim of white solidarity. In these ways, lynching spectacles revealed the threads with which white southerners stitched together an idealized white community" (Wood 9). Grace Elizabeth Hale echoes these sentiments in *Making Whiteness: The Culture of Segregation in the South, 1890-1940*. She writes,

publicly resolving the race, gender, and class ambiguities at the very center of the culture of segregation, spectacle lynchings brutally conjured a collective, all-powerful whiteness even as they made the color line seem modern, civilized, and sane. Spectacle lynchings were about making racial difference in the new South, about ensuring the separation of all southern life into whiteness and blackness even as the very material things that made up southern life were rapidly changing. (203)

Just as Hale notes that the act of lynching was a mechanism by which working-class immigrants claimed whiteness, the act of lynching in these films, robbed of its racial component, becomes a way in which class resentments are enacted on screen.

In a 1933 study entitled *The Tragedy of Lynching*, sociologist Arthur Franklin Raper, while not ignoring the racial component of lynch mobs, argues that the act was inextricably linked to economic troubles and was committed predominately by the working classes. He points out that lynch rates had a positive correlation to the "per acre value of cotton" of a given region (30), and that "the counties where lynchings occurred in 1930 were economically below

the average” (6). He goes on to argue that the mobs themselves were predominately made up of the poor:

As to the ownership of property, the known active lynchers were generally propertyless. In the majority of cases they were unemployed, rambling, irresponsible people, many of them with court records. In the rural communities, the more shiftless types of white farm tenants and wage hands were most in evidence. Being without property to tax or collect legal damage from, mob members recklessly destroyed property at a number of places. (11)

Finally, while Raper does not ignore the human cost of lynching completely, he does emphasize the damage to property and business interests done by the act, arguing that “the damage done to labor conditions, investment of capital, reputation of the community, and the like is inestimable” (42).

In many ways, Raper’s account of lynching could read as an account of the militant labor action seizing the nation at the time. In these films we see a conflation with the problems of mob violence with that of labor unrest, and the effect is that a mythology emphasizing the dangers of collective labor action was reinforced. Hale perhaps puts the connection most explicitly in her discussion of the class implications of the Leo Frank case: “Leo Frank had brought home the danger of calling the white masses into motion—they could turn on their white employers” (236). The act of lynching, much like the act of a sit-down or a strike, was partially about the perpetrators setting up boundaries between them and those they were attacking.

The vilification of the subversive potential of working-class collectives was one way in which the new collective spirit was contained in Hollywood mythology, but it was not the only means. Much of the film industry’s containment of the militant working-class collectivism involved redefining the movements within the contexts of the American traditions of self-

reliance and communitarianism. In the face of greater labor collectivism and government assistance programs, a number of politicians and social philosophers suggested a return to the individual facilitated by a greater emphasis on the local community; an impulse that can perhaps best be seen in the careers of Huey Long and Father Coughlin. As Alan Brinkley notes in *Voices of Protest: Huey Long, Father Coughlin, and the Great Depression*, Long and Coughlin argued that power

should not reside in distant, obscure places; the individual should not have to live in a world in which he could not govern or even know the forces determining his destiny. Instead, the nation should aspire to a set of political and economic arrangements in which authority rested securely in the community, where it could be observed and, in some measure, controlled by its citizens. (144)

For Long, returning power to the individual consisted of creating a nationwide network of “Share Our Wealth Clubs” that would “be composed of a nationwide system of local clubs. [And] Anyone committed to the idea of redistribution of wealth could join” (79). While in many ways Long’s Share Our Wealth Society espoused even larger government intervention than Roosevelt’s New Deal,<sup>18</sup> Long publicly denounced collectivism and relied upon an agrarian individualist rhetoric.

Father Charles Coughlin’s counterpart, the National Union for Social Justice, was less community based than Long’s program, but still operated under the assumption that the federal government and national politics were something to be bypassed if true reform was to be achieved. Coughlin’s National Union for Social Justice was an apolitical collective that “was not to be a partisan organization ‘any more than the United States Steel Trust or the United States Chamber of Commerce or the American Bankers’ Association . . . constitute a political party.’ . . . It would be ‘reckoned with by every Senator, by every Congressman and by every

President,' but it would not nominate or elect Senators, Congressmen, or Presidents of its own” (Brinkley 133).

While on some level these movements might seem radical, they were in fact a mitigation of the truly militant labor collectives of the period that sought to upend the capital-labor dichotomy and disrupt the capitalist economy through the seizure of government infrastructure (as seen during the San Francisco Waterfront Strike) and corporate property (during the sit-down strikes of 1936-37). Long and Coughlin’s programs, in contrast, suggested reforms based upon consumer capitalism by giving workers more purchasing power. Ultimately, for all of their bluster against Roosevelt’s New Deal, their plans focused upon the same consumer model of restoring purchasing power to the family and local community, a model relying heavily upon one of the most prevalent residual strains of American tradition: “Opposition to centralized authority and demands for the wide dispersion of power [and] A fear of concentrated, hidden power” (Brinkley 161).

In this way these movements functioned as a containment of the collectivist impulse by adhering to the traditional American-Capitalist status quo, which was also the predominate mode of representation in Hollywood film. As we have seen above, many films sought to redefine the collective as destructive to the working class, but certain strains of collective action persisted within the culture and on screen, and ultimately these strains were tamed through a national mythology that weakened radical collective action by containing it within the American romance with the local community. Charles Lindholm and John Hall write,

Americans continue to view central state organisation with great trepidation, fearing curtailment of individual liberty. Americans therefore tend to believe that political organisation in its ideal form ought to be a personal matter spontaneously achieved between neighbours meeting over the back fence, inspired solely by love and friendship;

otherwise it risks the dangers of bureaucratic rationalisation and entanglement with corrupting official state power. (37-38)

The turn toward the local community was facilitated by the belief that labor unrest was frequently caused by “outsiders.” While the employers and the state had a vested interest in delegitimizing collective action by equating it with communism and other “un-American” activities, occasionally, as in the case of the UTW strike discussed above, even the unions themselves echoed these sentiments. An article from the Chicago Tribune discussing the San Francisco Waterfront Strike in July of 1934 commented that the “strike fever spread[ing] throughout the country, lend[s] circumstantial support to the theory that a central agency, communistic or otherwise, is fomenting the trouble,” a view that was officially supported by labor itself when “The A.F. of L. [American Federation of Labor] was outright in declaring that communists in this country, under instructions from Russia, are planning a revolution. The A. F. of L. made public what it claimed were instructions from Russia directing communists in this country to set up secret, illegal organizations of workers in every possible plant and every possible union” (“Labor” 3). A *New York Times* article from the same month illustrates a similar sentiment regarding a strike wave in the Midwest:

In most of these cases it is charged, as it was at Wichita, that the trouble has not developed from the spontaneous discontent of those involved, but was fomented by paid radical agitators. Radical groups quite apart from the general political radicalism of the Middle West exist in several Corn Belt communities. Their leaders frequently are newcomers in the community and without other employment than the maintenance of group headquarters.

The authorities generally hesitate to call them Communists, but refer to them usually by the all-inclusive term agitators. Except in a few instances it is not clear that

they have an organic connection with the Communist party, although they speak the Communist patter and appear to be in correspondence with similar groups elsewhere.

(Jones E7)

Reporting such as this emphasized the core belief that such collectives were inherently dangerous mobs uninterested in advancing the cause of labor, which they were merely using as a front to foment revolution. In a cultural climate where militant labor was viewed as being instigated by a handful of outside agitators (both in the actual strike waves as well as fictionalized accounts such as those mentioned above), the local, tightly-knit community becomes even more significant as the only hope for a return to good will between the classes and national renewal.

Many in the 1930s began to point towards a return to what Lizabeth Cohen has termed “welfare capitalism.” Prevalent in the 1920s, this system approached the problems of poverty and workers’ rights by relying upon the charity of employers and other wealthy members of the community. The capitalists’ motivations for providing this charity were not totally, nor even primarily, altruistic. Cohen writes, “What welfare capitalists did not provide, government surely would, employers feared. . . . Progressive employers advocated providing for the welfare of their own workers and communities to keep the state [and one might add the workers themselves] at bay” (181). In other words, industrialists prevent collective action in the form of either unions or the government by solving their workers’ problems themselves and by doing so remain within the capitalist-individualist framework. The coming of the Depression meant that many of the businessmen who had previously provided charity to their workers and their communities could no longer afford to do so, which in turn led to the increased working-class collectivism of the 1930s. According to Cohen:

The local businessman who had once supported ethnic welfare agencies or provided mortgage money was now perceived as only watching out for himself. As workers became more aware of class differences within their own ethnic groups, they were on their way to becoming more sensitive to them in the larger world and more likely to recognize their common fate with workers of other ethnicities. (238)

Many in the 1930s were suggesting a similar strategy for solving the current crisis; *The Saturday Evening Post* printed multiple stories and editorials about wealthy men saving their communities, suggesting that local community involvement was the best solution to the current crisis.<sup>19</sup> Additionally, Roosevelt's Administration itself relied heavily upon "back to the land" rhetoric suggesting that a return to self-sustaining yeoman farming, and by connection to individualism, would help solve the nation's woes; his Resettlement Administration was devoted to just this purpose. Of the filmmakers working in the 1930s, perhaps none better illustrates the communitarian impulse and depoliticization of radical collectivism than Frank Capra. After *It Happened One Night* (1934), Capra took a decidedly political turn in his filmmaking, creating his Depression Trilogy, which consisted of *Mr. Deeds Goes to Town* (1936), *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington* (1939), and *Meet John Doe* (1941). While these films are political in nature, they are hardly radical, and remain deeply rooted in the American tradition of the rugged individualist and communitarianism as opposed to collective action. When positioned against the radical strike actions of the 1930s, or even Roosevelt's New Deal, these films were nearly reactionary in their skepticism of collective political action.

In *Mr. Deeds Goes to Town* Longfellow deeds inherits \$20 million from his deceased uncle, prompting him to leave his idyllic, small-town community of Mandrake Falls for New York City. The key scene in terms of the film's politics occurs when a dispossessed farmer breaks into Deeds' New York home, threatening to kill Deeds. The man chastises Deeds for his



disinterest in the suffering of common men and women, asking him, “Did you ever stop and think about how many families could be fed on the money you spend to get on the front pages? . . . How did it feel feeding donuts to a horse? Got a kick out of it, huh? Got a big laugh! Did you ever think of feeding donuts to human beings? No!” This illustrates the Depression-era sentiment that the wealthy were more concerned with throwing parties and amusing themselves rather than helping their common man, but while the scene does carry a limited threat of working-class revolt (the farmer has invaded the space of a wealthy man and threatened to kill him), the scene, and eventually the film itself, concludes by suggesting that the solution lay not in a working-class uprising, but rather in increased generosity from the wealthy. Deeds comes to the solution of using the bulk of his fortune to buy fully-equipped 10-acre farms and giving them to dispossessed farmers at no charge in exchange for the promise of working the land for a number of years. On some level this is an almost socialist solution akin to Roosevelt’s Resettlement Administration and Huey Long’s Share Our Wealth plans, but the difference in *Mr. Deeds Goes to Town* is that such reforms come about from the individual, not the collective. Unions do not fight for this land in the film, nor does the government step in to provide it.

Indeed, collective action in the film is a force detrimental to reform; Deeds’ uncle’s attorney, John Cedar (Douglass Dumbrille), utilizes the government in the form of the court system to have Deeds declared mentally incompetent and thus prevent him from giving away his fortune. In other words, the government, through law and regulation, threatens to prevent the individual from helping his community. It was a common argument of the era that government interference was preventing more efficient private charity. In a 1934 *Saturday Evening Post* article, writer Margaret Culkin Banning argued,

Five, or fifty, or a thousand dollars—whatever you may have been in the habit of giving—looks pretty picayune against those billions [in federal relief]. . . . On the other

hand, that five, fifty or a thousand dollars looks bigger and less secure in the private budget than ever before, so why not hang on to it? Often it has to be saved to pay taxes. Many people are getting ready now to say, with more emphasis than they said last fall, that they can't do it both ways. They cannot give to private relief and yet be taxed as heavily as they are for public relief. (5-6)

Cedar makes the conflict between the individual and the government explicit when he tells the judge, "If this man is permitted to carry out his plan, the repercussions will be felt throughout the foundation of our entire governmental system!" Deeds explores this difference himself when he declares,

From what I can see no matter what system of government we have there'll always be leaders and always be followers. It's like the road in front of my house. It's on a steep hill. Every day I watch the cars climbing up; some go lickity-split up that hill on high, some have to shift into second, and some sputter and shake and slip back to the bottom again. Same car, same gasoline, yet some make it and some don't. And I say the fellas who can make the hill on high should stop once in a while and help those who can't.

This is the individualist solution to the Depression *par excellence*; the working poor and unemployed should rely upon the generosity of the wealthy rather than their own collective strength or public welfare programs sponsored by the government.

Michael P. Rogin and Kathleen Moran have explored a similar reading for *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington*:

Smith refuses to use government taxes to finance his camp (in contrast to the CCC [Civilian Conservation Corps]), raising money from his boys instead. No New Deal senator would have filibustered against a relief bill that promised to feed the starving and construct public works. . . . Standing against deficit spending, big government, the

welfare state, and that quintessential New Deal project, the federal dam, Senator Smith sounds more like Reagan than Roosevelt. (219)

Of the trilogy *Meet John Doe* best illustrates the containment of the collective within a communitarianism based upon rugged individualism. In the film retired baseball player Long John Willoughby (Gary Cooper) is recruited by a newspaper to portray “John Doe” to the public. John Doe was a fictional character created by reporter Ann Mitchell (Barbara Stanwyck); he was an unemployed man who, frustrated with the political and social problems of the nation, publicly declares that he will kill himself by jumping off of City Hall on Christmas Eve. In order to keep the story alive the newspaper holds auditions to cast a homeless man as Doe, and eventually chooses Willoughby as the actor. Soon the newspaper’s wealthy owner, D.B. Norton (Edward Arnold), attempts to use John Doe’s mass popularity in order to promote his own, pseudo-fascist political ideals, turning the mass into a political mob.

The opening titles illustrate the collective nature of mass society in the New Deal era as well as its potential for destruction. As upbeat folk tunes such as “Oh Susanna!” and “Take Me Out to the Ball Game” play the audience views a montage of various workers working as a collective; farmers march in rows, throwing seed in unison, miners walk together through a mine shaft, and women sow at tables in a textile factory. However, in contrast to the music and these images of productive labor, there are also interspersed images of mass jams of people and vehicles on city streets, political rallies, and military marches. While the opening sequence never becomes dire, there is the suggestion that collectivism, if not properly contained, can turn from orderly and productive activities into chaos or militarism.

The conflict between individualism and collectivism in the film is represented by The Colonel (Walter Brennan playing Willoughby’s friend from his days as a hobo) and Norton respectively. When Willoughby is offered a contract to play Doe for the masses, The Colonel is

outraged; he tries to convince Willoughby to leave his new posh lifestyle behind and return to the open road. In many ways his argument is an appeal to rugged individualism, best exemplified by his “heelots” speech:

Then you get a hold of some dough and what happens? All those nice, sweet, lovable people become heelots. A lotta heels. . . . They begin creeping up on you—trying to sell you something. They've got long claws and they get a strangle-hold on you—and you squirm—and duck and holler—and you try to push 'em away—but you haven't got a chance—they've got you! First thing you know, you own things. A car, for instance. . . . Now your whole life is messed up with more stuff—license fees—and number plates—and gas and oil—and taxes and insurance— . . . and identification cards—and letters—and bills—and flat tires—and dents—and traffic tickets and motorcycle cops and court rooms—and lawyers—and fines—And a million and one other things. And what happens? You're not the free and happy guy you used to be. You gotta have money to pay for all those things. (Riskin 30)

Here The Colonel is making an individualist argument. Freedom for him is tied to the individualist tradition, and he believes that liberty can only be maintained if the individual remains untied to the community and outside the capitalist, consumerist culture.

Norton, on the other hand, serves as the film's representative of a highly-collectivized society. When we are first introduced to Norton, he is over-seeing the carefully choreographed maneuvers of his Norton Motor Corps as they ride on motorcycles with synchronized patterns (reminiscent of a Berkeley musical) wearing uniforms that cannot help but recall SS officers. Later, at a dinner he hosts for the corporate elite, Norton lays his plans out plainly: he will use Doe's popularity in order to ensure his success as a presidential candidate. He tells the group, “There's been too much talk in this country, too many concessions. What the American people

need is an iron hand!” The collectivization of the people into John Doe Clubs has facilitated their conversion into a political mob enabling a fascist takeover. This transition is most explicitly seen in Doe’s rally at Wrigley Field. Several long shots establish the size of the crowd below, making them appear as faceless members of the mass rather than as individuals, an effect emphasized by their holding black umbrellas above their heads, causing one member to blend in with another. Throughout the scene the crowd acts in unison, singing, raising their umbrellas, and rising to pray as a unified collective, in many ways evoking similar images from Leni Riefenstahl’s *Triumph of the Will*. When Norton exposes the deception to the crowd, blaming John Doe rather than himself, the crowd is initially silent before a few police officers scatter among them, booing and shouting at Doe. Very quickly the entire crowd joins in, becoming a mob intent on attacking Doe. The collective in this scene is represented as a riot waiting to break out.

But the meeting ground between the two extremes of Norton and The Colonel is where *Meet John Doe* proves itself to be a containment, rather than a renunciation, of the collectivist impulse. The film’s middle ground rests on the political philosophy of the numerous local John Doe Clubs that spread throughout the country in response to Doe’s radio speeches. In many ways these clubs function almost identically to the Share Your Wealth Clubs of Huey Long, which themselves were a return to early twentieth-century populism as a means of healing the nation’s current crises. Writing on Long and Coughlin, Alan Brinkley argues that the idea of community featured strongly in their solutions, by

protecting the integrity of local institutions. . . . Populist organizations— alliances, sub-alliances, marketing cooperatives, and others— were not simply political or economic units; they were agents for the regeneration of the community, and they placed a high value on neighborliness and local social dynamics. (164-65)

This is nearly identical to the John Doe philosophy. In his first radio address Doe tells the audience,

we've all got to get in there and pitch! We can't win the old ball game unless we have teamwork. And that's where every John Doe comes in! It's up to him to get together with his teammate! And your teammates, my friends, is the guy next door to you. Your neighbor! He's a terribly important guy, that guy next door! You're gonna need him and he's gonna need you . . . so look him up! If he's sick, call on him! If he's hungry, feed him! If he's out of a job, find him one!

While this is a collectivism of a kind, it is one with a distinctly non-radical bent; rather than preaching collectivized, class-based action to upset the current system, the movement and the clubs it inspires return to communitarian neighborliness rather than class-based political action. Individuals in the form of good neighbors not labor-based or government collective action are the solution to the nation's problems. Furthermore, just as Long's and Coughlin's social movements claimed to be apolitical in purpose, the John Doe Clubs "decided no politician can join." Collective political action is in this way demonized without demonizing the collective itself, instead turning its purposes away from radical, militant actions like strikes, marches, and sit-downs to politically safe actions like giving your neighbor a job or buying groceries for an elderly couple. As Roffman and Purdy note in their analysis of the film,

As long as they function as individuals within a community, that is, a small town full of good neighbors, then the little people represent a healthy, positive, albeit Pollyanna-like society. . . . People are given jobs . . . the economy picks up, and everyone lives a much happier life without any large-scale programs issued from on high. (188)

The paean to individualism and the skepticism of the collective were not lost on contemporary reviewers. In his *New York Times* review Bosley Crowther writes,

the strength of America and the hope of continued freedom depend upon the integrity of its individuals and their combined resistance to hysteria. John Doe—all the John Does—may be confused, uncertain, afraid, but so long as they maintain their independence, of thought as well as of action, there is a chance to pull through. (“How” X5)

Capra’s Depression Trilogy tamed collective action by repurposing it under the auspices of good neighborliness rather than militant rebellion.

While *Meet John Doe* serves as the most explicit example of containing the collectivist impulse that had swept the nation in the 1930s, numerous films in the early 1940s performed similar work. In *How Green Was My Valley* (1941) collectivized labor in the form of a coal strike in a small Welsh mining town leads not only to vicious sectarianism in a once peaceful community, but breaks up the Morgan family, first figuratively in that the father disapproves of his sons’ unionization, and later literally when after the strike the sons are blacklisted and must leave for America in order to make a living;<sup>20</sup> in *The Valley of Decision* (1945) a union threatens to disrupt the budding cross-class relationship between an Irish housemaid and her employer’s son, and it is only through the benevolence of the steel mill owner himself that tragedy is avoided; and, in *The Devil and Miss Jones* (1941), while collective action is moderately successful in the form of a department store strike, ultimately it is the change of heart of the store’s owner and his newfound benevolence that makes the workers’ lives better, not the strike itself.

By the early 1940s the radical collective that had been hinted at in films such as *Our Daily Bread* had been repurposed as a safe, traditional call for local community charity based upon the individual. A 1948 *Saturday Evening Post* article on Cy Ching, the Federal Mediator under the newly passed Taft-Hartley Act, illustrates how collective action had been contained

under the tradition of rugged individualism; recounting a labor negotiation an informant tells the Post:

I had a regular twister of a strike situation blowing up in our Illinois plants. I heard Cy was in Chicago and went to see him there. He didn't say much, but asked me to drop by his hotel room at five that afternoon. I hadn't been there ten minutes before I walked the head of the union who was giving me all this misery. I felt like strangling the guy with my bare hands—but, after all, he was Cy's guest. We had a drink and got to talking. Somehow Cy found out that this union fellow and myself had both been great on squirrel hunting when we were kids. It turns out we used the same make of gun. After a while Cy began kidding us a little about the bullheaded strike mess we were running ourselves into, and we began telling him what we were up against with the factions in the union and in the board of directors. Well, somehow in a couple of hours we had everything settled. (Smith 16)

Here we see a distillation of how collective conflict became solvable by individuals. Rather than the workers succeeding through collective action with the strike, or the corporation succeeding by relying upon strikebreakers, a couple of individuals in a room manage to come to an understanding and avert collective turmoil. The collective had not disappeared; unions would continue to be an important factor in American industrial life for decades, but their radical implications had been tamed. Even the once radical CIO lost much of its edge; repurposing its goal from disrupting the capitalist system to ensuring the ability of its members to enjoy the capitalist freedoms of America: “The CIO turned out to be engaged in a great project to protect the individual and the nuclear family from the vicissitudes of modern industrial society” (Fraser 78).



In the next two chapters I will look more closely at two symbols of masculine subversion that were prevalent in the popular culture of the New Deal Era: the Hobo and the Outlaw. Much as it did with collective action as a whole, Hollywood cinema diminished the class politics inherent in these figures so that they became identified primarily as masculine rites of passage rather than symbols of proletariat resistance.

#### Notes

1. For this dissertation I am tracing the New Deal Era from Roosevelt's Inauguration in 1933 to the passage of the Taft-Hartley Act and beginning of the Cold War in 1947.
2. This style has been well defined by David Bordwell in his seminal piece, "Classical Hollywood Cinema: Narrational Principals and Procedures," where he argues that:  
The classical Hollywood film presents psychologically defined individuals who struggle to solve a clear-cut problem or to attain specific goals. . . . The principal causal agency is thus the character, a distinctive individual endowed with an evident, consistent batch of traits, qualities, and behaviors. . . . the star system has as one of its functions the creation of a rough character prototype which is then adjusted to the particular needs of the role. The most "specified" character is usually the protagonist, who becomes the principal causal agent, the target of any narrational restriction, and the chief object of audience identification. (18)  
Additionally, the narrative typically involves two plot threads, "one involving heterosexual romance (boy/girl, husband/wife), the other line involving another sphere—work, war, a mission or quest, other personal relationships" (19).
3. While often thought of as a code of morality, the Motion Picture Production Code was also heavily invested in policing political and ideological subversion. For this reason the Code included provisions stating that "Law, natural or human, shall not be ridiculed" and "The courts of the land should not be presented as unjust" ("Motion"). Additionally, when reviewing film scripts, "Breen and his staff looked at each script with an eye toward its impact on 'industry policy.' This category was reserved for those films that, although technically within the code, were judged by Breen or Hayes to be 'dangerous' to the well being of the industry. Undefined to allow as much latitude as possible, 'industry policy' was invoked on those scripts that touched on social or political themes" (Black, "Hollywood" 178).
4. Roosevelt's first inaugural address set the tone for his back to the land movement in 1933, stating that "we must frankly recognize the overbalance of population in our industrial centers and, by engaging on a national scale in a redistribution, endeavor to provide a better use of the land for those best fitted for the land" ("First" para. 11).

5. As Raymond Durnat's *King Vidor, American* points out, the film was a failure that contributed to *Variety*'s "STICKS NIX HICK PIX" 1934 headline; Durnat continues, "Not only did the Midwestern "sticks" ignore these pictures, but the West Coast box office was particularly poor for *Our Daily Bread* and was hardly helped by a Hollywood premiere introduced by the socialist Democratic gubernatorial candidate, Upton Sinclair" (96).
  
6. This use of a new form of mass communication, the printing press, to foment mob action is very much prevalent throughout the representations of mobs in the 1930s. Besides *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*, *Fury*, *They Won't Forget*, *Meet John Doe*, and countless other films illustrate the media's capacity for creating a mob through the use of the printed press and the relatively new phenomenon of radio. *They Won't Forget*, *Fury*, and *Black Legion* all rely on close-ups of various symbols of mass media (the speaker, the microphone, and the radio itself), in order to emphasize their power.
  
7. The fear of the violence and insurrectionary potential inherent in labor collectives was not new to the 1930s or even the twentieth century. In the 1921 *American Steel Foundries v. Tri-City Trades Council* case, the court ruled that violent picketing used to prevent ingress and egress to a place of business was illegal, but Chief Justice William Howard Taft "went much further to rule that most picketing, though nonviolent, was inherently intimidating. The mere fact that pickets gathered about the foundry in groups of four to twelve persons 'constituted intimidation. The name "picket" indicated a militant purpose, inconsistent with peaceable persuasion.' The court limited the number of pickets to one at each gate" (I. Bernstein 675). In other words, Taft found the act of workers picketing during a strike to be an inherently violent, militant act, and after the post-NIRA strike-wave of 1934 and the sit-down strikes of 1936-37, this fear of the violence inherent in collectivized labor was only increasing.
  
8. These changes were instigated by a letter Breen received from the National Coal Association on August 29, 1934. In it the executive secretary wrote Breen that he had heard that Warner Brothers was making an unfavorable film about the coal industry. Reminding Breen of the importance of coal to the nation's economic recovery, he went on to argue that the basic premise of the proposed film was all wrong since management-labor conflict in the coal industry was a thing of the past.
 

Breen immediately forwarded a copy of the complaint to Jack Warner, along with his own recommendation that the script should be changed to show that "working conditions while not ideal . . . are getting better all the time. The point here," he added, "is to establish the fact that the miners have little to complain about." Ten days later, Breen dashed off several other recommended script alterations which included making it "clear that if the miners go out on strike, the company will be justified in employing other workers to do the work." He also expressed the hope that the film would make it "clear that the owners are opposed to violence on the part of the police." Breen concluded by pointing out that his office was especially interested in reducing the amount of violence in the film. This meant playing down the "vicious brutality of the coal and iron police" and eliminating any scenes showing miners doing any great damage to property. (Walsh 566)

9. Musmano had previously served as a Pennsylvania judge “who had played a key role in investigating the exploitation of coal miners in his state” (Walsh 565); the original script was based on his experiences with this labor exploitation.
10. *Riffraff* will be explored in further detail in the second chapter, which explores the representation and containment of the act of tramping in New Deal Era cinema.
11. While the defendants were found guilty and sentenced to four years under the law, none served more than seven weeks and the law was eventually rewritten to exempt picketing workers from being classified as a lynch mob (Dabney, “Anti-Lynching” 353).
12. In addition to these cases there are numerous other reports from the era connecting lynching with labor unrest, but perhaps no report connects the two phenomena so succinctly as an article from *The Christian Science Monitor* concerning a farm workers’ strike in California. The article states that “Elmer Joseph, Negro, said a group of farmers met him as he came from a meeting of the Workers Alliance, an organization of relief recipients. ‘They got out a rope and told me they would lynch me’” (“Cotton” 2), clearly linking race, lynching and labor unrest. This connection is further seen in the reporting on the sit-down strikes of 1936-37. The *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, dealing with a strike of editorial workers, put it this way, “There can be no compromise. You can not [*sic*] negotiate under the coercion of a mob. When you arbitrate the right to enter your own property you arbitrate under coercion. It constitutes submission to mob violence.” (Porters 6). In the public mind, or at least in the public press, there was little distinction being made between the lynch mob and the militant labor union.
13. The Black Legion in the film was based on a similar secret organization operating in Michigan that had been exposed in 1936; the organization “attacked Communists, blacks, Jews, and Catholics. Auto industry executives aided the organization in order to combat a unionization drive” (Duckworth 16).
14. As Matthew Bernstein points out, the janitor figure in *They Won’t Forget* is a composite of night watchman Newt Lee, who discovered the body, and janitor Jim Conley, who historians believe may have committed the actual murder (“Phagan-Frank” 62).
15. Lang fled Nazi Germany in 1933 after his latest film, *The Testament of Dr. Mabuse*, was banned by the government (Lang, “Fritz Lang Remembers” 47).
16. This was related to studio fears of antagonizing censors in the South. As Matthew Bernstein puts it, “the South had a definite place on Hollywood’s roll call of groups not to alienate” (“Professional” 122).
17. Barbara Mennel is particularly skeptical of Lang’s account in her analysis, pointing out that “The continued repetition of Lang’s claim that racially sensitive material was cut by the studio continues to cast Lang as the victim of the studio’s backward racial politics. . . . These descriptions reinforce the notion of the politically progressive émigré *auteur* fighting the racist studio system, a simplification of the intersecting processes in Hollywood that led to a hegemonic representation of whiteness” (218).

18. The Share Our Wealth plan would create an aggressively progressive tax system for those make over one million dollars a year. Once the yearly income for an individual reached eight million dollars, the tax was 100%. The government would confiscate all inheritance over one million dollars. This money would create a fund that would guarantee every American family a "household estate" of \$5,000 and an annual income of \$2,000 to \$2,500 per year (Brinkley 72-73).

19. One such story published on November 7, 1931 extolling the virtues of the private charity of a wealthy member of the community is typical of such reporting:

A single individual, a minor and by no means unusually prosperous factory official, had fed fifty families at one time out of his own resources and initiative; another minor company official had put a boy practically unknown to him through college for a year; the two practicing doctors had helped many people; a Masonic lodge and a veterans' organization were doing the same; and the gas company was not pressing the unemployed to pay their bills.

Among the employed workers there has been an extraordinary liberality in giving to community chests and other funds, showing a keen sense of personal responsibility. I visited a machine shop where all wage earners were supposed to lay off one week in three to spread the work, but a group of them had voluntarily assumed the lay-off of a man with eleven children so that he could work continuously. In a neighboring textile mill employing only women, a highly skilled operative, but with a husband working, voluntarily took the lay-off of a young girl with no other means of support. In another machine shop the employer gives all his men a five-dollar gold piece at Christmas; these the force had voluntarily pooled for the benefit of fellow workers laid off. (Atwood 126)

20. As was so often the case with these films, the original script of *How Green Was My Valley* dealt with the labor conflict in a far more direct way. Francis Walsh recounts the evolution of the script from labor film to family melodrama:

This first script received uniformly negative reviews from studio readers. But the major attack came from Zanuck who felt that the script had turned into "a labor story and a sociological problem story instead of a great human, warm story about real living people." He found the negative portrayal of the mine owners especially disturbing. They "are nothing but villains with mustaches," he wrote. "That might have been all right a little while ago," he continued, "but I'll be damned if I want to go around making the employer class out-and-out villains in this day and age." Zanuck charged the script writer with trying to create an English *Grapes of Wrath*. This might be acceptable if the story was happening today, he noted, but "this is years ago and who gives a damn?" Finally, picking up on the criticism made by some of the studio reviewers, he argued that the film could be interpreted as an attack on the English capitalist class. "Producing this picture," he concluded, "is about the best Nazi propoganda you can find." . . . Responding to a steady flow of suggestions from Zanuck, Dunne produced five scripts between June 25, 1940 and January 23, 1941 the date of the final one. These scripts drastically cut the amount of footage devoted to labor unrest, reduced the radicalism of the workers, and improved the image of the owners. For example, by the completion of the third script on November 11, all of the

violent clashes between the strikers and the army had been eliminated. Three weeks later, the strike itself all but disappears. On January 23, 1941, Zanuck wrote Dunne that "there is no need to go into the union business which is now a closed issue." All that was left of anything hinting of labor militancy were two brief scenes ultimately amounting to two minutes of screen time. (Walsh 571-572)

### CHAPTER III

#### HOME ON THE MAIN STEM: THE HOBO AS DISPLACED WESTERN HERO

The fear of working-class collectives during the Depression extended to the collective of migrant workers known as Hobohemia. While Hobohemia had existed in America in some form since the end of the Civil War, and references to hobo “armies” existed since the turn of the twentieth century, it was during the depression that anxiety over politically radical bands of migrant workers reached its zenith. Just as there was a fear that groups of working-class men were incipient mobs, there was a fear that hoboes were massing as an army with the goal of socialist revolution. During this time period the cultural representation of the hobo, long a mainstay on the vaudeville stage, went through a transition on the Hollywood screen. On the stage the “slovenly homeless man” was the center of “vaudeville’s assault on home and family” (DePastino 152), but in the 1930s Hollywood used this mythic figure to reinforce those very same domestic institutions. It was during the two decades of the New Deal that Hollywood helped to domesticate the figure of the hobo, redefining the status of migratory homelessness as a temporary rite of masculinization rather than a permanent, radically politicized underclass. By conflating the mythology of the frontier hero with that of the hobo, these films deprived the figure of much of his threat, removing him from the politically and sexually subversive collective of Hobohemia and instead celebrating him as the rugged individualist *par excellence*, thus reducing him to yet another celebration of masculine self-reliance and a vindication of the American Dream.

In the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries there was subversiveness inherent in the act of tramping. In *Citizen Hobo: How a Century of Homelessness Shaped America*, Todd DePastino writes of fears of a “Disenfranchised hobo ‘army,’ a figure that evoked not only the size, sway,

mobility, militancy, and camaraderie of the subculture, but also the spectacle of an aggrieved ‘National Manhood’” (244). Whether it was “General” Charles T. Kelley’s Industrial Army that marched to Washington, D.C. in 1894 for unemployment relief or the Bonus Army of 1932, there is a history of anxiety concerning a migrant, unemployed workforce threatening the capitalist status quo. Hoboes, who were often stereotyped as eschewing traditional masculinity by avoiding legitimate labor and sanctioned heteronormative family ties, were viewed as dangerously subversive. However, in New Deal era Hollywood cinema the tramp became a figure less subversive than his previous incarnations; specifically, he became a figure of containment used to promote a return to traditional heteronormative gender roles as a means of national economic renewal through a masculine rite of mobility.

While the hobo is often thought of as a symbol of individualism (and, indeed, in Hollywood cinema of the 1930s this is the aspect most often celebrated), Hobohemia was in actuality defined by its collectivity as much as by its retreat into rugged individualism. In the early twentieth-century Hobohemia was defined as much by the congregation of the Main Stem, hobo communities that sprang up in most major cities, as it was by their supposedly free-spirited mobility. Main Stems attracted thousands of migrant workers at a time primarily because of the need for a central labor market, but they also provided “an infrastructure for housing, marketing, and transporting their labor to the hinterlands. . . . [as well as] organizational life to a degree unimaginable in the mines, forests, construction sites, and harvest fields where hoboes labored” (DePastino 73, 75). It was this collectivity that posed the threat to the capitalist order more than the individualistic wanderings themselves, and as such it is this collective, class-based identification that is purged in representations of the hobo in 1930s cinema.

Similar to their portrayals of the labor movement, numerous newspaper and magazine articles of the Depression era employed a rhetoric that plays off of these fears of collectivity by

representing itinerant workers and hoboes as an army of the homeless, the implication being that such groups were incipient revolutionaries lying in wait to disrupt the lives of “productive” citizens, if not to initiate the complete overthrow of capitalist society. The anxiety that homeless mobility would lead to a breakdown of the capitalist system dated back to nineteenth-century labor movements.

Playing off of (and often exaggerating) the threat of subversive homeless mobility, the rhetoric of journalism and law enforcement tended to position the hobo army as an invading force that threatened the average citizen’s way of life. States with milder climates, such as Florida and California, established roadblocks in order to curtail the influx of migrants that occurred every winter. In November of 1936 the *Los Angeles Times* reports of one such blockade: “Hoboes, tramps and undesirable indigents, many with criminal records, who make their annual trek to Southern California when temperatures begin to fall east of the Rockies, will be stopped at border ports of entry” (“Ten” A1). Writing of the same blockade, the *Chicago Daily Tribune* reports that “[Los Angeles City] Police Chief James Davis today took first steps [*sic*] in a drastic statewide program of ‘armed resistance’ to ‘irresponsible and criminal invasion’” (“Block” 8). These articles are typical of much reportage on hobo culture during the New Deal era. Here we see that the migrants, while not necessarily labeled as politically subversive, are clearly marked with criminality. The second article, echoing the words of Los Angeles’s chief of police, directly evokes military rhetoric by offering to implement “armed resistance” to the hobo “invasion.” Just as the press validated concerns that the growing labor movement of the Depression era was a potential army of revolutionaries, the rapid growth of wandering homeless created a sense that there was now a vast, mobile army of subversives waiting to strike at the heart of traditional Americanism.



Rhetoric implying that Hobohemia constituted an army was not merely utilized by those who wished to destroy the subculture, but occurred in the writing of those more sympathetic to the migrant poor as well. In “America’s Homeless Army,” an article appearing in the May 1933 issue of *Scribner’s Magazine*, Lowell Ames Norris refers to the growing number of homeless boys as an “army of the American *bezprizorni*” (317).<sup>1</sup> While Norris is very sympathetic to the plight of the homeless boys, and makes an impassioned plea for social reforms to end their suffering, this extended metaphor linking the homeless to children in revolutionary Russia implies a level of subversion in their wanderings. While it would go too far to suggest that Norris would label the boys a radical threat, it is clear that he sees a similarity between Russia’s revolutionary era and the United States’ contemporary “army” of homeless boys.

Other leftist reporting on the crisis of homelessness during the 1930s played upon this same rhetoric. In “The Starvation Army,” a three-part story published in *The Nation* during April of 1933, John Kazarian is also mostly sympathetic to the growing numbers of homeless wanderers, yet he still uses rhetoric casting them as an army; at one point he even states that “the road is similar to the French Foreign Legion” (396), invoking the image of not only a rogue military force, but also a lack of native citizenship among the hobo “troops.” Kazarian writes, “it is not enough for a man to be out of a job. If he looks for food, he is regarded as a criminal. A hungry man without the means of satisfying his hunger is not a respectable citizen, and can be preyed upon by the police” (445). In other words, just as a member of the foreign legion is a member of a military force without a citizenship of his own, the hobo lacks legitimate American citizenship in the eyes of the nation. Often this belief that hoboes were not-quite citizens led to the belief that they were radicals and subversives at heart. The roadblocks established along several states’ borders illustrate this fear, as do the forcible removal of hoboes from their camps in several cities due to a fear of violence or subversion. Kazarian writes of one such instance in

Sacramento, CA where police broke up an encampment because “hundreds of men had gathered . . . and there was fear of a revolt” (Part 2 445). Both their sympathizers and detractors viewed the large mass of wandering homeless as an army waiting to become a site of potential subversion.

The most conspicuous example of an army of homeless men during the 1930s was the Bonus Army. Descending upon Washington, D.C. in the spring and summer of 1932, the Bonus Army (or Bonus Expeditionary Force as it was called by participants) was comprised of over 20,000 WWI veterans and their families who were demanding immediate payment on bonus certificates not redeemable until 1945 that promised reimbursement for their services in the war (Zinn 391). Hit hard by the Depression the veterans, out of work and desperate to support their families, had organized into exactly the type of army that had been feared since the rise of Hobohemia during the Industrial Revolution. While Roosevelt offered legitimate support to the movement from the political mainstream, more radical groups on both the right and the left had hopes that the army would do more than simply change the administration: “communists hoped that the veterans would prove a vanguard of the working class, right-wing populists saw the Bonus Army as a sphere of white male privilege opposed to big business and radicals alike” (DePastino 198-99). The Hoover Administration found the marchers threatening enough to order the U.S. military to forcibly remove them from the area.<sup>2</sup> Indeed, even some on the far left feared the revolutionary potential of the Bonus Marchers. John Dos Passos feared that right-wing radicals might eventually “enlist the Bonus Army’s Forgotten Man . . . into fascist organizations where he will be used as the praetorian guard of the imperial monopolies” (qtd. in DePastino 198). Just as the collectives were often feared as potential lynch mobs, hobo armies were feared for their radical potential.

In the 1930s Hollywood cinema Hobo collectives, and their subversive potential, found occasional representation, perhaps best illustrated in William A. Wellman's *Wild Boys of the Road* (1933). In this film two boys and a girl leave home because their parents can no longer afford to support them. On the road the boys and their fellow hoboes are continually harassed by both railroad employees and the police; while the film is sympathetic to the suffering that the boys endure on the road, and portrays them in a mostly positive light, the threat that these boys, if not helped soon, will descend into a radicalized mob or even an army that will demand their rights through violent revolution pervades much of the film. A recurring motif in the film is filling the frame completely with several boys; packed from left to right and top to bottom with the tramps, the cinematography emphasizes the large numbers of migrant homeless, and establishes them as a potential mob. At one point after the boys have been thrown off of a train an old man asks them, "What'd you let them push you around like that for?" The boys respond, "What are you saying? We oughta' fight 'em" to which the man replies, "Well, you got an army, aintcha'?" The boys quickly decide he is right and attack the railroad security guards and force their way on board the train. The boys' realization that they represent an army capable of an insurrection against the established authority of the railroads illustrates the violent, revolutionary potential of the migrant poor.

Shortly after boarding the train, the group is confronted by a yard bull who previously raped one of the homeless girls in the group. A number of boys are framed together in the shot, walking slowly and silently towards the camera. The shot is intercut with the bull looking panicked back at the boys before they enter the frame and beat him to death. Although the narrative of the film is clearly sympathetic to the boys here, the assault is shot largely from the perspective of the bull; the camera shows the boys in close-up punching towards the camera, and when the bull punches back the viewer sees only his arm stretching out from behind the camera.

While the narrative encourages the viewer to sympathize with the girl and her male avengers, the camera work, specifically the point-of-view shot, suggests that the spectators will identify with the bull as well. Visually this sequence illustrates the hidden anxiety that the homeless boys on the road, if pushed too hard, will strike out at the rest of society. In a sense, the viewer becomes a symbolic victim of the boys' assault in this scene.

Later, when the boys settle in a hobo jungle, the police arrive to clear out the camp, another sequence ripped from prevalent headlines of the 1930s. The scene that transpires as a result of this showdown recalls nothing so much as a battle between two opposing armies; indeed, the scene even ends on a close-up of Tommy's artificial leg left behind from the battle, a scene doubtlessly evocative of a WWI battlefield. As the cops move into the encampment, the boys stand above them in the frame, establishing dominance in the shot. Wellman then cuts to several closer shots of several boys standing while holding rocks, sticks, and pipes; again many of the shots are crowded with the homeless boys, emphasizing their numbers. As in the attack on the railroad policeman above, when the boys begin to attack the officers the camera assumes the point of view of the police; the boys throw their pipes and rocks down at the camera, causing the audience to identify with the police and accept the position of the assaulted. The police then proceed (with reluctance) to spray the boys with fire hoses; in these shots the camera either presents more point-of-view shots from the officers' perspectives or includes both the boys and the police in the same shot; once again the audience is visually prevented from identifying with the boys, and is placed in opposition to them via the cinematography.

*Wild Boys of the Road* is an excellent example of how a Hollywood film of the New Deal era functioned as a means of containment even when at its most socially activist on the level of plot. The film's narrative is clearly sympathetic to the problem of young homeless boys forced to wander the road, and is obviously calling for new social policies to end their suffering

(in the form of the New Deal). However, through his cinematography Wellman is not simply asking his audience to altruistically help the wandering armies of homeless, but implies that the failure to do so will result in violent uprisings and populist revolts that could very well strike the spectator him or herself. The viewer is, in other words, visually aligned with capitalist authority; when the homeless boys attack the railroad's enforcer they are represented as attacking the audience. While the film is sympathetic to the boys, the visual point-of-view most closely aligns the viewer with the capitalist hegemony. When the paternal judge, his courthouse watched over by the Blue Eagle of the National Recovery Administration, sends the boys home with the promise that things are about to get better, he is not only making a promise to the poor but to the audience as well: the New Deal will not only help the homeless and unemployed, but will help to restore order and stability by preventing the type of violent revolution threatened in the film and implied by the presence of large groups of wandering homeless.

Of course labor activism is the area where hoboes were viewed as holding the most potential for subversion. Indeed, by the 1930s there was already a legitimate link (as well as a pervasive mythology) connecting Hobohemia with unions and workers groups such as the IWW as well as the Socialist and Communist Parties. DePastino writes,

Rejecting the range of manners, morals, and habits associated with middle-class domesticity, Hobohemia fostered a powerful sense of collective identity among its members, an identity reinforced by the numerous advocacy groups that arose to promote hoboes' interest. By World War I, virtually every main stem in America hosted a local of the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) or some other formal organization intent on mobilizing the subculture for the larger purposes of social change. Through their pamphlets, newspapers, and songbooks, these organizations also disseminated a powerful set of hobo myths that enhanced group definition and celebrated Hobohemia as

a revolutionary vanguard . . . the IWW touted migratory homeless men as the “real proletarians.” (introd.)

Hobohemia’s connection with the IWW went both ways;<sup>3</sup> just as the Wobblies used the mythology and culture of the tramp as a means of creating a proletarian mythology for the United States, Hobohemia quickly usurped authority within the IWW itself, pushing it away from a model of incremental change via the ballot box to one of radical revolution:

Flamboyant propagandists and fund-raisers, members of the Overalls Brigade were also active delegates seeking to wrest control of the conflict-ridden IWW from what they derisively termed the “homeguard,” a faction that favored the ballot box as a path to socialism. As migratories without home or vote, the hobo delegation rejected ward and parliamentary politics, as well as the binding contracts painstakingly negotiated by traditional trades unions. Instead, they advocated direct action, embracing strikes, sabotage, and other forms of on-the-job protest as the only political weapons capable of destroying capitalism. (DePastino 95)

This history reinforced the belief that Hobohemia was a potential camp of subversive thought; like the unions of the early years of the National Labor Relations Act (NIRA), the hobo collectives privileged radical action based upon ideals of class-consciousness rather than short-term political or economic gains.

Numerous newspaper and magazine articles during the 1930s and 1940s addressed the potential for subversion present among the culture of the migrant worker, and while not every writer felt the threat was real, the belief in the threat was enough to assure that every writer covering the subject of tramping felt the need to address it. As James S. Carter puts it in an article for the *Los Angeles Times* written in 1931, "These men feel abused, swindled. If Communism is mentioned to them they shut up like a clam but the seed here has commence [*sic*]

to grow; they feel they haven't had a square deal" ("Incoming Hobo" K3). Many articles took an even more alarmist stance; an article appearing in *The Washington Post* in 1934 warns,

"Every group of boy tramps," says Prof. Minehan, "contains a Communist. Bolshevism is spreading rapidly among them. In the future it will spread more rapidly when it loses its foreign association. . . . Practically the only group which will speak for the homeless man and the young tramp is the Communist. And the lads on the road are rapidly becoming converts." ("Open" SM8)

Because hoboes were considered a ready-to-be-radicalized proletariat army, it is understandable that in Hollywood cinema of the New Deal era we see a conflation between radicalized unionization and tramping. Even films that portray the migrant homeless in a more sympathetic light, such as Wellman's *Heroes for Sale* (1933) and Lewis Milestone's *Hallelujah, I'm a Bum* (1933) show communists within the ranks of Hobohemia; the communist is portrayed as a fool character, not to be taken seriously. The communist in Wellman's film, for example, hypocritically and comically changes his ideology to suit his purposes; when asked if he hates capitalists he responds, "I despise them! I spit on them! But I'm willing to get rich with them." Meanwhile, *Hallelujah, I'm a Bum*'s Egghead is portrayed as overly-intellectual and overly-serious compared to the friendly and carefree Bumper (as is implied by the former's name), and, most importantly, Egghead is remarkably unpopular among the park's hoboes, so his radical politics can gain no traction. But while it would be wrong to say that communism is portrayed as a threat among the tramping class in these films, the ideology is still portrayed as intrinsically linked to the act of tramping; the majority of tramps may not be communists, and those who are may not be threats, but the popular notion that subversives exist within Hobohemia is still validated by these films.

Indeed, the idea that communists and socialists were *outside* forces exerting an influence on Hobohemia was prevalent during the 1930s and 1940s. In a piece appearing in the *Chicago Daily Tribune* on November 27, 1931, the author comments on this infiltration of Hobohemia:

Contrary to popular belief there is but little bolshevik sentiment. Most native born have a feeling that some day they will better themselves. Many have relatives at whom the bolshevik would strike. In most flophouses a copy of a communist paper is left at the side of sleeping men by a communist who slips in" [*sic*]. ("What" 4)

On the one hand, we once again have an article that downplays the connection between radical leftist movements and the current group of wandering homeless, but yet again the writer validates concerns that communism and tramping are linked. Just as in Chapter One we saw how the press argued that the vast majority of labor activists were not radical, but corrupted by a handful of outsiders, here outsiders wish to convert this army of the homeless into a force for their own revolutionary ends. In the process collective radicalism, far from being a solution to the plight of the growing numbers of wandering homeless, becomes one of the causes of their suffering. In other words, once again collectivism is represented as the cause of society's problems, and the solution is a return to the cult of the rugged individual.

Two 1936 films, J. Walter Ruben's *Riffraff* and Charlie Chaplin's *Modern Times* illustrate how Hollywood conflated radicalism, tramping, and poverty; in the process these films helped to establish a mythology that celebrated the tramp as the rugged individualist struggling against the establishment rather than a member of a collective revolution. In *Riffraff* radical union activity, in the form of a strike, is portrayed as the cause of protagonist Dutch's (Spencer Tracy) fall into poverty and tramping. An early scene in the film contrasts Dutch's rugged individualism against the collective of the union. In the scene, he addresses a group that had been listening to a communist encouraging them to strike. Dutch promptly takes the podium and



throws the radical over the dock before addressing the crowd, talking them down from the strike and pushing them back under the leadership of Brains, the moderate leader of the union who argues that they should avoid radical action, as it will play into the plans of the tuna canning company's owner. The visual composition of this sequence emphasizes Dutch's rugged individualism against the union's status as collective. In the sequence, shots of Dutch from a low-angle are intercut with shots of the audience from a high-angle, emphasizing Dutch's power over the mob. Additionally, Dutch is wearing black and shot from medium close-ups, in contrast to the union crowd which is wearing mostly lighter colors and is shot in medium long-shots, emphasizing the crowd's status as a collective group. Even when the camera moves in to a closer shot of one of the union members responding to Dutch's remarks, the frame is filled completely with union members, emphasizing the mob in the same way as we saw earlier in *Wild Boys of the Road*.

Before his fall, Dutch is clearly set up as a paragon of rugged individualist masculinity; he can successfully challenge the men in the union, the corporation's owner, and Hattie (played by Jean Harlow), but only as an individual; it is when he relinquishes this individual resistance for collective action that he loses his status and is forced to join the ranks of the wandering homeless. Shortly after marrying Hattie, Dutch becomes the leader of the tuna fisherman's union and leads them out on a strike, utilizing collective, rather than individual, action to challenge the authority of the company's owner. The strike fails because Nick, the owner of the cannery, wanted the union to go on strike so that he could hire scab labor at lower prices. A montage sequence shows newspaper headlines chronicling the failure of the strike double-exposed over images of large numbers of mostly faceless workers taking part in the strike and standing in breadlines, emphasizing the failure of the collective.

After the montage sequence Dutch calls a meeting of the workers wherein they vote him out as president and reinstate Brains. While Tracy still receives some close-ups during this sequence, most are long shots showing him with three or four other members of the union leadership. The opening shot of the sequence is at such a distance that Tracy is essentially faceless; this loss of identity emphasizes his membership in the collective of the union over his individuality in the same way as we saw in films such as *Our Daily Bread* in Chapter One. This collectivity is emphasized further when he quits the union in protest; as the camera tracks back leading Dutch as he walks out, he is surrounded on all sides by yelling union members. In contrast to the opening scene where Dutch chastises the group from above, here the camera shows him to be on an equal level with the rest of the union, emphasizing his membership in the group. While it is true that at this point Dutch is leaving the group, and is as such no longer part of the collective, the cinematography of this shot highlights the fact that it was his participation in collective action that led to his downfall. Eventually Dutch returns and asks Brains for his job back; in contrast to his former arrogance he now appears desperate, humble, and hungry, even considering stealing an apple from Brains' table; the union boss, while sympathetic, can offer him only a low-paying non-union job. Desperate, Dutch accepts and it is in performing this new job that he deceives and stops a group of radicals from destroying the docks, after which he is given his job back.

When the group of communists come to enlist Dutch in their plot, they make it clear that he had previously met two of the group "in the [hobo] jungles," linking Hobohemia to the radical labor movements. They then proclaim that their bomb is strong enough to destroy the docks "union and all"; again these radical movements are represented as being perpetrated by outsiders (in this case hobos) and are in reality harmful to both capital and labor. Dutch fights and thwarts the communists' plot and thus earns his place back into the union's good graces. Similar to Joe

Radek's defiance of both union and corporation at the end of *Black Fury* (discussed in Chapter One), Dutch's rugged individualism in his resistance to the radical leftist group that had originally led him astray, as well as his return to the patriarchal duties of supporting his household, result in the return of his economic fortunes.

Like *Black Fury*, the film is not, strictly speaking, anti-union, but it is strongly anti-collective action, and while tramping only plays a small role in the film, the fear that radicals sought to use collectives for their own ends is very much present in the film. This is similar to the fear that outside forces would radicalize the ranks of Hobohemia, using them as a leftist army to upset the capitalist establishment. Tramping becomes a punishment (and perhaps even a cure) for Dutch's previous radicalization; it is a rite in which he realigns his masculine duties from the working-class collective to the head of the patriarchal household. The message is clear: a return to patriarchal guidance of the family will lead to a stabilization of the household as well as a return to economic prosperity. Radicals disrupt the household and therefore are a threat to the couple and, by association, the economy.

Radicals' attempts to use the army of homeless as a revolutionary force are much more prevalent in Charlie Chaplin's *Modern Times*. In the film, Chaplin's Little Tramp is portrayed as a worker in a factory who succumbs to the pressures of Taylorized labor and suffers a mental collapse that costs him his job. At this point he becomes a tramp, adopting the life of a homeless worker, traveling between jobs, shacks, flophouses, and jails as he gains and loses labor through pure chance. A few contemporary reviews of the film comment on its politics; *Esquire* commented that the film "is the sum of Chaplin's work, finally given social orientation" (195), and the leftist *New Masses* praised the film for showing "honestly and truthfully how the American working class is carrying on a struggle against capitalism" (Shumiatski 30). That said, most contemporary reviews of the film brushed off the class conflict dimension, focusing instead

upon the vignette nature of the film and its whimsy; in *The New York Times* Frank Nugent addresses those reviewers “preoccupied by social themes,” but argues “We should prefer to describe ‘Modern Times’ as the story of the little clown, temporarily caught up in the cogs of an industry geared to mass production, spun through a three-ring circus and out into a world as remote from industrial and class problems as a comedy can make it” (“Heralding” n. pag.). Abel Green echoes this sentiment in *Variety*: “Whatever sociological meanings some will elect to read into ‘Modern Times,’ there’s no denying that as a cinematic entertainment it’s wholesomely funny” (“Modern” n. pag.). The *Esquire* review mentioned above commented with some surprise that “the ‘critics’ in all but the liberal and revolutionary press chose completely to ignore the [sociological] nature of the film” (195).

Now, some of the critical response, particularly in the trade press, is doubtlessly explained by the film industry’s general tendency towards apoliticism. As Robert Ray points out in *A Certain Tendency of the Hollywood Cinema, 1930-1980*, Hollywood cinema generally avoided making political statements aligned too closely with the right or the left, instead posing “issues only in terms allowed by the prevailing ideology” (13). No doubt some members of the critical press trained themselves to internalize Hollywood’s strategy and avoid noticing social commentary in even the most radical films, instead viewing their job as to separate films into “good” or “bad” pieces of entertainment. However, the tendency to downplay the more radical aspects of the film likely comes from the fact that the film itself is focused far more upon modernity’s assault upon individualism than any cry for collective action. As Colin Shindler points out in *Hollywood in Crisis: Cinema and American Society 1929-1939*, “There are elements in the film, such as the shooting of the heroine’s father by riot police, which could be construed as sympathetic to the oppressed proletariat but Chaplin was no revolutionary. . . . Far from elevating the idea of collectivism, *Modern Times* is a plea for individualism” (70-71).

Much has been made of Chaplin's critique of modernity's assault on individualism in *Modern Times*. Garrett Stewart's "Modern Hard Times: Chaplin and the Cinema of Self-Reflection" takes this critique to its extreme conclusion by suggesting Chaplin is using the film to critique the technological progress of cinema, specifically the introduction of sound, as harmful to individualism. As Stewart puts it, "the specter of technological encroachment upon the soul of man bulks ominously in the gags of *Modern Times*" (303).<sup>4</sup> Indeed, the film includes several motifs that reinforce modernity's attack on the individual. The opening titles are placed over the image of a clock ticking away, emphasizing the regimentation of time associated with industrialized labor. The following montage sequence shows a herd of sheep moving in unison towards the camera, which then dissolves into an image of a mass of faceless workers doing the same. The visual metaphor is rather ham-fisted: the modern work place has turned men into sheep. As the shots move into the factory, the huge machines loom large over the men, emphasizing their importance over that of the workers. Additionally, two of the most famous vignettes in the film, the first where the Tramp is force-fed his lunch by a malfunctioning feeding machine and the second a sequence in which he becomes trapped in the gears of the great machine powering his factory, exemplify the ways in which a Taylorized work place assaults the individual.

Obviously modernity, in the form of the clock, the factory, and the machines, is set up as an antagonistic force against which the proletariat must struggle. However, it is important to note another, less talked about, consequence of modernity that is set up against the workers in the film: the collective. While a reading of the film focused upon class conflict could justifiably point to issues such as the aforementioned killing of the gamine's father and the bourgeois factory owner who watches over his workers via a series of giant monitors while working on a

jigsaw puzzle as his workers toil away, and argue that the film is anti-capitalist, I would argue that the film is in fact pro-individualist (and thus pro-capitalist) and anti-collective.

At the beginning of the film the owner of the factory cycles through different camera feeds watching the workers in his factory. He then proceeds to tell one of his workers to “speed her up” at which point the camera cuts to the assembly line where the Tramp is tightening nuts as they speed past him. The shot pans past the men working in unison on the line and finally rests on Chaplin’s character who continually struggles to keep up the pace. When he is finally given a break, he has developed a tic from the repetitiveness of the task; he is unable to stop twisting his arms in the motion he used to tighten the bolts. Eventually the repetitiveness of the task causes him to suffer a mental breakdown wherein he views everything, fire hydrants, noses, and buttons on women’s dresses, as nuts to be tightened. The assembly line functions as an apt visual metaphor for the ways in which the industrial capitalist economy and mechanized labor impede upon the sovereignty of the individual, but it also speaks to another, more subtle threat: that of the collective. After all, what is an assembly line but a means by which a large group of workers are forced to work as a single unit?

When Chaplin suffers his breakdown the audience finds it endearing not only because of the antics of the slapstick, but because he disrupts the unity of the collective. While he is spraying oil on his co-workers they leave their stations and are temporarily distracted from their collective task; when The Tramp leaves the asylum, a montage sequence of several shots of rushing traffic and massive crowds shot from canted angles and super-imposed upon one other while accompanied by a discordant soundtrack further emphasize the masses and collectives that modern industry has created. The effect is unsettling and meant to emphasize the assault on the Tramp as he is pushed out of the safe confines of the asylum, but that the sequence is immediately followed by a shot of the Tramp walking quietly, and alone, along the sidewalk

emphasizes his resistance to the mob of modern capitalism; the individual wins a temporary victory over the collective via the act of tramping.

In the above instance the collective responsible for the Tramp's suffering is clearly a creation of the capitalist industrial complex. However, to view the film simply in terms of class conflict ignores the numerous instances where *working-class* collectives injure the Little Tramp and his companion. While riot police shoot and kill the Gamine's father, this incident is perhaps not as strong an indictment of the capitalist system as Shindler suggests; in fact, in the film the unemployed mob that instigates the riot can be interpreted as being just as responsible for his death as the police. The sequence opens with a title card reading, "While outside there is trouble with the unemployed," followed immediately by a frame filled with over a dozen angry men yelling and shaking their fists in the direction of the camera. Just as we saw above in *Wild Boys of the Road*, the cinematography here encourages the audience to identify with the members of the capitalist system the men are yelling at, not the unemployed workers themselves. That the film never shows the ones who take the shots that kill the girl's father further pushes the blame onto the mob rather than the law or capitalist system; they are, after all, the only ones the viewer sees engaged in violence.

In an earlier scene, shortly after recovering from his mental breakdown the Tramp is walking down the street as a red flag falls off of the back of a truck. He picks it up, following the truck down the road and waving the flag in an attempt to get the driver's attention and return it to him. As he is walking, however, a group of protesting workers falls in behind him waving signs that read "Libertad," "Unity" and "Liberty or Death," again filling up the screen, forming a mob/collective. The camera tracks back as the Tramp and the protestors move towards it, with the truck out of the frame even the cinematographic construction of the scene has usurped the character's agency; because he is in front of the protestors and in the center of the frame, visually

he is identified as the leader of the group, even though the plot casts him as an innocent bystander. The mob is rapidly dispersed by police who grab Chaplin, assuming that he is the leader since he was carrying the red flag. Just as he suffered for his forced membership in a corporatist collective (i.e. the assembly line), the Tramp suffers for his assumed membership in the leftist collective of organized labor. Importantly the individual suffers in similar ways for both incidents: institutionalization in a mental health facility and a prison respectively. A similar episode repeats itself later; after finally managing to get a job at a factory, he is once more out of work because the union goes on strike. During the ensuing battle with police, Chaplin's character, now safely positioned away from the collective, accidentally launches a brick at a police officer. Once again mistaken for a leftist agitator, the Tramp is taken back to prison. Just as in *Riffraff*, collectives prove to be the undoing of the rugged individualist.

Now, this is not to say that *Modern Times* is as reactionary in its views towards collective labor action as *Riffraff*, but both are similar in the sense that collective action is seen as potentially dangerous to the individual worker. While the films, to varying degrees, acknowledge that the corporatization of the labor force is harmful to the proletariat, both stop short of blaming the plight of the working classes on corporations or the corporate class. Instead, the blame is shifted to the process of collectivization that modernity has created in the modern work force; the process of creating a mass labor force has deprived workers of their individuality. By relocating the suffering of the working class onto such a process, collective action can no longer be viewed as a viable solution. Indeed, the collectivization of a counter-mass will only exacerbate the problem by further robbing the worker of his individuality.

If the collectivization of culture from all sides is the problem, then the solution becomes to divorce oneself from all groups; in *Riffraff* this means accepting one's depoliticized place within the working class, in *Modern Times* it means retreating from both collectives of the



Taylorized work place and radical workers' movements. Importantly, in both films the act of tramping becomes a means by which one can reclaim his individuality. In *Riffraff*, Dutch gives up his dreams of leading a collective force for change, saying, "I ain't the big shot I thought I was. Belcher kept telling me I was Trotsky or somebody, but I ain't, see? I couldn't be, or even president. I know what I am now; I'm just the best fisherman on this coast." Dutch has decided to embrace his individualism rather than join or become the leader of a collective. Similarly, the final scene of *Modern Times* shows the Tramp and the Gamine walking down the road into the sunset, away from modern civilization. As Mark Winokur puts it:

The Tramp has been forced to the road again, but it is a forcing to which he consents, which he makes his own, which he himself has necessitated. This is not subversive in a local way; the Tramp is following orders dictated by the prevailing social codes. But in the sense that he refuses to understand by those codes that he is being punished, he is approaching the subversive, not because he is advocating the overthrow of these codes, but because he reinterprets them according to a radically individual light. (224)

Tramping becomes the only viable means of reclaiming individuality lost due to collective action, and a retreat into individuality via the myth of the heteronormative couple-against-the-world becomes an artificial panacea for the struggles of the working classes.

It was by redefining Hobohemia through the lens of rugged individualism rather than collective action that Hollywood was able to domesticate the tramp figure. Because the greatest threats inherent in the Hobohemian subculture were its status as a latent "army" and its capacity for disrupting heteronormative relations, redefining tramping as a temporary ritual undertaken in order to reclaim masculine individuality before the successful return to capitalist society became a means by which the emergent radical culture could be contained within the residual culture of

the frontier hero. As such the hobo was recuperated as yet another figure reinforcing the myth of the self-made man.

Two of the most important qualities of the hobo in the popular imagination, the celebration of mobility and rugged individualism, date back to the myths of the frontier heroes of America's past. As Frederick Jackson Turner put it in his *The Significance of the Frontier in American History*, "The frontier is productive of individualism. Complex society is precipitated by the wilderness into a kind of primitive organization based on the family. The tendency is anti-social. It produces antipathy toward control, and particularly to any direct control" (ch. 1). For Turner, the frontier was vital to the production of Americanism itself; he argues that "in the crucible of the frontier the immigrants were Americanized, liberated, and fused into a mixed race, English in neither nationality or characteristics" and that "the growth of nationalism and the evolution of American political institutions were dependent on the advance of the frontier" (Turner ch. 1).

If the frontier myth became the defining force of American politics, the mobility possible within the frontier space was no less important in the defining of American masculinity, and no figure represented this masculine mobility as much as the cowboy. As Michael Kimmel puts it in *Manhood in America: A Cultural History*:

As a mythic creation the cowboy was fierce and brave, willing to venture into unknown territory . . . and tame it for women, children and emasculated civilized men. As soon as the environment has been subdued, he must move on, unconstrained by the demands of civilized life, unhampered by clinging women and whining children and uncaring bosses and managers. (110)

It was the civilization of the East that was potentially emasculating to men. Masculinity, so reliant upon the concept of self-made manhood, required an autonomy and self-reliance that could only be found on the frontier because of civilization's link to femininity. In the city:

Women set the tone of those institutions that restrained masculine excess—schoolroom, parlor, church. “Woman” meant mother, the one responsible for curtailing boyish rambunctiousness; later, “woman” meant wife, the wellspring of emotional and moral strength. If men wanted relief from the demands for self-control, they had to “light out for the territory.” (Kimmel 44)

But in addition to being regarded as a vital component of Jeffersonian Democracy, Americanism, and masculinity, the frontier myth provided an explanation for the nation's rapid economic growth. The course of the nineteenth century saw the United States expand both in terms of geographical territory (via the Louisiana Purchase) and economy (via the Industrial Revolution), and, as Richard Slotkin points out in *Gunfighter Nation*, “It was perhaps inevitable that these two dramatic expansions be linked in American historical mythology and that the westward movement of population be read as a cause—even as the cause—of American economic development” (17). Put another way, America's rise was dependent upon the existence of the frontier. If the frontier, and freedom of movement within that frontier, were vital to the constitution of American individualism, masculinity, and the economy, then the closing of the frontier, which Turner puts at 1890, becomes a potentially destabilizing event for American society.

Slotkin goes into great depth concerning how cultural anxiety arising from the closing frontier led to the myth of the frontier getting transplanted onto the landscape of the modern industrial economy. He observes that while the industrial revolution facilitated the closing of the American frontier, many saw “industrialization as a more than adequate substitute for the cheap

land frontier, because it promised a continuous and inexhaustible increase of resources for each successive generation” (Slotkin, *Gunslinger* 283); for them, “the past was romanticized as a prelude to an attempt to reproduce, under industrial conditions, the mythical order of an the [*sic*] idealized frontier” (Slotkin, *Gunslinger* 286).

But how did the new industrial frontier affect the traditional concept of masculinity and rugged individualism so reliant upon the mobility and self-reliance that was possible on the physical frontier? The difficulty in answering this question led to much anxiety about what these virtues, long considered inseparable from the American character, now meant. Indeed, even before the economic collapse of the Depression, manhood had taken a hit. As Kimmel points out, prior to the Industrial Revolution “Manhood had meant autonomy and self-control, but now fewer and fewer men owned their own shops, controlled their own labor, and owned their own farms. More and more men were economically dependent, subject to the regime of the time clock” (62). Men like Thomas Jefferson had “admired the yeoman farmer not for his capacity to exploit opportunities and make money, but for his honest industry, his independence, his frank spirit of equality, his ability to produce and enjoy a simple abundance” (Hofstadter 23). The farmer who owned his own land on the frontier represented a key component to not only the autonomy central to the mythology of American democracy, but an important exemplar of masculinity as well. As we have seen in Chapter One, the Roosevelt Administration reinforced this agrarian ideal with their Resettlement Administration which sought to encourage urban citizens to go “back the land.”

If the rural countryside was the site of masculine independence, then the industrialized city was the site of emasculation and feminization; indeed, “to some commentators it was the city itself that bred feminization, with its conformist masses scurrying to work in large, bureaucratic offices, which sapped innate masculine vitality and harnessed it to the service of the

corporation” (Kimmel 89). It was, I would argue, the collectivization of men into groups, the severing of the masculine individualist subject from his former autonomy, which led to the fears of emasculation, but also important was the relative instability of the new industrial market place in comparison to the old economic model. As Kimmel puts it,

American men began to link their sense of themselves as men to their position in the volatile marketplace, to their economic success—a far less stable yet far more exciting and potentially rewarding peg upon which to hang one’s identity. The Self-Made Man of American mythology was born anxious and insecure, uncoupled from the more stable anchors of land ownership or workplace autonomy. Now manhood had to be proved. (7)

And it is this necessity to prove masculinity within the economic sphere that allows a convergence between economic and masculinity crises to occur. Kimmel writes that in numerous studies conducted during the 1930s men frequently “described ‘humiliation within the family’ as the ‘hardest part’ of being unemployed. With their economic power eliminated, their status as head of the household is eroded and with it their sense of manhood” (146). If earning power was now the predominant marker of manhood, then an economic crisis would lead to a nationwide crisis of masculinity; indeed, in some quarters the economic crisis was thought to be *caused by* the erosion of masculinity and traditional gender roles more broadly.

For some, the erosion of masculinity in America had begun much earlier than the 1930s and had in fact triggered the Great Depression. In addition to the loss of workplace autonomy that occurred during the Industrial Revolution, the early twentieth century saw other pieces of the American masculine mythos begin to collapse. In *Engendering Culture: Manhood and Womanhood in New Deal Art and Theater*, Barbara Melosh writes,

As metropolitan culture came to dominate national life, traditional American ideals of manhood became memories and legends . . . [the] ridicule of military pomp and

revulsion toward military force echoed a broad critique of war and a rejection of the soldier as an image of manliness . . . The bold entrepreneur of nineteenth-century capitalism, a heroic figure for some, had become discredited for many in muckraking journalism and the wave of Progressive reform . . . with the crash, the entrepreneur became suspect again, caricatured repeatedly in the images of the rotund capitalist with cigar. (30)

Additionally:

The expanding service sector [and decreasing mining and industrial work during the Depression] fundamentally changed the character of middle-class and white-collar work. Men increasingly moved into jobs that required traditionally feminine skills: Sales and advertising required schooling in the unmanly arts of persuasion . . . [and] the old image of the entrepreneur gave way to the diminishment of individual authority associated with new forms of corporate management. (Melosh 96-97)

So, with the arrival of the great Depression not only had the old possibility for proving one's manhood on the frontier been eliminated, but so had the means of proving one's manhood in the industrial and financial sectors. And even for those who were still employed, the perceived feminization of labor due to the expansion of the service sector led to the belief that men were less masculine than they had been previously.

The erosion of traditional gender roles and how it had contributed to the weakening of the American character was a subject of much discussion in the press during the New Deal. On the eve of World War II, *The Saturday Evening Post* published an article entitled "Self-Discipline or Slavery," in which historian and philosopher Will Durant was concerned with how the American people had lost their way, and how they could correct their mistakes in order to

meet the crisis that was at hand. Typical of many writers of the era, Durant placed the blame on the blurring of gender roles:

Women ceased to be women, longing to be men; the masculinization of women was the correlate and the result of the demasculinization of men; intellect without character unsexes either sex...women ceased to be mothers and become expensive toys . . .

Powerful instincts, formed for the care of offspring, fretted in frustration [for women].

Man did more and more for woman; but since he could not bear children, and she would not, fertility fell, the race lost the will to live; and as the best bred least and the worst most, Western society began to die at the top, like a withered tree. (“Self-Discipline” 46)

This was not the first time during the Roosevelt era that Durant had written an article concerned with the decline of American Democracy,<sup>5</sup> but here he places the blame at the feet of the masculinization of women and the emasculation of men, and his solution for defending a depressed democracy against the coming storm of fascism was simple: reinforce traditional gender roles and return to the traditional family. He writes:

We should learn, in school and college, to do things as well as to read and memorize and talk: the girl should learn how to cook without killing, how to care for a home, a husband and a child; and the boy should acquire some mechanic trade that will give an economic footing to his personality . . . Both sexes should be educated in the same schools, but in separate classes by separate studies for distinct ends; girls should be taught by women; boys, from their eighth year, should be taught by men. (“Self-Discipline” 49)

The re-masculinization of men and re-feminization of women was for Durant and many others during the New Deal era a core necessity for American economic renewal. A return to traditional gender roles would mean the return of American prosperity.

Between 1929 and extending into the late 1930s, newspapers and magazines were filled with stories detailing the declining marriage and birth rate and the increased divorce rate;<sup>6</sup> put simply, the traditional heteronormative American family was seen to be in decline, and because its decline coincided with economic collapse, the latter was seen to be caused by the former. As David Kennedy notes in *Freedom From Fear: The American People in Depression and War, 1929-1945*, “The marriage rate had fallen since 1929 by 22 percent. The Depression’s gloom seeped even into the nation’s bedrooms, as married couples had fewer children—15 percent fewer in 1933 than in 1929” (165). A number of newspaper articles used economic metaphors when discussing family issues—one article compared lax divorce laws in some states to lax incorporation laws in others, another compared families that failed due to divorce to banks that failed due to the Depression—subconsciously linking economic prospects with the state of the family in the public mind.

Both *Riffraff* and *Modern Times* explore the ways in which the economic fortunes of the male protagonist are dependent upon his romantic fortunes. Immediately after Dutch and Hattie are married in *Riffraff* he brings her home to an image of middle-class domestic bliss. He has filled their home with expensive furniture and electric appliances that he bought on the installment plan. When showing Hattie the kitchen Dutch told her that he bought the electric washer for her so that she doesn’t “end up looking like [her] sister,” the implication being that happiness within the relationship is linked to consumer goods. While Dutch’s willingness to go into debt for his class aspirations clearly serves as a critique of the irresponsible consumption blamed for causing the Depression, the visual image of the perfectly decorated middle-class home immediately after the couple’s marriage links economic and romantic prosperity. In this scene the seeds are planted for how Dutch will temporarily lose both his income and his place as patriarch of the couple. He tells Hattie that part of the reason for his purchase of the home was



that he needed “a place to hold meetings,” specifically union meetings where they will eventually plan their strike. This creates the impression that Dutch does not lose his home because he went too deeply into debt, but because he has permitted a politically radical collective to invade his domestic space.

Dutch’s situation deteriorates rapidly after his leaving the union; without an income, the modern furnishings he bought for his wife on their wedding day are repossessed and he decides to strike out on his own to remake his fortune. Before leaving home he tells Hattie, “I love you, but I gotta make good. And if I make good I’ll send for you, and if I don’t you’ll never see me again. Never.” We soon see him in a hobo jungle, disheveled and sporting a five o’clock shadow, riding the rails with the rest of Hobohemia. While Dutch’s tramping experience occupies only a very small portion of the film, it is significant because of why it is initiated and how it comes to an end. Just as the mobs in chapter one disrupted the family, here the collective action of the union causes Dutch and Hattie’s possessions to be repossessed and thus emasculates Dutch as breadwinner. His journey on the road is initially to reprove his capacity to support his family, but he returns in order to reestablish his authority in the household. Hattie, without Dutch’s guidance, is arrested for theft, so he comes home in order to help her get out. Significantly Dutch does not successfully reunite with Hattie until after he has defeated the radical leftists and reclaimed his union card and job, fulfilling his promise to “make good” and securely establishing the link between romantic and economic prosperity.

Economic prosperity is frequently connected to fantasies of domestic bliss in *Modern Times* as well. At one point The Tramp and The Gamine, after gleefully proclaiming that they don’t live “anywhere” sit down and imagine themselves living together in a home. Apart from the economic fantasy of rising to the middle class, the sequence is filled with images of the couple fulfilling their traditional gender roles. The opening shot presents the Gamine in a dress

welcoming the Tramp home, holding a skillet in one hand. She prepares and serves his meal after his return from work (presumably). The two are then shot in two shot as they share a meal in their kitchen, the cinematography in contrast to the framing of the fantasy sequence where the couple is shot individually as they dream of middle class domesticity. Visually the establishment of middle class prosperity is represented as inseparable from the formation of the couple.

Later in the film the Tramp gets a job as the night watchman of a department store allowing the couple to engage in the fantasy of middle class consumption. The pair eat at the store's café, play in the toy department, and, most significantly, once again establish a fantasy home in the bed department herself in fancy bathrobe as the Tramp reclines, smoking on a chaise lounge, echoing another scene of middle class domesticity. Shortly after the Tramp loses his job for allowing a robbery to take place on the premises, the Gamine finds a shack that the couple turns into another simulation of middle class domestic life. Just as she did in the fantasy the Gamine cooks dinner for the Tramp; although the food and her utensils are not up to the ideals set in any of their previous fantasies, she is portrayed as fulfilling her traditional gender role expectations. The two eat dinner, again in two shot, as the Tramp opens the newspaper with the headline: "Factories Reopen! Men to be Put to Work." While the job (like all of the Tramp's jobs) is short-lived, the linking of a return to employment with the establishment of a mimicry of middle-class domesticity once again links the two; while Chaplain's film is ultimately more complicated than *Riffraff* in terms of creating this link, there remains the implication that economic prosperity follows the reestablishment of the family.

Apart from its prevalent appearance in Hollywood narratives of the era, the idea that America needed to revitalize the traditional family in order to restore the nation's economic fortunes found its way into official government policy. In 1933 Warren S. Thompson and P. K.

Whelpton, commissioned by the President's Research Committee on Social Trends, published a report entitled *Population Trends in the United States* that proposed that population growth in the United States had reached its zenith and American families were on the decline. While the report was far from completely pessimistic on the effect the decline of American fertility would have on its economy, Thompson and Whelpton did admit that changes in production and consumption patterns would be necessary in order to avoid economic stagnation and decline, and expressed their belief that such population decline was partly responsible for the Great Depression.

In their official report for Roosevelt, Thompson and Whelpton took it as a given that the declining growth rate of the United States' population was irreversible and would eventually lead to stagnation. Additionally, they echoed the fears present in the popular press that such a negative trend in population growth could result in economic decline, and perhaps already had played some role in the Great Depression:

The decrease in young dependents which makes for larger savings by persons in the prime of life has been accompanied by an increase in older people who must draw on their savings or on the current production of the community for their needs. The latter, however, has offset the former only partially. Since savings, on the whole, are invested in some form of business enterprise, the capital available for investment may have been increasing most rapidly at just the time when the number of persons for whom necessities must be provided has been increasing most slowly. In this manner the decline in the birth rate has contributed directly to the lack of balance in the industrial system which is in part responsible for the present troubles.

It is not the intention of the authors to suggest that the slower population growth has brought on the present depression; although the decline in annual growth since 1923 may have been a contributory factor. (325)

While the authors stated that they did not feel that this trend must necessarily lead to the decline and stagnation of the national economy, they included the implication in their report and acknowledged that adjustments would be needed to avoid further economic collapse as a result of the projected slowing of population growth. In a prior report Thompson pointed out that:

As long as population is growing by leaps and bounds business grows in like manner and customers are not wanting. With the slower increase in the number of customers in the future our business has a new situation to meet. It cannot depend as much as formerly upon mere increase in number of customers. It must begin to plan how it can improve the quality of its customers. It would seem on the face of things that there is but one way to do this. The purchasing power of the mass of the population must be increased. (“Old” 219)

And by 1933 Thompson and Whelpton came to a very similar conclusion in their report for the Roosevelt Administration. Indeed, they even acknowledged that some sectors of the economy would not be possible to recuperate even after readjustment to a slower rate of population growth:

Certain industries will face difficult and extensive problems in adjusting to a slower population growth. They include industries in which technical improvements are increasing human efficiency at a rapid rate, whose products have a relatively inelastic per capita consumption, whose productive capacity is already largely in excess of the effective demand, and those in which capital (including land) is relatively durable and nontransferable and has a high value per unit of product. Such industries, of which

agriculture unfortunately is an example, will be particularly handicapped by the operation of several of these factors. ("Population Trends" 322)

While Thompson and Whelpton suggested changing business practices in order to adapt to the new trend in population, others began to focus on an effort to revitalize the family. If family life and the economy were connected, asserted the conventional wisdom, strengthening the heteronormative family would result in a stronger economy. In many ways this was the policy of the New Deal itself. As Wendy Kozol points out in her study of New Deal era photography of rural poverty, "Madonnas of the Field: Photography, Gender, and 1930s Farm Relief," both the Resettlement Administration and Farm Security Administration emphasized "the family as an integral unit of subsistence farming" and "encouraged and supported traditional gender divisions on the farm" (9). By reinforcing a return to traditional gender roles, the New Deal Administration made the implicit argument that the destabilization of the family caused by the perceived "masculinization of women" and "feminization of men" was at least partially responsible for the current economic crisis. By reinforcing these traditional, heteronormative gender roles, so went the unspoken argument, the family and thus the nation would be restored. It is for this reason that "Relief rhetoric frequently focused on families. Families were perceived as more deserving and appealing than single individuals, for they represented stability and tradition to a society dislocated by the Depression" (Kozol 9).

This emphasis on reinforcing traditional gender roles was not isolated within the New Deal's farm relief photography projects, which obviously played off of the nation's agrarian past, but became a focus of other New Deal attempts to represent the Depression. Melosh points out the ways in which the Treasury Section of Fine Arts (TSFA) and the Federal Theatre Project (FTP) also favored traditional representations of gender in the projects they commissioned. Like Kozol, Melosh argues that "Most murals and sculptures with agrarian subjects restricted women

to familial or domestic settings and framed women's work as family labor. Female figures were wives, mothers, and daughters. In a few examples of allegories, female figures predictably embodied fertility" (58). On the farm, the division of labor according to gender was portrayed as assuring the success of the farm, but she goes on to argue that a celebration of traditional gender roles as ideal extended into the realm of factory work as well:

Treatments of labor were steeped in ideologies of manhood. In sharp contrast to the comradely ideal of the farm family, representations of wage labor consistently excluded and hence made invisible women's productive work, privileging male domains of craft and heavy industry. Moreover, the core ideal of the manly worker carried the complementary image of female dependence. The masculinity of work rested not only on the autonomy of craft skill or visibly productive labor but on the wage earner's place in the family. The cultural ideology and social fact of the male breadwinner defined manliness in part by the exclusion of women from the market. (Melosh 83)

The exclusion of women from the workplace in artistic representations of wage (or what Melosh refers to as "manly") labor suggested that the economic success of men and the nation, depended upon women remaining within the domestic sphere and performing traditionally feminine roles in the home. While the 1920s had seen more women enter the workforce than ever before, the 1930s saw the beginning of a conservative project to put them back in the home, a reaction that was often explained as a means of restoring the economic order and re-invigorating the nation's masculinity (this is a process we will see repeat itself in Chapter Four, in my analysis of the home front films of World War II). As Melosh writes, a popular slogan of the Depression era was "Don't take a job from a man!," which was on several occasions even legislated: "a number of state legislatures, and then the federal government, passed the so-called married persons' clause, mandating that the civil service could employ only one member of a family; many

women were dismissed under the rule” (1). Again, the presence of women in traditionally male roles was implied to be the reason for the emasculation of men and, in turn, the economic collapse; these government commissions of public art projects represented both urban and rural labor in such a way as to exclude women from anything deemed the province of men.

These art projects were part of a larger project of constructing a new American mythology, incorporating many aspects of its traditional, agrarian origin into the realities of modernity and industrial capitalism; reinforcing gender boundaries and the definition of the traditional family was central to this endeavor. While not officially commissioned by the federal government, Hollywood cinema of the New Deal era was very much a part of this broader project of re-mythologizing American gender politics. As mentioned previously, the crisis of masculinity present during this or any economic crisis meant that “Depression-era efforts to mend the collapsed economic system necessitated reaffirming the patriarchal social order on which it was built, for economic dislocations, migrations, and unemployment threatened to emasculate men in their role as breadwinner” (Kozol 10).

As mentioned above, the frontier hero, traditionally represented as the cowboy sent to tame the West, was the definitive individualist and patriarch; he was sent into the wilderness in order to make it safe for civilization and the family. The message of the Western genre is clear: in a time and space of instability (whether due to violence or economic uncertainty), only a strong, masculine individual can save society. While women and families frequently appear in these myths, their survival is only possible due to the arrival of the masculine individual. As Giuliana Muscio argues in *Hollywood's New Deal*, Roosevelt's New Deal relied heavily upon metaphors that were, if not directly invoking the frontier spirit, calling upon the closely related image of rural agrarianism. She writes, “The first New Deal was animated by an agrarian spirit with Roosevelt the ‘gentleman farmer’ . . . In my opinion, Roosevelt's agrarian spirit is always

driving the use of metaphors and and [sic] images referring to the earth. . . . His sense of solidarity, however, is not populist, but a sign of his heritage as an aristocratic benefactor of the rural community” (25). Roosevelt establishing himself in the model of the rural patriarch reinforced the return to traditional gender roles the new Deal sought to bring about.

Just as the Left was promoting the New Deal as a return to prosperity through a the rural and agrarian tradition, the Right was recommending a return to self-reliance on the frontier as an *alternative* to the New Deal, several examples of which we see in the generally anti-New Deal *Saturday Evening Post*, which ran several stories valorizing modern day pioneers and their economic success. One such story, “Salute the Thirty-Niners,” published in May of 1939 begins,

Many stories of struggle and success have glorified the pioneers of yesterday—the now famous Forty-niners—and I burn to tell the story of today’s pioneers, the Thirty-niners, for I am one of them.

The Thirty-niners are conquering today’s frontier—that frontier which spreads over all America and which we have called “Depression.” We are, like all pioneers, willing to meet the exigencies of our time, no matter what toil, so long as independence and hope of an independent future are sustained. We want our children to be free of fear, want them to know a better world than the alphabet one we now live in. (Pearmain 18)

In this selection we see the desire to link the trials and suffering of the pioneers of the nineteenth century with those living during the Depression; similarly, their success is linked with a movement westward, into the former frontier. The piece reinforces the values of rugged individualism present in the frontier heroes; in addition to proclaiming a desire for independence now and in the future, the writer’s desire to break free of the “alphabet” world in which she and



her family currently live is a clear reference to the collective assistance of the New Deal programs, frequently referred to derisively as Roosevelt's "Alphabet Soup."

A similar piece that ran in 1941, "The Pioneers of Wrong-Way-Home," celebrates the self-reliance of another group of modern pioneers who made their way to Alaska. The article carefully details how the family set up their lives on the frontier, building their own home, and, like the previous article, celebrates the fact that they did it on their own, proclaiming, "all this they achieved without a cent of Federal aid. Wrong-Way-Home started from scratch and its inhabitants were depression [*sic*] victims from the States" (Hilscher 22). Again, by turning away from the help of the collective and returning to the spirit of rugged individualism only possible along the frontier, economic renewal becomes possible.

With the emphasis placed on rugged individualism and pioneer mythology as a panacea to the economic and gender crises, it is not surprising that many Hollywood films of this era would return to the mythical mobile frontier hero. The 1930s saw a decline in Western feature film production in Hollywood,<sup>7</sup> which is obviously the most likely genre in which to deal with this iconic figure. Slotkin attributes this decline in production to the fact that the Western, having "developed during the boom times of the 1920s," was "linked with the heroic age of American expansion and the dream of limitless growth. . . . In 1932-35 it may have seemed that that vision of history was invalid" (*Gunslinger* 256).

In the films of this era frontier masculinity became written upon the figure of the hobo and tramp. In many of these figures we can see echoes of earlier frontier heroes; the tramp's mobility on the open road became a modern equivalent to the frontier masculinity celebrated in the 19th century. In the 1930s the tramp became, as DePastino suggests, a "belated frontiersman . . . a relic from a world that had once rewarded freewheeling masculinity" (128). Just as we saw the road become an escape from the collectives of civilization and a space for redefining

masculinity in *Riffraff* and *Modern Times*, here we see the liminal space of the open roads and rails of America become a zone in which masculine autonomy can be reclaimed.

The Hollywood cinema of the New Deal era is very much invested in the connection between the economic and domestic crises of masculinity, which we can see in Frank Capra's *It Happened One Night*. In Peter's introductory scene he is confined in a phone booth both fighting with his editor. He is surrounded by a group of men listening in, admiring the idea of a workingman confronting his boss, an act one of the onlookers describes as a "man bites dog" situation. Eventually Peter's editor fires him and hangs up, but Peter continues to launch a diatribe at his now absent boss, playing for the crowd that has assembled around him, and eventually pretending to quit. When he departs he is greeted by the crowd as a hero, and referred to as "The King," suggesting a masculine power in his confrontation. But the viewer, unlike the onscreen audience, is aware that Peter's display is fraudulent; rather than being a workingman's declaration of masculine independence from his employer, his dismissal from the newspaper represents the impotence of the male worker during the Depression. He can bluster and put on a display, but he lacks real autonomy. The shot composition of this scene reinforces the entrapment of masculinity within the confines of wage labor. Peter is initially shot in a tight close-up, symbolically trapped in the phone booth, tightly locked in the frame by the phone on the right and the crowd on the left. The composition here reinforces Peter's impotence; while the onlookers celebrate his display as an act of masculine independence, the viewer is aware that Peter is powerless and entrapped by his relationship with his boss, a powerlessness emphasized by the depersonalized nature of being fired over the telephone.

The entrapment of modern emasculating employment is represented in a somewhat different form in another film about playing poor, Preston Sturges's *Sullivan's Travels*. Here the protagonist, John Sullivan, is a wealthy film director rather than a recently unemployed reporter,

but he still suffers from the loss of personal control of his financial life due to his overprotective producers and estranged wife. In his case, while he is financially stable he is still portrayed as lacking control over his artistic and personal decisions. While he wishes to make a serious film that is “a commentary on modern conditions. Stark realism. The problems that confront the average man,” he is continually thwarted by his producers, who want him to focus on the light-hearted comedies that have made him a success. They mock his desire to make a “serious” film by suggesting he has not suffered enough to understand how the real world works; they tell him, disingenuously, that while he was being pampered in boarding school and college they were struggling to succeed in the real world. In other words, they deny Sullivan’s occupational freedom because he has not proven himself and thus earned the right to make “real” films.

When Sullivan sets out to earn this right he runs into similar issues of physical entrapment as Peter did in *It Happened One Night*. While the cinematography here does not portray Sullivan as being cornered into a confined space, the narrative initially deprives him of freedom of movement. When he decides to go undercover as a tramp to discover what real suffering is like, his producers refuse to allow him to go alone, threatening to have him declared mentally unfit to make his own decisions if he does so. To that end, he is followed closely by what he refers to as a “land yacht,” a large bus containing all of the luxuries of his previous life ten feet behind him and his bindle.

The scene opens with Sullivan walking down the road, dressed as a hobo with bindle over his shoulder. He appears alone, but when he turns to look behind him the camera pans to reveal the looming form of his studio’s bus following closely behind him. In contrast to Sullivan’s apparent isolation on the road, the front seat of the bus is crammed with four members of his studio discussing the “adventure” they are about to undertake. The visual contrast of Sullivan shot in medium shot alone on the road with trees and grass behind him, with the crew

crammed in the bus emphasizes the confinement of Sullivan's upper-class Hollywood life versus the freedom of Hobohemia. Sullivan's attempt to isolate himself is undercut by the encroachment of civilization crawling immediately behind him. Even when he manages briefly to separate from them, his hitchhiking and freight hopping continually bring him back to Hollywood. Commenting on his failure to strike out on his own he states, "Everything keeps shoving me back to Hollywood or Beverly Hills . . . almost like, like gravity. As if some force were saying, 'Get back where you belong' . . . Maybe there's a universal law that says, 'Stay put. As you are, so shall you remain.'" "

The linking of the lack of mobility with emasculation in these two instances suggests how the cinematic representation of the tramp became a symbol of reclaiming masculinity during the Depression. Because of the freedom of mobility it suggests, the act of tramping was represented in Hollywood film as a kind of masculine rite of passage; an ordeal to be successfully passed in order to regain the masculinity lost due to the economic crisis. In many of these figures we can see echoes of earlier frontier heroes; as R.W. Connell points out in *Masculinities*, "Exemplars of masculinity, whether legendary or real—from Paul Bunyan in Canada via Davy Crockett in the United States to Lawrence 'of Arabia' in England—have very often been men of the frontier" (186). The tramp's mobility on the open road became a modern equivalent to the frontier masculinity celebrated in the 19th century.

Still, in many ways the hobo figure would seem to be an unlikely one for such a return to the traditional family; apart from his subversive threat to capitalist economics, Hobohemia had long been defined as a homosocial space where men could escape the feminizing space of home, a space where men gathered together in implied, or even explicit homosexual relationships as an alternative to heteronormative marriage. The press frequently linked Hobohemia with confirmed bachelorhood. An article from the *Washington Post* in 1934 interviewing several young male

tramps quotes one man relating how he came to be on the road; he tells them that he “had had trouble with a girl” and that “Her old man came over to our house and proceeded to raise hell . . . He thought I ought to marry her, I suppose, but I couldn't see it that way. So I beat it” (“Open” SM8). Another article published in the *Daily Boston Globe* in 1932 mentions how the greatest threat to Hobohemia is “matrimony. It's the hobo's greatest menace. Every year it thins their ranks. There's nothing they can do about it” (“Hobo College” 3). In addition to providing a space for men to flee from their matrimonial duties, the fiercely homosocial world of Hobohemia also threatened the heteronormative family by encouraging homosexuality. DePastino writes:

While most men on the road preferred the temporary company of a woman, some hoboos did have sex with each other. Just how many is unclear. Outside commentators often exaggerated hoboos' homosexuality in order to cast further disrepute on the subculture . . . But while investigators of Hobohemia and their informants disagreed as to the extent of homosexuality on the main stem, virtually all concurred . . . that homosexual practices among homeless men [were] widespread. (85)

However, while historically the hobo represented a threat to the traditional heteronormative family, Hollywood's portrayal of the figure successfully contained his subversive elements and reincorporated them to reinforce the status quo. In *It Happened One Night* and *Sullivan's Travels*, the act of tramping is recuperated into heteronormative capitalism through a repurposing of the Jocker/Punk relationship:

predatory relationships between older hoboos, or “jockers,” and young initiates, or “punks.” These relationships, widely discussed and lampooned among hoboos and non-hoboos alike, signified not only Hobohemia's homosexual undercurrent, but also the subculture's larger gender ideology that encouraged masculine domination. Coercing, cajoling, or enticing punks into sex, jockers offered in exchange protection, money, or

general instruction in the skills of begging, freight hopping, and securing food and shelter. (DePastino 86-87)

While there was a fear that older hoboes would seduce and corrupt the youth,<sup>8</sup> by transferring the position of the “punk” onto a female rather than a young male these films allowed the masculine domination inherent in the relationship to reinforce rather than undercut traditional gender roles. By traveling with an inexperienced and submissive female companion, tramping becomes a rite in which the male regains his authority and masculinity through the instruction and domination of a female sidekick.

In *It Happened One Night*, Peter sets out on the road after he has been fired and quickly encounters Ellie Andrews, a runaway heiress who is attempting to reunite with her husband before her father can annul the marriage. The beginning of the characters’ arcs suggests a break from traditional gender roles; Peter has been fired and is thus denied his masculinity in the market place and Ellie has escaped the patriarchal control of her father in an act of rebellion. Throughout their travels together Peter reasserts his masculine authority by disciplining Ellie and progressively bringing her under his authority. Having been emasculated through his firing, Peter reclaims financial independence through the control of Ellie’s money. One of his first acts as her unofficial guardian is to deny her the right to spend her own money; when she attempts to buy candy on the bus he takes her money away from her and tells her that “from now on you’re on a budget.” From that moment on he assumes control over the couple’s spending power, and he becomes responsible for paying for lodging and food. In other words, by asserting control over her finances Peter has reclaimed a level of economic control and undercut Ellie’s act of rebellion against patriarchal authority; in so doing their experience on the road becomes a means of reestablishing traditional gender roles.

There are moments when Ellie undermines Peter's masculine authority on the road, perhaps most notably in the hitchhiking scene. In this scene we see Peter spending a great deal of time lecturing Ellie on hitchhiking. While this fits into an established pattern in the film where Peter plays the role of masculine instructor to Ellie on the elements of working-class life (which is, as is often the case, coded as masculine),<sup>9</sup> his authority is undercut here by the fact that Ellie proves more successful than he does at hitchhiking in practice. However, this brief moment of power is undercut by the fact that the driver Ellie attracts eventually robs them, thus allowing Peter to reassert his guardianship by chasing the driver down and stealing his car, thus reasserting his authority. Additionally, Ellie's agency here is contingent upon her sexuality, in that she stops the approaching vehicle by revealing her leg to the driver. Whereas earlier Peter sexually dominates Ellie by threatening to undress in front of her, here Ellie invokes her own undressing, wresting a degree of sexual control back from Peter. Still, because the driver she attracts ends up robbing them, this sequence can be read as a critique of uncontrolled feminine sexuality. Without masculine guidance, Ellie attracts the "wrong sort" of man.

Stanley Cavell has written of the infantilization of Ellie in the film, arguing that "throughout her escapades with Clark Gable, Claudette Colbert is treated by him as a child, as his child, whose money he confiscates and then doles back on allowance, whom he mostly calls 'brat' and to whom he is forever delivering lectures on the proper way to do things" (84), even spanking her when she contradicts him. After eliminating Ellie's economic independence, this infantilization effectively curtails her last refuge of potential power over the male protagonist: namely, that of sexual threat, which we see illustrated in the aforementioned hitchhiking scene. Perhaps the best example of Peter removing Ellie's sexual threat occurs during the first night the couple spends together. Here Peter sexually dominates Ellie via striptease; he teases her by asking if she ever wondered how a man undresses and proceeds to take off his clothes; by the

time he reaches his pants she retreats to her side of the blanket. Once there, he lies down on his bed and begins to tauntingly sing “Who’s Afraid of the Big, Bad Wolf?” mocking her innocence and also reinforcing his own sexual prowess as a “wolf.” In this scene it is Peter, not Ellie, who is perceived as a threat, reasserting his masculinity through the sexual domination of his female companion.

In *Sullivan’s Travels* Veronica Lake’s sexual threat (whose character is, importantly, known only as “The Girl”) is contained not through infantilization or even direct masculine domination, but through the hiding of her sexual attributes. Before The Girl joins Sullivan on the road she must first dress as a hobo, effectively becoming androgynous. The act of Lake, an established sex symbol, eliminating her status as sexual threat was commented upon by several reviewers of the time, one stating that “In her first film, 'I Wanted Wings,' the glamor girl wore a strategic gown, one expression and a mop of hair over her right eye. Now Sturges swaddles her principal assets in a hobo's outfit, [and] stuffs her hair under a disreputable cap" (*Newsweek* 19). The containment of the female sexual threat is of particular interest here as Sullivan has in some ways been emasculated by feminine sexual power; specifically by his wife, who married him for tax reasons, controls a large portion of his income, and is carrying on an implied affair with his business manager. By desexualizing a Hollywood sex symbol, the male protagonist symbolically reasserts his authority over the sexual threat of the female. And, just as in Ellie’s case in *It Happened One Night*, Lake’s desexualization can occur only on the road, which again becomes a zone in which the male may dominate and remove the sexual threat of the female. In both of these films, the masculine domination present in the Jocker/Punk relationship of the hobo is repurposed in order to reinforce the male’s masculinity; a repurposing that is only possible in the space of the open road.



The reclaiming of traditional gender roles becomes the purpose of tramping in these films, and even more important is its status as temporary rite. In a scene at the end of *It Happened One Night*, Peter waves to a group of hoboes riding the rails as he goes to reclaim his career and position as patriarch in a heteronormative couple. The waving illustrates his joy at the prospect of marrying Ellie, but it also suggests a kind of solidarity. There is, perhaps, in this moment a bit of recognition, the implication that Peter and Ellie's experiences hitchhiking, bus riding, and staying in auto camps is not so removed from the hobo on the rails, suggesting that the poverty experienced by the migrant poor is a temporary rite meant to re-prove masculine authority. *Sullivan's Travels*, while still portraying a temporary tramp experience, comes to a different conclusion, suggesting that poverty cannot be studied or explained, only "shunned" to use the words of Sullivan's butler, or perhaps alleviated somewhat via the light-hearted romantic comedies Sullivan was famous for. In both cases the subversive potential inherent in a migrant hobo army are contained; issues of poverty and class warfare are displaced onto a conservative view of the restoration of traditional gender roles, and questions of national economic renewal are redirected into the drive to return to the heteronormative family.

It is also worth noting that the class conflict implicit in Hobohemia is absent from Peter and Sullivan's tramping. Rather than the lower economic classes or the underclasses that challenged the established capitalist system, these men come from the middle and upper classes respectively. While on the one hand their descent into tramping illustrates anxieties concerning the instability of class status during the Depression, there is something comforting about these temporary hoboes as well. Tramping-as-rite allows Peter and Sullivan to use the new frontier space of the road to improve themselves, Peter economically and Sullivan artistically, so that they return to the established hierarchy in a better position than they enjoyed before. Tramping,

in other words, becomes redefined as a means of improving and individual masculine protagonist's position rather than a collective threat to patriarchal capitalism.

By the beginning of World War II, hoboes were recuperated as American citizens through their contributions to the war effort. Numerous newspaper articles of the time wrote about how the various hobo "kings" were mobilizing their troops for the war effort. An article published in *The Baltimore Sun* in January of 1941, nearly a year prior to America's entry into the war, states,

Six months ago the word went out from [the] organization for hoboes to get off the road and to help in the nation's defense program. [Jeff Davis, one of the Hobo Kings] told them to get jobs or join the army, navy or marines. So far, from 12,000 to 15,000, including some of our officers, have joined up. During the World War, he claimed, hoboes sold more than \$15,000,000 worth of Liberty bonds and 30,000 joined the military forces. ("Hoboes Doing" 8)

Articles such as this reference old anxieties of hobo "armies" quite literally, but assimilates them back into legitimate American citizenship. Rather than threatening to subvert the capitalist political system, these hobo armies became the vanguard of defending Americanism against the forces of fascism. Quite quickly, the specter of the hobo army is converted from threat to windfall, just as we will see done with collectives on the whole during World War II in Chapter Four.

We see this final domestication of the hobo in 1947's *It Happened on Fifth Avenue*. In the film an unemployed World War II veteran, Jim Bullock (Don DeFore), is evicted from his apartment and becomes homeless; he is eventually welcomed into the home of millionaire Michael O'Connor (Charles Ruggles) by older hobo Aloysius T. McKeever (Victor Moore), who covertly spends his winters in the mansion while O'Connor is on holiday in the south. Later

in the film, Jim invites several of his veteran friends to live in the mansion as well, as the group plans to buy an abandoned army camp and convert it into low-cost housing. While the trajectory is reversed in that the men start out as soldiers for the American cause and then become homeless, the link between these homeless men and Americanism remains intact; there is little subversive about their economic hardships. In some ways this film parallels the figure of the “Forgotten Man” prevalent in the 1930s, but with significant differences. The Forgotten Man was forgotten not only by the people, but also by the government, and the government was seen as the one who must ultimately remember him. In films such as *Heroes for Sale* (1933), *I’m a Fugitive From a Chain Gang* (1932) and *Wild Boys of the Road* (1933), an indifferent or outright malicious government is directly responsible for the suffering of the homeless protagonists and, at least in the case of *Heroes for Sale* and *Wild Boys of the Road*, it is the government, in the form of the New Deal, that must help them in the end. *It Happened on Fifth Avenue* instead places the onus of success on the individual; the Forgotten Man of World War II (if he can even be said to be forgotten), is harmed not by an indifferent government, but by an indifferent corporate structure (here it is O’Connor, as absentee landlord, who forces Jim from his apartment). More importantly, it is self-reliance and a return to the heteronormative couple that will assure economic success, not the government.

The ideal of home ownership is central to *It Happened on Fifth Avenue*’s recuperation of the hobo figure. The New Deal’s focus on increasing the consumer base caused home ownership to become a central focus of economic renewal. DePastino writes, “it was not until the New Deal of the 1930s when mass suburban homeownership became an explicitly political goal, a way of restoring the bonds of community and nationhood during a time of unparalleled homelessness” (267). By the end of the 1940s, “the suburban home became the centerpiece of a new corporate liberal order that promoted masculine breadwinning, feminine child rearing, and

the steady consumption of durable goods within the context of the nuclear family” (DePastino 270). In the film, the space of the O’Connor’s home becomes a zone of renewal for both the family and the economy; the domestic space encourages a return to the heteronormative family and, as such, implies a return to economic prosperity. At the beginning of the film, the O’Connor mansion is vacant and the family is a broken home; Michael’s wife Mary (Ann Harding) tells him, “You left me and married your money,” and McKeever similarly suggests, O’Connor was “so engrossed in his holding companies that he couldn’t hold his wife and family together.”

It is through McKeever’s usurping of the house for domestic purposes that the community is renewed. Aside from the narrative, the *mise-en-scene* contributes to the film’s sense of domestic renewal; early shots in the mansion, while McKeever is there alone, show him in a long shot, his body dwarfed by the large, darkened rooms of the mansion, emphasizing his isolation in the building. Once he is joined by Jim, his friends, and the O’Connors, the shots begin to emphasize the characters rather than the setting. The formerly dark and empty entrance hall is now filled with hanging laundry, and far more shots are shot from medium close-up rather than long distance, increasing the importance of the characters within the scene. Scenes within other domestic spaces of the mansion, such as the kitchen and the dining room, occur on much smaller sets that emphasize the closeness of the family/community. Additionally, it is during the usurpation of the mansion that McKeever is able to play matchmaker, bringing the elder O’Connor’s back together and uniting Jim with their daughter Trudy. While on one level O’Connor’s dereliction of his patriarchal position within the family for his business suggests that domestic success is more important than financial success, the film goes on to suggest a link between the two. It is because O’Connor has turned his back on his family that he has become

indifferent to those affected by his business decisions, and it is his re-assumption of his duties as husband and father that allows him to make more compassionate business decisions.

Jim's hardships and successes are directly contingent upon Michael O'Connor's relationship with his wife and Jim's own relationship with Trudy. In the beginning of the film, when the couples are still separated, Jim is evicted due to the cold business calculations of O'Connor; it is through the unification of the couples that Jim and his friends are granted the right to implement their business plans, which importantly involve a housing development for other suffering veterans and their families. If the hobo has become a modern manifestation of the pioneer hero, perhaps this represents his final domestication by indirectly invoking the Homestead Act;<sup>10</sup> indeed, McKeever and Jim were both effectively squatters on the O'Connor's property, and their improvement of it has entitled them to a piece of its value; Jim by marrying Trudy and having his business plan approved, and McKeever by being given the right to "come through the front door" next winter rather than having to sneak in. Just as the mobile frontier hero must eventually settle down to assume his place as head of an economically successful heteronormative family, the hobo eventually ends his tramping for domestic stability.

Thus the hobo figure was redefined as a self-reliant, rugged individualist; he became a stage of masculine initiation before assumption of one's place in the patriarchal family, rather than a permanent confirmed bachelor who threatened to radicalize and mount a collective attack against the capitalist system. This is not to say that Hobohemia was completely divorced from its subversive potential in these films; many of them, such as *Wild Boys of the Road*, still illustrated the subversive potential of armies of homeless men wandering the country. However, the predominant representation of the period allowed the incorporation of the tramp into the dominant American mythology. By representing tramping as largely temporary and masculinizing, tramping became a masculine rite of passage through which some men must pass

to prove themselves worthy of assuming their position within the heteronormative couple. While economic collapse had threatened to emasculate men and decrease national fertility, the tramp became part of the national mythology of self-reliance rather than a focal point for anxieties of collectivist revolution, dispelling the threat inherent in hobo “armies.” While tramping would maintain some of its subversive potential in the future, it would never again carry the specter of populist revolution as it did during the New Deal era. Tramping was recuperated as not only masculine, but also distinctly American. An article in *The Christian Science Monitor* in 1935 declares that the hobo had “a straight line of descent: Christopher Columbus, Hudson, Cartier, Balboa and Cortez, the pioneers of the old west . . . Daniel Boone, Jim Bridger, Kit Carson” (Fowler WM4); tramping had been redefined as masculine adventure for American males. The Beat generation would take to the road as a means of rebellion but would channel rugged individualism and masculinity, not collectivism, while doing so. In my next chapter I turn to the ways in which outlaws were similarly deprived of their collectivist revolutionary potential and, once more, became a celebration of the rugged individual proving his masculinity in a temporary rite of passage, resisting collectivization so that he could one day return as head of the patriarchal household.

#### Notes

1. *Bezprizorni* was the term for the many children left homeless in Russia in the wake of the 1917 revolution; “750,000 bezprizorni banded together and hunted in packs like wolves; thieves, pickpockets, and robbers, as young as seven, sallying forth with homemade weapons to attack their victims” (Uys 6).
2. Howard Zinn writes,  
Four troops of cavalry, four companies of infantry, a machine gun squadron, and six tanks assembled near the White House . . . [General Douglas] MacArthur led his troops down Pennsylvania Avenue, used tear gas to clear veterans out of the old buildings, and set the buildings on fire. Then the army moved across the bridge to Anacostia. Thousands of veterans, wives, children, began to run as the tear gas spread . . . When it was all over, two veterans had been shot to death, an

eleven-week-old baby had died, an eight-year-old boy was partially blinded by gas, two police had fractured skulls, and a thousand veterans were injured by gas (391-92).

3. The Overalls Brigade, formed in 1908 by J.H. Walsh, was the most important group of homeless migrants to the blending of Hobohemia and I.W.W. culture. In the early part of the twentieth century they proceeded to use popular hobo songs, such as “Hallelujah, I’m a Bum,” in order to galvanize organized labor. DePastino writes, the men had been organized into a red-uniformed Industrial Union Band that parodied popular gospel hymns and sentimental ballads for street-corner crowds. In route to Chicago, the floating delegation peddled ten-cent song sheets that contained four of their most popular numbers, including “Hallelujah, I’m a Bum,” a decade-old hobo song that the activists transformed into a revolutionary anthem. (95-96) Walsh went on to compile these revolutionary parodies into a volume with the “provocative” title *Songs of the Workers, the Road, in the Jungles, and in the Shops—Songs to Fan the Flames of Discontent* (DePastino 96).
4. This reading is the critical consensus. Mark Winokur states, "The theme of *Modern Times*, which is about the oppression of the individual by the political-industrial complex, can be restated more mechanically as the use of the individual for something other than what he was intended" (220), and Sam Girgus contends Charlie Chaplin’s personal politics reflected this as well:

Chaplin really lacked a coherent and systematic philosophical and political ideology but, rather like Twain, put his emotions into highly moralistic terms and obviously simplified political categories. . . . Both men probably could be deemed anarchists in their responses to the pressures put upon them by their times and cultures, and in their fierce resistance to any form of domination or control (6).
5. In 1934 Durant wrote, “Is Democracy Doomed,” a piece that dealt with many of the same issues he would return to in 1941, but with much less emphasis placed upon a return to gender norms. In this article he instead proposed the implementation of a national civic education program designed to train the political leaders of the future.
6. In the first half of the 1930s nearly every major newspaper ran multiple stories concerning the national and local decline in the marriage rate. Articles of note appeared in *The Washington Post* (“Marriage, Divorce On Decline Here”), *Chicago Daily Tribune* (“U.S. 1930 Marriages Decrease 8.5% as Divorces Decline 4.2%”), *Daily Boston Globe* (“June Marriages in Decline in Boston”), and *New York Times* (“Brooklyn Women Outnumber Men”). While some of the articles pointed out the decline in divorces, the emphasis was generally placed on the decreasing number of families. Importantly, a number of these articles appear before the Crash of 1929, suggesting that the decline in marriage rates was seen as precipitating the Depression.
7. Of course the Western did remain a staple of B-Movie production throughout the decade. Films such as Roy Rogers’ *Sons of the Pioneers* (1933) and the *Three Mesquiteers* series

brought the frontier figure of the cowboy into the twentieth century in an even more literal sense than the tramp film.

8. Numerous articles fretted about the danger of the so-called “Wild Boys of the Road” merging with Hobohemia. In the April 15, 1933 edition of *The Hartford Courant* an article points to this fear of “corruption,” claiming, older “men traveling with boys . . . degrade the characters of their young victims, and teach them to beg, lie and steal. They accomplish their aims . . . under the pretense of befriending the youngster” (22).
9. Peter had previously taught Ellie how to properly dunk a donut as well as the proper way to ride piggyback. While Peter’s contempt for Ellie’s sheltered class is at the fore here, these scenes also indicate the ways in which he asserts his masculinity by guiding and instructing her.
10. The Homestead Act of 1862 allowed settlers to acquire government land by filing an application, moving onto the land, and improving it in some way, after which time they would become the land’s owner (Potter and Schamel).



## CHAPTER IV

### “I AIN’T SO TOUGH”: THE REINCORPORATION OF THE OUTLAW AS CAPITALIST HERO

As we have seen, the hobo figure was a problematic modern manifestation of the mobile frontier hero who was, throughout the course of the New Deal era, slowly purged of his inherent subversiveness and instead became, like the original Western frontier hero, a figure used to reinforce the conservative ideals of traditional masculinity and heteronormativity and, as a result, capitalism itself. In this chapter we will turn to another figure prominent in the era’s popular culture, the outlaw, and look at the ways in which this figure was similarly turned from a potential threat to patriarchal capitalism to another temporary state in which the male hero must prove his masculinity and, by doing so, renew the economic and democratic health of the nation by reclaiming his place as head of the heteronormative couple. By looking at how the outlaw narrative of the 1930s evolved from the rather subversive gangster cycle of 1931-32, to the G-Man cycle of mid-decade and finally the period-bandit genre that would close out the decade before a resurgence of the traditional Western in 1939, we will see how the lower-class outlaw was deprived of his subversive class implications to become yet another mythic figure of the New Deal capitalist order.

In *Gunslinger Nation*, Richard Slotkin notes the shift from the egalitarian Western frontier towards the centralization of capital in urban centers. He writes that “the social order envisioned in republican ideology and the Frontier Myth was one in which class tensions were disarmed by the broad diffusion of wealth and power” but “by 1890 it was clear that the industrialization of the economy had produced a social order in which wealth and power would increasingly be concentrated in the hands of a relatively few men, and a few powerful (and even

monopolistic) industrial and financial ‘trusts’” (*Gunslinger* 31). The collapse of the frontier became linked to the incorporation and consolidation of wealth and the industrialization of the nation. This shift led to a redefinition of manhood; rather than the self-sufficient rugged individualist of the frontier, the masculine ideal became one defined by economic success within the industrialized world.

Just as the open roads, auto courts, and hobo jungles of the 1930s were reinterpreted as a modern-day frontier in hobo films, the gangsters of the New Deal era were viewed as frontier outlaws. In his seminal ethnographic study of Gangland, *The Gang: A Study of 1,313 Chicago Gangs*, Frederic Thrasher explicitly lays out the new frontier of Gangland. He assigns Chicago’s gang territories names such as “North Side jungles,” “West Side wilderness,” and “South Side badlands,” emphasizing their connection to the Wild West (6-7). And, just as the settling of the frontier was viewed as an interstitial phase between “the savage wilderness” and “civilization,” Thrasher viewed Gangland as filling the gap in services in modern society (22). The gang, in other words, provides services and structure to those members of society not provided for by the recognized state apparatus. While Thrasher conducted his study two years prior to the stock market crash, this observation becomes even more relevant upon considering the increased number of citizens no longer economically secure due to the Depression. With the passing of the frontier and the loss of the possibility of legitimate business success in the Depression era, the gang became an interstitial space for American society, a zone in which the authority of a corrupt and incompetent state could be escaped and capitalistic ideals could be pursued, achieved, and occasionally critiqued, in a way that was no longer possible in the legitimate corporate structure. This shift led to the decline of the Western’s popularity as a genre in Hollywood cinema and the corresponding increase in the production of gangster films; Robert

Sklar notes, "In 1929 the gangster for the first time surpassed the cowboy as a subject for Hollywood moviemakers" (8).

Unsurprisingly, the Prohibition Era gangster was simultaneously celebrated and reviled by the public in the 1920s and 1930s. Even before the Stock Market Crash there were those who positioned the new prohibition laws, frequently blamed on the increased involvement of women in the political process, as feminizing the nation's masculine individualist spirit. In *War on Crime: Bandits, G-Men, and the Politics of Mass Culture*, Claire Bond Potter argues that the failure of Prohibition, and the rise of the gangster, was attributed by the public to a recently feminized federal government. She writes that "new constituencies of white, female voters threw the strength of many male legislators behind maternalist agendas such as temperance, protective legislation for mothers and children, labor reforms, and international peace initiatives" (14). The perception of the Volstead Act as maternalistic was compounded by the fact that the chief enforcer of Prohibition from 1921 to 1929 was a woman, Assistant Attorney General Mabel Walker Willebrandt. A *New York Times* article from 1925 illustrates how the enforcement of the Volstead act was perceived as feminine: "she talks about her work in a womanly way, one might say in the way of a schoolmarm versed in the law" (Ulm SM1).<sup>1</sup> The rhetoric surrounding the Volstead Act and its enforcement by the Department of Justice positioned Prohibition as a feminine law meant to domesticate men.

Because even its supporters linked prohibition to feminine control of men, it is little wonder that bootleggers became celebrated as masculine paragons. The perceived maternalism of the prohibition state creates a space in which the gangster, in his resistance to the state's feminized agenda, can be viewed as a rugged masculine individualist. Martha Grace Duncan argues that "admiration for criminals may arise out of contempt for the state's weakness" (12), and while she is specifically referring to vigilantism in this instance, one cannot help but draw a

parallel between a vigilante and a Prohibition-era bootlegger such as Capone. In both cases, the outlaw proves capable of delivering something the public demands that a feminized state refuses to grant them.

The sensationalist press and mass culture perpetuated this masculinist celebration of the outlaw. Popular biographies such as Fred D. Pasley's suggestively titled *Al Capone: The Biography of a Self-Made Man*, emphasized the rags-to-riches nature of these gangster figures. For Pasley in particular, Capone represented the rugged individualist business tycoon of the Carnegie and Rockefeller type.<sup>2</sup> The promise of the American Dream, of upward mobility via hard work and perseverance, had been broken; in its place was a system in which the only way to succeed was to defy the feminized state; Capone and his ilk were ideals of masculinity for an age when legitimate economic paths of masculinization had been curtailed.

In "The Spectacle of Criminality," Richard Maltby comments upon the ways in which the press sensationalized gangsters in the 1920s and 1930s, granting them celebrity status among the public. He comments on how mob funerals, police raids and gang wars became media events for the press; by the end of the 1920s there was a reaction against this idolization. Maltby writes, "voices in the dominant culture expressed increasing concern that the media were presenting the gangster—archetypally Capone—as a heroic role model" ("Spectacle" 125).

Among the more left-leaning press, meanwhile, a number of articles pointed out the hypocrisy of prosecuting bootleggers or bank robbers while supporting the careers of Wall Street speculators and corrupt businessmen and politicians. In an article from *The New Republic* published in 1931, "Government by Gangster," the author argues:

What moral difference is there between the hold-up man who takes your watch at the pistol's point, and the coal operator who slashes wages because his men cannot get work anywhere else? How absurd to see the police smashing up with axes a roulette table in

an illicit gambling house and groveling with servility before the automobile of the big Wall Street speculator! (329-30)

The writer goes on to explicitly link the rise of the gangster to the collectivization of big business via incorporation when he argues that shifting ethics in the American culture have led to the proliferation of the gangster. They write, “We have come to be increasingly dominated by the standards of the business man; and these, as John T. Flynn shows in the series of articles we are now publishing, only too often boil themselves down into 'get the money'" (329). While contemporary commentators may have disagreed over whether or not the gangster phenomenon was to be praised or vilified, it was predominately viewed as simply a new spin on the rugged-individualist capitalist.

While the Gangster genre was not inaugurated by the Crash of 1929,<sup>3</sup> in the early years of the Depression the genre became a far more prevalent vehicle for capitalist critique. In *City Boys* Robert Sklar gives an in-depth accounting of the gangster genre between the 1920s and New Deal era: “Only a dozen films about gangsters were produced in the first half of the 1920s. An upsurge began in 1928, and in 1930 alone twenty-five gangster movies were released, fully one third of the entire output of the decade” (8).

Director Roland West’s *Corsair* (1931) perhaps most purely represents the celebration of the gangster figure as the self-made businessman *par excellence*. In the film Chester Morris plays John, a college football star from the West who plans to become coach after graduation. After coming to the East Coast to play his final game, however, he meets Alison Corning, a young heiress who convinces him to take a job at her father’s brokerage firm instead. He accepts in order to impress her, and the film quickly cuts to his Wall Street office one year later. John is unhappy with his career, which mostly consists of cheating old women out of their money. When he is given an ultimatum to either trick a woman into buying worthless stock or leave the

firm he angrily decides to leave the firm. Having learned of his boss's sideline in bootlegging, John decides to become a pirate, secretly stealing Mr. Corning's alcohol and selling it back to him. After some success on the high seas John is proven a success, earns Alison's respect and obedience, and becomes the president of an oil company in Venezuela.

The obvious absurdities of the plot aside, the film clearly illustrates the ways in which big business and organized crime were considered synonymous; indeed, a rival bootlegger and mob boss in the film is frequently shown with a stenographer at his side, taking the minutes of his meetings like a Wall Street secretary. David E. Ruth points out that before the final years of the 1920s representations of the criminal on screen had typically been of the shabbily dressed, lower- or underclass variety, but by the end of the decade Hollywood portrayals of the gangster had started to adopt a more middle- or even upper-class appearance. He goes on to add, "While depictions of the criminal had once confirmed for middle-class Americans the dangers of people who wore shabby clothes, spoke indecipherable languages, and dwelt in the wrong parts of town, by the middle of the twenties such reassuring cultural and physical distance had collapsed" (42).

For viewers the notion that Mr. Corning might be a Wall Street broker and a bootlegger, or that John could go from Wall Street broker to pirate to oil tycoon, was believable on the moral, if not the literal, level. In his *Washington Post* review of the film, Nelson B. Bell comments, "there are pirates operating on that short but adventurous thoroughfare in lower Manhattan [Wall Street]. . . . Probably hijacking liquor on the high seas is no less honorable than defrauding widows and children on land" (14). And, indeed, much of the press of the era focused on the fact that the outlaw or gangster, while perhaps technically outside the law, was bound by a higher moral code than a Wall Street businessman. An article appearing in the *New York Herald Tribune* in the spring of 1931, looking back at the career of train robber William Carlisle, recounts an incident during one of his robberies:

One woman cried at being forced to part with her jewelry, so the robber, whom the passengers described afterward as “a swell dressed young man with a white mask,” gave it back to her, generously adding for good measure a handful of trinkets taken from other passengers. Another elderly lady, cowering behind the curtains of a lower berth, told him in piteous tones that, though she could not see his face, his movements reminded her of a beloved son in Mexico. Wherewith the gallant lad took a platinum watch from the conductor's hat, presented it to her and told her to send it to her son as a gift from “William Carlisle.” (Winn SM6)

The outlaw bandits of the 1930s, such as Pretty Boy Floyd, were represented as having the same type of higher moral code. Not only did the press repeatedly claim that Floyd insisted on paying farmers for food and shelter when he was hiding out, but he was portrayed as having a deep sense of loyalty to his friends and fellow outlaws. One story, reported by *The Sun*, claimed that Floyd was willing to take responsibility for an illegal gun belonging to his friend “Red” Lovitt; the detective who found the gun told the reporter, “I found out later it wasn't his pistol. It was Lovitt's. Floyd figured it would lose Lovitt his job and that he didn't have a job. So he took the rap” (“When” 12).

John’s trajectory in *Corsair* from a banker who swindles the poor to a pirate who robs the rich plays into this same conception of the noble outlaw, but it also reinforces contemporary concerns of the feminizing state. The film repeatedly marks John’s geographic movement from the west to the east, referring to him as a “he-man son of the West” on several occasions. Additionally, this physical migration is mirrored by John’s career trajectory from masculinized sportsman to a Wall Street worker emasculated by both Mr. Corning and his daughter Alison; this movement from west to east and rigorous sportsman to office worker can be read as an inversion of Horace Greeley’s advice from a century earlier to “Go west.”

The inversion of western immigration and the emasculating forces of the city can be seen in Mervyn LeRoy's *Little Caesar* (1931). In the film, "Rico leaves rural America, the last vestige of frontier echoes, to make his way in the new American frontier, the big industrial complex" (Kaminsky 216); more directly, the opening scene of the film has small-time criminal Rico, a.k.a "Little Caesar," (Edward G. Robinson) telling his partner that they're going "East! Where things break big!" In the early Depression years the promise of the West was broken, and men who wished to prove their masculinity could no longer do so on the frontier, but must instead return to the industrialized, feminized city.

Part of John's emasculation in the film comes from his movement from an individualist to a member of a feminized collective. Michael Kimmel writes that among those concerned with a declining masculinity in the era, "the chief problem seemed to be women, both at work and at home, as coworker, as mother, and as symbol. Everywhere men looked, there were women. Work itself was seen as increasingly feminized, with more women employed in increasingly feminized offices—hardly the world of real men at all" (143). On the football field John is initially shot in a medium shot isolating him from the other players, and his is the only face visible, the camera then cuts to a long shot from above the field, but here John has run so far ahead of the other players that he is still shown in isolation; though part of a team, his individuality is visually reinforced. At the party held by East Coast society, however, John is surrounded by women wanting an autograph; this is a transitional moment in that while John is no longer granted privileged screen space as an individualist hero, he is still the center of the other actors' attentions and therefore commands the agency of the scene.

Later in the film, after he has begun his work on Wall Street, the floor of Corning's Stock Office is filled with women running around the floor, shouting over one another in a busy stock exchange. From this shot of a feminized financial collective the camera cuts to a shot



through the window of Corning's office where John is waiting as other men speak. The camera is placed behind the frame of the window, giving the appearance of bars over the office, suggesting John has been imprisoned by an indifferent, feminized collective which no longer views him as the focus of its energies. Visually the film has moved John from a central individualist figure to less than a cog in the financial machine. This negative portrayal of collective society illustrates a point made by Claire Bond Potter: the "state centralization, capital concentration, and the proletarianization of labor wrench[ed] the powerless away from a past that appears in retrospect to be more desirable"; bandits, on the other hand, "articulate a prenational past" in which the individual could exercise agency over his life and further his personal economic goals without surrendering to the collective (84-85). It is only by becoming an outlaw that John is able to reassert his masculinity.

Just as the frontier of the west held the promise of masculinization and economic success through rugged individualism, the confinement of the eastern city threatens to weaken sportsmen morally, sexually, and economically. As we saw in *Our Daily Bread*, the emasculating threats of the city are represented through the female characters. In the beginning of the film while attending a high society party after his final game, John is shown framed by two women admiring his strength. One sits beside him on a couch to the left of the frame rubbing his arms while the other sits on the floor at his feet to the right of the frame, squeezing his thigh. While on the one hand the framing (particularly of the woman at his feet) represents John as the dominant figure in this image, and the admiration of his strength as an athlete reinforces male power fantasies, there is, perhaps, something emasculating here. His body in this shot becomes a sexual object to be gazed and groped by the female spectator; rather than pursuing his own sexual conquests, as is the traditional masculine ideal, he becomes the pursued himself.

And, like John, Rico in *Little Caesar* finds himself turned into a feminized object for public consumption. While he also enjoys this attention, there is the implication once again that Rico is not his own man but is in some sense community property (an interesting twist on the notion of “public” enemy). It is crime boss Montana’s image in the newspaper that inspires Rico to travel to the big city in the first place; fame, the allure of being consumed by the public, holds an appeal for Rico. While he is disparaging of his friend Joe Massara’s desire to become a dancer, telling him “Dancin’? Women? Where do they get you? I don’t want no dancin’. I figure on makin’ other people dance,” gang life’s appeal to Rico has more to do with fame and power than money, insisting that while money is fine what he really wants is to “be somebody.” Put another way, rather than his masculinity resting upon self-reliance and independence, Rico’s sense of masculine power is dependent upon the collective of the gang and of mass society.

Before Rico meets with “The Big Boy,” the mob boss who plans to give Rico a promotion within the gang, LeRoy shoots an extended scene of Rico dressing up in a tuxedo, carefully preparing himself for presentation to the director of his gang. The shot composition here reinforces Rico’s “to-be-looked-at-ness,” to borrow Laura Mulvey’s term, typically used to refer to the female subject on screen (Mulvey 11).<sup>4</sup> Rather than shoot Rico directly, the camera is pointed at a mirror in which we can see Rico’s reflection; he brushes his hair, adjusts his tuxedo, and poses as we watch through the mediated surface of the mirror. Meanwhile his assistant Otero moves within the frame of the camera, looking up at Rico (still standing behind the camera) with a look of veneration, not dissimilar from the way in which the women look at John during the party sequence of *Corsair*. Like John, Rico is the object of a sexualized gaze, but here the gaze is male rather than female; first in the guise of Otero in the dressing room and later the appraising capitalist eye of The Big Boy who determines whether or not Rico will have the right to advance in the gang.

In many ways this male “to-be-looked-at-ness” was inherent in male stardom, and some critics, such as Leo Lowenthal, have observed that even male stars were primarily objects to be consumed. In his essay “Biographies in Popular Magazines,” he comments on the shift in the subjects of popular biographies in the early part of the twentieth century from industrialists, businessmen, and politicians (what he refers to as “agents . . . of social production”) to entertainers (“agents . . . of social and individual consumption”) (296). Rather than being interested in the stories of active producers, the public had become fascinated by stars as passive objects to be consumed. In this way the gangster, treated as a celebrity in his own right in the press of the era, represents a shift from the productive (and masculine) industrialists such as Carnegie to a more passive (and thus feminine) decorative object. When Rico preens for a press photograph at a celebratory dinner, he places his hands on his waist and smiles, standing perfectly still in medium shot for four seconds; the camera cuts away and when it comes back he holds the same pose for four more seconds. The length of these two shots emphasizes the artifice of the pose and also his passivity; Rico simply waits, allowing an image to be created from his likeness for public consumption.

In *The Public Enemy* (1931) Tom Powers (James Cagney), also becomes an object of display. A scene in which Tom is fitted for a new suit recalls the scene in which Rico tries on his tuxedo in *Little Caesar*. Here the tailor, coded as homosexual, admires Tom’s body as he fits him for a suit to display his new-found wealth. While being measured and scrutinized by the tailor, Tommy asks that there be plenty of room around the waist; the tailor responds by squeezing Tommy’s bicep and saying, “Oh sir, here’s where you need room; such a muscle!” while rolling his eyes suggestively. Here Tommy, like Rico before him, is relegated to the feminized position of object of the male gaze. Ironically it is the outlaw position that makes him more dependent upon the gaze of others.

In a later scene Gwen in particular is shot in a manner that emphasizes Tommy's view of her as status symbol. In her apartment she appears in the foreground, lounging on a couch as Tommy sits on a chair behind her next to a table holding a white statue of a woman. Apart from the fact that Gwen is in a white dressing gown that sparkles in the same way as the statue, the lines of the statue's arms echo Gwen's posture, making a clear parallel between the woman and the object. Just as the statue is on display as a status symbol of wealth and culture, Gwen too functions in this way for Tommy. Yet the staging and dialogue of the scene suggests that Tommy is the one being consumed by the moll. Gwen is in the foreground, stretched along the bottom of the screen space, dwarfing Tommy and obscuring half of his body.

Additionally, Gwen's dialogue in the scene suggests that she, like Tommy, has done some shopping for a partner and has decided to purchase him. She calls him her "bashful boy" and tells him, "The men I know—and I've known dozens of them—oh, they're so nice, so polished, so considerate. Most women like that type. I guess they're afraid of the other kind. I thought I was too, but you're so strong. You don't give, you take. Oh, Tommy, I could love you to death!" Here Gwen implies that like Tommy she too has been consuming sexual partners and has settled on Tommy because of the status he grants her; her final line "I could love you to death" implies not only the conditional nature of her feelings for him (she *could* love him does not necessarily translate to she *does* love him) but also the threat that her feelings for him, whatever they are, could ultimately prove destructive.

The initial power dynamic between Alison and John is far more obviously emasculating. Upon asking him to dance she downplays his athletic prowess telling him, "You don't play badly." Later, after learning he plans to become a football coach rather than pursue a high-powered career on Wall Street, she turns her head away, ignoring him and motions for another man to cut in during their dance. When he brushes his hair out of his face she scolds him,

“Don’t do that, you look like a lifeguard trying to impress one of the servant girls.” Perhaps most significantly, it is Alison who secures a Wall Street job for John by asking her father, whom she also emasculates by referring to him as “Stevie” and generally ignoring the patriarchal authority he views as his right, to give him a chance. In these early scenes we see John go from the rugged sportsman, worshipped by men and women alike as the masculine ideal, to an object judged and found wanting by his potential love interest. Not only does he go from a dominant figure attracting attention and respect from the entire party to a man who hides, ignored by his dancing partner in a private room, but his entire career trajectory is changed, against his will. Alison decides that he will no longer pursue an athletic career, instead serving the feminized corporate structure of the city, and thus symbolically emasculates John in the process.

This is not to say that the city weakens these gangsters as men in the same way it weakens John in *Corsair*. Indeed, the city provides opportunities for success for these men that were no longer possible in the former frontier and rural zones of the nation. In *We’re In the Money: Depression America and Its Films*, Andrew Bergman argues:

The outlaw cycle represented not so much a mass desertion of the law as a clinging to past forms of achievement. That only gangsters could make upward mobility believable tells much about how legitimate institutions had failed—but that mobility was still at the core of what Americans held to be the American dream. (6-7)

Just as the wilderness of the frontier had once provided a space in which the rugged individualist could earn his social mobility during the nineteenth century, the city provided that space in the early twentieth century. However, after the Depression this promise of progress came with a price: the limiting of the individual’s agency via the constraints of various collective forces, whether they were the state, the corporation, or the gang. Gone were the days where a man

could prove himself through self-sufficiency and hard work; now he was dependent upon the group.

Rico's need to perform for the collective is contrasted in the film by Joe Massara, who also must perform to earn his way, but his performance occurs in the legitimate arena of professional dancing. In Joe's first scene auditioning for the Bronze Peacock (a name which itself evokes performativity and display), the camera shows Joe and his partner, Olga, dancing on stage in long shot; in the foreground we see a table with a man on the left edge of the frame and a woman on the right, both watching the couple dance, emphasizing their status as objects to be gazed at. For all of Rico's obsession with fame and putting himself on display before the public he is quick to ridicule Joe's performance as feminizing. Rico tells him, "It [dancing] ain't my idea of a man's game . . . now you're getting to be a sissy." However, it is possible to read Rico's constant criticism of Joe's dancing as a projection of Rico's own contempt for the performances he must put on for the group in order to thrive in the gang. Despite his protestations earlier in the film that he wants to make others dance for him, much of Rico's time in the gang involves him "dancing" for his superiors; he dresses for them, preens for them, even adopts different mannerisms for them.<sup>5</sup> Far from being the self-reliant masculine individual, Rico has become a performer, what he would dismiss as a feminized position. At the end of the film Rico is killed behind a billboard for Joe's new show; Rico's final performance, the histrionic cry, "Is this the end of Rico?," is shadowed by the image of the two dancers. Here Rico is denied the final dignity of an audience for his performance; he has been completely disempowered.

Writing for the *Los Angeles Times*, Alama Whitaker addressed the new trend in men assuming decorative desires that had previously been coded as feminine; men now had the same vanity that was stereotypically assigned to women, and it threatened to turn all men into

“sissies.” In her piece Whitaker complains about new male magazines whose advertisements include “clothes and liquor” but also “shaving creams and hair tonics” (H6). Whereas before Women held the monopoly on cultivating attractiveness and desirability for men, now men were desperately trying to attract women through their physical appearance, whether it be by purchasing hair tonics, lying about their age, or purchasing perfume (H6). Underwriting Whitaker’s complaints is the notion that men could lose their agency and become decorative objects in much the same way as women had been expected to do previously; their sense of worth no longer originated with what was believed to be an innate inner strength, but in others’ judgment.

The gangster film has been traditionally read as a radical take on the Horatio Alger myth of the self-made man. In a typical reading, Jeremy Reed argues that “it is safe to say that the popularity of the gangster film certainly adds up to an endorsement of the idea of violence both as a tough-minded response to economic hardship and as a means of asserting agency against an increasingly corporate, bureaucratized business environment” (94). During several polemical scenes in *Scarface* (1932) written on the insistence of MPPDA (Motion Pictures Producers and Distributors of America) President Will Hays,<sup>6</sup> concerned citizens and law enforcement officials complain about the bureaucratic process behind which gangsters hide. Early in the film the police chief tells Tony that he “hide[s] behind a lot of red tape, crooked lawyers and politicians, [and] writs of habeas corpus,” charges that directly call into question the hard-boiled manhood gangsters such as Tony and Rico self-cultivate. In *Scarface*, linking the gangster to the bureaucratic legal system cuts off even this avenue of resistance. During a later scene the police chief responds angrily to a reporter who calls Tony a “colorful character;” he connects the gangster to the Western frontier outlaw and by doing so establishes the modern urban gangster as feminized in comparison to the masculine western outlaw. He tells them that people “think these

big hoodlums are some sort of demigods. . . . They had some excuse for glorifying our old Western bad men; they met in the middle of the street at high noon and waited for each other to draw. But these fiends sneak up, shoot a guy in the back and then run away.” Here the chief holds up the outlaw of another era, nostalgically suggesting he was guided by a masculinist moral code that has since been forsaken for deviousness and legal trickery. *Scarface*’s gangsters’ reliance on legal tricks to escape punishment not only undercuts the valorization of these masculine fighting virtues but suggests that the gang is a collective just as restrictive and feminizing as the corporation or the state. In either case, far from being the rugged individualist challenging the collectivization of modern society, the gangster avoids confrontation and plays his role as a cog in the machine.

While the male protagonists of the classic gangster cycle are subsequently emasculated and destroyed by the feminizing collective structure of the urban environment in general and the gang in particular, in *Corsair* the protagonist is able to successfully utilize the zone of the outlaw to break free of the feminizing space of the city and the state and achieve economic and domestic success in the process. Much like the hobo figures from Chapter Two, for John the status of outlaw serves as a temporary masculine rite wherein he re-proves his manhood by making his fortune before regaining patriarchal authority as head of the heteronormative couple. When John decides to become a pirate rather than continue to serve Alison’s father on Wall Street, he confronts and assaults her in the process. He grabs her, forcefully kisses her, tells her, “That’s goodbye from a he-man son of the West” and pushes her down onto the couch before leaving the room. It is at this point that John begins to reassert control over his economic life as well by becoming a successful pirate and bootlegger, creating a problematic link between masculine sexual violence and economic empowerment. By the end of the film John’s re-masculinization is complete when he not only gets the better of his former boss, but also convinces him to make



John president of a Venezuelan oil concern and give him his daughter's hand in marriage.<sup>7</sup>

Alison, for her part, has become completely submissive to John (significantly the only man in the film she no longer dominates). He refuses to sit beside her when she pats an empty seat and initially refuses to marry her. After his scolding she casts her eyes down in close-up, her voice gets quieter and she meekly tells him that she loves him. Just as we saw in the first two chapters, the formation of the heteronormative couple with a strongly re-enforced patriarchal authority becomes a means by which masculinity may be re-proven and economic prosperity renewed.

*Corsair's* sexual politics are quite obviously conservative and reactionary in their rigid adherence to traditional heteronormative gender roles. But this exception aside, the films of the classical gangster cycle are unusual among nearly all Hollywood films for not only their lack of a romance plot at their core, but for the ways in which their sexual politics subvert traditional expectations of gender and sexuality. Coming at a time when more conservative films like *Corsair* were representing the necessity of strong traditional gender roles, and before the appearance of the Hays Code would formally institutionalize their presence in Hollywood film, these gangster films were challenging the bedrock of capitalist American culture. In the three films discussed above the rejection of the heteronormative couple becomes linked to at least temporary economic success.

*Little Caesar's* Rico is perhaps the most obvious at rejecting heteronormative romance out of hand. As mentioned above, when his partner Joe Massara tells him that he would like to get some money, become famous as a dancer and find a woman, Rico responds, "Dancin' . . . women . . . where do they get you?" And throughout the film Rico challenges Joe in terms of his relationship with Olga, by the end threatening to kill her by telling Joe, "She's through. She's outta the way." Indeed, Rico is the only one of the gangsters studied here to never be associated with a moll, and his jealousy over Joe Massara's relationship with Olga has frequently been read

as a homosexual attraction; after Rico is betrayed by Joe and Olga he complains, “This is what I get for liking a guy too much,” suggesting that his attachment to Joe may be more than platonic.

As mentioned above, there are also homosexual undertones to Rico’s relationship with the adoring Otero; at one point Rico lies back on his bed while an adoring Otero lies down beside him, fawning over him and saying, “Rico, now you’re famous,” an exchange not dissimilar from those between Tom Powers and Gwen in *The Public Enemy*, or any other number of gangsters and their molls from the era. Bill Lesley argues that Rico’s rejection of heteronormative relationships has less to do with homosexuality and more to do with Rico’s rejection of adulthood masculinity; he writes that “Notable in becoming an adult is the shifting of emotional attachment from ‘the guys’ to a woman, and from the separate subcultures of boys and girls to the central culture of husbands and wives” (17). While there is perhaps some truth to the notion that the gangster in these films is a juvenile delinquent who never grows up,<sup>8</sup> this reading ignores the importance of Rico’s homosocial (and perhaps homosexual) relationships to his economic success. Indeed, *Little Caesar* and the other films that make up the classical gangster cycle represent an inversion of the notion that romantic success leads to economic success that we have seen established in both the Hollywood cinema and the national culture. In these films heteronormative relationships become the harbinger of economic collapse for the protagonist.

Rico’s criminal career, and his life, is sacrificed at the altar of the heteronormative couple; Joe’s partner Olga convinces him to inform on Rico so that the two of them can be free of the gangster’s empire and pursue both their relationship and dancing career without his interference. Rico’s death in front of a billboard advertising the couple’s new dance revue emphasizes this point. As Rico dies the shot dissolves from his pained face to the billboard of the happy, smiling couple; the editing’s implication is clear: in order for the couple to thrive,

Rico must be destroyed. Put another way, unlike what we saw in the hobo films from Chapter Two, here the heteronormative couple brings the economic success of the protagonist to a screeching halt, subverting the capitalist ideal.

While neither Tom Powers of *The Public Enemy* or Tony Camonte of *Scarface* shun relationships with women in the same way as Rico, both embrace relationships that diverge from the norm of monogamous heteronormativity, and it is this departure that becomes linked with their successful careers in the gang. Throughout *The Public Enemy* Tommy exhibits an antagonistic attitude towards the concept of the monogamous heteronormative couple in general and women in particular. Tommy progresses from relationship to relationship throughout the film, and at one point it is stated that Tommy “isn’t the marrying type.” Indeed, his frustration with his first moll, Kitty, seems completely unprovoked. Tom tells his colleagues that he’s getting sick of her, but no real explanation is ever given, and when he slams a grapefruit in her face the act of violence is all the more shocking for its inexplicability. Indeed, this act seems to be as much about striking out at being in a relationship with *any* woman as it is about Kitty

herself. William Wellman explains that he was married to a woman at the time of filming who:

whenever we had an argument she had a wonderful way of handling it. This wonderful, beautiful face became like a sculpture. There was no movement in it at all, it just was beautiful and *dominant* [emphasis mine]. Just quiet. . . . And many a time when we had breakfast and we used to have grapefruit, I wanted to take that grapefruit and mash it in her face just to make her change just for a minute. (Schickel 209)

The implication in this statement is that this sequence represents for Wellman a symbolic striking out at feminine dominance in a relationship; the couple has become a constraint on Tommy’s economic growth, and having him shove the grapefruit in Kitty’s face before leaving her becomes a means of reasserting dominance.

Wellman's direction positions Tommy as antagonistic towards heteronormative coupling in more subtle ways as well. Unlike Tommy, Mac has become engaged to his moll, Mamie, but Tommy challenges this relationship, continually pulling Mac back into the homosocial world of the mob in the same way Rico tries to do with Joe in *Little Caesar*. Shortly after Mac becomes engaged to Mamie, Tommy interrupts them at a dance in order to get Mac to join him to kill a former associate of theirs. The shot composition positions Tommy as threatening the couple; Mac and Mamie are shot in a shallow focus two-shot while Tommy sits out of focus in the background. Tommy's face appears perfectly framed between the couple's chests, establishing him as a nearly literal wedge between the romantic couple. Later, it is Tommy's refusal to stay at the safe house that forces Mac to leave and get assassinated by the rival gang, thus permanently severing his union with Mamie.

Similarly, in *Scarface* Tony Camonte shuns permanent romantic relationships with women while at the same time disrupting those of his colleagues. While Tony shares Tommy's tendency to view women as status symbols more than partners (exhibited in the as when he refers to Poppy as "expensive"), Tony's refusal to form a couple stems from his implied incestuous relationship with his sister, Cesca. Tony is violently jealous of his sister's affections, and when he tells her it is his right to be protective since he is her brother she replies, "You don't act like it. You act more like . . . I don't know . . ." and later their mother seems to reinforce this more-than-brotherly interest, warning Cesca that "To him [Tony] you're just another girl," suggesting he views her as a potential sexual conquest.

Eventually Tony's attraction causes him to murder Cesca's husband. While Cesca initially plans to kill Tony in revenge, in the final scene she falls into her brother's arms and admits that she can't kill him, claiming that "you're me, and I'm you, and it's always been this way." When the police begin their final shoot out with Tony and Cesca, he tells her, "You're

here, that's all that matters." Their final blaze of glory shoot out with the police suggests a romantic couple making a last stand, and when Cesca dies in Tony's arms there is more than a little of the star-crossed lovers about them. Director Howard Hawks has admitted to placing the incestuous relationship there deliberately, stating that he told co-writer Ben Hecht "I've got an idea that the Borgia family is living in Chicago today. See, our Borgia is Al Capone, and his sister does the same incest thing as Lucretia Borgia" (McBride 47).

In many ways the classic gangster cycle represents an inversion of the linking of economic and romantic success (or failure) that we saw in Chapters One and Two. While the gangsters deviate from the socially acceptable pattern of the Hollywood romance in different ways, all of these figures subvert the concept of the heteronormative family that would become, as we have seen in the previous chapters, the bedrock social foundation of the New Deal programs. Just as we have seen that the collapse of the marriage and the family was connected to the economic collapse in the early Depression years, here we see gangsters openly flouting traditional sexuality. And yet for a time these gangsters are successful. If some have suggested that the gangster film is a glorification of the criminal lifestyle with a tacked-on moral lesson in the final reel, then perhaps the same can be said of these films' attitudes toward the rejection of the heteronormative couple; the films celebrate the freedom of such a rejection and suggest its economic possibilities while in the final reel condemning it in an appeal to placate the moral crusaders of the time.

Just as the reinforcement of traditional heteronormative gender roles was linked to economic success within the capitalist system in films such as *Corsair* and the hobo films mentioned in Chapter Two, the departure from acceptable sexual mores in the classical gangster cycle becomes linked with subversion of the capitalist system writ large. The collapse of the traditional family was seen as undermining capitalist stability; in his study of Chicago gangs,

Frederic Thrasher writes that “the most important agency in directing the spare-time activities of the boy is the family. In the under-privileged classes, family life in a large number of cases—either through neglect, misdirection, or suppression—fails to provide for or control the leisure-time behavior of the adolescent (79). Indeed, of the films in the classical gangster cycle the only father who is even seen is Tommy’s in *The Public Enemy*, and he appears in only one scene. Even here his silence, severity, and appearance in a policeman’s uniform identify him as more of an enforcer of the Law than a loving father figure. For the most part, the gangsters are raised by single mothers.

The collapse of the family implied by the gangster films of the early 1930s was connected to the collapse of another institution: business. Just as Thrasher argues that the gang functions as a surrogate family for the gangsters, it also functions as a surrogate business for those who had lost the opportunity for legitimate economic advancement due to the Depression. In *Corsair* we see John move from Corning’s Wall Street office to Big John’s Dockside office; in both rooms the man in charge sits at a desk, has a secretary to take minutes, and barks orders at his subordinates. However, John has chosen the office of the bootlegger over the banker because the former gives him a better opportunity for advancement and, ironically, a stronger moral center; John’s victims as a pirate and bootlegger are wealthy fellow criminals rather than poor widows and children. The status of gangster allows John to climb the social ladder while hurting only those who deserve it.

It is the promise of the social ladder that had been broken during the early years of the Great Depression, so it is no surprise that representations of the outlaw in culture begin to position themselves as an alternative model for economic advancement. If the Horatio Alger model of social mobility was no longer possible through legitimate labor, then criminality becomes an unofficially sanctioned means of bettering oneself. A number of scholars, including

Robert Pells in *Radical Visions and American Dreams*, have commented on the ways in which the gangster became, as Pells puts it “a parody of the American Dream” (271). He goes on to add, “In his longing to escape from the anonymous urban mass and impose his personality on events, in his ambition to eliminate the opposition and rise to the top, in his willingness to use any means no matter how aggressive or ruthless, in his disdain for the timid and conventional, in his insistence that he was merely a ‘businessman’ giving the public what it wanted, the criminal became a kind of psychopathic Horatio Alger” (271).

In *We’re In the Money: Depression America and Its Films*, Andrew Bergman goes so connects Rico in *Little Caesar* to one of the great American symbols of rising through the ranks via self-reliance and hard work, Andrew Carnegie. Specifically, Bergman argues that the values and advice Carnegie espoused in his speech, “The Road to Business Success: A Talk to Young Men” almost directly mirrors Rico’s strategy for success in the gang. For example, Bergman points to Carnegie’s admonition against alcohol, where he told young businessmen “the destroyer of most young men, is the drinking of liquor” (Carnegie 4); not only does Rico avoid drinking alcohol himself, but at the party thrown in his honor he chastises the men for getting drunk, telling them “I wish you boys wouldn’t get drunk and raise a lot of Cain because that’s the way a lot of birds get bumped off.” Just as drinking will prevent the businessman from being a success, it will also endanger the life of the gangster.

Carnegie went on to tell the audience “my advice to you is ‘aim high.’ I would not give a fig for the young man who does not already see himself the partner or the head of an important firm. . . . Say each to yourself, ‘My place is at the top.’ *Be King in your dreams* [emphasis in the original]” (2), and that “the prime condition of success, the great secret [is] concentrate your energy, thought, and capital exclusively upon the business in which you are engaged” (18). Rico takes this advice to heart; from his introductory scene where he jealously dreams of being

honored like “Diamond” Pete Montana and being in “a big town, doing things in a big way,” Rico imagines himself as the head of a large criminal organization, and, as we have seen above, is uninterested in any non-gang related activities, an attitude partially responsible for his scorn at Joe Massara’s dreams of romance and becoming a dancer. For Rico, as for Carnegie’s young businessman, advancement in the organization is all that matters.<sup>9</sup>

Yet there is a bitterness and jealousy present in the gangster genre that runs counter to the Horatio Alger-spirit of Carnegie’s advice. In his seminal piece on the gangster genre, “The Gangster as Tragic Hero,” Robert Warshow comments on the ways in which the genre embraces brutality as the central component of the gangster’s career; he writes, “Since we do not see the rational and routine aspects of the gangster’s behavior, the practice of brutality—the quality of unmixed criminality—becomes the totality of his career” (579). Far from the world of Horatio Alger and Andrew Carnegie where hard work, confidence, and perseverance were all one needed in order to succeed, in the post-Crash world of the gangster only the most brutal would survive and thrive. But more than a senseless brutality, the early Depression-era gangster focuses his brutality largely upon the wealthy and his superiors; he is, in other words, a socially mobile class warrior first and foremost.

In his reading of *Little Caesar* Gerald Peary remarks that it is Rico’s ruthless brutality towards his bosses that sets him apart from the cinematic gangsters who came before him. He writes, “Rico is the first to step on his bosses—Vettori, Arnie Lorch, ‘Diamond Pete’ Montana—and over them, on the way to the top, until he has earned the title of Boss himself” (294). And Rico is not alone; of the three other gangsters discussed above, two of them, Tony Camonte and Tom Powers, kill at least one of their former bosses. *Scarface* opens with Camonte killing Big Louis Costillo so that he and his immediate supervisor, Johnny Lovo, can take over the South Side of Chicago; later, Camonte kills Lovo and takes over the South Side for himself. Similarly,



a scene in *The Public Enemy* has Powers and Mac killing Putty Nose, their former boss and a small-time crook who exploited their thievery when they were children and cheated them out of their earnings. While Johnny does not kill his boss in *Corsair*, he does steal from and blackmail him, thus earning a financial if not physical victory over him. Even here though, the boss is set up as the narrative's villain who must be defeated if the protagonist is to succeed.

So while there is something to Bergman's claims that the gangster figure represented a re-interpretation of the myth of the self-made man, the character is far more subversive. In Carnegie's speech he tells the graduates, "They [unsuccessful young businessmen] also insist that their employers disliked brighter intelligences than their own, and were disposed to discourage aspiring genius, and delighted in keeping young men down. There is nothing in this" (17). All of the gangster protagonists in these films experience a boss who is intimidated by his underlings' intelligence and maintains jealous control over the organization, restricting his subordinates' ability to advance. In *Little Caesar*, Vettori, Rico's first boss, angrily lashes out at Rico for trying to plan the nightclub heist without his input. After establishing his dominance within the gang, Vettori presents his own plan, making a point of childishy insisting that the plan was developed by "I, Sam Vettori, not you Rico or nobody else; that's plain, ain't it." Immediately after which Rico points to the plans, identifying something that his boss had overlooked, thus establishing his intellectual superiority to Vettori and reinforcing the notion that the boss's anger stems from insecurity and jealousy rather than good business sense. Contrary to Carnegie's advice, and the good advice to self-made men who wish to advance, sometimes the boss is just out to get his intelligent, hard-working employees.

This pettiness is nowhere more evident than in *Scarface* where Johnny Lovo attempts to have Camonte killed out of fear that he is overstepping his bounds and may rise up to lead the organization. In the post-Crash world of the early 1930s, business was no longer perceived as a

realm in which noble capitalists created a space in which hard-working men could both prove their masculinity and make their fortune; instead it was dominated by selfish, petty misers, jealously guarding their fortunes and keeping the working-classes down in the process. *National Board of Review Magazine's* review of *The Public Enemy* explicitly tied corrupt bosses in business to the gangster genre, arguing that "Until they [gangster films] admit, for instance, that some of our largest and most respectable fortunes are founded on racketeering as essentially anti-social and iniquitous as Al Capone's, they will get nowhere near a diagnosis of what this hugely head-lined evil really is" (Hamilton 8).

And yet while the gangster film may not have directly confronted the iniquity of American business (at least outside of the rare case, such as *Corsair*), the films certainly subverted the formula for self-made manhood espoused by Carnegie and Alger. Furthermore, while they suggested that economic advancement was now only possible via criminality, they opened up the possibility of rising to the top not only for the working classes but also for non-Anglo ethnicities. All of the gangsters in these films are coded as working class and all but one, Johnny in *Corsair*, are immigrants as well.

The conflation of ethnicity and class has a long history in America in general, and the Depression era was no exception. Todd DePastino writes of how vaudevillian performers playing tramps on stage would put on burnt cork make-up, similar to black-face minstrel performers, in order "to portray countercultural lower-class whiteness" (156). Just as the tramp and the union figures were coded as not truly white or American, the gangster figure was frequently identified with his foreignness. While *Little Caesar* and *The Public Enemy* each code their protagonists as working-class ethnics in both manner of speech and, in Rico's case, the introductory scene in which he eats a spaghetti dinner, *Scarface* is the most obvious with its conflation of ethnicity, class, and criminality. Not only is the accent Paul Muni affects in the

film the most egregious of Italian caricatures, but during a scene added by the censors without director Howard Hawks' input, a newspaper editor delivers an anti-immigrant jeremiad to angry citizens, telling them to "Put teeth in the deportation act. These gangsters don't belong in this country; half of them aren't even citizens." Hollywood was not alone in casting the gang problem in an ethnic, un-American light. Thrasher argues, "Chicago has the character of a vast cultural frontier—a common meeting place for the divergent and antagonistic peoples of the earth. Traditional animosities are often carried over into gangs and color many of their conflicts in Chicago" (194). Similar to the ways in which we saw outsiders and foreign radicals blamed for the radical labor movements of the era, here these same outsiders are blamed for urban criminality.

And just as the foreign threat of the politicized union was greater due to its collective nature, the gangs of the 1930s represented a threatening group of non-natives working for their own self-interest. In some ways these gangs can be viewed as a fraternal organization, or even a union; a place where mostly working-class, ethnic men gather together, form a network, and work collectively to succeed. While most scholarship on the gangster genre argues that the gangster figure is the self-made man and individualist *par excellence*, there is something to be said for the ways in which the gang itself is portrayed as a sort of ethnic collective, an arena in which working-class non-Anglos can climb an economic ladder via the criminal syndicate. The Palermo Club of *Little Caesar* bears a striking resemblance to a fraternal order; when Rico is given his celebratory dinner at the club the club's crest hangs prominently in the background, bearing a symbol not dissimilar to that of the Freemasons, and a slogan, "Friendship, Loyalty," that suggests the brotherhood inherent in such orders and labor unions. Kimmel points out that such organizations enjoyed a surge in membership during the 1920s, and frequently came under critique for their collective cliquishness (195-96); Devere Allen questioned, "Is it a healthy thing

when so many Americans have to satisfy the normal craving for brotherhood by banding together on a basis which ineradicably mingles loyalty to one's own group with superiority and sometimes hostility to one's next door neighbor of another color, creed, or nationality" (75), suggesting an inherent fear of the fraternal order as a potentially divisive collective.

The gangsters in *Scarface* also use a fraternal order as their headquarters, the First Ward Social Club, and here the organization's status as a collective used to further the economic interests of its members is stated even more clearly. When Johnny Lovo and Tony Camonte take the gang from Big Louis, Lovo tells them, "We're going to get organized. . . . Running beer ain't a nickel game anymore, it's a business, and I'm gonna run it like a business" to which one of the gangsters replies, "Swell! We've been cutting each other's throats long enough." Just as was popular in union and labor rhetoric of the time, the working-class gang recognizes it is stronger together than individually, and that the collective of the gang offers the individual working-class gangster an opportunity for advancement that he could not possibly get on his own in Depression-era America.

It is this focus upon working-class collective advancement that positions the early gangster films as subversive texts in the early years of the Depression. Yes, on some level the gangster represents the rugged individualism so important to American culture and, coming to prominence as a genre post-Crash, symbolizes a reactionary turn during a time of crisis, an attempt to revitalize the American traditions whose degradation was blamed for the collapse. Yet one cannot ignore the ways in which such films promised economic advancement for the working-class male and social mobility through collective action. Jeremy Reed is specifically talking about *Scarface* but he could easily be referring to any of the aforementioned gangster films when he says it "depicts an ethnic outsider constantly moving beyond his defined place in the social order and so pushing, shaping, and destabilizing society" (91). These films suggest a

new set of rules for American enterprise; a set of guidelines not set by the Andrew Carnegies or the other capitalists, but by the millions of working-class men seeking an equitable path to prosperity; in some ways the gangs of Rico, Camonte, and Powers can be viewed as a nascent workers' revolution.

The subversiveness of these films is exacerbated when one considers the ways in which these films were thinly veiled biopics; both *Scarface* and *Little Caesar* were secret histories of the rise of Al Capone. J.E. Smyth argues that such films should be read as biopics, and that their focus upon criminal figures emphasizes the breakdown of the myth of self-made manhood in the early Depression years. He writes:

As their production histories and reception attest, these films, in particular *The Public Enemy* and *Scarface*, were constructed as histories of postwar America, reinterpretations of the nationalist tendencies of traditional historiography and the canon of American "heroes." The structures of historical film could narrate the lives of both Abraham Lincoln and Al Capone. (558)

The perceived danger here is in the purpose of the biography. As Lowenthal observed in his aforementioned study of the popular biography, the "unbroken confidence in the opportunities open to every individual serves as the leitmotiv of the biographies. . . . They are written—at least ideologically—for someone who the next day may try to emulate the man whom he has just envied" (293). Put another way, just as a biography on the life of Abraham Lincoln may be seen as a model for an individual born into poverty to achieve great success, the gangster film-as-biopic provides a model for subversive success and indicates skepticism towards the American Dream. While the biopic would experience a resurgence in the latter half of the decade, after the implementation of the New Deal, in the early years of the Depression a narrative of social mobility without criminality would have struck the audience as false.

The later “Great Men” biopics would even borrowed some of the same talent; by the early 1940s Paul Muni would star in several such films (*The Story of Louis Pasteur* (1936), *The Life of Emile Zola* (1937), and *Juarez* (1939)), James Cagney would portray patriotic song-and-dance man George M. Cohan in *Yankee Doodle Dandy* (1942), and Edward G. Robinson would play Dr. Paul Ehrlich in *Dr. Ehrlich’s Magic Bullet* (1940). But whereas these were respectable self-made men, the likes of Rico and Tony Camonte are working-class thugs who broke free of their prescribed place in society and rose to economic success through a collective of other working-class ethnic men.

While the gangster film had long been a controversial genre, with regional censorship and stricter enforcement of the Production Code the genre seemed officially dead. While scholarship of the censorship and morality crusades against the gangster genre typically focuses upon their violence or the ways in which they make law enforcement look corrupt or incompetent, there is perhaps something to be said for the fact that this outrage stemmed just as much from the genre’s subversion in portraying figures of working-class resistance in the same manner as more respectable historical figures. Even during the era of the classical gangster cycle before strict enforcement of the Production Code, groups such as the Catholic Legion of Decency as well as local and state censoring boards put pressure on the film industry to take the bite out of these potentially subversive films. Lee Server illustrates some of the concerns these groups had, apart from the obvious violence inherent in the genre:

Some believed the guardians of the establishment feared the inspiring influence of the anarchic screen gangster on audiences embittered by the Great Depression; films about characters taking what they wanted or needed by force—and doing it in flashy clothes—were seen as dangerously heating up an already simmering citizenry. (31)

The problem was that these films represented working-class protagonists who challenged the capitalist order and, for a time at least, succeeded. Nothing illustrates this preoccupation with containing working-class revolutionary sentiments better than the production history of Howard Hawks' *Scarface*. While completed in 1930, ongoing conflicts between the censors and producer Howard Hughes prevented the film from being released until 1932. One of the sticking points was the ending; in the original script Camonte was meant to go out in a blaze of glory, resisting the police and the state until his death. In *Hollywood Censored: Morality Codes, Catholics, and the Movies*, Gregory Black writes:

The film's conclusion had given viewers a totally unrepentant "Scarface": Trapped in his apartment, Tony is bombarded with police tear gas and bullets to no effect; not until the entire building is set on fire does he come out, but with his guns blazing, not crawling and begging for mercy. Despite being hit by several police bullets, he manages to come face to face with the copper who has dogged him through the entire film. Tony raises his gun and pulls the trigger. Only a "click" is heard: His gun is empty. The policeman raises his gun and fires a fatal volley into Tony. As he goes down for the last time, the script called for the audience to hear, "click, click, click" as Tony attempts to fire his gun. (*Hollywood* 125-26)

In the ending actually shot, and the one most commonly seen with the film today, Tony cowers before the policemen when they enter his apartment, begging them for mercy before trying to run away, getting shot as he attempts his escape. Even this ending, however, was not enough for several censor boards at the time, and a new ending was shot as well. Hawks remarked "they told me to make another ending. Paul Muni wasn't there, so I had to make an ending without the star. I used feet, a hangman's noose, everything to say that he was hung" (McBride 45).<sup>10</sup> While much focus is generally placed upon the fact that the Production Code demanded criminals to be

punished for their actions, what really mattered was the way in which enemies were punished. All three of these endings result in Tony being killed for his crimes, but in the first he is able to go out resisting the state, and while the second portrays him as a coward, he is still shot while resisting arrest. However, in the third ending Tony is captured and legally executed by the state; not only does the rule of law and order prevail as it can be said to have done in the previous endings, but here the *process* of law and order prevails as well. Working-class resistance to the state has been contained by the legal mechanisms of the state itself.

While increased censorship and a more rigidly enforced Production Code are typically blamed for the disappearance of the gangster film, some scholars, such as Robert Sklar in *City Boys*, have claimed that a changing social climate including the end of Prohibition and the lightening of the Depression's severity played a role as well. He argues that the loss of topicality played a role as well, for while the most notorious criminals of the first years of the decade were the immigrant gangsters, by 1934 they "were Midwestern bank robbers with old-stock American names: John Dillinger, Clyde Barrow and Bonnie Parker, 'Baby Face' Nelson and 'Pretty Boy' Floyd" (63).

But if the censors had convinced Hollywood that the gangster genre must reinforce the state's ability to contain classed resistance to the capitalist order, then it is just as likely that the rise of the New Deal, a major expansion of federal authority, played a role in the shift as well. By the mid-1930s the gangster genre as it had existed in the early 1930s had been replaced by the emergence of the G-Man cycle of films.

The New Deal signaled an important shift in government control of business; rugged individualism was to be replaced not with working-class collectivism (a hybrid of which we saw in the gangster cycle of films), but by a carefully controlled state that ensured the perpetuation of capitalism, not its overthrow. According to Claire Bond Potter in *War on Crime: Bandits, G-*



*Men, and the Politics of Mass Culture*, the war on crime should be viewed as part of the New Deal's efforts to expand federal power into matters that were once considered local or state issues. She writes, "apart from the economic reforms, "the omnibus crime bill, which was passed by Congress in May and June 1934, epitomized another type of legislation that produced a centralized state apparatus after World War I" (1). In some ways the New Deal's war on crime established a national collective around the ideal of law enforcement, creating the sense that the public was participating in a large, collective effort to end crime. Claire Bond Potter explains that "the creation of this public was a routine feature of New Deal state making and was integral to the department's enhanced role as a part of that emerging, interventionist state" (136).

But this state collectivization should be seen as a replacement for, and in some ways antagonistic to, the working-class collectivism the nation saw in organized labor, or the ethnic working-class collectives we saw represented on screen in the gangster film. Anna Siomopoulos is correct when she states that "the intended effect of referring to 'one-third of a nation ill-housed, ill-clad, ill-nourished' in his [Roosevelt's] second inaugural address was to construct the nation as a single whole and to demand sympathy from the implied well-off two-thirds for their impoverished countrymen" (*Hollywood* 63), but she stops short of exploring the ways in which FDR was attempting to unify, or collectivize, the American public. If the ill-housed, ill-clad, ill-nourished third of the nation was part of the same collective as the well off, then the nation's public becomes rhetorically redefined as a classless whole. Put another way, the potentially revolutionary collectives of organized crime, hobo armies, or labor unions become reabsorbed by the body politic as members of one giant nationalized collective directed by the paternalistic New Deal state.<sup>11</sup>

By the end of the decade the class threat of the outlaw figure would be contained even further. More stringent enforcement of the Production Code meant that by the mid-1930s the

individualist gangster had been replaced by the G-Man. These films, which often featured the same stars made famous by the gangster cycle (such as Robinson and Cagney), were thinly-veiled attempts to portray the violence and excitement of the gangster genre while avoiding acquisitions that the industry was glorifying crime. William Troy sarcastically notes in his review of the film that "It is only by the merest coincidence that the featured player of the first in this new series, 'G Men,' is the well-remembered hero of 'Public Enemy' and other unsavory classics of an older and less regenerate day" (694); the change in protagonists, in other words, did not fool the viewers.

It is my contention that pieces of the gangster genre, namely the masculine outlaw rebelling against an unjust social order, were translated into another genre of the mid- and late-1930s: the period bandit film. In addition to issues with censorship, part of the generic shift can be explained by the change in zeitgeist from frustration with the Hoover era to a renewed sense of hope with the New Deal era led to a change in the respective genres' popularity. In the period bandit genre Hollywood would not only displace the fight for social justice onto the past and into a foreign milieu, but would also declass the protagonists and remove much of their sexual nonconformity. Whereas the gangsters and their spiritual successors the G-Men were working-class men who managed to succeed in the capitalist world while for the most part shunning the traditional heteronormative romance, the bandits of the latter part of the decade were temporarily impoverished aristocrats who were fighting not to overturn the social hierarchy, but to reclaim their rightful place within it, and the romance subplot of these films carried as much weight as their crusades for social justice. Put another way, these new outlaws sought the same path of national renewal (not revolution) through the re-establishment of the heteronormative couple that was embraced by the New Deal order.

Of course some of the shift from the gangster to the period outlaw had to do with the shifting demographics of the nation's public enemies. After the end of Prohibition the people no longer mythologized the criminal as self-made man, but instead turned to poor rural bandits such as Bonnie and Clyde, Pretty Boy Floyd, and John Dillinger. Newspaper and magazine articles from 1933-1934 rapidly shifted their content accordingly, covering the daring exploits of these robbers rather than "businessmen" like Capone. If Capone and his ilk were comparable to the likes of Carnegie and Rockefeller, the new gangsters were reminiscent of the heroes of the Wild West. Writing of Floyd after his death in 1934, the *New York Times* wrote, "he became a myth, as well as a man. He was likened more and more to the lawless 'heroes' of the old West" ("Floyd" 2); similarly, writing of John Dillinger's bold escape from prison in 1934, the *New York Times* commented, "John Dillinger, notorious bank robber and murderer, walked out of the heavily guarded and supposedly escape-proof Lake County jail this morning in a daring escape that rivals the exploits of the heroes of Wild West thrillers" ("Dillinger" 1). Even when the press wasn't making direct reference to Western outlaws when covering these bandits' exploits, the rhetoric clearly evoked frontier banditry. Writing of Bonnie and Clyde, a 1934 *Atlanta Constitution* article reads, "Riding at break-neck speed over the side roads in the Oklahoma-Kansas-Missouri border section, the outlaws successfully dodged scores of officers and national guardsmen after the shooting near Commerce, Okla." ("Barrow" 11A); the rhetoric here calls to mind the legendary outlaws of the west, riding on horseback to rob a stagecoach and escape, once again linking the current bandits to outlaw heroes such as Jesse James.

While there is some debate as to whether or not local communities supported outlaw bands as much as history and the contemporary press would have us believe, there is little question that the mass media of the era was more than eager to elevate these figures into legends.<sup>12</sup> Their daring exploits, particularly their escapes, were celebrated by the press, as were

their fantastic feats, even when almost certainly apocryphal. One popular story from 1933 about Pretty Boy Floyd that appeared in, among numerous other outlets, *The Washington Post*, reported that a pilot claimed he had met:

Floyd and two other men in San Diego and agreeing to act as pilot in a kidnaping [*sic*] in which a movie actress, now in the middle of a picture production, was to be the victim.

Officers quoted the flier as saying the actress was to be kidnaped [*sic*] at midnight tonight from her Malibu home, loaded into a fast plane which he was to rent, flown to an isolated spot in the mountains in Mexico and held there until producers of her picture paid a \$250,000 ransom. ("Movie" 3)

This plot parallels episodes from countless westerns and the lives of other periods' outlaw heroes who frequently absconded with women of wealth and station as part of proving their manhood. In this way Floyd is not so different from the pirate captains and bandits such as Robin Hood and Zorro who frequently kidnapped noblewomen in the films that would come in the latter half of the 1930s.

Apart from their daring exploits, these rural bandits were also celebrated as noble heroes and defenders of the poor. Pretty Boy Floyd was doubtlessly the most celebrated champion of the working classes, eventually immortalized by Woody Guthrie's "The Ballad of Pretty Boy Floyd" in 1939. Richard E. Meyer recounts how "A common story about Floyd concerns his alleged practice of deliberately taking the time—usually at great risk to himself—to burn the unrecorded mortgages kept in the vaults of the banks he was plundering" (97). Several articles of the time echoed Floyd's charitable nature towards the poor; *The Washington Post* writes in 1934, "Throughout eastern Oklahoma and at Sallisaw, where he was born, Floyd reputedly would give part of his loot to indigent hill people, who, in turn, gave him shelter," and that a

woman who gave Floyd his last meal said, "He ate it like he really enjoyed it and then he gave me \$1. I didn't want to take it but he said the dinner was fit for a king and I must take it, so I did" ("Woman" 7). Even Clyde Barrow was occasionally written about in these terms. A *New York Times* article from 1934 states that after stealing a woman's car for an escape, Barrow freed her and "gave her \$30 and told her to have her 'car fixed up'" ("2 Officers" 5). While the outlaw might sometimes use the poor for his own ends, unlike the banker or businessman he always compensated them fairly for their trouble.

Veracity aside, the narrative that the poor who helped the outlaw bandit would be fairly rewarded was repeated again and again, not only establishing the bandits as noble outlaws in the Robin Hood tradition of stealing from the rich to give to the poor, but also functioning as a counterpoint to the grim capitalist realities of the Depression; if the self-made gangsters of the Prohibition era provided a parallel criminal alternative to capitalist success, the rural bandits threatened to replace it entirely with a more socialistic system in which money was transferred forcibly from the haves to the have-nots. These narratives obviously carried within them great subversive potential, emphasized by the fact that unlike men like Capone, who rose from poverty but eventually became indistinguishable from the Captains of Industry, outlaws like Barrow and Floyd were poor men who remained champions of the poor until their deaths. Indeed, their indigence was doubtless responsible for some of their popularity; as Claire Bond Potter points out, "the fascination with Bonnie and Clyde had expanded to take up cultural space that the poor rarely occupied" (97). The poor, in the guise of these bandit heroes, were given valuable media attention as being not only poor rebels but the only ones willing to help the poor and helpless when the state and capitalists failed them.

This was potentially dangerous and subversive ground for hegemonic capitalism because if the people started worshipping bandits with socialist philosophies rather than the capitalist

criminals of the Prohibition era they might openly rebel themselves. For while the self-made gangster was a poor man who managed to succeed through criminality, he at least adhered to the values of the capitalist system, while the rural bandit attacked them. Perhaps not coincidentally, Brian Taves marks the second adventure film cycle (the first occurring in the 1920s, largely thanks to Douglas Fairbanks) as kicking off in 1934, the year of the deaths of John Dillinger, Bonnie and Clyde, and Pretty Boy Floyd, with the release of *Treasure Island*, *The Lost Patrol*, and *The Count of Monte Cristo*. While there were subversive elements in these films in the form of rebel outlaws such as Long John Silver and Edmond Dantes/*The Count of Montecristo*, for the most part these films would contain the outlaw's subversive potential by rewriting their narratives as ones of renewal of the traditional political and economic systems rather than revolution.

Unlike the gangster figures from the films earlier in the decade, or the real life rural bandits of the time, the outlaws in films such as Michael Curtiz's *Captain Blood* (1935) and *The Adventures of Robin Hood* (1939) and Rouben Mamoulian's *The Mark of Zorro* (1940) recast the bandit as a former aristocrat or middle-class artisan who has temporarily lost his station due to a specific unjust ruler. Rather than becoming tales of subversive social mobility like their gangster predecessors, or a revolt against the capitalist system as a whole like their real life contemporaries, the bandits in these films were fighting a temporary fight against a temporary usurper, and once that fight was won they would return to their place within the system; in keeping with the New Deal spirit there would be no social mobility and no revolution. As Anna Siomopoulos points out, "class mobility was seen as a threat to the American way; class rise was the mirror image of impoverishment in that the former was vilified as the latter was feared" ("I" 7).

The bandits in the cycle of 1930s adventure films owe far more to E.J. Hobsbawm's concepts of the "Social Bandit" and "Primitive Rebel" than to the politicized narratives that sprang up around Floyd and his contemporaries. In his seminal works covering the outlaw bandit in folklore, *Primitive Rebels* and *Bandits*, Hobsbawm refers to the ideology of the outlaw bandit as a kind of "revolutionary traditionalism" (*Primitive* 28), arguing that:

even in backward and traditional bandit societies, the social brigand appears only before the poor have reached political consciousness or acquired more effective methods of social agitation. . . . For social banditry, though a protest, is a modest and unrevolutionary protest. It protests not against the fact that peasants are poor and oppressed, but against the fact that they are sometimes excessively poor and oppressed. (*Primitive* 24)

Put another way, the bandit hero of folklore can best be read not as a rebel who challenges injustices of the capitalist system as a whole, but instead focuses his rebellion upon individuals rather than the state or the capitalist system; he is a warrior without class consciousness. While the outlaw by definition operates outside of the law, he does not engage in any activity meant to change the law; indeed, for Hobsbawm one of the defining characteristics of the outlaw bandit is that "he is not the enemy of the king or emperor, who is the fount of justice, but only of the local gentry, clergy or other oppressors" (*Bandits* 43). Just as Hollywood film had a tendency to relocate systemic critiques onto individual characters, so too did the outlaw bandit folklore tradition.

In contrast to Hobsbawm's take, Brian Taves views the adventure genre in film as highly political and revolutionary, specifically as echoing the spirit of the American Revolution. He argues that "a political consciousness underlies all of these activities; the plots of these films follow a pattern of despotism, subversion, and the establishment of a government system to

protect the rights of its citizens” (xi), and that “[t]he swashbuckling hero typically spearheads a popular revolt against a tyrannical pretender . . . power alternates between the forces of change and the status quo until the conflict eventually gives birth to a new era of freedom” (16).

Yet swashbucklers in the 1930s such as *Captain Blood*, *The Adventures of Robin Hood*, and *The Mark of Zorro* did not end with a “new” era of freedom; on the contrary, while the narratives of these films did illustrate certain democratic values they all had at their center an aristocratic (or in the case of *Captain Blood*, bourgeois) hero to which the underclasses look for unquestioned leadership, and they all end not in a popular uprising or mass action, but in the re-establishment of the proper hierarchy. The heroes of these films do not represent a collectivized threat to the capitalist hegemony but are rather temporary disruptions against very specific unjust actors.

Michael Curtiz’s *Captain Blood*, the earliest of these three films, perhaps best illustrates the apoliticism (or at least non-revolutionarism) of the cinematic swashbuckler. When the film begins Blood (Errol Flynn) is a doctor in seventeenth-century England during the time of the Duke of Monmouth’s rebellion against King James II. While fighting is erupting throughout the city, Blood is in the safety of his own home, having refused to take sides during the war because Monmouth would likely be as bad a king as James. Though neutral during the fighting, Blood is summoned to care for the wounded rebels and is arrested and put on trial for aiding the enemy. While he claims that his “business was with his [the rebel’s] wounds, not his politics,” he is found guilty and sentenced to a life of slavery in Port Royal, Jamaica.

The representation of the island in the film is the epitome of oppressive capitalism; the slaves become tools for the industrial interests of the island, and even the freemen frequently find themselves oppressed by the burdens of debt and forced labor. As Julian Savage puts it, “Port Royal is governed by the ineffectual Governor Steed (George Hassell), who complains



more of his gout than enacts the duties of his office. The island is controlled by the mine and plantation owners” (Savage 3). An early scene establishes the governor’s indifference; when one of the slaves attempts escape, he is captured and beaten in public. He is then branded with the letters “FT,” for “Fugitive Traitor,” on his cheek, shot in close-up as he looks off towards screen right. The image dissolves to a close-up of the governor looking screen-left, at first suggesting he is looking at the tortured slave, and saying, “What a cruel shame that any man is made to suffer so.” The camera then pans down to show the governor’s bandaged foot and he complains of his “beastly gout.” The visuals make it clear that the governor is so wrapped up in his own concerns and pains that he is completely unaware of those of his subjects. Later, during the trial of Honesty Nuttall, a debtor, the accused remarks that he didn’t pay off his debts because he had no money but the island’s indifferent governor sentences him to forced labor until he pays off his debts. The visual construction of the scene emphasizes the governor’s coldness towards his subjects’ plight. He sits on an ornate chair fanning himself, his back to the camera, alienating to the audience, ruling, “Well if it’s for debt don’t annoy me with such petty things; order him to work it off.”

Because of a legitimate authority that is indifferent to the people’s suffering, eventually Blood and his fellow slaves must take matters into their own hands by stealing a Spanish ship to escape the island and become pirates. On some level, their actions seem to imply a radical class-based collective’s rebellion against the capitalist order; not only do they claim to be taking ownership of their own labor, no longer alienated via the pointless tasks assigned by their masters, but their freedom from the system of oppression is initiated by an act of violence against their former master and torturer, Colonel Bishop, when they throw him overboard, echoing the manifestation of class conflict in the killing of the gangster’s bosses in the films mentioned above. Additionally, the group agrees to form a “brotherhood of buccaneers” and

create a series of articles that include rules such as “sharing alike in fortune and in trouble,” that “all monies and valuables [should be] lumped together in a common fund, first to fit, rig, and provision the ship, after that recompense for wounds” with penalties for men who conceal treasure from other men. At first glance the pirate ship seems to be the perfect socialist society, where wealth is shared, the community welfare is provided for, and a crude universal health insurance policy is offered.

Yet the slaves stop short of overthrowing the class hierarchy that is intrinsic to the capitalist system itself. In his analysis of the swashbuckler film, Richard E. Bond provides an analysis of the ideal hierarchical relationship visually suggested by the film: “Blood’s placement on the upper deck suggests a power relationship, as does the shot-reverse shot used to reinforce the visual perspectives of the film’s subjects. Curtiz’s shot selections demonstrate that the pirate vessel is firmly under Blood’s command” (313). This is a solid analysis, and Bond is correct that visually Curtiz establishes Blood’s dominance over the crew, but he ignores the most important fact of this scene’s construction. The scene he is referring to, where crewmembers turn a wheel in order to lift the ship’s anchor, directly parallels an earlier scene where the same men, as slaves, turn a water wheel on Colonel Bishop’s plantation. In the original scene the men are shot from a high angle, emphasizing their powerlessness under Bishop’s rule, and work under the beat of a slow, ominous drum. In contrast, the scene aboard ship is shot at eye level and the men are singing joyfully as they turn the wheel. Most important of all is the change in foremen; in the original scene a man with long black hair and a white hat marches beside the men, whipping them in order to ensure they keep up the pace; in the scene aboard ship Blood, with long blonde hair and a black hat, mirrors the original, cruel foreman as he shouts orders to the men turning the wheel. The hierarchy of the capitalist system has not changed; the men are still working class, performing virtually the same duties, and are still taking orders from a

middle-class foreman, but they are now being treated fairly. They still have a master, but he is now a kind rather than cruel one.

Indeed, when the crew rebels slightly against Blood's rule, telling him that they will not return to Jamaica when he orders them to, he steps down as captain, telling them that he is clearly no longer in command. The men quickly renege on their demands and agree that they will follow him wherever he wishes to go. The message is clear—not only is the pirate crew not a revolutionary collective bent on class warfare, they are radically opposed to a more democratic form of leadership; acquiescence to the capitalist hierarchy is encoded as loyalty. At the end of the film even Blood proves willing to rejoin his place within the system's hierarchy. When informed that William of Orange has replaced James II during the Glorious Revolution, Blood dutifully accepts a commission in the royal navy and patriotically battles the French forces attacking Port Royal. Even Blood has no desire to challenge the monarchy or capitalism, but only seeks a more just master; his battle is a temporary one against an unfit ruler, not a system.

*The Adventures of Robin Hood* paints a nearly identical portrait of a working-class collective guided by an aristocrat who seeks a restoration of fair treatment under the traditional economic and political system rather than radical revolution. Once again, in New Deal fashion Robin and his Merry Men set the tone of a socialist society of equal workers. Like the slaves/pirates of *Captain Blood*, the Merry Men start out the film as an exploited working class; during the montage sequence that shows the word being passed around to meet Robin at Gallows Oak, the oppressed Saxons, represented as working class, stand in contrast to the wealthy Normans, led by Prince John, in Nottingham Castle. Even more importantly, the Saxons are shown performing labor (blacksmithing, laboring, farming) whereas John, the Sheriff of Nottingham, and Sir Guy of Gisbourne are displayed at leisure, a clear demarcation between the industrious working classes and parasitic capital.

Later a direct parallel to working-class oppression of the 1930s is illustrated when Robin shows Marian the suffering of those in Sherwood Forrest. After showing Marian and Robin in medium close-up the camera cuts to a point-of-view shot from their perspective showing the forgotten men and women of Sherwood; the camera pans slowly over the suffering, and then cuts once again to a long shot that tracks as the couple walks through the medieval flophouse. The scene here clearly parallels those from numerous forgotten man films of the era and is not that dissimilar from the numerous shelters Sullivan tours in *Sullivan's Travels*. As in *Captain Blood*, the suffering of the Saxons is coded as a class-based suffering through its parallel to the suffering of contemporary working-class Americans.

The villains too are much more concerned with contemporary capitalist concerns, i.e. squeezing money out of the lower classes for their own enrichment, than they are with protecting any medieval notions of noble authority or divine right; as Kevin Harty points out in his analysis of the film, Prince John and his minions are essentially "Medieval predecessors of the industrialists and bankers of the Depression, the Normans have one simple motivation: greed" (92). And, when Robin establishes his collective of forest outlaws he speaks with the same class-based language that would not be out of place in an FDR speech appealing to care for the impoverished one-third of a nation. Upon the group's establishment at Gallows Oak he makes them:

swear to despoil the rich only to give to the poor; to shelter the old and the helpless; to protect all women, rich or poor, Norman or Saxon; swear to fight for a free England, to protect her loyally until the return of our King and sovereign Richard the Lionheart; and swear to fight to the death against our oppressors.

Later, when Robin unknowingly robs King Richard (who is travelling incognito) he tells the King to "hand it [his purse] to me and if it weighs more than a just amount then I'll share it with

those who have less.” Robin is, in many ways, instituting a policy of taxation and wealth redistribution as a more equitable counter to the regressive taxing policies of the Norman rulers, very much in the spirit of the New Deal. Indeed, a number of the film’s contemporary reviews emphasized the connection between Robin’s fight in twelfth-century England and the New Deal coalition’s fight in the present day. James Dugan went so far as to compare Robin to FDR in the leftist *New Masses*, rhetorically asking "Didn't an inspired New York schoolboy a few weeks ago choose Robin Hood as his favorite hero because he robbed the rich and gave to the poor 'just like President Roosevelt'?" (29).

And, as in *Captain Blood*, parallelism is used to establish the difference between the just collective of the greenwood and the unjust leadership of the castle. In her analysis of the film Ina Rae Hark focuses on the visual politics of the film and how they applied to the contemporary 1930s setting. For Hark the essential difference between the visual representation of the Normans and the Saxons is that the Normans are typically aligned horizontally, representing stasis, whereas the Saxons are portrayed to emphasize movement and disruption (9). She goes on to elaborate that this disruption should not be read as endorsing anarchy (or, I would add, working-class revolution), but rather as emphasizing John’s illegitimacy as the proper ruler. She writes that “the camera most often rests on him after descending from a higher angle, as if to emphasize the vacancy at the top” (14). In particular, just as the oppressive labor sequence on the plantation in *Captain Blood* is filmed from a high angle, the banquet sequence in Nottingham castle is filmed from above, emphasizing not only the order Hark points out, but also the coldness and indifference of the Norman hierarchy; the later feast in Sherwood, in comparison, is shot largely at eye level. Additionally, whereas in the greenwood dinner Robin sits at a table organized in a rectangular pattern with other tables, suggesting an equality between Robin and

his guests, in the castle's banquet Prince John's ornate table is raised on a platform above the crowd.

As Hark argues, while not placed on a raised platform above his subjects like Prince John, Robin is frequently granted a height advantage over his subjects in the greenwood, at one point even standing on top of the dinner table to tower over his men, whereas John is frequently shown in longer shots, making him appear smaller, and his ornate costume makes him appear as a small child awkwardly clad in his father's clothes. The implication here is that Robin (and later Richard) are natural leaders of men, whereas John is a pretender; as Robin is also a member of the aristocracy this again points to a reinstatement of a disrupted status quo rather than a revolutionary impulse. Both *Sherwood* and *Nottingham* feature the same servants, performing the same tasks, and even clad in the same livery; just as we saw in *Captain Blood*, the proletariat are expected to perform the same labor under Robin's rule as they were under John's, and they will have no more say in the greenwood's governance than they did in Nottingham's, but they will have a kinder master.

While *Blood* and *Robin Hood* form temporary collectives for their own protection, neither is particularly interested in changing social conditions, nor are they really all that active in restoring legitimate leadership (the Glorious Revolution occurs completely without *Blood*'s help in *Captain Blood*, and the Merry Men do not even try to overthrow Prince John until King Richard returns to lead them himself in *The Adventures of Robin Hood*). As Hobsbawm points out the outlaw's rebellion "is an individual rebellion, which is socially and politically undetermined, and which under normal—i.e. non-revolutionary—conditions is not a vanguard of mass revolt, but rather the product and counterpart of the general passivity of the poor" (*Bandits* 36). The temporary collectives of men formed in these films also bear a striking resemblance to the New Deal coalition's "back to the land" movement, connected to a revitalization of

masculinity. As we saw with the road in the hobo films mentioned previously, the outlaw band represents a retreat to the “Green World” where masculinity can be reclaimed, the traditional heteronormative couple restored, and economic growth renewed. This renewal is based upon a revitalization of the old system rather than radical revolution.

In their temporariness these outlaw collectives resembled the numerous temporary-employment collectives established by the New Deal: most notably the Works Progress Administration (WPA), an organization focused on giving men temporary employment on public infrastructure projects such as bridges and dams, and the Civilian Conservation Corps, which was focused on temporary employment in preserving America’s natural resources through reforestation projects and the building and maintenance of public parks. In a speech delivered to members of the CCC Roosevelt told them, “you should emerge from this experience strong and rugged and ready for a reentrance into the ranks of industry, better equipped than before” (“Greetings” n.p.); later, in a fireside chat concerning the WPA, Roosevelt insisted that the measure was needed only “to establish the practical means to help those who are unemployed in this present emergency” (“Fireside” n.p.). In both cases it was made clear that such collectives were organized only temporarily until private industry was fully recovered; in the mean time, these organizations would provide not only employment and income, but also masculinization for young men. In 1936, on the occasion of the CCC’s third anniversary, Roosevelt proudly declared that the organization had contributed greatly to “the development of sturdy manhood” and that the men, “muscles hardened” had become “accustomed to outdoor work” and “improved in health, self-discipline, alert, and eager for the opportunity to make good in any kind of honest employment” (“Radio” n.p.). On some level the CCC camps were seen as a means of teaching men to be men, and that once they “graduated” (to use Roosevelt’s term from

the same radio address) they would be rewarded with economic success within the privatized capitalist system.

Just as in the gangster genre, the films in the swashbuckler cycle illustrate the preoccupation with the crisis of masculinity in the 1930s, but whereas the gangster films sought to correct this emasculation by dropping out of the established capitalist system and creating a parallel economic order based on outlawry, here the retreat from the current authority represents a zone in which the hero can prove his masculinity and thus cure the land by addressing the weakness inherent in the current rulers. Just as the Governor of *Captain Blood* ineffectually rules over his people as he complains of his gout, Claude Rains' costuming and Curtiz's direction depict Prince John as small and weak, particularly in comparison to Errol Flynn's tall, athletic build. Additionally, Prince John and the other villains in the film are coded as effete and foppish. All of them wear more ornate and decorative outfits than their Sherwood Forest counterparts: John's shining, jewel encrusted robes and tunics versus Richard's simple black robe and chainmail, Sir Guy's bright primary colors versus Robin's earth tones, the Bishop of the Black Canons' purple and gold robes covered in jewels versus Friar Tuck's simple robe and armored skull cap. And as regards the Sheriff of Nottingham, as Brian J. Levy and Lesley Coote point out in their analysis:

The "drag" connotations of the Sheriff's foppish clothing are emphasized when he is taken captive in the greenwood, stripped, and re-dressed in tattered carnival gear; helpless, standing pudgily alone among laughing "real" men, robbed of his purse (in medieval contexts the cutting of the purse is frequently metonymic of castration), he is the very picture of the homosexual as eunuch. (172)

There is more than the suggestion here that the leaders' manhood is lacking. It is important that all of the villains in the film are marked by their decorativeness (in a possible



inversion of the gangster cycle's adoration of preening celebrity, before his coronation John primps in front of a mirror, more concerned about his appearance than the assassin he has dispatched to kill his brother), whereas the heroes are marked by their martial ability, even the Friar wears armor and equipment for battle rather than decoration. Even the villains' romantic relationships are decorative; John and the Sheriff are not linked with any women at all, and Sir Guy's brief betrothal to Marian is meant purely as a political alliance; Sir Guy has little interest in her as a woman.

In Sherwood romance plays a key role in the relationships of both Robin and Marian and Much the Miller's son and Bess, Marian's handmaiden, setting up a stark contrast between a barren, effete state and the fertility of the bandits. Just as with the gangsters in the films in the early part of the decade, these villains connote "to-be-looked-at-ness," but here that exhibitionist quality is associated with perversion and villainy rather than heroic rebellion; the departure from traditional gender roles is not a means of escaping the capitalist order but the reason for its failure in the first place, connecting the film's romantic subplots to the cries to return to more traditional notions of heteronormativity.

In *Captain Blood* the crisis of masculinity extends past the rulers and gout-suffering governor to the protagonist himself. While Blood had previously fought in both the French and Spanish navies, at the beginning of the film he has given up the martial lifestyle, the "fighting virtues," to live the middle-class lifestyle of a doctor. When he asks his maid to care for his flowers in his absence she tells him, "You would think of geraniums when every other man is out fighting" and tells him that half of the town believes he's a coward, directly contesting his masculinity. When Blood arrives in Jamaica his masculinity is further questioned when he is put on display at a slave auction for Colonel Bishop. Just as the decorativeness of the villains in *The Adventures of Robin Hood* sets up their masculinity as contested, here Blood's falling under the

male gaze of Bishop disempowers him. He does challenge this emasculation somewhat; as Bishop appraises Blood's body, hands on hips, eyes discerning the slave's worth, Blood mimics him by placing his own hands on his hips and turning his gaze upon Bishop before shaking his head in disapproval. While there is an element of the reassertion of masculinity here, this brief moment is followed by Bishop's niece, Arabella, purchasing Blood for herself. While Blood turns Bishop's own gaze back at him, he has fallen under the gaze of Arabella, watching them both from above on the platform. His subjection to her gaze, and her subsequent purchase of him, emasculates him as well as upsets the traditional heteronormative hierarchy between men and women. It should come as little surprise that through the course of the movie the plot turns to give Blood the opportunity to reverse this situation, buying her from the French pirate Levasseur in order to reestablish his masculine dominance.

The threat of emasculation linked with economic suffering plays an even more prominent role in the third swashbuckler, *The Mark of Zorro*. Here too the protagonist Don Diego (Tyrone Power) is established as a paragon of martial masculinity who has become softened and emasculated through civilization. The film opens with a montage of men practicing the military arts in Spain; the viewer sees rows of men sword fighting, attacking targets on horseback, and jumping obstacles while riding. Diego, referred to as the "California Cockerel," is said to be among the best at these martial games. Men frequently challenge Diego to duels in order to prove their own manhood, as one of his friends tells him, "It's become a distinction to assail a California cockerel. You peg them slightly in the arm or shoulder and they boast of having met you." While Diego is the epitome of martial masculinity in Madrid, he is soon recalled back to live with his father in California; he laments that there is nothing exciting for a warlike man to do in the colony, thrusts his sword into the ceiling since he will no longer need it, and complains, "California: Where a man can only marry, raise fat children, and watch his

vineyards grow.” This stands in stark contrast to Madrid where, as the opening title card informs us “young blades were taught the fine and fashionable art of killing.”

The domestic nature of California has taken its toll on Diego’s family; after returning home he finds that a puppet governor, Luis Quintero (J. Edward Bromberg) has usurped his father’s position as governor, installed by the militaristic Esteban Pasquale (once again played by Basil Rathbone). Pasquale is every bit the model of martial masculinity that Diego is in Madrid, strutting around the governor’s mansion swinging his bare sword around; when Diego first encounters him he wryly comments, “How can I refuse a man anything with a naked sword in his hand.” Whereas Don Alejandro and Quintero lack the masculinity to exert their will upon the political world, Pasquale boldly brandishes his manhood before him as he pulls their strings. They have both lost patriarchal authority to a more capable, and masculine, male rival.

But Diego’s own masculinity also suffers upon his removal from the atmosphere of martial masculinity in Madrid. Upon his arrival, his father and the local priest, Fray Felipe, appraise Diego’s physical appearance; after admiring Diego for the man he has become, Felipe grips his bicep and declares, “He’s ripe for more than boy’s pranks now, Alejandro. I feel good muscle here,” to which Diego’s mother replies “Ah, muscles, you men. Is he without a face?” The scene simultaneously admires Diego for his masculine strength as it turns him into a decorative object much as we see happen to *Captain Blood* or, much earlier in the decade, to Tom Powers in the tailor shop. The admiration of the protagonist’s muscular physique plays on male power fantasies that become prevalent in the superhero genre (of which Zorro is a precursor), but at the same time there is an emasculating threat in the ease with which the male protagonist can go from active, militaristic agent to passive object-to-be-looked-at.

Furthermore, when Diego returns to California he sheds his martial masculinity and instead presents himself as a foppish aesthete. While this behavior is a ruse, affected to prevent

any suspicion of rebellion from falling upon him, it nevertheless emphasizes anxieties that the lack of a military life can weaken traditional masculinity and replace it with an effeminate, implicitly homosexual, façade. When Quintero's wife, Inez (Gale Sondergaard) expresses interest in Diego's clothes (and, indeed, a sexual interest in Diego himself), the camera places his face in close-up as he delivers a wistful monologue on the joys of shopping: "I love the shimmer of satin and silk, the matching of one delicate shade against the other. Then there's the choosing of scents and lotions, attar of rose, carnation, crushed lily, and musk. As for ornaments and jewels. . ." This exchange echoes Whitaker's lament that men were becoming "sissies,": "These fellows can talk clothes by the hour, and consider a new twist to a hat that has caught on as a current fashion is as great an achievement as Hoover Dam" (H6), suggesting not only the femininity of consumption but its growing prominence over more "proper" masculine endeavors. Indeed, while Diego's love for the feminine pursuits of selecting clothes and fragrances places him in stark contrast to the martial masculinity of Pasquale, more important is the way his lack of masculinity becomes linked to a lack of political interest and power. As Catherine Williamson puts it in her analysis of the film:

Diego as dandy is overtly apolitical, responding to his father's discussion of political strategy in California with an insipid magic trick. By emphasizing an obsession with the fashionable and the trivial, Diego as dandy assures the men around him that he is unfit to engage in the masculine realm of war and politics and therefore harmless. (7)

There are also implications that Diego's proposed marriage to Lolita (Linda Darnell) will be little more than political in nature, Quintero goes so far as to joke that "poor Lolita's" married life is likely to be as "tepid" as Don Diego's bath.

The link between lack of patriarchal and political power extends to Diego's father, who proves incapable of defending the people or even his own position as governor; while he is not

malevolent as Prince John is, nor ignorant of his people's suffering as the Governor of Port Royal in *Captain Blood*, Don Alejandro is not up to the task of holding back or challenging the forces of Pasquale. Not only is Don Alejandro proven incapable of holding his own in the masculine sphere of politics.

While Diego's effete mannerisms are affected here, there is still the implication that a lack of traditional masculinity leads to a lack of patriarchal control and an ineffectual political system. Like the participants in the CCC retreated from urban unemployment and the connected threat of effeminization for the homosocial world of the conservation camps, the heroes of these films must retreat from the current society and return to the land in order to prove their masculinity in a series of physical trials, only after which may they return and restore the health of society with a strong patriarchy at its core. As mentioned above, in some ways this retreat to the natural realms of the greenwood or the high seas resembles Roosevelt's own back-to-the-land rhetoric; there are, in *Captain Blood* and *The Adventures of Robin Hood* at least, hints of the rural collective established in *Our Daily Bread*. The bands are each made up of a set of skilled artisans, each with a different specialty and task they are capable of performing, and just as John auditions the men who wish to join his commune to determine if their skills are needed, Robin takes care to recruit those who can fill gaps in his band of Merry Men. When he sees Little John holding the bridge he thinks that his band could use a strong man, and when he sees Friar Tuck sleeping at a fishing hole he comments that while his men have their physical needs cared for he could provide them with the spiritual guidance they are lacking. The greenwood and Blood's pirate ship, like Roosevelt's WPA and CCC, can be viewed as temporary, socialist collectives formed to equitably fulfill the group's basic needs for the duration of an immediate crisis.

However, the escape to these outlaw zones differ from *Our Daily Bread*, or even those of the gangster films in this cycle, in that they are never conceived of as anything other than

temporary states of last resort. All of the men in Sherwood and on Blood's pirate ship, plan to return to the traditional realm once it has been healed; the outlaw zone instead becomes a place where the outlaws can still live as men in a feminized world until order (gendered, economic, and political) is restored. As Graham Seal points out in his analysis of Robin Hood's folklore tradition, "There is also an important cultural dimension to these socio-political and economic differences. The oppressed group often has a fear—not necessarily made explicit—that its sense of identity, as coded into its traditions, customs, and worldview, is being outraged, ignored or otherwise threatened" (70). The outlaw tradition, in other words, is as much about reacting to a lost way of life as it is challenging specific economic circumstances; the lost way of life in this case is not only the loss of faith in the Horatio Alger myth, but the emasculation that accompanied the loss of earning power and the perceived collapse of the heteronormative family. As Michael Kimmel points out in *American Manhood*, "Even before the economic collapse of 1929, though, men's work was an increasingly unreliable proving ground, more the domain of the dull and the routine of George Babbitt than the arena of vaulting ambition and adventure of TR [Teddy Roosevelt]," but after the crash "Never before had American men experienced such a massive and system-wide shock to their ability to prove manhood by providing for their families" (140).

The proof of masculinity sought in the outlaw films was very much in the mold of Teddy Roosevelt's valorization of the "Strenuous Life" than the pseudoscience mentioned above. In a speech delivered to Chicago in 1899, Roosevelt introduced the themes he would go on to repeat again and again for the next two decades. He told the crowd:

I wish to preach, not the doctrine of ignoble ease, but the doctrine of the strenuous life, the life of toil and effort, of labor and strife; to preach that highest form of success which

comes, not to the man who desires mere easy peace, but to the man who does not shrink from danger, from hardship, or from bitter toil. (“Strenuous” para. 1)

Various clubs of the *fin-de-siècle*, such as the Boy Scouts of America, were guided by the philosophy that physical trials in the wilderness could revitalize one’s masculinity. Roosevelt’s own Boone and Crockett Club, originally meant for adult men, was designed to increase the masculine bona fides of its members and the nation as a whole (Kimmel 123).

1930s popular culture was concerned with masculine revitalization through physical challenges as well; hard-boiled detective writers like Raymond Chandler and Dashiell Hammett as well as Ernest Hemingway sought to redefine manhood in an era where masculinity was seen to be in crisis; “Hemingway eschewed the upper-class gentility into which he had been born and embraced a rough-hewn artisanal manhood demonstrated and tested in the most highly ritualized ways—boxing matches, bullfighting, hunting, soldiering” (Kimmel 214). In his study of men’s magazines, Tom Pendergast argues that this same renegotiation of masculinity occurred in the periodicals of the era; specifically, he sees the era as a transition from the Victorian model of masculinity, based on “self-control, assertiveness, and virtue” to the Modern model, based on “personality, cooperativeness, and self-effacement” (56). The focus on sports as a rechanneling of the martial virtues that were lost in the isolationist spirit of much of the 1930s were of particular importance; he argues that society supports “the athletic ascetic mode of masculinity, either by segregating it into an appropriate domain—i.e., the military subculture of the armed forces, military academies, and quasi-military boy’s organizations—or ritualizing it in organized sports” (62). Physical contests, traditionally part of military training, became reincorporated into a culture that was seen as effeminate due to their disappearance. Just as Teddy Roosevelt sought to recapture the virtues of the frontier through wilderness clubs and colonialism, popular culture of the 1930s sought to reclaim the virtues of martial masculinity during an era of peace.

In the swashbucklers of the 1930s the temporary status of outlaw serves as a masculine rite. The heroes of these films were renowned for their physical feats; contemporary reviews of the films focused a great deal on the physicality of the stars, particularly Errol Flynn. When the press was tasked with introducing him to the public for *Captain Blood* they spent a great deal of time talking up his athletic bona fides; as one example, the reviewer for *Time* commented, "Errol Flynn got bit parts on the London stage, later went to Tahiti, bought a boat, fished for pearls, prospected for gold in New Guinea. . . . Tall (6 ft. 2 in.), brawny (180 lb.), he boxed on England's 1928 Olympic team" (16). In the reviews of *The Adventures of Robin Hood* and *The Mark of Zorro*, on the other hand, both he and Tyrone Power respectively were accused of being less physical than Douglas Fairbanks, who played the same characters during the 1920s.<sup>13</sup> This comparison illustrates a preoccupation with the outlaw protagonists' physicality.

Despite these complaints, the films portray scene after scene of men engaging in various athletic feats. In *Captain Blood* these deeds are primarily identified with manual labor. Michael Denning speaks of the "cult of the virile male working-class body" that relied on "cartoon images of giant male workers pervading union newspapers and radical magazines . . . [and] a web of symbols which romanticized violence, rooted solidarity and metaphors of struggle, and constructed work and workers as male" (137). Just as labor union propaganda of the era created images of muscular males at work, *Captain Blood* shows male bodies at work; as the enslaved men push the water mill at the plantation, their sleeves are ripped, biceps exposed as they toil at their labor. While they are slaves, their strength in their labor is emphasized; the image here of the muscular men at work could parallel any number of union propaganda pieces of the time period meant to show the strength of the working-class male. In *Captain Blood*, however, the illustration of their collective strength is not meant to promote solidarity in a permanent, class-based collective, but rather to emphasize the growth of their character, particularly Blood's



character, as a result of living an extreme example of the “strenuous life” of hardship and toil. And, indeed, after his toil as a slave he becomes a successful privateer, military leader, and then governor; far from the somewhat effete doctor fretting over his geraniums, Blood’s life of toil transforms him into a model of martial masculinity.

By the release of *The Adventures of Robin Hood* and *The Mark of Zorro* labor was removed entirely from the physical rite of the outlaw. Robin and Zorro are both aristocrats and as such are not engaged in manual labor; their reclamation of masculinity depends upon a model of martial masculinity, or the fighting virtues, from the beginning. Both of these films feature montages of men working in unison, but in contrast to the Eisensteinian model that was used to depict a collective of men at work on a farm in *Our Daily Bread*, here the montages are used to show a collective of men engaged in the military arts. *The Mark of Zorro*, as mentioned above, opens with a montage of shots showing rows of men engaged in sword fighting; the sequence opens with a shot from above looking down the middle of two rows of men, dressed in identical costumes, crossing swords; the sequence then cuts to a shot looking down the middle of the rows from waist level, and back to another shot from above. These shots are followed by shots of rows of men attacking targets from horseback. Just as in *Our Daily Bread*’s montage sequences, shooting the men in long shot so that their faces are not discernible and dressing them in identical costumes emphasizes their status as a collective group rather than as individuals.

We see a similar technique employed in *The Adventures of Robin Hood* during the robbing of Sir Guy of Gisbourne in Sherwood Forrest. In preparation for the attack dozens of the Merry Men are shot climbing up tree branches in rows, once again dressed identically, evoking rows of ants crawling along a log. This shot is followed by a long pan and tilt shot, showing the men preparing vines, working to set their traps in place before the caravan arrives. During the attack itself the men jump from the branches, swing on vines, and run after the royal

troops in identical lines, often passing by the camera so quickly that they are little more than indiscernible green blurs. The utilization of Soviet-style montage to show not labor but physical feats of manhood illustrates a shift in how these collectives were thought of in the latter part of the decade. Here rather than being predominately a working-class collective defined by its work as we saw in *Our Daily Bread*, the collective becomes a homosocial sphere meant to promote manhood much in the same way as Roosevelt's Boone and Crockett Clubs, the Boy Scouts, or the countless other groups meant to promote manhood at the turn of the century. The period outlaw genre became a reactionary genre looking to the past for ideas to reclaim a perceived loss of masculinity; and the cinematic language of socialism was contained and reincorporated for these purposes.

Apart from the shift in representation of the collective, these films also reinforce the fighting virtues' ideal of masculinization through physical contests. In *The Adventures of Robin Hood* both Little John and Friar Tuck only join the Merry Men after an initiation that involves ritual combat with Robin. When Robin confronts Little John he decides to block his passage across a bridge in an attempt to provoke a fight and in the process convince the man to join their band. When he pulls his bow on Little John the man complains, "I've only a staff and you threaten me with a longbow and a grey goose shaft. Aren't you man enough. . . ." Robin then proceeds to get a quarterstaff and fight the man on equal, "manly" terms. John ends up winning the fight by knocking Robin into the water and the two laugh in camaraderie as they make their way to the bank. John expresses his desire to join Robin's group and tells Robin that he hopes he won't "hold it against [him]" that he beat Robin on the bridge; Robin replies, "On the contrary, I love a man who can best me."

When Robin meets Tuck he provokes him into a fight as well. First Robin holds him at sword point and forces the friar to carry him across the river on his back because the friar "must

learn obedience.” What starts out as a masculine display of dominance over what appears to be a slothful friar quickly turns into another initiation by combat when Tuck tosses Robin from his back and begins a swordfight with him; this fight ends in a draw, but as with the fight with Little John the two end the conflict in good-natured camaraderie and Tuck agrees to join the Merry Men. The masculine aspects of such combat is perhaps best seen in the climactic duel between Zorro and Pasquale in *The Mark of Zorro*. While this duel is to the death, and as such obviously not good-natured as in the previously discussed fights, Zorro’s taunt that “Ah, the Capitan’s blade is not so firm,” strikes directly at the heart of how these physical contests are as much about proving one’s masculinity as they are about achieving any other short-term goals.

Men besting other men in combat becomes a central theme to proving one’s own manhood in these films; medieval and renaissance-style combat becomes the equivalent of sports such as boxing or bodybuilding during the Great Depression; they are primarily a means of proving one’s manhood: “bodybuilding, becoming a sports or fitness fanatic, or perfecting the body as a way of perfecting the self, these were vigorous, desperate efforts to provide for men the possibility of imagining their manhood in its traditional settings, consuming their manhood in idealized versions of those settings” (Kimmel 114).

In *The Adventures of Robin Hood* sports enter the film directly in the guise of an archery contest established to lure Robin into a trap.<sup>14</sup> The Sherriff of Nottingham suggests the plan because he knows Robin’s ego as sportsman will prevent him from resisting; while on one level the sequence can be read as critiquing Robin’s inflated masculine ego since it is his irresistible desire to prove his manhood that leads to his arrest, the sequence spends so much time on the splendor and festiveness of the event that Robin’s capture is a secondary concern. While he may end the day in chains, his besting of the other contestants, the men at the competition hoisting

him on their shoulders, and his boldness in attending the event in the first place, valorizes his masculinity rather than challenging it.

Additionally, in these films the re-claiming of masculinity only becomes possible via the retreat to the natural world, which in this case constitutes a homosocial sphere in which men may contest and prove their masculinity against other men. The world of the outlaw is an explicitly masculine space, whether it is the pirate ship of *Captain Blood*, the greenwood of *The Adventures of Robin Hood*, or the figurative space of a legend in *The Mark of Zorro*. All of these films position the outlaw as a status in which the male protagonists may prove themselves while free of the feminizing aspects of civilization. Blood frees himself of Arabella's ownership, Robin of the effeminate court of Prince John, and Don Diego of the numerous women who ignore patriarchal authority, ranging from his mother's defiance of his father to Inez's attempts to seduce and control Diego as well as her husband. Writing of *The Adventures of Robin Hood* Levy and Coote argue that "the practical nature of outlawry is translated into the ritual of homosocial bonding: a bonding which in fact has as many positive connotations as homosexuality (that other 'Other,' as it were) has negative ones" (167), but the argument could easily be extended to any of the outlaw spaces in these films. Like the Boy Scouts or the numerous fraternal organizations of the era, these were spaces where men could learn how to be men from other men.

But in these films the space of the outlaw band is not meant to be a zone of permanent homosocial bonding, but rather a temporary space wherein the outlaw may reclaim his masculinity and help renew his nation as the head of a productive heteronormative couple. All of these films end not with revolution but with the old aristocratic order being restored; the male hero regains his aristocratic status and becomes united with his love interest. As Williamson points out in her analysis of *The Mark of Zorro*, "Diego/Zorro's mission, it turns out, is about

preserving the line of succession, about maintaining the system's power to 'reproduce' itself. Individual reproduction (Diego's 'fat children'), reproduction of the land (lush vineyards), and reproduction of the state all converge here” (Williamson 13).

It is significant that Diego’s initial complaint that in California a man can do nothing but “marry, raise fat children, and watch his vineyards grow” is repeated by him as the last lines of the film, but this time with pleasure rather than dread. Similarly, Captain Blood is united with Arabella upon his appointment to the governorship of Jamaica, and King Richard’s first order to Robin after raising him to the nobility is to marry Marian, to which Robin replies, “May I obey all your commands with equal pleasure.” Just as a lack of masculinity and fertility in the beginning of these films implicitly caused a lack of economic fertility, the renewal of society and end of economic suffering for an oppressed class becomes linked with the formation of a new heterosexual couple; economic production becomes possible via domestic reproduction.

By the end of the decade prominent portrayals of the outlaw had moved from the somewhat subversive working-class men who joined a gang to achieve social mobility via criminality to aristocratic reactionaries who sought to reclaim their place within the established social hierarchy. Whereas the gangster side-stepped or directly challenged the traditional capitalist order, the outlaw sought to restore a proper king to the throne; if the gangster genre suggested something was inherently corrupt about the capitalist system, the outlaw picture suggested that if a handful of corrupt leaders were removed from power order would be restored; whereas the gangster flaunted the heteronormative couple as the central unit of capitalist (re)production, the outlaw film embraced the New Deal’s emphasis on a return of traditional gender roles as the lynchpin to national economic renewal.

The evolution of the outlaw’s representation in Hollywood cinema would continue to better incorporate the ideals of the New Deal state, World War II America, and beyond. 1939

would see the release of *Stagecoach*, a film that would usher in the renaissance of the Western, which had been relegated to B-unit production for much of the decade.<sup>15</sup> These films would return the outlaw figure to the American West where he could engage in domesticating the wilderness within the space of American history, tying the linking of the heteronormative couple, economic prosperity, and Teddy Roosevelt's rhetoric of the strenuous life even more tightly to notions of nationalism and Americanness. Most importantly, all traces of a class-based collective would be wiped from them. Gone were the implicit class-warriors Rico, Camonte, and Tom Powers, and in their place were rugged individualists like John Wayne, Tyrone Powers and Flynn. Real men didn't need a collective; they could stand on their own with a female partner (not so much for themselves as to ensure successful economic (re)production for the nation); during the Cold War capitalism would become intrinsically tied to both the Western and heteronormative masculinity whereas Communism would become linked with femininity and homosexuality as a result. However, there was a brief detour in this representational trajectory when the collective was once again celebrated by Hollywood and linked once more to organized labor. During World War II Hollywood films represented the two wartime collectives of the combat unit and the woman's home front and it is to these two related genres that we turn for the final chapter.

#### Notes

1. Additionally, Willebrandt and a number of other proponents of the Volstead act frequently emphasized the importance of women in the passage and enforcement of the Prohibition law. Willebrandt told a group of supporters in 1926 that "'watchful units of women,' can keep public officials delivering their best efforts, even though such officials at times be the kind that, unwatched, 'would slight the task in hand'" ("Uphold" A16), and Attorney General Sargent "appealed to the women of the country to ostracize those who serve liquors in the home" ("Sargent" 17).

2. In the book Pasley refers to Capone as "the John D. Rockefeller of some twenty thousand anti-Volstead filling-stations" (Pasley 9); and a "captain of industry" who "revolutionize[d] crime and corruption by putting both on an efficiency basis, and . . . instill[ed] into a reorganized gangland firm business methods of procedure" (Pasley 11).
3. D.W. Griffith's short *The Musketeer's of Pig Alley* (1912) is generally considered the first gangster film, and the genre had experienced a resurgence in the late-1920s thanks in part to Josef von Sternberg's *Underworld* (1927).
4. In full, Mulvey states, "In their traditional exhibitionist role women are simultaneously looked at and displayed, with their appearance coded for strong visual and erotic impact so that they can be said to connote *to-be-looked-at-ness* [emphasis in original]" (Mulvey 11).
5. In his autobiography, *Mervyn LeRoy: Take One*, LeRoy comments that Edward G. Robinson played Rico as a man who  
 always tried to copy the man higher up, in hopes that he would thus assume the characteristics and eventually the job of that man. . . . Rico doesn't smoke cigars, until the top man in the mob offers him one. He tries to smoke it, very amateurishly, but from then on he uses them in his pathetic effort to copy the style of that man at the top. (98)
6. These scenes were added without director Howard Hawks' input or even knowledge. He claims, "There were a lot of things that I never saw [in *Scarface*]. They made a lot of strange scenes. I didn't have anything to do with the scenes with the mayor of the city. . . . The censors put it in. I wouldn't have a damn thing to do with it" (McBride 45).
7. The move to Venezuela can represent another means for John to prove his masculinity. As Michael Kimmel puts it, "If the frontier was closed, some reasoned, why not extend its boundaries beyond the borders of the continental United States and create new frontiers where men could test and prove their manhood?" (82).
8. Frederic Thrasher's gang study defined the gang as a primarily juvenile activity, arguing that most boys in gangs are between the ages of 12 and 26, which "is a time of physical and social development—an interstitial period between childhood and maturity" (80). These gangster films frequently portrayed the gang member as a boy who never grew up.
9. The preceding two paragraphs are largely a summary of Bergman's argument found on pages 7-10 of his *We're In the Money*.
10. The last-minute changes did not fool viewers at the time. *The National Board of Review's* review of the film read,  
 It may easily occur to the suspicious on seeing the conviction and hanging without any glimpse of the face of Tony, the central figure in those scenes, that the scenes were made as an afterthought when the face of the actor who played Tony was no longer available. Did the picture intend to show what so often happens in life, the criminal triumphant over law to the very end? (10)

11. In Chapter Four I take a closer look at the mechanisms wherein working-class collectives became absorbed by a de-classed national collective.
12. According to Claire Bond Potter the celebration of the rural bandit was almost entirely a creation of the urban media. She writes,
 

Contrary to the populist romances bandits and sensational journalists recounted, poor and working-class people not only defended themselves against robberies and stickups but aided besieged banks. Although the *Tulsa Daily World* reported citizen resistance extensively, these brutal crimes were often repackaged for urban papers and true crime magazines, producing a crime wave for the rest of the nation. (69)
13. *The New York Times*, *New Yorker*, and *Variety* all similarly commented on Flynn's lack of physicality compared to Fairbanks in *The Adventures of Robin Hood*, but *Time* is representative of the consensus: "Replacing Douglas Fairbanks in Robin's bonding buskins is as much of a he-man's job as pinch-hitting for Babe Ruth. In the current cinema lithe, lanky Errol Flynn hits no home run" (57). *Variety* and the *New York Times* do likewise for Tyrone Power in *The Mark of Zorro*, *Times* critic Bosley Crowther commenting that "Mr. Fairbanks, we can tell you, was really something to see—a swashbuckler who swashed with magnificent arrogance and swished, when required, with great elan. Mr. Power rather overdoes the swishing, and his swash is more beautiful than bold" (Rev. 23).
14. The original screenplay included yet another medieval athletic contest that was never shot: a large, medieval-style jousting tournament (Behlmer 448).
15. The blending of these genres was enhanced by the use of some of the same actors in each genre. Just as Cagney and Robinson went from playing criminals in the Gangster cycle to playing government agents in the G-Man cycle, Errol Flynn was recast in several Westerns after *The Adventures of Robin Hood* (*Dodge City* (1939), *Sana Fe Trail* (1940), and *They Died With Their Boots On* (1941)), and even James Cagney starred in one film in the genre (*The Oklahoma Kid* (1939)).



## CHAPTER V

### “THE BEGINNING OF A BEAUTIFUL FRIENDSHIP”: THE WAR EFFORT’S APPROPRIATION OF MILITANT LABOR

As mentioned in the previous chapters, America’s mythology of the rugged individualist merged with the aesthetic imperatives of the Hollywood studio system, specifically the focus upon the individual star-protagonist and the nearly omnipresent romantic subplot, in order to create a powerful cinematic mythology countering the growing spirit of collectivism in the nation’s working classes. The narrative focus upon the individual and the romantic couple not only reinforced the traditional values of American capitalism, but also ensured that representations of radical working-class collectives rarely reached the screen. But upon the approach of World War II a change, sanctioned by the federal government and led by Hollywood, seized the cinematic zeitgeist. While Hollywood would never represent the radical collectives we see hinted at in *Our Daily Bread* (1934) and *Gabriel Over the White House* (1933), the rhetoric and filmic language of the working-class collective was appropriated during the war years in order to represent the nation itself as a single large collective.

During the war years Hollywood was converted to de facto film production; groups of men that would have been portrayed in a threatening manner in films such as *Fury* and *They Won’t Forget* during the mid-1930s or later as playfully subversive the outlaw period films of the latter half of the decade, became the patriotic combat unit and home front in World War II. Furthermore, the project of class obfuscation that we saw during the transition from the gangster cycle to the outlaw period genre is completed in these films. Working-class labor, working-class stars, and working-class values become absorbed by the national collective; as Raymond Williams suggests in his discussion of emergent, residual, and dominant cultures, here the

dominant culture of the war era combined the residual elements of the frontier hero with the emergent culture of the labor collective in order to better serve the current needs of the nation, not only redefining good American citizenship (at least temporarily), but redefining the terms of the labor collective itself. Building on the redefinition of the fight for social justice as being a temporary conflict directed at corrupt individuals rather than systems that we saw in the outlaw film, these World War II collectives came to be defined by their temporariness.

Yes, in Hollywood film of the War era the desires of the individual and the unification of the couple was temporarily frustrated (as most famously seen between Rick and Ilsa in *Casablanca*), but there was often the insistence that the separation was temporary. For the duration of the war the working-class masculine energies that had been devoted to the formation and maintenance of the couple, as well as the aggression and frustration formerly associated with the radical labor movement, became redirected into the war effort. Represented in working-class terms but no longer depicted as working class as such, these collectives were not politically radical movements meant to permanently redefine the status quo, but rather temporary alliances to achieve specific goals; the collective was, in other words, largely depoliticized, and this depoliticization would be seen in the shift of the labor movement itself during the war years. No longer concerned with class consciousness as we saw in Chapter One, unions would instead focus upon non-radical goals, such as increased wages, that were better assimilated to the capitalist system. While Hollywood was not responsible for this transition, the cultural mythology that would reinforce this shift is partially a product of the change in collective representation that takes place during the World War II era Hollywood cinema; here the collective becomes sanctioned for a time, but only once de-classed and depoliticized.

As mentioned in Chapter One, the growing collectivization of society by corporations, labor, and Roosevelt's New Deal Administration led to a great deal of anxiety concerning the

erosion of the masculine individualism that was at the core of American mythology. This erosion was seen as contributing to the economic crisis of the 1930s; by the end of the decade it was feared that the oncoming war in Europe would result in further collectivization along class lines leading to a renewal of the Great Depression. In a 1940 *Saturday Evening Post* article, “War Against the Middle Class,” Peter F. Drucker argues that the institutionalization of total war in Germany and England has begun to erode the economic power of the middle class by closing smaller businesses and transferring “their equipment and labor forces . . . to big business or to government controlled authorities” (43).<sup>4</sup> He implies that if the United States enters the war the same economic redistribution would occur here, and once such redistribution occurs it will never be reversed. He even goes so far as to suggest that the economic turmoil that would impact the middle class as a result would be “almost as severe as that confronting the German middle class under Nazi rule” (43).

Arguments for isolationism were, of course, quite common prior to U.S. involvement in the war, but little attention is generally paid to the ways in which such arguments frequently hinged upon the fear that entry into the war would disrupt the delicate economic recovery taking place in the late 1930s. A residue of the anxiety towards collectivization we saw during the 1930s, there was a fear that the total collectivization of the nation’s economic production for a war effort would destroy any future chance at national prosperity. In his vastly influential editorial, “The American Century,” Henry Luce summarizes these concerns before refuting them:

We are all acquainted with the fearful forecast—that some form of dictatorship is required to fight a modern war, that we will certainly go bankrupt, that in the process of war and its aftermath our economy will be largely socialized, that the politicians now in office will seize complete power and never yield it up, and that what with the whole

trend toward collectivism, we shall end up in such a total national socialism that any faint semblances of our constitutional American democracy will be totally unrecognizable. (62)

Luce dismisses these fears by emphasizing Teddy Roosevelt's policy of masculine interventionism on the world stage, stating that "In any partnership with the British Empire, Great Britain is perfectly willing that the United States of America should assume the role of senior partner . . . the chief complaint . . . has really amounted to this—that America has refused to rise to the opportunities of leadership in the world" (63). He goes on to add that it is the destiny of America to "exert upon the world the full impact of our influence, for such purposes as we see fit and by such means as we see fit" (63). While collectivizing itself America continued to embrace the model of the masculine individualist hero, thus combining the need for national organization with the established mythology of the frontier hero.

It is no surprise then that Hollywood, which had played such a pivotal role in the representation of collectives during the 1930s, would find itself creating a new mythology for the war era. Indeed, many studios, particularly Warner Brothers, began shifting to an anti-fascist stance prior to America's entry into the war, earning the industry a scrutiny it would not see again until the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) hearings of 1947. In 1941 Senators Burton K. Wheeler and Gerald P. Nye initiated hearings in order to investigate Hollywood's alleged production of interventionist propaganda; Nye went so far as to claim the movies in question, including *Confessions of a Nazi Spy* (1939) and *The Great Dictator* (1940), were "the most vicious propaganda unloosed on a civilized people" (qtd. in Schatz, *Boom* 39), and that Hollywood sought to enter the war in order "to make the world safe for Empire and Communism" (Nye 720). By the time of the hearings in 1941, however, the spirit of

isolationism in America had largely evaporated and the hearings were considered a failure.<sup>5</sup> Naturally, after the attack on Pearl Harbor they were abandoned entirely.

Signaling a détente in the antagonistic relationship Hollywood had had with certain factions of the federal government during the previous decade, the ever media-savvy Roosevelt Administration turned to Hollywood to aid the nation's wartime conversion. In his examination of 1940s Hollywood cinema, Thomas Schatz argues that while the federal government had previously eyed the studios' monopoly over the film industry with suspicion:

with the nation suddenly plunged into a global war, Washington saw the movie industry in a very different light. Hollywood's control over every phase of the industry was now deemed a key asset, and the movies an ideal source of diversion, information, and propaganda for the citizens and soldiers alike. (*Boom 2*)

Shortly after Pearl Harbor, Roosevelt appointed Lowell Mellett, a staunch proponent of the New Deal with no film industry experience, as liaison between the studios and Washington; by mid-1942 the movie liaison office was working under the Office of War Information (OWI) and the Bureau of Motion Pictures (BMP) in order to better coordinate Hollywood production with the nation's war goals (Koppes and Black 56-58). While the industry was not converted to government-controlled war production, as much of American industry was,<sup>6</sup> these government offices constituted a guiding hand meant to encourage, rather than force, studio cooperation with the war effort; a project that met with mixed success.<sup>7</sup>

In their analysis of wartime Hollywood, *Hollywood Goes to War: How Politics, Profits, and Propaganda Shaped World War II Movies*, Clayton R. Koppes and Gregory D. Black argue that the BMP and OWI's policies constituted a second Production Code for the film industry that proved in many ways to be incompatible with the original Code. They write that the codes:

shared a certain conservatism in that they upheld the legitimacy and justice of American politics and society. OWI, however, demanded overt political positions while PCA tried to minimize them. And OWI through its embrace of the New Deal and the “Century of the Common Man” advocated a mild social democracy and liberal internationalist foreign policy that was anathema to the authors of the PCA code [Daniel Lord and Martin Quigley] and its chief interpreters [Will Hays and Joseph Breen]. (69)

The OWI, in other words, ran counter to Hollywood’s imperative to avoid political controversy and provide mere entertainment. Whereas the Production Code under the administration of the conservative Joseph Breen was used to eliminate pro-labor and pro-collectivist messages in film, the OWI requested that Hollywood insert such images of co-operation and individual sacrifice for the war effort.

Just as the Hays Office used the Production Code as a tool for eliminating leftist political messages in the cinema, the BMP utilized the *Government Information Manual for the Motion Picture Industry*, prepared in the summer of 1942, to promote national unity and a collective war effort. The manual begins with the premise that "segments of agriculture, labor, and industry still think in terms of themselves. . . . Inevitably their own particular interest colors their thinking as to the way they want to fight this war. We must emphasize that this is a people's war, that we must hang together or we shall hang separately" (sec. 1). The Roosevelt Administration relied upon the same sort of collectivization under numerous government bureaucracies that had defined the previous decade; just as the New Deal sought to blend corporate capitalism with government intervention in order to revitalize the flagging economy, Roosevelt sought to collectivize the nation’s economy in order to defeat fascism. In addition to the OWI and BMP, the early days of the war saw the creation of:

The War Production Board (WPB), the civilian agency that coordinated the wartime economy and the production of war goods; the War Manpower Commission, which coordinated and allocated the overall human resources required for military, industrial, agricultural, and other civilian needs; the War Labor Board (WLB), which handled labor-management disputes in defense-related industries; the Office of Price Administration, which controlled prices and regulated the production and availability of civilian goods, including the rationing of virtually all the necessities of day-to-day life. (Schatz, *Boom* 132, 134)

The appointment of Mellett, a staunch New Dealer, makes sense in light of the massive collectivization effort; the OWI and BMP's sought to not only promote but also to normalize, even valorize, the nation's shift to a collective society.

Nearly every aspect of the industry's artistic production was converted for the purpose. As Schatz points out, "This 'conversion to war production' remains utterly unique in Hollywood's history. Never before or since have the interests of the nation and the movie industry been so closely aligned, and never has Hollywood's status as a national cinema been so vital" ("World" 89); this led to a certain tension within the industry that can be seen in the narratives of several of the era's films. In *Power and Paranoia: History, Narrative and the American Cinema 1940-1950*, Dana Polan's analysis of Hollywood's shift in tone and focus during the 1940s, he argues that a selfish individual's conversion to a group-centered sense of duty underlines much narrative of the war years. Many critics, from Polan to Jeanine Basinger, have pointed out the ways in which Hollywood films of the war era become dominated by the conversion narrative, but I would add that in many ways such narratives also illustrate Hollywood's own conversion, providing a metacommentary on the ways in which Hollywood, in collaboration with the BMP, sought to create the World War II narrative film.

Of course, Michael Curtiz's *Casablanca* (1942) is the most famous, and most representative, of all World War II conversion narratives. In the film Rick Blaine (Humphrey Bogart) is an American living in exile in Casablanca while it is under the control of Vichy France. Through the course of the film Rick goes from an individualist who merely tolerates his workers' involvement in the French resistance, and who famously declares, "I stick my neck out for no one," to actively assisting the resistance's fight against the Nazis; in the end he goes off to join the French resistance officially, thus ending his individual neutrality. Rick's selfish neutrality can be compared to America's sluggishness in joining the war; his line "If it's December 1941 in Casablanca, what time is it in New York? . . . I'd bet they're asleep in New York; I'd bet they're asleep all over America" clearly signals this analogy, but the film also speaks to the smaller, more individual conversions every American was being asked to make during the war. The difference in the shot composition of Rick's introductory scene and the final shot of the film visually illustrates this shift from the individual to the cause. We see only Rick's hand and a check being placed upon the table that Rick then signs, his face still hidden from view. As the check is taken away, the camera finally cuts to a medium close-up of Rick, the only character in the frame. The conclusion of this introduction, isolating Rick within the screen space, emphasizes his individuality (as does the earlier insistence of one of his staff, Carl, that Rick "never drinks with customers") but its opening shot is even more significant. Rick is introduced not by his face but by his signature on a check, a powerful symbol of both individual authority and capitalism's dependence upon individuality. Put another way, Rick is his bank account in this sequence; his signature is the proof of his individualism and the financial account connected to the check is the authority that grants his individuality power.

By the end of the film, Rick has reneged on his pledge to "stick my neck out for no one" and aids his former lover and her Czech resistance leader husband in escaping the Nazi officials



stationed in Casablanca. The film ends with him and the Vichy prefect of police, Louis Renault (Claude Rains), who assists in covering up Rick's crimes against the Nazi regime, walking off from the airport into the night fog. Louis informs Rick that he knows of the location of a local Free French garrison, and the two men walk off to join the war against the Nazis. Rick resolves to join the collective fight against Nazism, sacrificing his individuality, his romantic relationship, and his wealth. The shot composition of this sequence emphasizes this sacrifice; as the two men walk off into the fog the camera cuts to a high-angle long shot behind the two men; the camera tracks back further and further away from the two men as they walk off, their faces unseen and their figures diminishing from view. While introduced alone and filling the frame, Rick departs the film with a political companion in long shot; the individuality so prevalent in the introductory scene has dissipated within the nascent collective.

On a metanarrative level the film also illustrates the conversion process Hollywood itself would undergo during the war years. As mentioned in the previous chapters, the romantic couple was the central subplot of classical Hollywood narrative. Indeed, as has been my contention, it was largely this imperative to include the formation of a romantic couple that functioned as a means of containing collective sentiment within the Hollywood cinema; the couple served as an apolitical alternative to collective action. But here, when collectivity is deemed vital for the unification of America's wealth and resources to defeat fascism, it becomes necessary to temporarily disrupt the romantic couple in favor of the patriotic collective. In the film *Ilsa* (Ingrid Bergman), Rick's former lover from his days in Paris, returns to Casablanca with her husband, Viktor Lazlo (Paul Henreid), leader of the Czech resistance. The two are on the run from the Nazis and seeking two letters of transit in Rick's possession that will allow them to escape to neutral territory. As Rick and Ilsa reunite, their romance is rekindled and Ilsa offers to stay with Rick rather than her husband; the film builds up the couple's renewed love for

one another, but at the end Rick tells her to leave with her husband rather than stay with him, telling her, “you belong with Victor. You’re part of his work, the thing that keeps him going . . . . I’ve got a job to do, too. Where I’m going you can’t follow. What I’ve got to do you can’t be any part of.” Whereas in films of the 1930s such as *Modern Times* (1936) and *Black Fury* (1934) the protagonists abandon the collective in order to ensure domestic happiness within a romantic couple, here Rick abandons the romantic couple in favor of the collective fight for justice. This is a rather startling shift in priorities within Hollywood filmmaking that is directly connected to the Roosevelt Administration’s implementation of total war and the OWI’s collaboration with the Hollywood studios.

Beyond the narrative, *Casablanca* illustrates another important aspect of Hollywood’s wartime transformation: the conversion of stars. Bogart was not the only former individualist converted to patriot; in *Projections of War: Hollywood, Culture, and World War II*, Thomas Doherty argues that in the cinema of the war years “The stars who bit their lips and swallowed their pride were often the swaggering swains and taciturn outsiders of the 1930s—[Errol] Flynn, the rakish egoist; Bogart and [John] Garfield, the urban loners; and John Wayne, the brawling cowboy” (112). In *The Fighting 69<sup>th</sup>* (1940) Cagney, who we saw in the previous chapter was the individualist outlaw par excellence of the previous decade, was reincorporated into a wartime collective (set in World War I), wherein he plays a soldier whose individualism makes him resistant to joining the combat unit, but by film’s end he redeems himself through his personal sacrifice to the collective survival of the unit; in *The Seahawk* (1940), in what in many ways could be viewed as a spiritual sequel to *Captain Blood*, Flynn plays a privateer who patriotically serves his kingdom during a time of war; and, as we will see later in this chapter, in *The Fighting Seabees* (1944) John Wayne, initially resistant to allowing his contractors to fall under military rule, swallows his pride and submits to the U.S. Navy. By placing the most individualist stars

from the previous decade within the context of a patriotic collective, Hollywood made their characters' conversions more powerful; an audience familiar with the rugged outlaw heroics of Flynn and Bogart could not help but be moved when seeing them repress their individualism in order to serve the needs of their nation.

And leads were not the only stars to undergo such conversions during the war years. In *Casablanca* the quasi-collaborator Louis, played by Claude Rains, also undergoes a patriotic conversion. Rains had an established history of playing aristocratic villains, often usurpers who abused their power, in Warner Brothers films during the 1930s; some of these roles included Prince John from *The Adventures of Robin Hood* (discussed in Chapter 3), District Attorney Andy Griffin in *They Won't Forget* (discussed in Chapter One), Emperor Napoleon III in *Juarez* (1939) and the Earl of Hertford in *The Prince and the Pauper* (1937). At first glance, *Casablanca*'s Louis Renault appears to be in this same mold, if much more likable. He is a wealthy figure of moderate authority who abuses his power for his own individualistic, selfish ends; as an official of the Vichy government those in the Allied nations would likely argue that he is an usurper as well. Yet by film's end he, like Rick, has abandoned his selfish individualism to join the Free French. The star narrative here seems to suggest that not only are the individualist heroes joining the collective effort against Nazism, but so are the formerly selfish villains.

But perhaps the most significant conversion of the Hollywood studios during the war era was in terms of genre. It is during this era that we see the inception of the combat unit narrative, and it is within this genre that the temporary conversion from individualism to collectivism would reach its apotheosis. Central to any discussion of the World War II combat film is Jeanine Basinger's important study of the genre, *The World War II Combat Film: Anatomy of a Genre*. While Basinger herself is careful to avoid oversimplifying the genre as purely a replacement for

previous Hollywood style narratives, such as the Western, she does acknowledge their similar roots; she writes, “It is possible to say that the Western Cavalry troops became the World War II fighting unit, and then returned to their Western format after the war. Or that stories about gangster, pirates, and revolutionaries underwent the same redressing” (86). Again, it is important to note that Basinger distances herself from such a reading but recognizes the tropes borrowed from the older genres and repurposed for the combat film. I would go on to suggest that this transition represents a similar project to the shift from gangster genre to G-man cycle to the outlaw genre discussed in Chapter Three; the necessity of a shifting ideology outgrew the current restraints of existent genres and thus pieces of the old were reincorporated into the new in order to fulfill the new ideological project. The efforts of the OWI and BMP, as well as the studios themselves, made this transition perhaps unique in Hollywood history in that it was a *deliberate* shift in ideological tone and generic creation.

Films of the combat genre, much like *Casablanca*, often involve a conversion narrative of sorts. Generally the films focus upon a hastily assembled combat unit filled with a disparate group of soldiers. As Basinger puts it, the film centers upon “the group of mixed ethnic types (O’Hara, Goldberg, Matowski, etc.) who come from all over the United States (and Brooklyn)” (16); furthermore, as Kathryn Kane argues in her analysis of the genre, *Visions of War: Hollywood Combat Films of World War II*, “The use of stereotypes or major traits usually provides most of the information needed to distinguish one man from another, since they are not so much persons as parts of a whole” (91). Indeed, in a film such as *Bataan* (1943), which Basinger considers the most influential combat film, we see a group made up of WASPs, a Jewish American, an African American, a Mexican American, Irish Americans, the son of immigrants from Eastern Europe, and two Filipino soldiers. While progressive in the sense that the film portrays ethnicities prominently onscreen that had largely been ignored or relegated to

servants and menial laborers in the previous decade, as Richard Slotkin points out in his analysis of the film there is a reliance on:

Patronizing stereotypes. The Irishman is coarse and feisty, the Jew has bad feet (a traditional anti-Semitic stereotype), the Hispanic is addicted to jazz and dance music, the Moro is distinctly more “savage” than the other Filipino. Epps [the African-American character] is brave and dignified, but still comfortably within the range of accepted racial stereotypes: he sings blues and spirituals, is a would-be preacher, and does all the grave digging. (“Ethnic” 480)

Apart from the obvious problematic issues of racial representation in these films that the use of these stereotypes brings up, the reliance upon types and caricatures also signals the desire to blend the individual characters into the background; the formation of the unit is more important than any of the individual characters and therefore the characters are developed less fully.

In many of these films the transition from individual to collective values parallels *Casablanca*'s plot, portraying a roguish loner who throughout the course of the film transitions into a selfless soldier willing to devote himself to the national war effort. In *Bataan*, Corporal Barney Todd (Lloyd Nolan) is a cynic (and escaped criminal) who joins a unit ordered to prevent the Japanese from crossing a bridge while the bulk of U.S. and Filipino soldiers retreat. Nolan plays Todd with a mocking smirk and a snide remark always at the ready. When Todd is introduced he is lounging in a hammock; the camera shoots his getting up in long take, emphasizing the time it takes him to stand in line for roll call after ordered to do so by a superior officer, illustrating his contempt for authority. Later he is seen smoking as the unit ties explosives to the bridge; a fellow soldier tells him he shouldn't smoke around the explosives and he snidely replies, “That's going to worry me, what you think,” refusing to get rid of the cigarette until explicitly ordered to do so by the sergeant. While Todd never necessarily softens

up, he does at least participate in the unit's defense of the bridge and ultimately loses his life in the process. It is the Sergeant, Bill Dane (Robert Taylor), who offers Todd his redemption in the narrative; while he has known Todd was an escaped criminal throughout the entire film, it is in the final moments when Dane offers to "forget" who Todd is, reneging on a previous oath to see him hanged for his crimes. The narrative implication here is clear: regardless of one's crimes in a previous life, service to the collective war effort offers a means of redemption; redemption lies in sacrificing one's self for the communal good.

*Air Force* (1943) features a similar individual conversion. In the film Joe Winocki (John Garfield) is a would-be pilot who was washed out of flight training by his current bomber's captain. When the film opens he is a disgruntled gunner who, denied his dream of becoming a pilot, has resolved to resign his commission. While the Captain tells the mother of another crew member that "In a way he'll be looking out for me; that's the way the crew of a bomber functions," and Winocki that "It takes all of us to make this ship function . . . we all belong to this airplane," Winocki continually discredits the crew's importance on the mission. When his young crewmate is expressing his excitement at being "lucky" enough to get assigned as a crewmember on a B-17, Winocki tells him, "How far do you think you'll get as an enlisted man? . . . Look, if you don't go through flying school you don't rate." Generically, Winocki's insistence that only pilots matter in the Air Force is a holdover from the cycle of films concerning World War I flying aces. As Basinger points out, "A World War I flying ace is usually alone, his scarf flying behind him, and he salutes his enemy, another elite, individual ace. A World War II flyer is usually a part of a large crew, a group who work together" (96). Like Todd, by the end of the film Winocki has willingly joined the bomber unit as a gunner, even inventing the tail gun, and to a large degree renounces his pursuit of individual glory (although he does eventually prove his abilities as a pilot himself, thus realizing his individual dream).

The visual style of the World War II combat film, whether focused upon the infantry as in *Bataan*, the Air Force as in *Air Force*, or the Navy as in films such as *Destination: Tokyo* (1943), emphasized the shift in emphasis from the individual to the collective. In her analysis Basinger writes concerning the editing style of the genre, “By cutting from a personal view of characters involved in a dialogue and action as individual human beings to a more distanced and impersonal view, the film shows us the larger situation its characters are in” and that the characters are frequently shot individually at first, but as a collective group as the film goes on (20, 44). In *Bataan* the characters are frequently shot as a group in frame together as they make preparations, discuss plans, or bury a comrade; in *Air Force* and *Destination: Tokyo* the sets are so cramped (a bomber and submarine, respectively) that the frame is frequently filled with large numbers of crewmen.

Kane points out the ways in which director Howard Hawks utilizes the framing in *Air Force* to indicate Winocki’s isolation from, and eventual reconciliation with, the unit. In the scene mentioned above where Winocki mocks his enthusiastic crewmate, the sequence begins with the unit filling the frame together; however, as Winocki denigrates the air service (or at least non-pilots) the rest of the unit leaves one by one until he is left alone in the frame, visually representing his individuality (35). Later, after the crew learns of the attack on Pearl Harbor, Winocki is shot in three shot with two other crew members, signaling the beginning of his conversion to the war time collective (37). Additionally, the films in the genre featured “recurrent images of men marching together, airplanes flying in formation, ships forming a task force, even the uniform dress of the men, express the scope of the effort and its method—united action—and forcibly demonstrate the smallness of the individual” (91). Visually and narratively these films were invested in representing the transition from the individual heroes of the

gangster, outlaw, and western genres of the 1930s to the ideological necessities of wartime America.

The World War II conversion narrative is one that has been studied at length by scholars such as Kane, Schatz, and Basinger, and it is not necessary to discuss it in more depth here. Suffice it to say, the Hollywood cinema of the early 1940s was engaged in idealizing the conversion to an ethics of collectivity in line with the desires of the Roosevelt Administration, a collectivity, as has been noted in the previous chapters, that Hollywood had up until that point denigrated. Ironically the films of this era utilized many of the techniques previously used to represent a negative version of collective action in order to celebrate it; indeed, many times these wartime collectives were portrayed as virtual communes. In “The Century of the Common Man,” Vice President Henry Wallace’s response to Luce’s “American Century,” he states:

Everywhere the common people are on the march. Thousands of them are learning to read and write, learning to think together, learning to use tools. These people are learning to think and work together in labor movements, some of which may be extreme or impractical at first, but which eventually will settle down to serve effectively the interests of the common man. (370)

Here Wallace directly links the organization of the Allies’ efforts against the Axis to the organization of labor movements. While Hollywood would rarely directly state this connection, the wartime collectives’ similarities to the labor unit are striking and indicate a rather unique movement in Hollywood’s representation of labor; more significantly, these films represent a significant shift to depoliticize the labor collective by absorbing it into the war effort.

As we saw in the collective farm of *Our Daily Bread* in Chapter One, during the height of the Depression one of the radical solutions presented by the left was the commune or collective farm made up of a disparate group of individuals who pool their various resources and



skills in order to flourish in a way not possible under the capitalist hierarchy. By the end of the decade, as we saw in Chapter Three, the nature of the collective rural community where every man has his job and shares in the wealth they produce collectively was reinterpreted within the framework of the outlaw bandit community portrayed in films such as *The Adventures of Robin Hood* (1938) and *Captain Blood* (1935); these collectives, while radical in their way, were meant to be only temporary solutions to current problems; the commune was meant to dissolve at the end of the current crisis and return authority to its proper place within the capitalist system. In the World War II fighting unit we see this repurposing taken a step further; in the combat unit film the surrender of individuality for the sake of the collective is not only temporary, promising to end at the conclusion of hostilities, but is deprived of even the nominal subversiveness present in the band of outlaws.

Apart from the perfunctory stereotypical traits of each character mentioned above, the combat unit in *Bataan* is composed of individuals whose disparate skills create a competent group, a model of interdependence. The group has a mechanic, a demolitions expert, a musician, a preacher, a pilot, and a tracker familiar with the jungle; throughout the course of the film these men are identified with their skills and are assigned duties accordingly. In many ways the roll call sequence of *Bataan*, wherein the unit lists their names and backgrounds, parallels a similar scene in *Our Daily Bread* when John walks down a line of men looking for work and they identify themselves not by name but by their trade (carpenter, stone mason, plumber, musician, etc.). Both of the scenes are staged similarly, with a row of men facing the camera in medium shot while the leader conducting the roll call (John in *Our Daily Bread*, Sergeant Dane in *Bataan*) stand with their backs to the camera; in both scenes the camera tracks down the line of men as the leader moves down the line, man by man. These similarities are more than

coincidence; they speak to an appropriation of the cinematic rhetoric used to represent the working-class collective in the previous decade.

Nearly all of the combat films of the era follow a similar pattern; in *Air Force* each crew member has a specific job to perform (mechanic, navigator, pilot, bombardier and gunner), and their B-17, the *Mary Ann*, only functions when the team is working in tandem; *Destination: Tokyo* emphasizes a similar division of labor as do *Sahara* (1943), *Gung Ho!* (1943), *Thirty Seconds Over Tokyo* (1944), and countless others. And, as Basinger and Slotkin point out in their respective analyses, the roll call scene is present in nearly all films of the genre. However, the combat unit film is not the only genre of the World War II era to focus on the formation of a wartime collective; the home front film often featured a group of women who must band together in order to survive while their husbands, fathers, and sons are at war. Schatz points out some of the similarities in the two parallel genres in a comparative reading of *Air Force* and *Since You Went Away* (1944):

Both are conversion narratives that trace the adjustments and sacrifices that American women and men had to make for the war effort to succeed. Both redefined family and community, positing a new (albeit temporary) kinship system based on mutual need and commitment to the task at hand. Both depicted epic journeys, although of a very different sort: the men in a Flying Fortress, traveling through space and externalizing their war-induced anxieties by fighting and killing; the women in an American domestic fortress, traveling through time and internalizing their anxieties by loving and nurturing—and waiting. (“World” 117)

I would add that the groups we see coalesce in both of these genres are not merely surrogate families but also surrogate labor collectives, making these groups just as much a commune as they are a family as Schatz suggests (though, admittedly, there are elements of both).

*Tender Comrade* immediately establishes the parallels between the home front collective and the fighting unit. Apart from its socialist connotation,<sup>8</sup> the title implies a shared military service, as in the phrase “comrade-in-arms,” suggesting that the wives in the film share a certain military kinship with their husbands in the armed forces. The opening sequence of the film emphasizes this implication; the film opens with Jo Jones (Ginger Rogers) greeting her husband Chris (Robert Ryan) who is home on furlough. After spending the night together Jo wakes up wearing Chris’s army jacket, after which she wakes her husband and prepares him for the train that will take him to his assignment. Jo’s wearing of the uniform visually declares her as Chris’s comrade-in-arms, and thus establishes a parallel between the combat unit and the home front.

After Chris leaves for the war and Jo mourns his departure at the train station, the following scene shows Jo and a number of other women working at Douglas Aircraft, a defense contractor. An establishing shot of the exterior of the plant is immediately followed by a shot of half-finished aircraft, which is then followed by a medium shot of Rogers in her work uniform driving a forklift. In the span of fifteen minutes the viewer sees Rogers go from wearing her husband’s army jacket to being a perfectly dressed and styled middle-class wife (or Hollywood’s version of one) to finally wearing the working-class uniform of the factory worker, her Hollywood starlet hairstyle concealed by a hairnet.<sup>9</sup> In a sense this sequence is illustrating a very rapid conversion narrative such as the ones we see in the combat unit films; in this opening we see Jo trade in the “uniform” of middle-class domesticity first for a military uniform and finally for that of the factory worker, illustrating the conversion to wartime needs that women were expected to experience.

After a few brief scenes of Jo and her friends working in the factory, the film moves on to the women sharing lunch in the factory cafeteria. Paralleling the roll call scenes of the combat unit films, this is the sequence in *Tender Comrade* where the female home front collective is

formed. Just as the war unit must come together for the duration of the war, the women on the home front must form a collective as well. However, whereas the war unit in films such as *Bataan*, *Air Force*, and *Destination: Tokyo* is formed in order to complete a specific mission, the one in *Tender Comrade* is formed as a means of achieving more comfortable living; while Jo briefly hints that living together will allow them to better serve the war effort (she comments that they currently have two cars between them, and that they should sell the one and share the other rather than have “two sets of tires wearing out,” a clear nod to wartime rubber rationing), mostly they are pooling their resources in an attempt to find more comfortable housing for less money.<sup>10</sup>

In addition to the differences in the two collectives' *raison d'être*, the groups also differ in their make-up and manner of formation. In the combat film the unit is made up of men from various racial, ethnic, and religious backgrounds; the women in the home front film are almost exclusively WASPs, and when someone of a different race or ethnicity emerges (Manya (Mady Christians) in *Tender Comrade* and Fidelia (Hattie McDaniel) in *Since You Went Away*) they are almost always the housekeeper for the group of women rather than an equal member as they are in the combat film. Instead, as Doherty puts it, “the all-girl squad was not as concerned with absorbing ethnic differences as in unifying divergent female stereotypes—the man-hungry gal, the world-weary dame, the sheltered rich girl, the cornfed sweetie, and the mother hen” (161).

Furthermore, these groups differ from the male combat units in their structure; being military in nature, the combat units have a defined leader who conducts the roll call introducing the members of the unit and then proceeds to direct their actions. While there are hints of democratic elements to the unit in that they are usually made up of volunteers and the difference in rank between the leaders and the soldiers is generally not that great, there remains a defined hierarchical structure. In *Tender Comrade*, while the group is formed by Jo, it is clear the group will be equals in their endeavor; Jo tells the group that they will “run the joint like a democracy”

by taking a vote when there is a disagreement, and will “share and share alike” when it comes to their income and resources. Furthermore, the shot composition of the groups’ formation signals its difference from the combat genre; whereas in films such as *Bataan* the leader of the collective guides the camera’s view as we pass by character after character, in *Tender Comrade* the group is introduced all in frame at once sitting around the table, and while Rogers is in center frame (signaling her nominal leadership of the group), nobody directs the gaze of the camera like Dane does in *Bataan*’s roll call. In this way the female home front collective can be said to be far more subversive than the male combat unit in its tendency to subvert capitalist hierarchical structures.

Many of the differences between the parallel genres of the combat unit film and the home front film can of course be attributed to the difference in gender. The collective of the war unit signals a temporary shift from rugged individualism, but the hierarchical nature of the unit meant that the system was not necessarily too far off from the codes of self-made manhood present within the capitalist patriarchy back home. Even more significant than the structure itself is the ability for a member of the unit to rise through the ranks with a combination of hard work and dedication; as Polan argues, in these films the second-in-command “functions as a sign of a possible elevation in the ranks; where only special training can create a commissioned officer, promotion to the rank of sergeant comes in the heat of battle” (72). While these films also portray the darker aspects of such a system in that for one to ascend the ladder the previous leader must first die, the focus upon meritocracy is very much within the tradition of self-made manhood.

The women in the home front collectives at first appear to be treated differently. Rather than rising through the ranks of their group, or fulfilling a specific mission, the women instead replace the homemaking duties normally expected of them with sanctioned wartime activities.

Doherty writes, “Where men prove their mettle by suppressing aggressiveness and independence, women prove theirs by doing the exact opposite: suppressing docility and calling up reservoirs of strength and endurance” (161). Additionally, the male combat unit is defined by movement (*Air Force*), a specific mission or goal that requires action (*Bataan*), or both (*Destination: Tokyo*), whereas the woman’s home front film is defined by stasis and often lacks a clearly defined goal for its protagonists. Of course films such as *Wake Island* (1942), *Air Force*, *Destination: Tokyo*, *Bataan*, and countless others make it clear that men are fighting for their wives and daughters back home as much as the women are preserving the home front for their men overseas. It could be said that the two units are defined by the ways in which they are fighting for the preservation and reunification of the couple; whereas we have seen in the previous chapters that collective action was represented as antithetical to traditional gender roles and national fertility, here the collective has been appropriated to serve those ends. No longer subverting the traditional patriarchal capitalist system, the collective is now seen as preserving it.

It is these films’ promise of a return to patriarchal capitalism that distances them from the working-class collectives that arose in the thirties and were nominally represented in *Our Daily Bread*. Just as the hobo and outlaw figures were contained and redefined as temporary masculine rites of passage meant to ensure the continuation of the traditional economic and social system, here the entire collective itself is repurposed, and just as those previous genres used the promise of the romantic couple to restore wealth and prosperity without the need for the collective, here the collective becomes only a temporary set-back for the couple, and one that will ultimately make the domestic unit stronger. The increasing number of families at the beginning of the war can perhaps explain the shift in sentiment concerning the collective’s relationship to the family. Schatz recounts, “the early 1940s saw something of a ‘marriage boom’ and a mild ‘baby boom.’ . . . From 1940 to 1943, one million more families were formed

than would have occurred under normal conditions, while the birthrate rose about 15 percent. . . . The number of family households increased by about two million during the war” (*Boom* 136). Whereas increasing divorce rates and declining birth rates defined the period leading up to the Great Depression, by the early 1940s the opposite was true, and this increase in national fertility meant a lessening of the crisis of masculinity that defined the previous decade. In this new milieu the collective could become a temporary means of ensuring the survival of this newfound fertility during the current international crisis.

In the home front films the promise of the return of the women’s husbands and a life of prosperous middle-class domesticity directs everything the women do. In *Tender Comrade*, as Jo’s husband waits to depart from the train station, the couple discusses their future middle-class domestic life; they dream about buying a home, building a barbecue, entertaining guests, and having children. There is even a nod to the agrarian ideal in their future suburban lives when they declare that they will have a “big backyard with a vegetable patch in it.” The departure scene is a common feature of both the home front and the combat unit genres. Films such as *Wake Island*, *Air Force*, *Thirty Seconds Over Tokyo* (1944), and *Action in the North Atlantic* (1943) all utilize the scene to establish the promise of future reunification of the couple.

In *Since You Went Away* (1944) the first departure scene occurs in the opening moments before the film begins; Anne Hilton’s (Claudette Colbert) husband has left before the film opens, a leaving represented only by an opening title card featuring a woman standing alone in a train station. It is not until much later in the film that we get a proper departure scene, this time between Anne’s daughter Jane (Jennifer Jones) and her fiancé Bill Smollet (Robert Walker). On their last day together the couple goes to the country, walking around a farm and riding a tractor, illustrating not only the hope of domesticity to come in the future, but also the nation’s future fertility; just as the Roosevelt Administration and films from the 1930s suggested that a return to

the land would mean a return to prosperity, here a return to the land and the prosperity to come is a reward for temporary service in a unit, whether it be on the home front or in combat. While Bill is killed in combat by the film's end, Jane's father, previously missing in action, is found, thus the domestic unit as constituted before the war promises to be reunited. The final shot of the film shows the three women of the Hilton household embracing one another on Christmas Eve after learning that their father/husband is alive, after which the camera tracks back through the window to show them from outside. The house and family, which the opening title had referred to as "the Unconquerable Fortress: the American Home" still stands. In many ways the film is defined by stasis; the family is much the same at the end of the film as it was in the beginning, suggesting that when the war ends the family as it was before the war, not the collective, will be restored as the center of American life.

In *Tender Comrade* the temporariness of the women's union is visually emphasized during the first scene in the commune's new home. As Jo prepares for bed, alone in her room, the other women in the house can be heard talking with one another; the camera focuses on a medium close-up of Rogers with a photograph of her husband on screen left. While the wartime household has been assembled, the men are away and the women are alone together, the current collective is consigned to off-screen dialogue; the couple, even when not physically united, takes precedence and promises to return. Later the group further proves its commitment to the couple when Doris's (Kim Hunter) husband Mike (Richard Martin) comes home on furlough. The group organizes a dinner to celebrate, placing the couple in the center of the darkened room, the lighting making them the focus of the scene while the rest of the group remains in the kitchen, preparing a feast consisting of their husbands' favorites. Mike becomes a surrogate for all of their husbands, and Doris and Mike represent all of the film's separated couples. The readiness with which the women make the couple the focus of their attention illustrates the ways in which



the home front collective was depicted as serving the romantic couple. These were not radical, class-based groups, but a temporary unit meant to assure the family's survival.

Similarly, when Jo has a baby the entire group pitches in to help her raise the child. Yet when the child is born Jo is again shown by herself, without the other women, while she talks to a picture of her husband just off screen. Again, while the collective may temporarily care for the child, it is not positioned as a replacement for the traditional family unit. And, even though Jo's husband is killed by the end of the film, it is clear that the child, named after the father, will carry on the family's legacy. When Jo first learns of her husband's death she tells her baby first; she is shot in medium close up, holding her husband's photograph in the frame beside her as she talks about the news. She tells the child how much he looks like his father, and how he reminds her of him; if the home front unit cannot ensure the reunification of the couple, it at least preserves its legacy. Jo tells her son that his father died trying to ensure that he would have a better break than he did, fitting since the combat unit fighting overseas was depicted as fighting to preserve the couple in a similar way to home front films such as *Tender Comrade*.

The combat unit like the home front film, featured a scene of departure where the husband, boyfriend, or father leaves the female member of his family to go to the front; such scenes, again, imply that the couple is truly what is at stake here, or, to invoke a cliché, they are what he is fighting for. *Destination: Tokyo*, while lacking a proper departure scene, emphasizes the importance of the couple in its opening scenes. Before boarding the submarine Captain Cassidy (Cary Grant) tries to call his wife but is unable to reach her due to the lines being busy on Christmas Eve; as he turns to board the submarine he greets a crewman by asking if his baby has been born yet; when Cassidy sits at the desk in his office, photographs of his wife and children are featured prominently, first at screen left of Cassidy in a medium shot, then in close-up as the captain's voice-over narration reads the contents of the letter to his family.

This memory of domesticity is very similar to the scenes we saw above in *Tender Comrade*; although the romantic couple is not on screen together, the specter of domesticity hangs over the entire film. This is emphasized further after the letter-writing sequence when John Garfield's character, the aptly named Wolf, looks at a picture (one of the many photos of women lining the walls of the cabin) of his crewmate's sister and says, "Say, that's a cute war objective you've got there." In Hollywood films women, not politics, were the reason men fought the war, just as men were the reason women worked in the factories back home. As Kane points out, "the woman is the agent who provokes a new awareness in the man of shared values. Moreover, by assuming the responsibility of a stable emotional relationship, he is prepared and prompted to assume greater responsibility elsewhere and so grows to maturity" (115). As such, these representations are clearly not completely equal; although Jo and Anne, in *Tender Comrade* and *Since You Went Away* respectively, both ration and work in the factories to contribute to their husbands' combat victories, it is hard to imagine either of these women referring to their husbands as a "war objective." The women are clearly the more passive, objectified position in this dynamic, but in both cases service to the collective good is done primarily as a means of assuring the survival of the couple.

*Destination: Tokyo* goes even further in this philosophy. Midway through the film Captain Cassidy delivers a speech concerning one of their fallen comrades. In a typical nod to the importance of the family, the story he recounts is one in which their fallen comrade purchased a pair of roller skates for his young son. He tells the crew that in contrast the Japanese soldier who killed him had been given a knife at that age, and received military training throughout his childhood. He concludes by telling them that the reason they are fighting this war is to "Wipe out a system that puts daggers in the hands of five-year-old children" and that their fallen mate died for "more roller skates in this world, including some for the next generation of

Japanese children.” Apart from satisfying the OWI manual’s desire to not vilify the Japanese people but rather to emphasize that “The enemy is militarism—the doctrine of force—the age-old idea that people cannot co-inhabit the earth unless a few men dominate all others through physical force” not the Japanese or German people themselves (sec. 2), this speech also perpetuates the notion that the protection of the family is the reason Americans are fighting this war.

The importance of the family to the war effort and its current absence is further emphasized by the ways in which the combat unit becomes a surrogate family. In *Destination: Tokyo* (and many other films of the genre such as *So Proudly We Hail* (1943) and *The Story of G.I. Joe* (1945)), the position of combat-unit-as-family is established via a Christmas dinner. On the *U.S.S. Copperfin* the crew’s Christmas celebrations emphasize the absence of the family unit. Upon waking a crewman tells his mate, “If I were in Connecticut now my mum and dad would come in to wake me up singing Christmas carols,” immediately after which a group of sailors enter the cabin singing “It Came Upon a Midnight Clear.” They then proceed to carol through the ship in a long tracking shot, offering a vision of domestic middle-class holiday celebration within the confines of this military collective. After the caroling the camera cuts to a close-up of the menu for a feast including everything one might expect from a Christmas dinner back home; indeed, the list of food is so long that the menu must slide up the screen in order to fit it all on camera. The cafeteria itself is completely decorated with garlands, bells, and even includes their cook dressed as Santa handing out presents. The celebration is a stand-in for the celebration they are all missing back home, their crewmates stand-ins for their wives, mothers, and girlfriends. Indeed, Cookie, the cook who has prepared the feast tells them after they have insulted him, “Who practically mothers all the guys on this ship? I do. Who bends over a hot stove all day long for you guys? I do.”

The film has numerous other scenes that are reminiscent of the domestic scenes from the combat film's parallel genre, the home front film, but perhaps none are as interesting as an emergency appendectomy the ship's pharmacist conducts on one of the youngest crewmen. As Robert Eberwin points out in *The Hollywood War Film*, the scene "plays like a birth scene from a different film, as if the men were waiting to hear about the delivery of a baby, which, in a way, Tommy still is" (79); the shots of the surgery are crosscut with scenes of the men nervously watching the clock, playing cards, and waiting for news of their comrade, similar to husbands waiting for news of their wives' giving birth. The wartime unit offers (what is doubtless meant to be seen as) a pale imitation of domestic life back home.

Collective action may not be represented as negatively as we saw in films such as *Black Fury* and *Riffraff*, being accepted as a necessity, but the unit is still portrayed as a sacrifice and poor substitute for the family proper. Furthermore, because of the ways in which they are seen as a substitute or surrogate for the family and domestic couple, these wartime groups ultimately prove to be just as mutually exclusive to the romantic couple and family as the radical collectives were. Because of this, unlike communes such as that depicted in *Our Daily Bread* that threatened a permanent and significant change in the capitalist system, these wartime communes, much like the outlaw bands seen in Chapter Three, were defined by their temporariness. A group of men or women might live together, share work and resources, and live as equals during the war, but eventually they would go back to their lives as middle-class businessmen or working-class factory workers and farmers; the collective, in other words, is a temporary solution to a specific problem not a realignment of class identification; once its goal is achieved the collective will dissolve.

The ways in which Hollywood representations of wartime collectives reflected working-class collectives of the previous decade was partially a product of the desire to promote class

unity for the duration of the war. As we have seen, the 1930s was a period of tremendous conflict between labor and big business; recognizing this, the reconciliation of business and labor became a national priority during the early days of the war. The popular press made frequent appeals for industrial peace; not surprisingly, generally these appeals, though technically directed at both labor and business, were focused more upon labor's need to pitch in to the war effort.<sup>11</sup> In an article from September 5, 1942, a *Saturday Evening Post* writer complains that the labor movement's compromises to the war effort have largely been confined to speeches rather than action; he writes "We shall scan the Labor Day speeches with interest and concern, hoping earnestly for evidence that the leaders of labor understand the terms of labor's freedom and are prepared to act on them" ("Free" 100); a similar article from the *New York Herald Tribune*, also from September of 1942, suggested that British capital and labor had established a truce for the duration of the war and that the U.S. should follow suit, even citing Teamster President Daniel Tobin as:

Imploring American workers to make greater sacrifices if necessary, Tobin also called upon American business leaders to do as their English contemporaries are doing—be governed by decisions and do nothing to irritate the workers to the end that they may cause dissatisfaction amongst the toilers, and that eventually all questions at issue between capital and labor should be subjected to decisions by governmental tribunals. ("Tobin" 15)

In many ways this drive towards reconciliation of the two sides of the industrial warfare that spread throughout the nation in the 1930s was made easier by the massive increase in production created by the war effort. Beginning with the Lend-Lease Act passed in the spring of 1941, the War provided Roosevelt the additional motivation he needed in order to further fund American industry and promote an economic boom.

As mentioned above, upon U.S. entry into the War a number of government agencies, particularly the WPB and War Labor Board (WLB), were created in order to help the wartime industrial boom to grow and to prevent labor disruptions. The WLB was a tripartite board that had the power to decide all labor disputes that transpired during the war; additionally, Congress passed the Economic Stabilization Act of 1942 “essentially freezing wages at the level of September 15, 1942” (Brecher 238). The stated goal of such policies was to prevent work stoppages and thus assure the steady production of tanks, airplanes, and other war material for the front. The effort paid off not just tactically but economically; Schatz recounts:

In 1939-1940, 8 million people—nearly 15 percent of the workforce—were unemployed. . . . By early 1942, as the government began awarding war contracts . . . unemployment had fallen to 3.6 million. By 1944, the U.S. workforce had increased by 18.7 million and unemployment bottomed out at 800,000. . . . [Additionally] Conversion to a war economy boosted salaries, of course, with total wages and salaries increasing from \$52 billion in 1939 to \$113 billion in 1944. Under government-imposed salary-limits on raises, average weekly earnings in manufacturing rose 65 percent during the war, from \$32.18 in 1942 to \$47.12 in 1945” (*Boom* 134-35).

Partly in response to the economic boom and partly as a gesture of sacrifice to the war effort, both the AFL and the CIO offered pledges that there would be no strikes or other work stoppages for the duration of the war (Brecher 237).

Indeed, during the war years the major unions, particularly the CIO, began the shift away from radical political action in favor of tangible, short-term economic goals; class-solidarity and consciousness were no longer of fundamental importance as they were during the strike waves of 1934. While it is true that “Government and industry discovered they needed each other; the advancement of political and economic interests went hand-in-hand. And as the

anticipated expansion of American political influence after the war increased the profit-making potential of American business” (Koppes and Black 141), government also recognized it needed the unions; the union leadership, for their part, realized that they needed the government and business leaders. In exchange for no-strike pledges and accepting a freeze in wages, the union leadership obtained the right to set up “maintenance-of-membership provisions, under which no union member could quit [the union] for the duration of the contract,” ensuring that union numbers would not shrink during the war even though they could no longer extract real concessions from business, but also “making the unions dependent on the government instead of their members” (Brecher 239). The strategy paid off for union leadership; Brecher comments that by 1946 nearly 70 percent of workers in manufacturing, and nearly all of those working for a major corporation, were working under a collective bargaining agreement (240).

Under such an alliance between big business, the government, and union leadership, it comes as little surprise that the bulk of wartime sacrifices were placed on the workers themselves. While their wages were frozen at 1942 levels, union ranks swelled, the government increased its production capacity, and business leaders consolidated their power and earned record profits. As Anna Siomopoulos puts it in *Hollywood Melodrama and the New Deal: Public Daydreams*:

the antitrust emphasis of the New Deal waned, and the government abandoned the plan to restructure the economy or even intervene in the daily affairs of the corporate world. Once FDR's administration began concentrating in the early 1940s on fiscal policy—the government's getting and spending of money—many of the most important and largest government relief programs were dismantled, programs like the Civilian Conservation Corps, the Works Progress Administration, the National Youth Administration, and the Home Owners' Loan Corporation. As relief programs were allowed to die out, they were

replaced with war bureaucracies that were state agencies in name only, since, effectively, they were run by Wall Street. For example, the War Relations Board, later the War Production Board, was assigned the task of coordinating production and investment, but ultimately worked to limit wage increases, and was presided over by captains of industry from U.S. Steel, Sears, Roebuck, and General Electric. (92)

Workers were forced to contribute to the survival of the unions while having none of the benefits associated with organized labor in the 1930s. In two articles from 1943 *The Saturday Evening Post* exhibited its characteristic anti-union stance, although this time with a pro-worker slant; discussing the maintenance-of-membership provisions sanctioned by the War Labor Board, the writers argue:

The union leaders, entrenched in their new security, write the rules, collect the dues and fire the individual worker who fails to pay or otherwise gets off the reservation. If he were thus treated by his employer, the worker could invoke Wagner Act No. 1 to protect him. But because the new Simon Legree is called a labor leader, there is nothing the dissatisfied worker can do but indulge in a wildcat strike. ("Another" 104)

Furthermore, they argue that "to compel a man to produce for the war effort is one thing. To compel him to contribute to the support of union leaders whose featherbed rules, slowdowns and other tactics have impeded the war effort is another" ("Do" 92). If the labor collective of the union and business collective of the corporation were now united with the government in the name of fighting a war against fascism, the workers were to make the sacrifices.

Because of the unions' shift away from leading the fight against worker exploitation, it comes as little surprise that the class activism we saw in the previous decade now took the form of wildcat strikes and illegal work stoppages carried out by the workers themselves, generally without union authorization. Indeed, despite leadership's alliance with the federal government



and big business, and the no-strike pledges, the war years saw more strikes than any other four-year period in U.S. history; during this time period “there were 14,471 strikes involving 6,774,000 strikers. . . . In 1944 alone, 369,000 steel and iron workers, 389,000 auto workers, 363,000 other transportation equipment workers, and 278,000 miners were involved in strikes” (Brecher 243). The reasoning behind these strikes sheds further light on the widening of the ideological gap between union leadership and the rank and file. In a 1947 study of wildcat strikes during the war, Jerome F. Scott and George C. Homans concluded that “Most of the strikes were protests against discipline, protests against certain company policies, or protests against the discharge of one or more employees” (280), and “In many cases, the strikes were directed against decisions of the War Labor Board” (Brecher 242).<sup>12</sup> Put another way, while leadership was content with economic gains, the membership’s rebelling against capital and challenging federal authority suggests the radical class politics of the 1930s labor movement still existed within the rank and file.

Leadership, for its part, attempted to defuse such conflicts and end work stoppages as quickly as possible, becoming in large part a servant to both the government and business leaders. It was common for leaders to tell their members that the War Labor Board would prevent their demands from being met, making any strike or protest useless, and increasingly relied upon appeals to the WLB rather than collective action in order to get what concessions they could for their workers (Millis and Brown 274-81). As Scott and Homans point out, “Many of the labor leaders had moved up in the union pyramid to the point where they were dealing more with War Labor Board decisions and policies relating to the union as a whole than with the feeling of the men in the lines” (282). On occasion leadership utilized intimidation tactics on the rank-and-file akin to purging in order to eliminate conflict; Brecher recounts the strike at the Bell Aircraft Corporation plant in Georgia when “Union officials ordered them [the strikers] back to

work, but the workers held out for six hours. Next they were called to a meeting in the plant labor relation office. Union officials told them they had forfeited union protection when they broke the no-strike pledge, then company officials handed out discharge slips to the seventy workers" (242). In essence these practices purged radical elements years before the passage of Taft-Hartley in 1947 would utilize loyalty oaths to codify the deradicalization of unions.

For the most part cinematic representations of this wide-spread labor strife were non-existent; when strikes and work stoppages were portrayed on screen they were generally safely contained within the American past, pre-Pearl Harbor, as in *An American Romance* (1944) and *The Valley of Decision* (1945).<sup>13</sup> Instead Hollywood reinforced the mythology supported by the Roosevelt Administration that labor unrest was non-existent, no-strike pledges were being honored by the workers, and management was acting in good faith to treat their workers fairly. The BMP's *Government Information Manual for the Motion Picture Industry* spends a great deal of time explaining the importance of a united labor front to the studios; it states:

Labor is united today. Labor and management must also pull together as one team. Past grievances must be forgotten in the urgent necessity to present a solid, militant front against the common enemy. A progressive step in this direction has been the establishment in some industries of joint management-labor committees to consult on problems of production. . . . The overwhelming majority of firms establishing Victory Committees have reported that labor-management relations have improved since the Committees were inaugurated. (sec. 4)

The Office of Censorship's code went even further and "prohibited showing labor, class or other disturbances since 1917 which might be distorted into enemy propaganda" (Koppes and Black 126).

The project of the government and the Hollywood studios was to represent the collective spirit that defined the 1930s labor movements while simultaneously removing the subversive, anti-capitalist class dynamics inherent in such movements. In these films politics of collective action become absorbed by New Deal capitalism. Whereas before groups such as labor unions and leftist mobs were seen as emasculating in a culture that had always worshiped masculine self-sufficiency, now sacrificing one's individual autonomy for the communal good was an acceptable, even admirable, model of masculinity. Absorption of the individual into the war effort was culturally authorized because it was seen as a temporary measure that would ultimately make the world safe for capitalism. As such, to a large degree class status is obscured in the collectives represented in these films; positions that were in reality working class became encoded as middle class on screen, making an implicit promise that at war's end all members of the collective would enjoy middle-class domestic bliss.

The erasure of working-class politics from wartime Hollywood cinema can be illustrated via a return to our analysis of *Tender Comrade* and *Since You Went Away*. In both of these films the female collective, specifically those who work in the factories back home, are portrayed as middle class, which is far removed from the wartime reality. Bilge Yesil writes:

Despite the popular myth that women who found employment during the war were entering the job market for the first time, 29% of women workers in 1944–1945 had actually worked more than 10 years; and another 19% more than 5 years. Also, a significant number of women employed in manufacturing jobs during the war had already been working before the war in service or clerical positions. (105)

Indeed, predominately female wartime labor was made up of “working-class women, white or black, who had always worked abandon[ing] their low-wage jobs during the war for high-paying defence positions” (Yesil 105). Maureen Honey supports this interpretation of the female

workforce in her study, *Creating Rosie the Riveter: Class, Gender, and Propaganda During World War II*; she finds that “only one third of women in war manufacturing plants described themselves as having been employed as housewives before the war” (19), “only 10 percent of women in war production centers had attended college, and fully 54 percent had not graduated from high school” (20). While not unheard of, the extensively retold story of the middle-class housewife who patriotically found employment in war production while her husband was overseas was largely a myth.

Hollywood perpetuated the myth of the middle-class female industrial worker in films such as *Tender Comrade* and *Since You Went Away*. The former film includes some nods to the working-class collectivism we saw in the 1930s. When Doris announces her recent marriage to her friends, Jo welcomes her to the “War Widows Local Number 37,” jokingly referring to being a war wife as a union job. This joke hints at working-class collectivism while at the same time appropriating it; just as we saw in previous chapters that the collectives were portrayed as antithetical to the domestic couple, here the female collective is established in this one-liner as a group that comes into being only upon the departure of their husbands and will, presumably, dissolve upon their safe return.

Aside from the collective’s temporary status, which has been discussed at length above, the women in this film are clearly coded as middle class. Apart from their clothes and hairstyles, clear markers of middle-class femininity, their home is an old-fashioned but ornately decorated house with at least four bedrooms and a fireplace; the women even hire Manya as a maid to help with the housework, further solidifying their middle-class aspirations. Furthermore, if the women are now somewhat less well off, it is clearly implied that before the war they were more solidly middle class. The only woman with experience in housework is the older member of the group, Helen (Patricia Collinge), who asks the other women, “Honestly, you girls, haven’t any of

you ever kept house before?” Because all but one of the women were married before the war and it is heavily implied (and in Jo’s case explicitly stated) that the women did not work prior to the war one can assume they were able to afford domestic servants prior to their husbands’ leaving for the war. While the script drops hints that the women experience financial difficulties due to the war (again, they are living together so that they can maintain a middle-class lifestyle, and Jo’s husband works overtime hours prior to the war in order to prepare for his departure), the image presented on screen is one of middle-class domesticity. Furthermore, as is hinted when Doris’s husband visits on furlough, they will return to their old lives at the conclusion of the war. The female collective here is not portrayed as inherently or permanently working class, but is instead a group formed as a temporary solution to a temporary problem, with no long-term political goals whatsoever. It was a collective meant to sustain the domestic status quo in a time of extremity, not overthrow it.

Whereas Jo and her friends in *Tender Comrade* must pool their resources to enjoy a middle-class lifestyle, the female war worker in *Since You Went Away* is shifted socially upwards to a solidly upper-middle class position. The book upon which the film is based, *Since You Went Away: Letters to a Soldier from His Wife* by Margaret Buell Wilder, focused largely upon “the business of getting jobs to help the family’s reduced budget” (Hartung 374), but the film adaptation includes nothing but the most perfunctory hints of financial difficulty. Numerous contemporary reviewers pointed out how the Hiltons represent anything but the “typical” American family; Bosley Crowther states “There is a great deal of talk and anxiety about the family’s financial plight. . . . Yet their home is an absolute vision of well-decorated luxury. And the wardrobes of mama and daughters seem inexhaustible” (“Screen” 16), and James Agee similarly notes that the home is only the typical American home “if you agree with me that seven out of ten Americans would sell their souls for it” (137).

While the youngest daughter, Brig (Shirley Temple) claims that the Hiltons must find another means of income to make ends meet, the film never shows anything in the way of economic hardship; while food shortages are referenced repeatedly, it is always in the context of rationing demands rather than financial need. The family does decide to take in a boarder, and while Brig initially proposes this idea for financial reasons, it is the service component of providing housing to a veteran in need during the housing shortage that ultimately persuades the family to take a renter. Brig tells her mother and sister “Why shouldn’t we rent a room? There’s such a terrible shortage.” and “Suppose Pop were looking for a room in some crowded city like this?”; it is, in short, out of a sense of patriotism rather than financial need that the family takes in a boarder.

Additionally, both Jane and her mother Anne find work (as a nurse and welder respectively) out of a sense of duty to the war effort rather than from financial hardship. Jane finally persuades her mother to allow her to become a nurse’s aide after speaking with a woman whose granddaughter was missing in action after the Battle of Corregidor. Anne, while considering her daughter’s request, looks at the older woman who the camera shows smiling in close-up, then cuts back to Anne who allows her daughter to get a war job as a nurse but “just for the summer.” The camera then fades to a scene showing Jane in a large group of nurses taking the oath. The cinematography here establishes Anne as just a member of the collective; the women are shot in long shot, contained in the bottom left quadrant of the frame with a large mural of men fighting looming over them, taking up the vast majority of the screen space. The visual construction here diminishes the importance of Jane-as-individual and reinforces her selflessness in joining the nurses. The nurses’ oath to “accept no compensation and receive no reward” for their service further emphasizes the job as motivated by patriotism and service rather than financial need.

Anne's own path to eventual war service follows the same trajectory as her daughter's; she is guided far more by the desire to serve the communal good rather than by financial need. After Jane finally explodes at the selfishness of the film's hoarder character played by Agnes Moorehead, Anne confesses, "I haven't really made any sacrifices . . . I'm afraid we're two of a kind, and the realization doesn't make me very proud or happy," expressing her shame that Jane grew up and became a selfless adult "while mother knitted or worse yet, while mother didn't even knit." As in the scene showing Jane's decision to become a nurse, this scene of Anne's realization immediately fades into a scene of welders working in a shipyard. In a long tracking shot the camera moves down a line of female welders, stopping at each one as their foreman inspects their work; their faces are obscured by welding masks and the viewer is only aware that they are women as they lift the mask at the end of each stop to acknowledge their boss. The cinematography here obscures the women as individuals in a way similar to the scene showing Jane's induction as a nurse; the women in the factory, including Anne herself, have sacrificed individuality for collective service.

In many ways the sequence emphasizes the unity of labor in a visually similar way to the films discussed in Chapter One. But whereas in those films the labor collective is portrayed as dominated by the working classes and antithetical to the romantic couple, here the film's major representative of the collective is upper-middle class, and the film symbolically rewards Anne for her selflessness by delivering her the news that her husband, previously listed as missing in action, is safely recovering in a hospital. The collective, in other words, preserves the couple while it is in crisis rather than destroying it as we saw in the films of the 1930s.

For its part the film does deliver a nod to the vast numbers of working-class women in factory labor through the character of Zofia Koslowska (Alla Nazimova), who, as Anne writes to her husband, has a name "nothing like what we heard at the country club," linking her class to

her ethnicity and thus largely conflating working-class status with ethnicity, a conflation also seen in Fidelia, the family's African-American housekeeper who is the first character in the film to get a wartime job.<sup>14</sup> During a scene in the company cafeteria as Zofia and Anne share lunch, Zofia recounts her experiences during the war in Eastern Europe as well as her arrival in America, reciting from memory and with reverence the inscription on the Statue of Liberty. While Zofia is a working-class immigrant and thus much more representative of the typical female war worker than is Anne herself, the motivations the film assigns to her obscure the class conflict inherent in the working-class female worker. While "war work for them [working-class women] meant social advancement, since it provided higher wages than did traditionally female occupations" (Honey "Working-Class" 685), Zofia seems much more interested in performing a patriotic service to her country than advancing in social class; her motivations, in other words, are much closer to those of the upper-middle class Hilton family.

The film obscures the class ambitions of working-class women as they were in the real shipyards and munitions plants. As Stephen R. Patnode notes, wartime factories tended to publish announcements for their female workers that "emphasized domesticity and marriage, simultaneously pointing to the presumed transitional nature of women's wartime employment" (237).<sup>15</sup> In reality and on film, the class ambitions of working-class women were obscured in an appeal to patriotism; when Zofia tells Anne "You are what I thought America was," one gets the sense she is referring to the latter's new-found sense of selflessness and domestic lifestyle rather than her class position. In short, Zofia and Anne are united in a wartime collective; they are participating together in a communal effort to arm America in the war; their class differences are erased and, on Zofia's part, the possibility for class consciousness is eliminated. The female collective is one working together to ensure national middle-class domesticity, not radical class conflict.



Hollywood also minimized class identity in the representation of male wartime collectives, although here the residual connections to the working-class collectives of the 1930s are more evident. In these films the class conflict between labor and capital was generally displaced onto a conflict between labor and the military; this served the dual purpose of erasing the class dynamic of the conflict as well as creating a situation in which labor would have no choice but to submit to authority; the unions could not, after all, maintain a positive public image while challenging the military during wartime.<sup>16</sup>

Despite the OWI's insistence that labor now stood united behind the American forces, the contemporary press was filled with accounts of tension between military forces and labor. Occasionally this tension exhibited itself implicitly through comparison. The numerous comparisons between strikes and warfare during the 1930s made the comparison between U.S. soldiers overseas and workers on the home front a natural one. Occasionally these comparisons were favorable, likening workers at home to soldiers abroad. In an article written for the *New Masses* in 1943, Louis F. Budenz writes, "American labor now has to be counted in legions. It represents a power in the land, a power that has been in reality the 'backbone' of this people's war which our distinguished commander in the Pacific has termed it" (18). Of course, one would expect such praise in the leftist *New Masses*, but elsewhere the comparison often made workers seem selfish in comparison to the soldiers risking their lives at the front. An article in the *Los Angeles Times* from early 1942 argues against paying war workers overtime, asking, "why [does] everybody [have] to make sacrifices except the members and officers of labor unions. . . . Men in the Army and Navy do not get time and a half or double-time pay, nor are they on a 40-hour week" ("Overtime" A4). While the Roosevelt Administration wished to portray organized labor as fully assimilated into the national collective war effort, the popular press often portrayed

the labor movement as greedy and selfish, looking out for their own self-interests while potentially endangering the lives of soldiers fighting for their country.

The numerous wildcat and quickie strikes of the war years were also portrayed largely in terms of the tension they created between the military and labor, rather than capital and labor. An article from *The New York Times* in September of 1944 wrote of a wounded soldier successfully ending the strike of a Dodge plant (that, the article informs the reader, made the B-29 Superfortress); the article states that the soldier told the striking workers:

If you people could have seen my buddies thirsting in Africa, mowed down on the beaches of Sicily, shivering in the cold of the Italian mountains. . . . If you could have seen them get the bullets and the shell fragments into their insides—and crawl toward any hole there was—why, you'd go back to work immediately—you'd work twenty-four hours a day to bring back your sons, your brothers and your fathers! (“End” 19)

Similarly, an article from a 1945 edition of the *New York Times* recounts a letter written by a union member and soldier, imploring workers not to strike for the duration of the war even when their grievances are justified. He tells the workers to consider themselves “one big team,” asking them, “Haven’t there been enough of our boys killed and wounded and missing to make every American realize he must put every bit of energy to the wheel, and that wheel must run smoothly?” (“Soldier Unionist” 25). In these and many other articles, unions and workers on strike were positioned as in opposition to soldiers and the war effort; by narrativizing the soldiers’ positions in these stories the press established a stark dividing line between the selfless soldier and the greedy unionist.

Occasionally the press related these accounts with even more sensationalism, indicating the potential for violence inherent in the conflict between soldiers and labor. In October of 1944 *The Christian Science Monitor* writes of a group of soldiers who approached a picket line in

Baltimore and removed an American flag that was attached to one of their signs, telling the workers, "I fought for that flag over-seas, and I don't like to see it profaned by that sort of thing," the sergeant said, "Take it off." ("G.I.'s" 9). A *New York Times* article from the same year recounts an even more violent encounter between unionists and soldiers at the Kansas City North American Aviation Company's bomber plant. The story details how a group of soldiers "stormed [the plant's] entrances today, dispersing pickets and tearing up union placards" ("Soldiers, Sailors" 41), and told the workers "we'll be back . . . and they'd [workers trying to cross the picket line] better get in" ("Soldiers, Sailors" 41). While the labor unrest during the war years was nowhere near as violent as the East Coast textile or San Francisco waterfront strikes of 1934 discussed in Chapter One, these numerous reports resembled the reports of clashes between strikers and company and state police during the Great Depression. In both cases, striking is linked to a form of industrial warfare and as such inherently threatening, but during the war years workers were vilified by being set up in conflict with the military during wartime. Because of the OWI's desire to have the film industry portray World War II as "a people's war," the conflict between labor and the military does not appear as bitter in the Hollywood cinema of the era as it does in the contemporary press. The *Government Information Manual for the Motion Picture Industry* informs the studios that a fifth column "distracts and confuses his intended victims by fostering racial, religious, economic and political differences among themselves. He directs their fear and distrust against their allies, their friends, their neighbors, against management, against labor, against those of another faith or a different race" (sec. 2), persuading the studios to create films that would promote unity rather than represent the various conflicts present during the era. Racial and ethnic tensions of the era are virtually non-existent in the cinema (except, of course, against the Japanese), and the labor conflict was significantly diminished.

Still, such conflict did not disappear, but was instead appropriated and incorporated into the sanctioned war narrative of disparate groups of people setting aside their differences to combat a common foe. In these films labor, while generally not portrayed as selfish as it was by the press, begin the film in conflict with the military and must learn to surrender its own cause in order to work with the armed forces by the end of the film. This was labor's conversion narrative; instead of shedding their individuality for the collective, which they had already done during the Depression, workers were asked to shed their class identity for national unity. Even more than in the women's collectives seen above, the labor collectives are deprived of their working-class status and absorbed into the broader collective of the war effort. Falling under military jurisdiction, the subversive working-class labor collective of the 1930s becomes merely another unit in the army defending American capitalism and industry. Class conflict has been suppressed and the militaristic aggression seen as targeting business and capitalism during the 1930s in events such as the San Francisco Waterfront strike and the East Coast textile strike is instead repurposed to defend capitalism against the forces of fascism.

It is fitting that the film *Basinger* sites as the first A-production combat unit film from a major studio, *Wake Island* (1942), contains a significant subplot involving a conflict between the island's military forces and a civilian contractor. In the film the two protagonists we are introduced to are the commander of the island's military forces, Major Geoffrey Caton (Brian Donlevy), and the boss of the civilian construction unit on the island, Shad McClosky (Albert Dekker). The two clash almost immediately or, to be more accurate, McClosky immediately clashes with Caton. When Caton politely offers his razor to allow McClosky to shave before they land at Wake Island, the contractor gruffly brushes him off, telling the Major that his contract includes nothing about "taking orders from brass hats . . . call me when we get there, that's all I want from you." He later tells his men that the island is filled with "brass hats trying

to play soldier” and that “if any of them get in your hair, come see me.” Significant here is that Major Caton and, for the most part, the rest of the military, never ask McClosky or his laborers to do anything unreasonable and are thinking only of the men’s safety and welfare when they give the laborers orders. When the Major gives orders that civilians will respond to air raid drills, McClosky protests against the time it will waste, to which Caton responds, “The responsibility for the life of every man on this island is invested in us.” The representation of the two sides of the labor-military conflict here very much casts labor as the instigating party, similar to the strategies of the contemporary press; whereas the military just wants to do their job, defeat the enemy, save as many American lives as possible, and return to their families, labor comes across as petty and needlessly combative.

Apart from telling Caton to stay out of his way on the airplane, McClosky also picks a fight with two marines (played by Robert Preston and William Bendix) as they are digging a ditch as a punishment. McClosky approaches the men from behind and begins tossing rocks at them; when the marines turn around and ask him what he wants, he replies “I was just wondering what would happen if marines had to do a *good* day’s work” before wandering off. When he returns he drives his truck into a hole, getting it stuck. He orders the marines to help him push it out, and tells them “are you going to come out peacefully or do I have to drag you out,” leading to a fight between him and one of the marines. Again the labor leader here is portrayed as petty and needlessly provocative, pushing the military into fights they don’t necessarily want because of perceived slights. These conflicts suggest the ways in which labor was represented in the culture at the time: a group of selfish individuals refusing to assimilate their group to the collective war effort over a set of perceived (and totally invalid) grievances.

Just as the labor collectives were perceived as being at odds with the domestic couple in the films discussed in the earlier chapters, in *Wake Island* labor’s selfishness is linked to the

absence of a romantic couple. In the opening scenes of the film, following a prologue establishing the film's historical context in the days leading up to Pearl Harbor, several men are shown in sequence saying goodbye to the women in their lives. Major Caton is shown saying goodbye to his daughter, leaving her money for ice cream while he is away; next a marine is shown saying goodbye to his wife, who cries at his departure. Both of these sequences illustrate the commonly reinforced notion of the man fighting in the combat unit to defend his family back home; the domestic couple is splintered during the war, but the promise of its reunification fuels the men at the front by invoking traditional gender roles of masculine protection and duty. Later in the film this notion pays off when pilot Lieutenant Bruce Cameron (Macdonald Carey) learns that his wife has been killed at Pearl Harbor, which grants him the resolve necessary to carry out a successful suicide assault against an attacking Japanese cruiser. While the collective war effort has divided the romantic couple, as have the collectives explored in the previous chapters, here the domestic couple and combat unit are linked with the former providing the motivation to better serve the latter.

McClosky, on the other hand, is introduced as having no familial connections whatsoever. After the soldiers' departures from their loved ones, McClosky is escorted to the docks by two native women; he thanks them for showing him around, then gruffly pushes them aside to leave the island, a subtle hint that he is a womanizer, a comic figure that is nevertheless positioned as an outsider in many combat unit films. As Kane points out in her analysis of the combat film, the women-chaser characters:

are usually regarded with amusement because of their boyish delight in irresponsibility.

Yet there is often an underlying disapproval of their behavior. Their obsession with individual achievement and unbridled lust contradict the commonly held values of cooperation and self-control; other men sublimate sexual tensions as they suppress all

personal conflicts, but the woman-chasers do not—they are immature and self-indulgent.

(Kane 86)

McClosky's refusal to shave and constant desire to find a bar further add to his character's irresponsibility. In light of the ways in which collectivized labor was linked to an erosion of the romantic couple, McClosky's portrayal as the only major character in the film unconnected to a love interest is significant; while the communal war effort might lead to the temporary (or, in the case of death, sometimes permanent) separation of the couple, the collective is still represented as primarily serving the interests of the romantic couple, even in separation. Unlike the early collectives discussed in the previous chapters that were represented as primarily focused upon class conflict and in conflict with traditional domesticity, here the couple becomes the reason for the war.

Part of *Wake Island's* conversion narrative then involves the conversion of the labor collective to the national unity necessary for the war effort. After the Japanese have attacked Wake Island, the contractor stays behind and offers to help the military's defense of the island. He asks Caton to give him a gun, but the Major tells him "No, you can be more valuable than that" by digging foxholes and trenches for the fighters. McClosky agrees and, shot in a two shot with Caton who offers him a cigarette, smokes with him. In this scene not only is a bonding ritual completed between two rivals (a staple of the combat unit genre, which Basinger terms the "Quirt/Flagg relationship" after the two protagonists of *What Price Glory?* (1926)) (92-93), but labor is symbolically converted to the war effort. The bonding between the two sides is completed in the final scenes of the film when the two are shot in a two shot in a machine gun nest and share the last two cigarettes and bottle of beer on the island after Caton gives McClosky the grudging compliment, "You know, this is a pretty good trench your guys dug." Rather than

provoking needless conflict with the military, labor is now successfully united with the war effort.

As in the outlaw bands, this bonding is linked to the homosocial sphere created by the combat unit. If the collective is typically seen as unmanly and antithetical to the masculine responsibilities associated with the traditional romantic couple, here the new national collective of the war effort is defined as inherently gender normative. Indeed, the *Commonweal* reviewer praised *Wake Island* for possessing “a hardy lustiness which is due to the absence of women” (“Heroes” 473). After McClosky’s fight with the marine mentioned above, Caton arrives and asks what is going on, McClosky covers for the soldiers by telling the Major that his disheveled appearance is due to tripping and falling in the ditch rather than fighting. As Basinger points out, the fight between soldiers and the subsequent concealing of it from superior officers is a common trope of the combat unit film (29), but here it is used to illustrate a level of burgeoning solidarity between the marines and the civilian contractor. Just as we saw in Chapter Three, the fight between these men functions as a masculine rite of passage. McClosky’s covering for the two marines signals the beginning of the laborer being assimilated into the group; indeed this is the first selfless act he performs in the film, and the first time he does anything to assist any military personnel. A leader of organized labor is absorbed into the national capitalist collective by utilizing the same focus upon traditional gender roles that had been used to vilify class-based collectives a decade earlier. Masculine aggression, initially deployed in class warfare is repurposed to defend American capitalism.

In *The Fighting Seabees* (1944), construction boss Wedge Donovan (John Wayne) and his crew undergo a similar absorption into the wartime national collective. In the film, a fictionalized account of the formation of the Navy’s Construction Battalion (or “Seabees”) during World War II, Donovan is the owner of a construction company who works for the



United States government, building airstrips and other military facilities in the Pacific. Here the tension between labor and the military is a bit less arbitrary than in *Wake Island*; whereas McClosky bristles against any sort of authority merely on principle, Donovan's complaints are grounded in his desire to protect the men working for him. The Navy refuses to arm them due to international law regarding the arming of civilians, so they are easily killed by the Japanese forces that (in Hollywood film and U.S. propaganda at least) have little regard for the rules of war. Donovan's grievances are therefore much more in line with some of the grievances of labor leaders who wish to improve working conditions in order to protect their men. Still, there is more than a degree of pure stubbornness to Donovan's relationship with the Navy, and the Navy is again consistently shown to be the more reasonable side of the labor-military conflict. When Lt. Commander Robert Yarrow (Dennis O'Keefe) offers to arm Donovan's men but informs the labor leader that they will have to undergo military training first, he rebuffs them by telling them that his men, as blue-collar workers, already "know what it is to fight." When he storms out he tells the Naval officers, "I'm not built for waiting; you learn that in the Navy, not in the construction business," and promises that if attacked by Japanese forces he will arm his men and counter-attack, with or without Navy permission.

Donovan makes good on his word during a sequence that calls to mind the scenes of industrial warfare during the 1930s. When the Japanese attack the island, Donovan is told to keep his men protected in the bunkers and to stay out of the soldiers' way, but when he finds some of his men wounded he decides to give his men the guns he had smuggled onto the island and lead an assault against the Japanese. After arming themselves the workers ride off on their bulldozers and heavy machinery in a sequence evocative of a line of armored cavalry riding into battle; the workers sit on the vehicles like tanks, firing from the cover of the vehicles' metal plating. The group is filmed in long shot as a unit as it drives into battle in a manner similar to

the presentation of the combat unit in earlier films, but here the group is devastated while the military commanders watch on in disbelief. After the battle is over, Yarrow approaches Donovan and, pointing to the dead men and destruction all around them, tells him to “Go on! Look around; see what you’ve done!”

The images here also evoke the images of industrial warfare seen in the press of the previous decade. The shots of workers carrying guns and riding machinery into battle, being shot down in the process, but calls to mind similar images from strikes along the San Francisco Waterfront and the East Coast textile mills discussed in Chapter One. While the men are represented as fighting as a unit here, having thus already undergone a conversion from individualism of sorts, they are also shown as not only failing but putting the lives of others in danger. Yarrow had a plan to destroy Japanese forces without loss of life to American forces, but when Donovan’s crew gets in their way numerous Americans are wounded and killed, including the two rivals’ love interest, Constance Chesley (Susan Hayward), who is critically wounded. The laborers are a collective, but they are the wrong type of collective: one based upon class rather than nation. It is only by undergoing military training and becoming disciplined members of a “proper” unit that the men can succeed in the war; put another way, part of their discipline involves the shedding of class identity for a new military identity.<sup>17</sup>

The recruitment and training montage presented after Donovan swallows his pride and offers to create a trained military unit reflects this loss of class identity. The opening shot of the montage is a close-up of a *Union News* newspaper featuring Donovan in a naval uniform with the headline: “Wedge Donovan is Hiring!” followed by shots of workmen in working clothes reading the article in union halls and construction sites before signing up. The sequence concludes with a series of shots of the men in military uniforms training in various military drills; throughout the course of this montage sequence not only have the men been prepared for

warfare, but they have gone from being identified with their work and working-class identities in the early shots of the montage to being predominately identified as military personnel in the later shots, in essence dropping their class identity in favor of joining the new national collective.

Once deprived of their class consciousness, labor collectives are safely assimilated into the larger national collective of the war effort. When the Seabees are attacked in the final sequence of the film, they prove victorious by surrendering their status as workers to the military's war effort. They fight the Japanese by becoming a military unit no different from the ones we saw in films such as *Bataan* and *Air Force*; they even name their tractor *Natasha* in a nod to the numerous vehicles named after women in the genre such as the *Mary-Ann* (the B-17 in *Air Force*) and *Lulu Belle* (the M3 tank in *Sahara* (1943)). When Donovan rides the tractor into an enemy position assuring victory for his unit, the vehicle becomes symbolic of the transition the working class is asked to make during the war. They are no longer workers identifying only with their class but soldiers identifying as Americans, beginning the shift away from class consciousness that would solidify in the post-war years.

*The Fighting Seabees* was far from the only film to dramatize the conversion of the male working-class collective to wartime needs; films as diverse as the action film *Action in the North Atlantic* (1943) and the comedy *Mr. Winkle Goes to War* (1944) illustrate the blurring of class consciousness during the war years.<sup>18</sup> The desire to show organized labor assimilating itself to the national war effort via the Hollywood cinema was, again, largely directed by the OWI's *Government Information Manual for the Motion Picture Industry*. In fact, *Action in the North Atlantic* was made directly in response to a declaration from the OWI in the manual:

The men of the Merchant Marine are the unsung heroes of the war. The newspapers record that three merchant vessels were sunk today by U-boats. Thirty-five men lost. Today, yesterday and tomorrow. But the ships continue to sail, and the men are there to

sail them—frequently men who have just been rescued from a torpedoed ship. They are nameless men, ordinary sailors without uniform, average Americans with homes and families. They keep the guns, planes, tanks and food flowing to America's fighting men and America's allies. They are doing that job and asking no praise. But they deserve praise—all we can give them. (sec. 6)

Warner Brothers was the first studio to make a film almost directly based on this statement of praise from the OWI, eventually expanding a two-reel short into the feature film (Green. “U.S.” 25).

The film *Action in the North Atlantic* is not only a celebration of the heroics of the Merchant Marine as the OWI wanted, but also a conversion narrative concerning how the working-class merchant sailors shed their primarily working-class identity in order to adopt a more military structure. The film never quite illustrates the tension between the military and labor that we see in *The Fighting Seabees* or *Wake Island*, but the conflict between service as a military unit and service as a unionized worker is illustrated via internalized conflicts among the workers themselves. In the film naval officers are stationed aboard the crew's second ship, the *Sea Witch*, in order to man weaponry as well as to train the merchant seamen in its use. There is a bit of light-hearted tension between military personnel and the merchant marines, and a bit more in the new U.S. Merchant Marine Academy. Captain Steve Jarvis (Raymond Massey) is particularly dismayed by the new model of training sailors; they are to be taught by the middle-class model of the Academy rather than via learning from their peers through practical experience, a more working-class model of learning than institutionalized instruction. Jarvis tells his first mate that when he was Cadet Ezra Parker's (Dick Hogan) age he had “sailed around the Horn in a square rigger”, and, “How else can you learn the sea? By rigging a kid in a fancy cadet's uniform and sticking his nose in a book?” When Parker reports for duty on the *Sea*

*Witch*, Jarvis complains of “book learning sailors instead of experience.” There is a degree of class tension here as well as a separation of working-class jobs from working-class identity; because a sailor can achieve his position via middle-class instruction rather than working-class labor, the class consciousness of the labor collective becomes sublimated. This film, like the films discussed above, is celebrating the working class’s contribution to the war effort while simultaneously weakening its class identity; the collective of the war effort is, in other words, transclass.

Unlike the construction crew in *The Fighting Seabees*, who while clearly working class are never shown as identifying primarily with their class, the Merchant Marine of *Action in the North Atlantic* clearly plays upon the notions of class consciousness arising during the 1930s. After a U-Boat sinks the crew’s ship in the early moments of the film, the sailors meet in the National Maritime Union Hall to await their future jobs. While playing cards in the hall, one of the men, Johnnie Pulaski (Dane Clark), informs the others that he is waiting for a safe job on the Staten Island Ferry rather than going back to shipping war materiel overseas. His fellow union members get angry at him, one refusing to play poker with him, another telling him that he might find it difficult to look the Statue of Liberty in the eye if he abandons his war duties. When asked why he is sticking around the union hall if he plans to abandon them, he informs them that he is “all paid up” on his dues and has his rights, to which his fellow sailor, “Boats” O’Hara (Alan Hale) responds, “The only uniform we’ve got is a union button and nobody’s wearing one who ain’t got what it takes.” When O’Hara and the rest leave Pulaski’s table he tells him, “”What are you doing wearing that Union badge” before ripping it off. This sequence illustrates the conversion of labor to the war effort in microcosm; whereas Pulaski sees his membership in the union granting him rights as a worker to choose the work he wants and provide for himself and his family through his labor, the other members illustrate how organized labor is now seen

as a new branch of the armed services. O'Hara's ripping off of the union badge indicates that loyalty to country now takes precedence over loyalty to the union or social class.

The sequence parallels the cinematography seen in the combat unit films as well, further establishing this series of labor-goes-to-war films as an extension of the combat unit and a redefining of organized labor as a branch of the armed forces. When Pulaski responds by defending his right to worry about himself and his family before the collective needs of the nation, he is shot in an isolated close-up, while O'Hara and the other union members arguing with him are shot primarily in two-shot or larger groups, illustrating their membership within the collective. As the group leaves the table, Pulaski is left alone, shot in medium close up on screen right, the emptiness of the rest of the screen space emphasizing his isolation; his comrades, in contrast, are shot in a large group as they line up for assignments on their new Liberty Ship. At the end of the sequence when Pulaski decides to sign up as well, he is once more shot in medium shot with the three other members of his group, signaling his sacrificing of selfish personal goals (which in this case include workers' rights) for the greater good of the national collective.

Much of the cinematography of the rest of the film utilizes the techniques of the combat film and, prior to it, the Soviet film, in order to emphasize the importance of the collective good versus the individual. In his analysis of the film in *The Star-Spangled Screen*, Bernard Dick points out that *Action in the North Atlantic* is “a Soviet-type film: no *mise-en-scène*, no long takes—just rhythmic cutting and tonal montage (gradation of light and shade)” (223). He goes on to argue that the final sequence of the film in which the *Sea Witch* docks safely at the harbor in Murmansk visually parallels the union of the sailors and the townspeople of Odessa in *Battleship Potemkin* (1925). He writes that “when the people of Murmansk greet the seaman as comrade, he returns the greeting joyously. . . . another echo of *Potemkin*, in which, at the end, the mutinous sailors cry ‘Brothers!’ to the Czarist crew who respond by waving to them” (225).

And, indeed, a number of the shots of the crew waving to the villagers, the villagers waving back, and the cutting between them are identical to features in Eisenstein's film. But whereas *Potemkin's* sequence is meant to reinforce the class-based consciousness and solidarity arising within those oppressed by the aristocratic Czarist regime and is thus functioning as a call to class warfare, in *Action in the North Atlantic* the same techniques are deployed to show the sublimation of class identification. The middle-class captain, working-class crew and villagers, and the militaries of Russia and the United States are shown as all being part of the same collective effort in which class has been, to a large degree, erased.

The film also reconciles the place of the domestic couple within the new wartime collective. In the union hall sequence Pulaski claims to want to stay out of harm's way in order to protect his family; the other members argue that the only proper way to care for the family is to serve in the war. He is told that many of the other sailors have families and that "The problem with you, Pulaski, is that you think America is just a place to eat and sleep. You don't know what side your future is buttered on." The implication being that service in the wartime unit will ultimately save the family back home. Likewise, when Captain Steve Jarvis (Raymond Massey) returns home he strolls along a middle-class New England street where he meets his wife; she greets him warmly and welcomes him home by preparing his bath and putting him to bed, again reinforcing the notion that it is the domestic couple these men will return from the war to, not the organized labor movement that was growing before the war.

The importance placed upon the domestic couple, a tendency which we have seen in the previous chapters was largely used to delegitimize collective action, is perhaps best represented in the conversion narrative subplot of First Officer Joe Rossi (Humphrey Bogart). His is not a conversion to the war effort from organized labor, for he is already a devoted sailor and patriot; Rossi's conversion is instead one from womanizer to devoted family man. At the beginning of

the film he tells Jarvis, “When I’m in port, I want to see somethin’ better lookin’ than a dentist” to which his captain responds that he’s been in trouble (and had a woman) in every port, such as with “that blonde in Honolulu [and] the redhead in Singapore.” When he returns to shore, Rossi’s first visit is to a nightclub featuring a lounge singer, a setting and character that would not be out of place in most of Bogart’s hardboiled crime films. When he is introduced to the singer, Pearl O’Neill (Julie Bishop), the scene seems to play out like any of Rossi’s former frivolous encounters, with flirtation and double entendre. It is only a few scenes later, when Jarvis visits Rossi’s home, that we learn Rossi and O’Neill have gotten married, making Rossi, the consummate womanizer, the head of a domestic couple. There is little reason given for their marriage in the film, and the subplot in many ways seems unnecessary; O’Neill simply says, “That’s why I married you, Joe, so you would have somebody to say goodbye to and come back to.” Rossi’s rather perfunctory marriage reinforces that the collective is only a temporary wartime measure, but that the romantic couple is ultimately what lies in the country’s post-war future.

The end of the war was in reality not greeted with this image of domestic stability, however, but with even greater labor unrest than the numerous wildcats and quickies that were seen during the war itself. Brecher writes:

The first six months of 1946 marked what the US. Bureau of Labor Statistics called “the most concentrated period of labor-management strife in the country’s history,” with 2,970,000 workers involved in strikes starting in this period. By the end of 1946, 4.6 million workers had been involved in strikes; their average length was four times that of the war period. (246)

Primarily caused by a combination of “The cancellation of defense industry orders, the ending of wartime wage and overtime policies, the end of the No Strike Pledge . . . and deep fears of



another depression” (Rondinone 153), there can also be seen in this post-war strike wave an existential crisis for the labor movement. On some level one can view the labor unrest that exploded after the war as a result of the contested nature of labor’s post-war identity; would it be the often-revolutionary anti-capitalist movement that it had been before the war, or would it be simply another faction working within the capitalist system? As Troy Rondinone argues in *The Great Industrial War: Framing Class Conflict in the Media, 1865-1950*, the rise of “industrial pluralism,” a philosophy of labor-capital relations made possible by the structure of war mobilization:

understood America to consist of a collection of interest groups grounded in an egalitarian political system. . . . the pluralist model of social relations proved widely popular once the antagonistic model of class war finally lost its resonance in the 1940s. Interest groups, unlike armies, had a vested concern in the smooth operation of a fair system of rules. . . . One of the hallmarks of industrial pluralism was a sense that labor and management were essentially equals, participating together in working out labor conditions (162).

Rather than being portrayed as a revolutionary unit determined to upset the political-economic system, labor was now seen as little more than a lobbying group; in Rondinone’s accounting it was such a shift in perception of the labor movement that led to the passage of the Taft-Hartley Act in 1947. The policies implemented by Taft-Hartley, such as “outlawing sympathy boycotts [and] disqualifying strikers from voting in union representation elections if their strike violated fair labor practice guidelines” (163), emphasized the shift away from looking at labor as a single group united by radical class warfare.

The wartime policies of the Roosevelt Administration encouraged labor and big business to think of themselves as units working together with the government and the military to defeat

the Axis. This stance, along with the government policies meant to strengthen union leadership and stabilize membership during the war years, created an incentive for organized labor to stop thinking in terms of class warfare and to start working with the government and business to quell labor unrest. Just as they had occasionally betrayed workers' desires during the war years in the name of industrial harmony, "The unions were willing to continue their role in disciplining the labor force. Ninety-two percent of contracts in 1945 provided automatic arbitration of grievances and 90 percent of contracts pledged no strikes during the course of the agreement by 1947" (Brecher 248). The decrease in radical strike action and militant solidarity coupled with the rise of the term "management" to refer to capital meant that the language of class warfare largely disappeared from labor conflict.<sup>19</sup> In some ways Hollywood can be seen as providing a mythological framework for this rhetorical shift in the representations of labor during the war years; transferring labor's conflict with capital onto the military lays the groundwork for removing class consciousness and the class struggle as organized labor's *raison d'être*. In a 1943 interview with the *Saturday Evening Post* R.J. Thomas, then president of the United Auto Workers and the organizer of the 1937 Chrysler sit-down strike in Detroit, was quoted as saying, "I don't know much about the class struggle! . . . I'm interested in wages, hours and working conditions!" (Lahey 17); organized labor was, in other words, meant to improve the lives of workers under capitalism rather than to challenge the capitalist system itself.

The establishment of labor harmony was accompanied by the return to traditional gender roles and a re-emphasizing of the importance of the couple to the country's continued economic success. Just as strong definitions of masculinity and femininity had been identified as the means of pulling the nation out of the Depression during the 1930s, in the late-1940s a strong romantic couple would ensure continued industrial harmony and prosperity; the temporary collective of the war years had ended and, as promised in the films and other cultural products

discussed above, the family and romantic couple would take its place. This conversion from the wartime collective to the post-war and Cold War-era cult of individualism can be seen no more clearly than in the push to end women's participation in labor and return them to the home. As Yesil puts it, by early 1945 "the image of the war worker woman began to disappear from the ads and was already being replaced by the mythical homemaker" (113).

For the man the end of the war meant a conversion from the collectivist combat unit overseas back into capitalist society with a female partner. Perhaps no cultural product illustrates the importance placed on this conversion, particularly the ways in which economic success of the masculine individual are re-linked to his success in the romantic couple, than William Wyler's *The Best Years of Our Lives* (1946). The film centers on three soldiers (played by Frederic March, Dana Andrews, and Harold Russell) returning home from the war and attempting to reclaim the lives they left behind. At the beginning of the film the three soldiers are all shot together in a long take as they talk with one another on a plane returning to their home town, the cinematography here identical to that used in the combat unit film in order to convey a sense of unity. They continue to be shot together as they share a taxi going to their respective homes, and are only shot separately as they are dropped off one by one. When Homer (Harold Russell) is dropped at his home the camera cuts between a two shot of the two remaining soldiers in the car with shots of Homer reuniting with his family. When the next soldier, Al Stephenson (Fredric March), is dropped off at his apartment building the last remaining soldier is shot in close up in the car as it drives off, Stephenson seen receding through the rear window. The next sequence shows Stephenson reuniting with his family, shot together with his wife and children. The soldiers represent the typical combat unit in that each is from a different social class, each has different skills, and each is in a different period of his life. The

juxtaposition of the cinematography here illustrates the dissolving of the wartime collective, but more importantly it directly establishes its successor: the couple.

The penultimate shot illustrates the permanent dissolving of the collective in favor of the domestic couple. A long take shows Homer marrying his fiancé Wilma (Cathy O'Donnell) on screen right while Stephenson stands with his wife (Myrna Loy) in the background; the third veteran, Fred Derry (Dana Andrews) is visible on screen left, isolated, but following his eye line connects him with his love interest, Stephenson's daughter Peggy (Teresa Wright), in the background. As the ceremony concludes the other members of the wedding party converge on the newlyweds leaving Peggy and Fred to stand in isolation on the left side of the screen; he walks into the background to kiss her and the camera finally cuts to the couple in close up, leaving them completely alone in the cinematic space, and making the formation of their couple the final visual of the film. The couple has replaced the collective of the war years.<sup>20</sup>

The war years then represented a contradiction; it was a time in which the collective effort took precedence over the individual in the cultural mythology, but at the same time the collective was only deemed necessary to ensure the survival of the individual and the family. In the conversion of the working-class collective for wartime needs it was de-classed; gone were the radical working-class collectives of the Depression years, and in its place arose a larger, national collective of American society, which may have conflicts between various factions but never between classes. The Hollywood cinema of course was not wholly responsible for creating or reinforcing this phenomenon; the government's policy of total war, union leadership's collaboration with the government and business, and the dawn of the Cold War and a new Red Scare were all critical factors in ensuring the deradicalization of the labor movement which would be codified by Taft-Hartley in 1947. Hollywood's contribution, as ever, was to provide the mythological framework for this shift. By first denigrating the collective as mob,

then assimilating subversive figures such as the hobo and the outlaw back into the capitalist system, and finally by portraying the collective as nationalistic rather than class-based, Hollywood helped to appropriate the representation of the rising spirit of collectivity during the 1930s and redefined it so that it might exist within patriarchal capitalism.

#### Notes

1. The theory of total war involved the complete mobilization of a nation's resources towards the war effort, which in the case of World War II America at least might be seen as an extension of the centralization efforts of the Roosevelt Administration during the 1930s. This no doubt added to the spirit of isolationism on the right in that those who felt the New Deal had already gone too far feared the doctrine of total war would end the American ideal of self-sufficiency and rugged individualism forever. As Drucker puts it, "Its [total war's] means are the complete organization of everyone and everything as cogs in a war machine. This machine, in order to be efficient, must be controllable and controlled from the top at all times" (45).
2. By the time the hearings were adjourned on September 26 (they would not be officially ended until the day after Pearl Harbor) Senator Nye had been largely discredited on the floor of the Senate by Senator Ernest McFarland, who prodded Nye to name specific films and scenes that were dangerously propagandistic, which Nye proved unable to do (Koppes and Black 43-45).
3. Disney Studios being the most prominent exception, as it was completely converted to war production, producing numerous training films for the military and non-fiction shorts. Their only feature-length film during the war years was an animated documentary about strategic bombing entitled *Victory Through Air Power* (1943) (Schatz 181).
4. The OWI's biggest failure was doubtlessly its failed attempts to curb Hollywood's racist depictions of the Japanese. While the "OWI felt racial epithets distracted attention from the fact that the real enemy was ideological, not racial [and] tended to play into the hands of those [in Japan] who wanted to make this a racial war" (Koppes and Black 100), the countless incidents of casual racism towards the Japanese in films of the era shows that their notes on this issue were, for the most part, ignored by the studios.
5. The film's writer, Dalton Trumbo, would be one of the Hollywood Ten called before the House Un-American Activities Committee in 1947 and later blacklisted by the industry.
6. A primary concern among employers during the war years was female worker safety. There was a particular obsession with women's hairstyles and the danger of hair getting stuck in machines, leading to a safety campaign that encouraged women to keep their hair covered and even led to the changing of Veronica Lake's famous peek-a-boo hairstyle;

“the War Production Board required Lake to change it, wearing her locks short and pulled back” (Patnode 232).

7. A major housing shortage was a reality of life for many on the home front during the war years. Dana Polan writes, “During the war 50 percent of the American population is renting and frequently doing so in habitations far below needs and expectations” (254).
8. This despite the fact that big business was the greatest beneficiary of wartime industry and labor policies. Howard Zinn writes,  
By 1941 three-fourths of the value of military contracts were handled by fifty-six large corporations. A Senate report, “Economic Concentration and World War II,” noted that the government contracted for scientific research in industry during the war, and although two thousand corporations were involved, of \$1 billion spent, \$400 million went to ten large corporations. (417)  
The textile industry alone increased profits by 600 percent during the war years (418).
9. There were racist motivations for some of the strikes as well. Schatz writes:  
the Detroit “hate strikes” [were caused by] white workers who walked off the job to protest black integration of traditionally white shops. These strikes reached a climax of sorts in June 1943, when 25,000 workers at Packard staged a weeklong strike after two blacks were promoted to long-segregated machinist positions. The conflicts spilled out into the streets of Detroit, which soon became inflamed in weeks of violent race riots, culminating on 21 June, when 25 blacks and 9 whites were killed and another 800 were injured. (“Boom” 137)
10. Even though set in the past, the original script for *An American Romance* still proved too controversial for the OWI, prompting them to push director King Vidor to make changes in order to downplay labor strife. In the original script, “American industrialists were the heroes; bankers were the heavies. Labor existed only as a mute mass; unions were vaguely sinister” (Koppes and Black 148), but the final shooting script was revised with the OWI’s notes in mind, so that “unions are no longer sinister; they have become the housebroken moderates of the New Deal ideal” (Koppes and Black 154).
11. This is one of the film’s rare nods to reality in terms of social class and female labor during the war years. Maureen Honey notes “half of the major production areas employed significant numbers of black women. . . . war manufacturing industries drew roughly equal numbers of women from housework and other industry groups such as trade and domestic/personal service” (*Creating* 20).
12. Patnode details one of the more morbidly sexist examples of this tendency to look towards women’s future as wives and mothers. He details a safety campaign at the Sperry Gyroscopic Corporation that told the story of a young engaged woman getting careless at work and injuring “that third finger, left hand” before the wedding. The implications of this safety campaign’s rhetoric are clear; as Patnode argues, “Sperry did not caution women to avoid crippling accidents because it might affect their ability to continue

earning a living. Rather, they should not ruin their ring finger—then they would not be able to wear a wedding band and perform all of the duties that the ring conferred" (237).

13. It should be noted that there were class tensions within the actual military itself in regards to the treatment of officers versus enlisted men. Zinn writes:

combat crews in the air force in the European theater, going to the base movies between bombing missions, found two lines—an officers' line (short), and an enlisted men's line (very long). There were two mess halls, even as they prepared to go into combat: the enlisted men's food was different—worse—than the officers. (418)

14. Donovan is in many ways an amalgam of working- and middle-class values. His toughness in sticking up for his men links him to the working-class labor leaders and individualists in films such as *Riffraff* and *Black Fury*, but he is different from those figures in that he is the owner of his own construction company; similarly, McClosky in *Wake Island* is his construction gang's foreman. The conflation of class that we saw begin in the outlaw films in Chapter Three is completed here; a figure like Donovan combines the masculine virtues of the working classes while simultaneously depriving the collective of working-class resistance.

15. *Mr. Winkle Goes to War* also features a climactic sequence in which Mr. Winkle (Edward G. Robinson), a mechanic, rides a bulldozer to victory against a Japanese machine gun nest. Another case of "the workers go to war" being literalized.

16. Rondinone makes a great deal of this shift to the term "management" to refer to capital. He writes:

employers would be described as a single interest in a wider field of business interests (albeit the largest one). Being "managers" of a single business rather than "generals" of capital, men like Wilson and Alfred P. Sloan appeared less threatening. They dealt with their company's employee dispute using a process of careful negotiation rather than armed confrontation. Given the orderly appearance of this strike, "management" seemed not just a replacement term for capital but a new category altogether, one stripped of the dangerous implications of industrial war. (156)

17. Fred's new job is an additional metaphor for the reconversion of the war collective to the domestic sphere: he constructs pre-fabricated houses out of airplane parts.

## CHAPTER VI

### CONCLUSION: THE BEST YEARS OF THE COLLECTIVE

*The Best Years of Our Lives* illustrates how the ideals of the collective and America's rugged individualist past were sutured during the New Deal era. The film focuses upon the re-assimilation of three servicemen to civilian life and emphasizes the dissolution of the masculine collective of the combat unit in favor of the family. The early scene of the men shot in a single frame, sharing a ride home in a military aircraft, and the final sequence that visually separates Fred from his former wartime collective in favor of a romantic union with Peggy illustrates Hollywood's reconciliation of the radical working-class collective to the needs to American patriarchal capitalism.

In the film Al returns to work as a banker, and while his wartime experiences have granted him a greater sympathy for those in need, his more liberal attitudes are directed at fellow soldiers rather than along class lines. When a former Navy Seabee requests a loan from his bank in order to buy a farm, Al asks him if he has any collateral; when it becomes clear that he does not, Al decides to give him the loan anyways even though the management of the bank finds the sailor to be an unnecessary risk. In this sequence we see the upper-middle class Al, functioning as a representative of the world of finance, act in solidarity with a working-class sharecropper and construction worker who wants "a little piece of [his] own" land to work. The man, for his part, is leaving behind a job associated with the industrial working-class to embrace the dream of self-sufficiency via agrarian land ownership. Al identifies with the working-class man because of their shared military history; on both sides identification with a class is erased in favor of new bonds of solidarity fostered by the war years.



Similarly Fred, the working-class soldier-protagonist of the film, returns to a job in retail upon his return home. His former drugstore has been sold to a corporate chain, so it is no longer under the local management it once was, symbolizing the alienation between worker and distant corporate CEO. Additionally, Fred creates no bonds with his fellow workers and there is no sense of solidarity between the members of the new retail/service-based working classes as there was among the industrial working class in the 1930s; when Fred is fired for hitting a customer who disrespected veterans' war service, there is no union representative or workers' collective to defend him; he simply walks away on his own. Eventually Fred finds work building prefabricated homes out of old bombers, a symbolic representation of the conversion of the collective needs of the war effort to the individualized needs of the family; more importantly, Fred is hired not out of a sense of class-solidarity, but by a soldier who recognizes the needs of a fellow veteran. With the war effort class solidarity was removed as the collective's *raison d'être*; now that the war was over the collective itself was to be replaced by the miniature collective of the couple and nuclear family.

In *The Best Years of Our Lives* the realignment of energies previously directed towards collectivization towards the family are perhaps best represented in the relationship between Homer (who lost both of his hands during the war) and his fiancé, Wilma. Homer initially tries to distance himself from Wilma, believing that his disability creates a burden he doesn't want her to have to bear. Near the end of the film, however, she pushes him to allow her to show her ability to stay with him, telling him, "If it turns out I haven't courage enough, we'll soon know it." He invites her to watch him remove his prosthetic arms, telling her that once he removes them he is "as dependent as a baby who doesn't know how to get anything except cry for it." Her response is to button his pajama top, put away his prosthetic arms, and tuck him in to bed. Reminiscent of the scenes of nurses caring for wounded veterans in films such as *Since You*

*Went Away*, this sequence illustrates the redirection of collectivist energies towards the miniature collective of the couple/family. Rather than caring for soldiers, Wilma cares for her husband; the sequence suggests a companionate (if not egalitarian) model of marriage where the collective energies of the couple are combined to ensure the survival of the household, although it must be noted that the male's desires and needs remain the focus of such a dyadic collective, preserving the hierarchical structure of patriarchal capitalism even while incorporating elements of the collective spirit.

And indeed, the fate (and even existence) of the female home front collective illustrated in films such as *Tender Comrade* and *Since You Went Away* is left much more ambiguous in *The Best Years of Our Lives*. None of the three soldiers' love interests were engaged in war labor while their husbands were away; only one, Fred's wife Marie, was employed in any capacity and she was a nightclub waitress. Indeed, her employment is a central point of contention in the couple's relationship and one of the reasons their marriage ends in divorce; rather than engaging in the selfless labor of constructing airplanes or tanks for the men overseas, Marie took work to make more money and have a good time on her own. When Fred returns he convinces her to quit the job, but she eventually insists on going back because she is unsatisfied with the limited amount of money her husband is able to earn. The reduction of female wartime labor to the selfish actions of a nightclub waitress effectively erases the contribution of female labor to the war effort as well as vilifying the notion of female labor in general. Not only must women return to the domestic sphere now that the war is over, the film suggests that "proper" women never left this sphere to begin with. Because of the class dynamics of female wartime labor, i.e. the prevalence of working-class women among wartime laborers, this also effectively erases working-class contributions to the war effort.

As we have seen, the female home front collective with its lack of hierarchical structure and socialistic distribution of economic resources, contained more subversive potential than the male combat unit so its erasure from the post-war years is to be expected. This appropriation of potentially radical collective action makes the film's narrative a fitting end point for the trajectory of the collective's representation during the years of the New Deal. What began as the promising rise to class consciousness of millions of workers after the passage of the NLRA and Wagner Act was ultimately reabsorbed by the capitalist system and converted to a means of perpetuating consumer capitalism. The cinema of the era paralleled this negotiation and appropriation where working-class collectives in the form of mobs and gangs were initially feared for their radical class and sexual implications, later redefined as temporary rites of masculinity deprived of any permanent class allegiance, and finally redirected into a national war effort. By the end of the war years the collective became replaced by the couple on screen; in reality, formerly radical labor collectives such as the CIO became little more than another lobbying group within the hegemonic capitalist system; the emergent culture of collectivism had been successfully contained by incorporating it into the dominant and residual cultural aspects of nationalism and rugged individualism. The focus upon the couple/family, both within the Hollywood cinema and in labor organizations such as the CIO, represents a redirection of the class-based collectivist energies from the previous decade into a more sanctioned space. While mass and collective action would appear again in twentieth-century America, it was largely dissociated from its former connection to class politics.

Now, eighty years after the Great Depression and in the worst economic downturn since that time period we see a similar redirection of working-class energies, particularly *masculine* working-class energies, from frustration with the political-economic system of late capitalism to nostalgia for the "traditional" family and rugged individualist masculinity. While campaigning

for President in 2011, Republican primary candidate Rick Santorum argued that Social Security “would work a lot better if we had stable demographic trends. . . . A third of all the young people in America are not in America today because of abortion” (Schwarz n.pag.). This argument is not dissimilar from the arguments heard in many quarters during the Great Depression that declining marriage and birthrates were responsible for the economic downturn; in both cases, frustrations with flaws in the political-economic system are displaced onto the perceived collapse of traditional family relations.

And, just as we saw in the Hollywood of the New Deal era, current cultural production is filled with texts that conflate loss of economic security with a loss of familial security and masculinity. Contemporary television series such as *Breaking Bad* perform similar cultural work as the outlaw narratives of the past by displacing frustrations concerning economic hardships, such as financial insecurity and the lack of adequate health insurance, onto frustrations concerning masculine insecurities. The current crop of masculine anti-heroes share a kinship with the rugged individualists of the past in the degree to which they fail to recognize that their hardships are a result of class conflict rather than emasculation. The obfuscation of the class struggle through appeals to renew the couple led by a strong patriarch has remained a dominant strain in America’s suppression of class conflict throughout the twentieth- and into the twenty-first century and warrants further study.

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