Abstract

Visibility Matters:
The Pursuit of American Belonging in an Age of Moving Images

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Visibility Matters examines the history of a long-held American conviction: that to be fully present and fairly portrayed in movies and on television is both a prelude to other forms of inclusion and, in itself, an essential part of national belonging. Virtually since the birth of the motion picture as a commercial entertainment with a mass audience in the 1910s, through the movies' maturation and then their midcentury battle with television for supremacy, and on to the rise of network television as the predominant medium for mass entertainment by the 1960s and 1970s, this conviction prompted racial, ethnic, and religious minorities, and eventually other marginalized social groups as well, to criticize what they saw on screen, and to organize and agitate to change it. In their pursuit of fair representation, they studied and analyzed moving images and their effects, picketed and boycotted particular pictures and programs, appealed to governments to regulate screen content and diversify employment in the motion picture and television industries, and negotiated directly with producers for specific changes in content and to facilitate routine consultation. Even as Irish Americans and Jews, African Americans and women, and Latinos and gays and lesbians struggled to dismantle the legal, political, and social structures that enforced their marginalization, many were preoccupied by whether people like them were fairly represented on screen. They were certain that their visibility mattered.

Offering a contextualized history of this persistent certitude, *Visibility Matters* probes a series of key moments between the mid-1910s and the late 1970s in order to lay bare the roots of this notion, trace its development, and weigh its implications. During the twentieth century, racial and ethnic minorities and other marginalized groups staked claims to full citizenship and seized some share of the political and cultural power once wielded by a narrow and more homogenous elite. Simultaneously, new mass cultural forms and media technologies fundamentally altered how Americans spent their leisure time, learned about the modernizing world around them, and participated in politics and governance. In tracing the history of this evolving but persistently powerful way of thinking—one that viewed political and cultural incorporation as tightly interconnected goals—*Visibility Matters* provides a novel perspective on the diversification of U.S. society and the mediation of U.S. culture during the twentieth century, on the deep entanglement of these two momentous transformations, and on the changes they together wrought in American life. As it does so, it also illuminates Americans' varied and shifting understandings of citizenship and national belonging, of prejudice, and of the influence and political significance of mass entertainment. Finally, it sheds light on the constant but evolving interactions among different marginalized groups and social movements, and it highlights the persistently central role played by African Americans in consolidating the widely-understood common sense that banishing negative tropes and stereotypes in American moving images was a key step toward full belonging for any social group. The broad embrace of the well-traveled notion that visibility matters, and the particular ways in which it was articulated at different moments and by different groups—including the conflicting visions with which it was pursued—permits a fresh

understanding of the centrality of race and racial struggle in twentieth-century America; of the varying dynamics of exclusions rooted in race, religion, ethnicity, gender, and sexuality; and of the divergent fortunes of different marginalized groups over the course of the century.

Visibility Matters:
The Pursuit of American Belonging in an Age of Moving Images

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by
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Acknowledgments

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I am eager for the new stories we will write together. Historians both, we spend much of

our days thinking about the past, but he makes me excited about the future.

Introduction

This is America—So Goes TV, So Goes Reality

In late 2008, shortly after Barack Obama became the first African American to be elected president of the United States, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People issued a report strongly critical of the lack of racial diversity in American network television programming. Benjamin Jealous, the NAACP's president and CEO, used Obama's election to drive home the report's findings. In a press statement, he declared, "This is America: so goes TV, so goes reality. We don't think it's any accident that before we had a black president in reality, we had a black president on TV."[1]

Jealous was hardly alone in associating Obama's victory with television and the movies. For instance, while Jealous referenced the U.S. president portrayed by Dennis Haysbert in the television drama *24* from 2001 through 2006, other commentators noted how Obama's story echoed that of the 1967 movie *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner*, or likened his image more generally with that of Sydney Poitier, that film's star.[2] But few stated the case so directly as Jealous, who not only drew a causal connection between television content and the "reality" of an African American's ascent to the presidency—

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[1] Lynn Elber, Associated Press, "Network TV Diversity Lacking In 'Virtual Whiteout' Of Television," *The Huffington Post*, December 18, 2008, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2008/12/18/network-tv-diversity-lack_n_151991.html. The report was NAACP Hollywood Bureau, *Out of Focus - Out of Sync Take 4: A Report on the Television Industry* (Baltimore, MD: National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, 2008).

[2] For the former see, e.g., Frank Rich, "Guess Who's Coming to Dinner," *The New York Times*, November 2, 2008, http://www.nytimes.com/2008/11/02/opinion/02rich.html; Ezra Klein, "Guess Who's Coming to the White House?," *The American Prospect*, November 5, 2008, http://prospect.org/article/guess-whos-coming-white-house. For the latter see, e.g., David Ehrenstein, "Obama the 'Magic Negro,'" *Los Angeles Times*, March 19, 2007, http://www.latimes.com/la-oe-ehrenstein19mar19-story.html; Jake Tapper, "Guess Who's Coming to Dinner," *ABC News Political Punch*, January 13, 2008, http://abcnews.go.com/blogs/politics/2008/01/guess-whos-comi/.

between a group's representation in moving images and its political incorporation—but also characterized this connection as a quintessentially American one. "This is America."

Jealous gave voice to a long-held American conviction: that to be fully present and fairly portrayed in movies and on television is both a prelude to other forms of inclusion and, in itself, an essential part of national belonging. Virtually since the birth of the motion picture as a commercial entertainment with a mass audience in the 1910s, through the movies' maturation and then their midcentury battle with television for supremacy, and on to the rise of network television as the predominant medium for mass entertainment by the 1960s and 1970s, this conviction prompted racial, ethnic, and religious minorities, and eventually other marginalized social groups as well, to criticize what they saw on screen, and to organize and agitate to change it. In their pursuit of fair representation, they studied and analyzed moving images and their effects, picketed and boycotted particular pictures and programs, appealed to governments to regulate screen content and diversify employment in the motion picture and television industries, and negotiated directly with producers for specific changes in content and to facilitate routine consultation. Even as Irish Americans and Jews, African Americans and women, and Latinos and gays and lesbians struggled to dismantle the legal, political, and social structures that enforced their marginalization, many were preoccupied by whether people like them were fairly represented on screen. They were certain that their visibility mattered.

Visibility Matters offers a contextualized history of this persistent certitude, probing a series of key moments over the course of the twentieth century in order to lay bare the roots of this notion, trace its development, and weigh its implications. During

the twentieth century, racial and ethnic minorities and other marginalized groups staked claims to full citizenship and seized some share of the political and cultural power once wielded by a narrow and more homogenous elite. Simultaneously, new mass cultural forms and media technologies fundamentally altered how Americans spent their leisure time, learned about the modernizing world around them, and participated in politics and governance. In tracing the history of this evolving but persistently powerful way of thinking—one that viewed political and cultural incorporation as tightly interconnected goals—*Visibility Matters* provides a novel perspective on the diversification of U.S. society and the mediation of U.S. culture during the twentieth century, on the deep entanglement of these two momentous transformations, and on the changes they together wrought in American life. As it does so, it also illuminates Americans' varied and shifting understandings of citizenship and belonging, of prejudice, and of the influence and political significance of mass entertainment. It ultimately reveals diverse Americans grappling with problems of social cohesion and national belonging in the modern world of the twentieth century, a world characterized by increasingly heterogeneous and mobile populations, a quickening pace and scale of daily life, an ever more thoroughly commercialized and mediated culture, and a questioning of old verities and hierarchies— all conditions that persist in our own time.

Yet *Visibility Matters* is about a particular, delimited moment in American history: the roughly sixty-five-year span between the mid-1910s and the late-1970s. The beginning of this period witnessed the emergence of a class of urban, industrial wageworkers, populated through the mass migration to American cities of European immigrants, rural African Americans, and single men and women of all backgrounds—

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and concomitant struggles to maintain enforce social and racial hierarchies, to tightly

circumscribe the boundaries of national identity and belonging, and to restrict the flow of

new arrivals from abroad. By the end of this period, decades later, America had been

remade by a financial cataclysm and two world wars; by the forging of a dominant new

political coalition of blue-collar, African American, and Catholic and Jewish voters; by

the rise of a new middle class and its subsequent flight from cities; by the black civil

rights movement; and by the struggles for women's and gay liberation and a mounting

conservative counter mobilization. Descendants of early-twentieth-century European

immigrants occupied positions of political power, sought to recapture and celebrate their

"ethnic" heritage, and in some cases began to turn away from the New Deal coalition.

African Americans had won enormous gains, but racial inequality and segregation

continued to shape everyday life. Reforms in law and policy enabled and encouraged

new waves of migration from Central America and Asia, yet simultaneously perpetuated

and strengthened restrictive definitions of national citizenship.[3]

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[3] Works that were particularly influential in formulating this framing of twentieth-century American social and political history include George Chauncey, *Gay New York : Gender, Urban Culture, and the Makings of the Gay Male World, 1890-1940* (New York: Basic Books, 1994); Lizabeth Cohen, *Making a New Deal: Industrial Workers in Chicago, 1919-1939* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990); Lizabeth Cohen, *A Consumers' Republic: The Politics of Mass Consumption in Postwar America* (New York: Knopf, 2003); Gary Gerstle, *American Crucible: Race and Nation in the Twentieth Century* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2002); Gary Gerstle and Steve Fraser, eds., *The Rise and Fall of the New Deal Order, 1930-1980* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1989); James R. Grossman, *Land of Hope: Chicago, Black Southerners, and the Great Migration* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989); Matthew Frye Jacobson, *Barbarian Virtues: The United States Encounters Foreign Peoples at Home and Abroad, 1876-1917* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2001); Matthew Frye Jacobson, *Roots Too: White Ethnic Revival in Post-Civil Rights America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006); Joanne J. Meyerowitz, *Women Adrift: Independent Wage Earners in Chicago, 1880-1930* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991); Mae M. Ngai, *Impossible Subjects: Illegal Aliens and the Making of Modern America* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004); Daniel T. Rodgers, *Age of Fracture* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2011); Robert O. Self, *All in the Family: The Realignment of American Democracy Since the 1960s* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2012); Bruce J. Schulman, *The Seventies: The Great Shift in American Culture, Society, and Politics* (New York: Free Press, 2001); Thomas J. Sugrue, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996).

Unfolding alongside this reconfiguration of American society and politics was a similarly consequential transformation in American culture. The new urban dwellers of the early twentieth century enjoyed a flourishing world of modern commercial amusements, foremost among them moving pictures. Six decades later, broadcast television dominated the cultural landscape, and the movie industry struggled to find a creative voice and a viable business model. The intervening years constituted an age of moving images, an era in which screen content not only enjoyed unparalleled centrality and popularity in American life but also consistently attracted mass audiences. In motion pictures—especially after the consolidation of the Hollywood studio system by the early 1930s—and then in a television medium virtually synonymous with the three major broadcast networks, Americans experienced not only a culture saturated with moving images, but also one characterized by shared points of reference, relative homogeneity, and limited viewing options. It is possible to speak of a "mass" culture in this period in a way it is not beforehand, when popular culture was far more intensely localized, and is not in subsequent decades, as entertainment, mechanisms for delivering it, and audiences for it grew more fragmented and fractured, and moving images became densely integrated within interactive multimedia.[4] Although the notion that "visibility matters"

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[4] General histories of motion pictures include Lary May, *Screening Out the Past: The Birth of Mass Culture and the Motion Picture Industry* (Chicago: University Of Chicago Press, 1983); Robert Sklar, *Movie-Made America: A Cultural History of American Movies*, rev. ed. (New York: Vintage Books, 1994); Thomas Schatz, *The Genius of the System: Hollywood Filmmaking in the Studio Era* (New York: Pantheon, 1988). General histories of television include Erik Barnouw, *Tube of Plenty: The Evolution of American Television*, 2nd rev. ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990); J. Fred MacDonald, *One Nation Under Television: The Rise and Decline of Network TV*, rev. ed. (Chicago: Nelson-Hall, 1994); Gary R. Edgerton, *The Columbia History of American Television* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007). Herman Gray proposed in 2005 that "a cultural politics that assumed a central, stable, even national public sphere" was "no longer tenable," pointing to ongoing transformations in the technologies of mass communication and the increasing emergence of a "global entertainment/information/communications market" characterized by simultaneous consolidation of ownership and segmentation of audiences. These changes, he noted, were under way as early as the late 1970s, but they were consolidated in the United

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remains powerful to this day—as Benjamin Jealous's 2008 declaration indicates—this particular period was the crucible in which it was forged.

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The visibility of historically marginalized groups in motion pictures and television is hardly a neglected subject. Existing examinations by historians, scholars in other disciplines, journalists, and activist intellectuals generally fall into one of two broad categories. The majority of scholarly and popular attention has focused on representations of marginalized groups on screen, while a smaller corpus of scholarship has scrutinized the "interventionist strategies" undertaken by such groups to alter screen content.[5]

The best known assessments of how marginalized groups have been represented in motion pictures and television continue to be the many retrospective surveys that describe and evaluate depictions of a particular marginalized group in a particular medium over a span of years. These "images of" books, in most cases written for a general audience, were usually produced by journalists, critics, and activists, as well as by some scholars. They can be traced back at least as far as the British film critic Peter Noble's 1948 book *The Negro in Films*. But they proliferated in the early 1970s, with the publication of works by journalist/critics, including Donald Bogle's *Toms, Coons,*

States by the 1996 Telecommunications Act. Herman Gray, *Cultural Moves: African Americans and the Politics of Representation* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 7–8, 79–81.

[5] I borrow the term "interventionist strategies" from Barbara Dianne Savage. See Barbara Dianne Savage, *Broadcasting Freedom: Radio, War, and the Politics of Race, 1938-1948* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999), 10.

Mulattoes, Mammies, and Bucks: An Interpretive History of Blacks on Film in 1973,

Marjorie Rosen's *Popcorn Venus: Women, Movies, and the American Dream* the same

year, and Molly Haskell's *From Reverence to Rape: The Treatment of Women in the*

Movies in 1974.[6] These were soon joined by similar books, articles, and films assessing

the images of Latinos, gays and lesbians, Jews, Asian Americans, and Native Americans,

among others, in motion pictures as well as in television. The emergence, proliferation,

and popularity of these "images of" studies during the 1970s is an important aspect of the

history *Visibility Matters* seeks to reconstruct, and their historical and intellectual

contexts will be probed in detail in Chapter 3.

During the 1980s, scholars devoted increasing attention to studying how

marginalized groups were represented on screen and elsewhere in the mass media, both in

the past and in the present. The "images of" approach fell out of favor, however,

supplanted by the growing intellectual currency of cultural studies and poststructuralist

theory.[7] As the sociologist Herman Gray wrote in 1995, analyses of film and television

informed by cultural studies approaches rejected "fixed and unified subject positions,

identities, and historical forces" in favor of "more complex understandings of televisual

and cinematic practices." Instead of seeking after authenticity and accuracy, and

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[6] Peter Noble, *The Negro in Films* (London: S. Robinson, 1948); Donald Bogle, *Toms, Coons, Mulattoes, Mammies, and Bucks: An Interpretive History of Blacks in American Films* (New York: Viking Press, 1973); Marjorie Rosen, *Popcorn Venus: Women, Movies, and the American Dream* (Coward, McCann & Geoghegan, 1973); Molly Haskell, *From Reverence to Rape: The Treatment of Women in the Movies* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1974).

[7] See, e.g., Stuart Hall, "Encoding/decoding," in *Culture, Media, Language: Working Papers in Cultural Studies, 1972-79*, ed. Stuart Hall et al. (London: Hutchinson, 1980), 128–38; Stuart Hall, "Cultural Studies: Two Paradigms," *Media, Culture & Society* 2, no. 1 (1980): 57–72. On the "linguistic turn" in the context of historical scholarship, see Joan W. Scott, "The Evidence of Experience," *Critical Inquiry* 17, no. 4 (July 1991): 773–97. For an interesting survey of the state of research across disciplines on "images" in motion pictures and television, before this turn took firm hold, see the general introduction to Allen L. Woll and Randall M. Miller, *Ethnic and Racial Images in American Film and Television: Historical Essays and Bibliography* (New York: Garland, 1987).

assuming that passive audiences were wholly swayed by the positive or negative images they saw on screen, Gray argued, such scholarship aimed to produce "more complex and nuanced readings" that attended to contradiction and the possibility of appropriation and transgression, and saw popular culture as the site of political contestation. The film scholar Richard Dyer put it bluntly around the same time, declaring that much "'images of' work" was "deadly" and politically feeble, and calling instead for "considerations that get more nearly at the complexity and elusiveness, the real political difficulty, of representations."[8]

A large literature on questions of representation has since emerged within film studies, media studies, American studies, sociology, ethnic studies, queer studies, and other related disciplines.[9] This literature has helped to illuminate representation's complexities and the fluid, contingent nature of its politics. But it has tended to suggest that its own priorities diverge sharply from those of the latter day heirs to the activist intellectual traditions that *Visibility Matters* seeks to reconstruct: that whereas activists assume the coherence of group identity, scholars emphasize its constructed and contingent nature; whereas activists assume that "positive" and "realistic" representations are a self-evidently desirable goal, scholars articulate a more complicated politics conscious of visual texts' multivalent qualities; and whereas activists assume that media

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[8] Herman Gray, *Watching Race: Television and the Struggle for "Blackness"* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995), 1–5; Richard Dyer, *The Matter of Images: Essays on Representation*, 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2002), 1–2. Lester Friedman offered a similar critique of "image of" studies in 1991, writing that such works "inevitably focus on value-laden judgments of authenticity and elusive concepts of realism." Lester D. Friedman, ed., *Unspeakable Images: Ethnicity and the American Cinema* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 1991), 2.

[9] Just a few representative examples of such works include Christine Acham, *Revolution Televised: Prime Time and the Struggle for Black Power* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005); Alan Nadel, *Television in Black-and-White America: Race And National Identity* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2005); Charles Ramírez Berg, *Latino Images in Film: Stereotypes, Subversion, and Resistance* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2000).

powerfully influences audiences, scholars highlight the complex dynamics of spectatorship. Accordingly, this literature devotes relatively limited attention to the history and the striking persistence of the pursuit of fair representation, and is more inclined to critique or problematize these activist traditions than to historicize and contextualize them.[10] *Visibility Matters*, by contrast, aims to do the latter.

In this task, it builds upon works in the second category described above, which offer accounts of particular interventions and interventionist strategies by marginalized groups to shape screen content. Scholars have documented the controversies that surrounded certain motion pictures and television shows—including the film *The Birth of a Nation* in 1915, the sitcom *Amos 'n' Andy* in 1951, and the movie musical *Porgy and Bess* in 1959—in the course of broader assessments of those works and their antecedents.[11] Others have examined historical moments when outside groups turned their attention generally toward motion pictures or television, such as during World War II, when black activists and the federal government's Office of War Information each

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[10] For instance, the media scholar Sasha Torres acknowledges that "the conceptual category of the 'stereotype'" has "historically been successful in organizing aggrieved collectivities of (usually middle-class) African American spectators into counterpublics," but criticizes a preoccupation with stereotypes as inattentive to the resistant potentials of spectatorship, to the complexities of televisual texts and contexts, to other "problematic representational modalities" (such as the ethnographic gaze), and to the historical codependence of the civil rights movement and the television industry. Sasha Torres, *Black, White, and in Color: Television and Black Civil Rights* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2003), 1. To be certain, however, some scholars working in the cultural studies tradition have collaborated with contemporary activists pursuing fair representation on screen. For instance, the sociologist and television scholar Darnell Hunt contributed to reports on industry diversity by the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, the Screen Actors Guild, and the NAACP. See. e.g, United States Congress, House of Representatives, Committee on the Judiciary, *Field Hearing: Proposed Combination of Comcast and NBC-Universal*, June 7, 2010, 111th Congress, Second Session (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 2011), 147–157; Darnell M. Hunt, ed., *Channeling Blackness: Studies on Television and Race in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005).

[11] For book-length studies, see Melvin Patrick Ely, *The Adventures of Amos "N" Andy: A Social History of an American Phenomenon* (New York: Free Press, 1991); Melvyn Stokes, *D. W. Griffith's The Birth of a Nation: A History of "the Most Controversial Motion Picture of All Time"* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007); Ellen Noonan, *The Strange Career of Porgy and Bess: Race, Culture, and America's Most Famous Opera* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012).

sought to improve the movies' treatment of African Americans, or the late 1960s and

1970s, when numerous "advocacy groups" targeted prime-time entertainment

television.[12] Many others have offered histories of particular social groups, social

movements, and activist organizations and their interventions to transform film or

television entertainment.[13] Taken together, this body of scholarship provides compelling

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[12] On the former, see e.g., Clayton R. Koppes and Gregory D. Black, "Blacks, Loyalty, and Motion-Picture Propaganda in World War II," *Journal of American History* 73, no. 2 (1986): 383–406; Clayton R. Koppes and Gregory D. Black, *Hollywood Goes to War: How Politics, Profits, and Propaganda Shaped World War II Movies* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), chapter 6; Thomas Cripps, *Making Movies Black: The Hollywood Message Movie from World War II to the Civil Rights Era* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), chapters 2–5; Lauren Rebecca Sklaroff, *Black Culture and the New Deal: The Quest for Civil Rights in the Roosevelt Era* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009), chapter 6. On the latter, see Kathryn Montgomery, *Target: Prime Time: Advocacy Groups and the Struggle Over Entertainment Television* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989); Allison Perlman, "Reforming the Wasteland: Television, Reform, and Social Movements, 1950-2004" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Texas at Austin, 2007).

[13] Examples of such histories are numerous. Those focusing on African American activism include Leonard C. Archer, *Black Images in the American Theater: NAACP Protest Campaigns—Stage, Screen, Radio and Television* (Brooklyn, NY: Pageant-Poseidon, 1973); Thomas Cripps, "Movies, Race, and World War II: 'Tennessee Johnson' as an Anticipation of the Strategies of the Civil Rights Movement," *Prologue* 14, no. 2 (1982): 49–67; Anna Everett, *Returning the Gaze: A Genealogy of Black Film Criticism, 1909-1949* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001); Steven D. Classen, *Watching Jim Crow: The Struggles over Mississippi TV, 1955-1969* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004); Kay Mills, *Changing Channels: The Civil Rights Case That Transformed Television* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2004); Thomas Cripps, "'Walter's Thing': The NAACP's Hollywood Bureau of 1946—A Cautionary Tale," *Journal of Popular Film and Television* 33, no. 2 (Summer 2005): 116–25; Brenna Wynn Greer, "Image Matters: Black Representation Politics and Civil Rights Work in the Mid-Twentieth Century United States" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Wisconsin-Madison, 2011); Yuya Kiuchi, *Struggles for Equal Voice: The History of African American Media Democracy* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2012); Cara Caddoo, *Envisioning Freedom: Cinema and the Building of Modern Black Life* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014), esp. chapters 5–6; Jenny Woodley, *Art for Equality: The NAACP's Cultural Campaign for Civil Rights* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2014). On feminist activism, see Patricia Bradley, *Mass Media and the Shaping of American Feminism, 1963-1975* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2003); Allison Perlman, "Feminists In The Wasteland: The National Organization for Women and Television Reform," *Feminist Media Studies* 7, no. 4 (2007): 413–31. On gay and lesbian activism, see Kathryn Montgomery, "Gay Activists and the Networks," *Journal of Communication* 31, no. 3 (1981): 49–57; Steven Capsuto, *Alternate Channels: The Uncensored Story of Gay and Lesbian Images on Radio and Television* (New York: Ballantine Books, 2000); Vincent A. Doyle, "The Visibility Professionals: The Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation and the Cultural Politics of Mainstreaming" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Massachusetts Amherst, 2005); David Eisenbach, *Gay Power: An American Revolution* (New York: Carroll & Graf, 2006). On Latino activism, see Chon A. Noriega, *Shot in America: Television, the State, and the Rise of Chicano Cinema* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000). For a rare example of a study that considers multiple groups together, see M. Alison Kibler, "Paddy, Shylock, and Sambo: Irish, Jewish, and African American Efforts to Ban Racial Ridicule on Stage and Screen," in *Culture and Belonging in Divided Societies: Contestation and Symbolic Landscapes*, ed. Marc Howard Ross (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009). See also M. Alison Kibler, *Censoring Racial Ridicule: Irish, Jewish, and*

evidence of the many ways that a deep and persistent faith in the power of fair representation in moving images has made itself manifest.[14]

Most of these studies, however, are focused on only one social group, thereby minimizing attention to the interactions among multiple groups and the connections, continuities, and differences among their struggles and interventions. Most also limit their focus to relatively short periods of time and to a single medium, thereby preventing them from drawing broader conclusions about how the pursuit of fair representation on screen has changed over decades. Although the best of these studies carefully consider how "visibility" or "fair representation" emerged as a goal for particular marginalized groups in particular moments, they nevertheless generally aim to revise the history and historiography of an individual social group or movement, or of film or television, rather than grappling with this notion as a phenomenon central to the history of the United States in the twentieth century.

Visibility Matters, by looking across multiple decades, marginalized groups, and media forms, begins to address this gap. Rather than document how particular groups were or were not visible at particular moments, or narrate the controversies that attended particular cultural texts, it emphasizes the evolution of ideas about the power and significance of fair representation in moving images over the long term, seeking

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African American Struggles over Race and Representation, 1890-1930 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2015), published too late to be consulted here.

[14] Other works also relevant to this history are social histories of particular marginalized groups within the film and television industries, which include Neal Gabler, *An Empire of Their Own: How the Jews Invented Hollywood* (New York: Crown, 1988); David Ehrenstein, *Open Secret: Gay Hollywood, 1928-1998* (New York: William Morrow, 1998); William J. Mann, *Behind the Screen: How Gays and Lesbians Shaped Hollywood, 1910-1969* (New York: Viking, 2001); Donald Bogle, *Bright Boulevards, Bold Dreams: The Story of Black Hollywood* (New York: One World/Ballantine, 2005).

ultimately to help us better understand why movies and television mattered so much to so many who peopled major social movements of the twentieth century.

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The pursuit of fair representation in moving images encompassed two distinct but inextricable impulses: one concerned with quantity (a desire for visibility, as opposed to outright invisibility or inadequate visibility) and the other with quality (a desire for "positive" or "realistic" portrayals as opposed to ones considered offensive, damaging, or stereotypical). Although never separable, the relative prominence of these two impulses varied over time and from group to group. Both, however, reflected the currency of an analysis that saw marginalization as resulting from prejudice, and prejudice, in turn, as rooted in unfamiliarity. In this view, movies, and, later, television left the majority either misinformed or uninformed about the true nature of those marginalized in society, and they distorted how marginalized groups saw and understood themselves. If altered suitably, movies and television could undo this damage.

One theme of *Visibility Matters*, then, is the persisting and entwined appeal of prejudice as a way of understanding and explaining racism and other forms of marginalization and exclusion, and of a so-called "powerful effects" model in which motion pictures and television were understood to have a strong and direct influence on their viewers. A history of these beliefs illuminates both the interactions of social movements with social scientists and other experts, and the gaps that existed between popular understandings and scholarly interpretations. For instance, *Visibility Matters* expands upon recent histories that examine connections among the social scientific study

of prejudice, the new causal explanations it produced, and efforts to combat intolerance and discrimination before and after World War II.[15] It also demonstrates how personal prejudice has persisted as a popular paradigm for explaining social marginalization, even as explanations rooted primarily in individual psychology lost favor among scholars.[16] In the same way, it demonstrates both how social movements drew upon the work of media scholars in pursuing fair representation in moving images, and how such efforts were also shaped by the power that ordinary Americans ascribed to new media technologies even in the absence of supporting social scientific evidence.[17]

However, even as marginalized groups saw fair representation in moving images as a way of changing minds and combatting prejudice, they did not pursue it merely as a means to this end. Instead, they also came to understand it as, in itself, a crucial component of national belonging. The emergence of this analysis, and its central role in marginalized groups' preoccupation with and pursuit of fair representation, is a second theme of *Visibility Matters.* Motion pictures matured at a time of intense debate over the boundaries of American national identity, and they quickly became a battleground in the

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[15] See Stuart Svonkin, *Jews Against Prejudice: American Jews and the Fight for Civil Liberties* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997); Diana Selig, *Americans All: The Cultural Gifts Movement* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008); Anthony Q. Hazard, Jr., *Postwar Anti-Racism: The United States UNESCO, and "Race," 1945-1968* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012).

[16] See, e.g., Svonkin, *Jews Against Prejudice*, 192–193; Walter A. Jackson, *Gunnar Myrdal and America's Conscience: Social Engineering and Racial Liberalism, 1938-1987* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1994), chapters 7–8. For a reflection on these questions and the challenge facing historians and other scholars in balancing the individual and the social "levels" in accounting for racism, see Thomas C. Holt, "Marking: Race, Race-Making, and the Writing of History," *The American Historical Review* 100, no. 1 (February 1995): 1–20.

[17] Social scientific research on media effects will be examined in greater detail in Chapter 3. On efforts to understand the meanings ordinary people ascribed to technology, see, e.g., Warren Susman, "Culture and Communications," in *Culture as History: The Transformation of American Society in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984); Lynn Spigel, *Make Room for TV: Television and the Family Ideal in Postwar America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992); Classen, *Watching Jim Crow*.

struggle to fortify or expand those boundaries. The centrality of the movies to the

propaganda efforts of the U.S. government during World War II further strengthened the

perceived connections between visibility in moving images and national belonging, as did

the political retrenchment of the postwar period, which derogated alternative solidarities

of color, class, or ideology. As broadcast television—which was transmitted over public

airwaves and at least notionally subject to federal government regulation—displaced the

movies by the 1960s, new opportunities emerged to formalize a right to fair

representation guaranteed by the state to all citizens. Even as those opportunities were

foreclosed by the late 1970s, the government nevertheless acknowledged and even

encouraged the idea that to be visible on screen was an essential part of being fully

American.

To trace the origins and historical development of ideas about national belonging

is to draw connections among several disparate areas of scholarship. Scholars of film and

television have over the last several decades assessed how moving images work to

construct and reshape a "national imaginary" or "national culture," characterized by the

inclusion and elevation of some individuals and groups and the exclusion or

diminishment of others.[18] *Visibility Matters* historicizes such analytical approaches,

uncovering the evolving ways in which marginalized groups themselves understood

moving images as significant to the terms of their inclusion within the United States. In

so doing, it documents an important aspect of the history of what social scientists have

termed "cultural citizenship"—a concept one scholar has defined, in part, as "the positive

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[18] For an invocation of the "national imaginary," see Gray, *Cultural Moves*. For "national culture," see, e.g., Michael Paul Rogin, *Blackface, White Noise: Jewish Immigrants in the Hollywood Melting Pot* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996). On the origins of the "national imaginary" as an analytical concept in film studies, see Michael Walsh, "National Cinema, National Imaginary," *Film History* 8, no. 1 (April 1996): 5–17.

acknowledgment of difference in and by the mainstream."[19] By putting these concepts

from critical and cultural studies into historical perspective, *Visibility Matters* aims to

explore why and how it was that representation in motion pictures, televised

entertainment, and the profit-oriented industries that produced them, came to seem

essential to belonging in the United States. In so doing, it seeks to extend the work of

historians who have reexamined the nature and historical evolution of American

citizenship and called attention to "differences in the experiences of citizenship," to

changes in those experiences over time, and to the twentieth-century entanglement of

citizenship with consumerism.[20]

A third theme in *Visibility Matters* is the constant but shifting interactions among

the different marginalized groups and social movements who pursued fair representation

in moving images—and the influential role of African Americans in this phenomenon.

African Americans developed an intellectual and strategic toolkit that was borrowed

eagerly as other social groups sought to understand the nature of their marginalization

within American society and to conceive of a solution to it. That toolkit was assembled

initially in conversation with other minority groups in the early years of motion pictures,

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[19] Toby Miller, "Introducing... Cultural Citizenship," *Social Text* 19, no. 4 (Winter 2001): 2. The broad concept of "cultural citizenship"—what William V. Flores describes as "the various processes by which groups define themselves, form a community, and claim space and social rights"—was developed in the context of Latino studies. See Renato Rosaldo, "Cultural Citizenship and Educational Democracy," *Cultural Anthropology* 9, no. 3 (August 1994): 402–11; William V. Flores, "New Citizens, New Rights: Undocumented Immigrants and Latino Cultural Citizenship," *Latin American Perspectives* 30, no. 2 (March 2003): 89. Particularly intriguing is Miller's use of the term with reference to mass communication, as when he contrasts earlier guarantees of political representation (political citizenship) and "a minimum standard of living" (economic citizenship) with "the distinctive postmodern guarantee" of "access to the technologies of communication." Miller, "Introducing... Cultural Citizenship," 2–3. The history related in the chapters that follow, however, calls into question this implied periodization, suggesting the deep and longstanding connections between efforts to secure fair access to media of communication and the pursuit of national belonging.

[20] Linda K. Kerber, "The Meanings of Citizenship," *The Journal of American History* 84, no. 3 (December 1997): 833–54; Cohen, *A Consumers' Republic*.

inspired by the efforts of Irish Catholic and, especially, Jewish communal and religious leaders in the 1910s and 1920s to shape screen content. During World War II, a number of factors converged to elevate African Americans' struggle for fairer representation in the movies, making it a surrogate for the cause of "minorities" generally. By the 1960s and 1970s, black campaigns for visibility in both motion pictures and television were cited by a new generation of Latino, feminist, and gay and lesbian intellectuals and activists who sought to place their own demands in the same tradition. Over the course of the twentieth century, then, African Americans' pursuit of fair representation helped to consolidate a widely understood common sense that American moving images relied upon and recycled negative tropes and stereotypes regarding marginalized groups, and that banishing such portrayals was a key step toward full belonging for any group.

Given these facts, it is not surprising that African American interventionist strategies targeting moving images, as well as other realms of media and culture, have been documented especially thoroughly. Even within the historiographies of the black civil rights movement and the longer African American freedom struggle, however, historians have paid only limited attention to what Barbara Dianne Savage has termed the "braided relationship" that has historically existed among "race, media, and politics."[21] *Visibility Matters* joins other recent efforts to reinterpret the history of the long civil rights movement by answering Savage's call to attend to this "enduring and unrecognized strand of African American political thought."[22] But it aims also to expand upon this

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[21] Savage, *Broadcasting Freedom*, 5–6.

[22] Ibid., 10. See, especially, Sklaroff, *Black Culture and the New Deal*; Greer, "Image Matters"; Woodley, *Art for Equality*. See also Brian Ward, ed., *Media, Culture, and the Modern African American Freedom Struggle* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2001); Waldo E. Martin, *No Coward Soldiers: Black Cultural Politics and Postwar America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005); Justin T. Lorts, "Black Laughter/Black Protest: Civil Rights, Respectability, and the Cultural Politics of African

scholarship, showing how African Americans pursued fair representation in conversation with similar, simultaneous efforts by other marginalized groups. In doing so, it also contributes to an emerging literature that probes the connections, differences, and commonalities among the social movements of marginalized groups in the twentieth century United States.[23] The wide embrace of the well-traveled notion that visibility matters, and the particular ways in which it was articulated at different moments and by different groups—including the conflicting visions with which it was pursued—permits a fresh understanding of the centrality of race and racial struggle in twentieth-century America; of the varying dynamics of exclusions rooted in race, religion, ethnicity, gender, and sexuality; and of the divergent fortunes of different marginalized groups over the course of the century.

<div align="center">❖</div>

Necessarily, *Visibility Matters* is selective in both its narrative and its research. In aiming at providing a history over the *longue durée* of the notion that fair representation in moving images is essential to national belonging, it can probe deeply at only several crucial moments and aspects of this history. It is deliberately not focused on rehearsing the better known controversies regarding particular movies and television shows, many of

American Comedy, 1934-1968" (Ph.D. dissertation, Rutgers University, 2008); Ruth Feldstein, *How It Feels to Be Free: Black Women Entertainers and the Civil Rights Movement* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013); Judith E. Smith, *Becoming Belafonte: Black Artist, Public Radical* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2014).

[23] See, e.g., Cheryl Greenberg, *Troubling the Waters: Black-Jewish Relations in the American Century* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006); Shana Bernstein, *Bridges of Reform: Interracial Civil Rights Activism in Twentieth-Century Los Angeles* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010); Timothy Stewart-Winter, *Queer Clout: Chicago and the Making of Gay Politics* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, forthcoming).

which have been examined in great detail. Indeed, it is less focused on interpreting or reinterpreting particular texts than it is on reconstructing the ideas that shaped such controversies, and the interventionist strategies they produced. It neglects certain marginalized groups—perhaps especially Native Americans and Asian Americans—in aiming to balance attention to those who have played especially significant roles in the development of this notion, and attention to differences of race, ethnicity, religion, gender, and sexuality. Its ambit is motion picture and television entertainment, although it is conscious of the many forms of communication mediated by these technologies, especially by television. Finally, although attuned to the ways that the pursuit of fair representation on screen could pit differing visions of collective identity against one another, *Visibility Matters* does not devote significant attention to those who rejected this pursuit entirely. Rather, it focuses on those diverse and more numerous outsiders who did believe visibility mattered, and on the desire they ultimately shared to get inside, to transform the mainstream and its culture certainly, but to join it—in short, to belong. *Visibility Matters* aims to help us explain the power of this impulse.

Chapter 1, "A Pencil of Peculiar Force," examines the many-sided struggle over motion pictures that unfolded between the 1910s and the 1930s. Ethnic, religious, and racial minorities—Irish Americans, American Jews, and African Americans—played crucial parts in the fledgling industry as producers, performers, exhibitors, and customers. Confronting the new medium, and in conversation with one another, Irish Catholic, Jewish, and black advocates developed shared concerns regarding "caricatures" and "ridicule" on screen, but also had distinctive preoccupations and sometimes contradictory goals for motion pictures that reflected their different social positions. Concurrently,

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social scientists, many of them subsidized by moral reformers, documented the movies'
powerful influence on audiences, including their ability to foster prejudice. By the mid-
1930s, pressure from reformers forced the motion picture industry to adopt a voluntary
Motion Picture Production Code that had been authored by Irish Catholic advocates who
integrated their pursuit of improved depictions of ethnic Irish into a larger critique of the
movies' treatment of religious and moral questions. Thus, although the Code aimed
primarily to raise the movies' "moral standards," it also promised "consideration and
respectful treatment" of "the just rights, history, and feelings of any nation." As
implemented, it empowered some European immigrant groups to curtail stereotypes,
created new obstacles for Jews and especially African Americans in their pursuit of fair
representation, and blunted calls for greater government oversight, while offering a
model of intervention in Hollywood characterized by negotiation, self-regulation, and
outside pressure.

Soon, however, World War II decisively transformed marginalized groups'
pursuit of fair representation in motion pictures, energizing and elevating in particular the
efforts of African Americans. Chapter 2, "Citizenship in the World of the Movie," traces
the varied agendas of black activists and cultural figures, Hollywood liberals and leftists,
and government bureaucrats as they intersected during the war to focus unprecedented
and sustained attention on how minority groups, especially African Americans, were
represented on screen. As political moderates, liberals, and radicals alike embraced the
shared goal of victory and a common rhetoric of Americanism, optimistic advocates
sought ambitiously to curtail stereotypes and ensure that blacks and other minorities were
fully integrated in the movies. But after 1945, the coming of the Cold War irreparably

fractured these wartime alliances and foreclosed the most far-reaching visions articulated and interventions plotted during the war. Nevertheless, the pursuit of fair representation of African Americans in moving images, and its crucial importance to American belonging, gained a new and lasting prominence in the consciousness of many Americans of all races.

Chapter 3, "Intricate, Mysterious, but Implacably Real Relationships," moves forward to the three decades following the war's end, a time of rapid transformation in both American society and, with the debut of television, in American mass media. These changes prompted extensive efforts to investigate and explain the connection between screen and society. In the immediate wake of the war, even as Hollywood sought briefly to encourage tolerance through film, social scientists cast doubt on the effectiveness of such pictures. In succeeding years, however, these narrow debates regarding influence, prejudice, and tolerance gave way to broad indictments of the treatment of marginalized groups in motion pictures and on television. This shift owed partly to evolving ways of watching and appreciating movies, partly to the rise of television and a movement to reform it, and partly to developments in the study of film and mass communications. But most importantly, it resulted from the efforts of African American activists and intellectuals. Quickly joined by participants in other social movements inspired by the black civil rights struggle, they fostered a sprawling conversation about screen "images" of blacks, of women, of Latinos, of gays and lesbians, and of numerous other groups. Through two modes of inquiry in particular—critical histories of movie images and methodical analyses of television content—they asserted influentially that American

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moving images, past and present, actively enforced the social and political marginalization of women and minorities, and they demanded thoroughgoing reform.

As a result, by the late 1960s and into the 1970s, protests of movies and television programs were an almost constant feature of American life. The final chapters consider two overlapping but distinct projects pursued during these years. Chapter 4, "The Government Has To Do Something About It," describes a series of efforts to enlist the aid of the federal government in securing fair representation for marginalized groups on screen. Buoyed by the legislative victories of the civil rights movement and the regulatory gains of the television reform movement, African American, Mexican American, and feminist activists came to expect that a government that was increasingly committed to minority equality could and would act on their behalf. From outside and within the government, through the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, the Federal Communications Commission, and the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, they sought to discourage "demeaning," "distorted," and "stereotyped" portrayals on television and to use nondiscrimination measures to diversify the leadership of motion picture studios and television networks and broadcasters. They failed more often than they succeeded, stymied by the faith in free markets and the belief in free expression that were each deeply rooted in American political culture and each in ascendance during these years. Again and again, the federal government effectively declared visibility in motion pictures and television outside its control yet also important or even indispensable—cementing fair representation in moving images as an essential but unofficial part of national belonging.

Chapter 5, "The Ultimate Goals of Wider Representation," turns from the quest for government intervention to the simultaneous campaign by minority performers and professionals to build up their power within Hollywood, and to use that power to secure both changes in content and greater diversity in the casting of actors and the employment of off-camera personnel. As illustrated by the history of the organizing undertaken by African American actors and other professionals in Hollywood beginning in the 1940s, this project had deep roots. Those who pursued it developed over the course of decades their own particular vision of fair representation—one that combined positive and realistic images on screen, steady and dignified work for minority actors, respect and influence for marginalized groups within Hollywood, and a prominent place for performers and entertainers in minority politics. Perhaps nothing embodied this vision better than the Image Awards, which were first distributed by the NAACP's Beverly Hills-Hollywood branch in 1967 and quickly provided a model for other organizations' "awards programs." Over the Awards' first dozen years, their planners sought to use the event to improve, simultaneously, the status of blacks in Hollywood, the visibility of blacks on screen, and the reputation of blacks in America. Although the fledgling Image Awards themselves encountered difficult challenges, by the late 1970s and early 1980s, the vision of fair representation they epitomized—in which belonging in Hollywood and belonging in America were so tightly linked as to be almost inseparable—was flourishing.

In the twenty-first century, the notion that fair representation in moving images is central to belonging in America is one that pervades politics, culture, and social activism. Americans today seem more invested than ever in matters of visibility, on a proliferating

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array of screens. The history chronicled here cannot fully explain why this is so, for the decades after 1980—as the epilogue, "When Things Really Begin To Change," suggests—were marked by new transformations in American society, politics, and media and constituted a distinct new phase in the story of this notion. But it was over the course of seven decades at the heart of the American twentieth century, in and through the struggles for belonging waged by diverse persons and groups, that this idea emerged and flourished. *Visibility Matters* tells that story.

Chapter 1

A Pencil of Peculiar Force

Director D.W. Griffith's *The Birth of a Nation* was a landmark in the history of American cinema. An epic, twelve-reel, three-hour narrative, it was the first motion picture projected at the White House, and the most expensive U.S. production to date, so captivating and sensational that enormous audiences willingly paid premium rates, as much as two dollars, for tickets.[1] And at a New York City screening on April 14, 1915, about six weeks after its premiere there, an audience member hurled eggs at the screen. Another man in the same audience at the Liberty Theater stood and jeered. Both were escorted out by ushers and private detectives. In Boston several days later, a group of prospective patrons who had been refused tickets were beaten by plainclothes police after lingering in the lobby of the Tremont Theater protesting their exclusion. Eleven were arrested. Others made it into the screening and tossed eggs at the screen, shouted, and released stink bombs. Two days afterward, two thousand demonstrators marched on the nearby Massachusetts State House, demanding the film's suppression. In June, eight more protesters were arrested outside the same theater. Later that year, five hundred people protested the film outside a Philadelphia theater, and after someone threw a brick through the theater window, 150 police dispersed the demonstration with nightsticks, injuring many and arresting several.[2]

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[1] Melvyn Stokes, *D. W. Griffith's The Birth of a Nation: A History of "the Most Controversial Motion Picture of All Time"* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 3, 111-112.

[2] Ibid., 140–155; Thomas Cripps, *Slow Fade to Black: The Negro in American Film, 1900-1942* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), 55–60.

The largely–African American protestors who flung eggs, stink bombs, bricks, and epithets at *The Birth of a Nation* in 1915 objected to the film's distorted history of the U.S. Civil War and the Reconstruction period, to its depiction of black and mixed-race characters (all played by white actors in dark makeup) as venal politicians and sexual predators, and to its celebration of the violent political terror waged by the Reconstruction-era Ku Klux Klan. Their actions were the most dramatic aspect of a larger campaign by African Americans and their allies, led in part by the fledgling, six-year-old National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), to use lobbying, public testimony, and litigation to have the film banned, or at least its most offensive portions censored.

Early in 1915, the NAACP's small Los Angeles branch and other local African American groups asked the city's censorship board to ban the soon-to-debut film, citing its potential to inflame racial violence and the resulting threat to public safety. But despite a resolution of support from the city council, the censors rejected the NAACP's request. So too did the mayor and the chief of police. The NAACP members then turned to the courts, which prohibited a matinee preview on public safety grounds but allowed the film's February 8 premiere and subsequent screenings to go on.[3] The fight shifted in March to New York, where leaders at the national headquarters of the NAACP pressed the National Board of Censorship of Motion Pictures, a private, producer-organized oversight group that had already approved the film, to reconsider its decision. They secured only some modifications. NAACP leaders also filed a lawsuit against the film's producers and won an audience before New York's mayor, who promised to require the

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[3] Stokes, *D. W. Griffith's The Birth of a Nation*, 129–30.

removal of several notorious scenes that depicted black men preying on white women. But the disputed sequences ultimately remained, and the suit was dismissed.[4] Attention turned by April to Boston. There, the mayor convened a contentious hearing where NAACP leaders and other African American activists offered reasons, ranging from historical inaccuracy to the power of the black vote in the city, for him to ban the film. He concluded he lacked the authority to do so, but persuaded the producers to cut a number of scenes. Later that month, the Tremont Theater melee and subsequent march persuaded Massachusetts's governor to endorse the expansion of the state's censorship laws to prohibit "any show or entertainment which tends to excite racial or religious prejudice," and to instruct his attorney general to prosecute the Tremont's management under an existing law against "immoral" performances. In the end, despite strong opposition, the new censorship law was passed with enthusiastic black support—the local NAACP convened at least eighteen mass meetings in Boston's black community over the course of its campaign against the film. But the newly empowered censors then declined to ban the film, and the judge in the Tremont Theater case sought further cuts but likewise allowed *The Birth of a Nation* to play on.[5]

And so it continued around the country. Where strong local or state censorship laws existed and friendly politicians happened to hold office, as in Ohio and Kansas, the film was barred from theaters entirely. More commonly, where such laws were weaker or allies absent, as in Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, and numerous other cities, official

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[4] Ibid., 134–40; Cripps, *Slow Fade to Black*, 55–58. The NAACP's audience with the mayor had been preempted by overtures from allies of Booker T. Washington, who sought to undercut the rival organization.

[5] Stokes, *D. W. Griffith's The Birth of a Nation*, 141–50; Cripps, *Slow Fade to Black*, 58–63; Daniel J. Leab, *From Sambo to Superspade: The Black Experience in Motion Pictures* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1975), 23–24, 37.

prohibitions on the film were successfully overturned by producers' lawsuits. In the

South, where the NAACP lacked branches, the film was screened largely without

interruption. Partly as a result of its campaign against *The Birth of a Nation* in 1915, the

NAACP itself doubled in size, from five to ten thousand members. But black political

power was enormously limited, and even where African Americans enjoyed some sway,

state and local censorship laws—an uneven patchwork of measures that primarily

focused on perceived moral threats—were imperfect weapons for combatting racist

content and racial caricature.[6]

The protests against *The Birth of a Nation* occupy a singular place in the histories

of film and African American politics.[7] But the campaign against that film was only one

of many similar efforts by minority groups in the United States during the movies' first

decades. Taking a wider angle reveals a many-sided struggle waged during this period,

when mass migration, rapid urbanization, technological change, and the

commercialization of leisure and amusement upended existing structures of political,

social, and cultural authority and prompted an acute reaction against perceived racial,

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[6] Stokes, *D. W. Griffith's The Birth of a Nation*, 151–70; M. Alison Kibler, "Paddy, Shylock, and Sambo: Irish, Jewish, and African American Efforts to Ban Racial Ridicule on Stage and Screen," in *Culture and Belonging in Divided Societies: Contestation and Symbolic Landscapes*, ed. Marc Howard Ross (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009), 272–73. Attempts by African American groups to create competing films that offered more favorable images of blacks were stymied by lack of funds, although they did help to jumpstart the production of "race films" aimed at black audiences. Cripps, *Slow Fade to Black*, 70–76; Stokes, *D. W. Griffith's The Birth of a Nation*, 163–68; Davarian L. Baldwin, *Chicago's New Negroes: Modernity, the Great Migration, and Black Urban Life* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 126–130. Only in the late 1910s and 1920s did efforts to keep *The Birth of a Nation* off of movie screens and away from a mass audience begin to find some wider success. The coming of World War I provided African Americans an opportunity to describe the film as a threat to unity in the war effort, and the rise of nativist sentiments and the second Ku Klux Klan made some Catholics and Jews allies in opposing a picture that celebrated an organization that now targeted them. Still, for decades afterward, controversies periodically arose over the screening of a new print with synchronized sound, potential remakes, and revived presentations in commercial and educational settings. On such efforts in the late 1910s and 1920s and beyond, see Stokes, *D. W. Griffith's The Birth of a Nation*, 227–75.

[7] For a recent revisionist account of the protests, see Cara Caddoo, *Envisioning Freedom: Cinema and the Building of Modern Black Life* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014), chapter 6.

ethnic, and religious outsiders. Even as reformers and politicians described the emerging

medium of motion picture entertainment as a threat to both public morals and the social

order, rising but still-marginalized social groups also came to understand movie

caricatures and derogatory representation on screen as obstacles to their progress and

political incorporation. Motion pictures became a racial, ethnic, and religious battlefield.

An establishing shot of this battlefield would include in its frame, alongside

African Americans, two more social groups: Irish Americans, largely Catholic, a crucial

and politically powerful movie audience, and American Jews, who from the start featured

prominently among the medium's producers and exhibitors. Consider, then, two

additional protest campaigns that unfolded a dozen years after the premiere of *The Birth

of a Nation*. Together, the three protests suggest some striking similarities and

connections between each group's interventions in motion pictures and the concerns that

drove them—but also begin to reveal consequential differences in each group's position,

and in how each conceptualized and pursued fair representation on screen.[8]

Much had changed in American motion pictures by 1927, when a movie debuted

that, in the view of Boston's movie censor, occasioned the most complaints since *The

Birth of a Nation* twelve years earlier: *The Callahans and the Murphys*, a comedy

produced by Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer (MGM), one of the handful of large, vertically-

integrated corporations that had come to dominate movie production, distribution, and

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[8] On African Americans' central role in early motion pictures, see, e.g., Jacqueline Najuma
Stewart, *Migrating to the Movies: Cinema and Black Urban Modernity* (Berkeley: University of California
Press, 2005); Caddoo, *Envisioning Freedom*. For an analysis emphasizing the crucial symbolic role of
African Americans, blackface minstrelsy, and white supremacy in American cinema, see Michael Paul
Rogin, *Blackface, White Noise: Jewish Immigrants in the Hollywood Melting Pot* (Berkeley: University of
California Press, 1996).

exhibition.[9] Starring Marie Dressler and Polly Moran as the friendly rivals Mrs. Callahan

and Mrs. Murphy, the film depicted two quarrelsome Irish American families whose

children became romantically entangled. Dismayed Irish American groups saw in *The

Callahans and the Murphys* characters who dug ditches, drank, fought, and caroused at a

St. Patrick's Day picnic where Mrs. Callahan and Mrs. Murphy doused one another with

beer. It all recalled the clownish "stage Irishman" who had long been a fixture of

American and English theater and had just recently diminished in prominence, under

steady pressure from middle-class Irish-Catholic groups like the Ancient Order of

Hibernians (AOH). There was, moreover, a subplot making light of an apparently out-of-

wedlock birth, and there were jokes poking fun at the size of Irish families. That the film

made its characters' Catholicism explicit—they crossed themselves regularly and

displayed crucifixes in their homes—ensured that Catholic lay organizations and the

church's hierarchy, both populated largely by Irish Americans, would also have cause to

complain that the film was immoral and to protest its implications of Catholic moral

hypocrisy.[10]

As was the case with *The Birth of a Nation*, some were especially direct in

voicing their objections, shouting complaints as the picture played and directing an

arsenal of projectiles at the screen, taking to heart calls for direct action issued in the Irish

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[9] See, e.g., Thomas Schatz, *The Genius of the System: Hollywood Filmmaking in the Studio Era* (New York: Pantheon, 1988), chapters 1–4; Robert Sklar, *Movie-Made America: A Cultural History of American Movies*, rev. ed. (New York: Vintage Books, 1994), chapters 5 and 9.

[10] Frank Walsh, *Sin and Censorship: The Catholic Church and the Motion Picture Industry* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1996), 35–40; Francis G. Couvares, "Hollywood, Main Street, and the Church: Trying to Censor Movies before the Production Code," in *Movie Censorship and American Culture*, ed. Francis G. Couvares (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1996), 145–46. Regarding the "stage Irishman," see Joseph M. Curran, *Hibernian Green on the Silver Screen: The Irish and American Movies* (New York: Greenwood, 1989), 11–13. On the AOH, see Timothy J. Meagher, *The Columbia Guide to Irish American History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 237.

American press, which had been stirring discontent about the film since its June premiere in Los Angeles. One reporter, for the *Gaelic American*, demanded readers "rotten-egg the Stage Irishman and punch the theater manager who produces the vile thing." Surrounding such direct protests was, again, a broader campaign of opposition, waged by the leaders of Irish American and Catholic organizations.[11]

As with *The Birth of a Nation*, the campaign against *The Callahans and the Murphys* began in Southern California, where the motion picture industry's production studios were now scattered in and around the Los Angeles suburb of Hollywood. There, the film premiered to broadly positive reactions from audiences, critics, and local and state censors in June 1927. But the Los Angeles branch of the AOH and other local Irish American organizations quickly demanded MGM withdraw the film, and the local archdiocesan newspaper condemned the "farfetched vulgarity and scenes of debauchery" that were "saddled upon one of the cleanest races in America." Discontent spread through Irish American organizational networks and the Catholic press. Individuals penned letters of protest, priests criticized the film from the pulpit, and screenings were cancelled in a number of cities. Several state chapters of the AOH resolved to campaign against anti-Irish movies, the organization's national convention took up the issue, and Irish American groups trained new scrutiny on other studios' recent offerings, such as Warner Bros.' *Irish Hearts*. In short order, nervous officials at MGM's New York headquarters ordered the film's producer Eddie Mannix to make any and all changes necessary to end the furor. Seconding this directive was Will Hays, the Republican politician who had been installed in 1922 to head the new Motion Picture Producers and

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[11] Walsh, *Sin and Censorship*, 41–42; Steven Alan Carr, *Hollywood and Anti-Semitism: A Cultural History up to World War II* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 78.

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Distributors of America (MPPDA), polish the industry's image, and fend off moral reformers' threats of expanded government censorship. Working with Rita McGoldrick, who headed the Motion Picture Bureau of the International Federation of Catholic Alumnae (IFCA), as well as with the Catholic Theater Guild, Mannix eliminated all references to Catholicism in the film, made other cuts, and added a prologue characterizing the Callahan and Murphy families as "both of that fast fading old school." These changes satisfied representatives from Los Angeles Irish American groups who attended a screening at the end of July.[12]

They did not satisfy Charles McMahon, head of the Motion Picture Committee of the National Catholic Welfare Conference (NCWC). McMahon declared that *The Callahans and the Murphys* remained both "a gross insult … to the ancient fatherland culture of the Irish people" and a "hideous defamation of the Catholic faith." MGM and the MPPDA tried to emphasize that other Irish and Catholic leaders disagreed with McMahon's double-barreled diagnosis. But McMahon's opposition was cause for particular concern. He, like McGoldrick, consulted for the studios on Catholic issues, and he received funds from the MPPDA to support his work drafting a list of recommended films for Catholic audiences that was published in the *NCWC Bulletin*. Because many Protestant reformers had advocated federal controls on film content and were growing skeptical that Hays could stand up to what they saw as immorality on screen, Hays increasingly relied on the support of Catholic groups, some of which were more skeptical of government censorship. Any break in the MPPDA-Catholic alliance would be problematic. As this alliance frayed, and as summer became fall and violence

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[12] Walsh, *Sin and Censorship*, 37–43; Couvares, "Hollywood, Main Street, and the Church," 145–47; Curran, *Hibernian Green on the Silver Screen*, 34–35.

unfolded in some theaters where the film played, two more signs of trouble appeared: an ominous new bill before the New York City Board of Aldermen that would ban films that "disparaged any race, creed, or nationality," and a new call from Philadelphia's influential Cardinal Dennis Dougherty for the film's complete withdrawal. Clustered in America's largest cities and dominating their politics, Irish-Catholics wielded tremendous power to shape the fortunes of a motion picture industry whose profits depended on strong box office receipts at the urban, first-run theaters owned by the major studios. And so, under pressure from Hays, MGM agreed to pull *The Callahans and the Murphys* from theaters. The New York bill was shelved and so, at least for the time being, was Dougherty's threatened boycott. Hollywood proceeded with caution—and with Irish-Catholic advisers on retainer and well-publicized endorsements in hand—when making films on Irish and Catholic themes during the remainder of the 1920s.[13]

Even as the controversy over *The Callahans and the Murphys* played out during the summer and fall of 1927, another major motion picture also drew censure and demands for its removal from theaters. *The King of Kings* was a big-budget biblical epic that told the story of Jesus' last days, directed and independently produced by Cecil B. DeMille. For Hays, who encouraged its production, the film was another gambit, ultimately unsuccessful, in the effort to build a stronger cooperative relationship with Protestant clergy and to dampen their criticisms of the movie industry. But the strongest criticisms of the film itself came from Jewish leaders, who saw in its plot and characterizations another in the long historical line of passion plays that charged Jews with responsibility for Jesus' death. The villains in *The King of Kings*, the Jewish high

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[13] Walsh, *Sin and Censorship*, 31–44; Couvares, "Hollywood, Main Street, and the Church," 147–49. On the proposed New York law, see also Kibler, "Paddy, Shylock, and Sambo," 264.

priest Caiaphas and the traitorous Judas, were played by Jewish actors and given

stereotypically Jewish characteristics, they complained, while Pontius Pilate condemned

Jesus only reluctantly. No indication was offered that Jesus (played by a blond English

actor), his disciples, and his mother were Jews, too.[14]

Among the critics were leaders of the Anti-Defamation League (ADL), which had

been established by the Jewish voluntary organization B'nai B'rith in 1913 to fight anti-

Semitism in the United States, and had identified caricatures of Jews on screen as a

"pressing problem" from its earliest days. During the production of *The King of Kings*,

the ADL had appointed a series of rabbis to join Catholic and Protestant counterparts as

religious consultants on the film. One was Edgar Magnin, rabbi of the Hollywood

synagogue that was home to many top Jewish film executives, who claimed that he had

tried to persuade DeMille to scrap the film, and failing that, had worked to improve it

before its release. Several months after the film's April debut, the ADL quietly opened

behind-the-scenes negotiations, first with DeMille and then with the MPPDA, to seek

changes to the film. At the same time, the ADL's leaders sought to parlay the

controversy, the simultaneous furor over *The Callahans and the Murphys*, and the

MPPDA's desire to avoid future problems with outside pressure groups into a more

formal role for the ADL as adviser to the producers. In November, the MPPDA agreed to

make a newly appointed ADL committee an official consultant on Jewish matters. In

December, the MPPDA declared that *The King of Kings* would not be distributed in a

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[14] Richard Maltby, "The King of Kings and the Czar of All the Rushes: The Propriety of the Christ Story," in *Controlling Hollywood: Censorship and Regulation in the Studio Era*, ed. Matthew Bernstein (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2000); Felicia Deborah Herman, "Views of Jews: Antisemitism, Hollywood, and American Jews, 1913-1947" (Ph.D. dissertation, Brandeis University, 2002), 53–57; Yael Ohad-Karny, "'Anticipating' Gibson's 'The Passion of the Christ': The Controversy over Cecil B. De Mille's 'The King of Kings,'" *Jewish History* 19, no. 2 (2005): 192–97.

number of Central and Eastern European countries where anti-Semitism was especially virulent. And in January 1928, the ADL announced that DeMille had agreed to alter the sentencing and crucifixion scenes and to add an introductory title describing the Jews' subjugation under Roman rule during Jesus' time.[15]

But even as the ADL negotiated privately, broader Jewish opposition to *The King of Kings* swelled. By the fall and early winter, as roadshow prints of the film wended through the country, a number of leading rabbis and rabbinical associations had publicly denounced the film. "As citizens, we protest against the use of the moving picture as an instrument of public education to disseminate religious and racial misunderstandings," wrote a committee of Northern California rabbis. Some demanded that the picture be withdrawn from circulation and called on Jews to boycott it. The Jewish press followed the story closely, advocating a confrontational stance. In addition to the film's producers, criticism also targeted Jewish actors in the cast and Jewish theater owners who agreed to screen it. And when the ADL's agreements with the MPPDA and DeMille became public, other Jewish leaders accused the organization of accepting an inadequate menu of alterations, rather than complete withdrawal, in exchange for future power in Hollywood. In early 1928, as older prints of the film remained in circulation, the ADL faced further attacks for what Rabbi Stephen Wise of the American Jewish Congress called its "ineptitude and insincerity."[16]

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[15] Maltby, "The King of Kings and the Czar of All the Rushes," 80–81; Herman, "Views of Jews," 33–39, 52–67; Ohad-Karny, "'Anticipating' Gibson's 'The Passion of the Christ,'" 199–202; Neal Gabler, *An Empire of Their Own: How the Jews Invented Hollywood* (New York: Crown, 1988), 266–67, 280–84.

[16] Maltby, "The King of Kings and the Czar of All the Rushes," 81; Herman, "Views of Jews," 55–68; Ohad-Karny, "'Anticipating' Gibson's 'The Passion of the Christ,'" 200–03.

The controversy over *The King of Kings* granted the ADL a position of apparent influence with the MPPDA but left it, for fear of jeopardizing that position by publicizing it, powerless to respond to outside critics to its effectiveness. The organization was further boxed in by its leaders' belief that private, behind-the-scenes negotiation was the most effective strategy for combating anti-Semitism, particularly as it related to the motion picture industry. During its first decade and a half, the ADL had determined that intervention at the production stage was the best way to shape screen content. But its leaders had also discovered that, even though the founders and heads of production at many of the major movie studios were Jewish, they were wary of anti-Semitic allegations that the industry was an immoral one under Jewish "control"—and thus had little interest in cooperating openly with a Jewish organization that sought to shape film content. Allegations of this sort became more prevalent over the course of the 1920s as criticism of the movies by both Protestant and Catholic moral reformers grew, alongside anti-Semitism generally, both within the United States and abroad. Indeed, some of the Irish-Catholics who protested *The Callahans and the Murphys* invoked the bogey of Jewish control and asserted, erroneously, that films did not routinely caricature Jews. Attuned to this growing sentiment, the ADL recommitted in the wake of *The King of Kings* to intervening discreetly in Hollywood.[17]

The campaigns against *The Callahans and the Murphys* and *The King of Kings* in 1927, along with the earlier battle against *The Birth of a Nation*, suggest the deep and often emotional investment of Irish Catholic, Jewish, and African Americans—three

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[17] Herman, "Views of Jews," 35–38, 59–60, 66–70; Ohad-Karny, "'Anticipating' Gibson's 'The Passion of the Christ,'" 204; Carr, *Hollywood and Anti-Semitism*, 77–78. Rita McGoldrick of the IFCA also condemned DeMille's concessions to the ADL, arguing they made *The King of Kings* less Catholic, and encouraged local clergy to promote the film in areas where it had come under Jewish criticism. Walsh, *Sin and Censorship*, 54.

groups that were to different degrees and in different ways marginalized within American society—in motion picture content. These protests also together illuminate how these three particular groups each played crucial but distinctive roles in both the emerging motion picture industry, and in the emerging understanding that fair representation on screen was a crucially important component of belonging in America. These three groups' interventionist strategies were characterized by shared concerns regarding "caricatures" and "ridicule" in both stage and screen entertainment and concurrent efforts to eliminate them using censorship laws. But each group also had distinctive preoccupations and sometimes-contradictory goals regarding motion pictures. African Americans pursued control over their own representation constrained by racially restrictive laws, their lack of power in the motion picture industry, and their acute social exclusion. Jews, who found that the movies could both present anti-Semitic caricatures and tropes and elicit broadly anti-Semitic attacks, sought simultaneously to diminish offensive representations and to parry charges that the industry's Jews were to blame for the movies' immorality. Irish Catholics integrated a pursuit of improved representations of ethnic Irish within a larger critique of the movies' treatment of religious themes and moral questions.

Meanwhile, evidence that the movies encouraged prejudice against minority groups featured prominently in the growing social scientific discourse of the influence of motion pictures, much of which was subsidized by critics of the movies and enlisted in their moral crusades. By the early 1930s, pressure from reformers, and in particular from Catholic critics, had produced the Motion Picture Production Code and the Production Code Administration. The Code aimed at raising the "moral standards" of motion

pictures, but it also mandated respect for the "rights, history, and feelings of any nation,"

and as implemented, it empowered its Irish Catholic backers and other European

immigrant groups to curtail offensive representations. Simultaneously, the Code's

broadly interpreted ban on "miscegenation" created additional obstacles for African

Americans in their pursuit of fair representation on screen. Perhaps most

consequentially, the new regime of industry self-regulation elevated consultation and

negotiation at the point of production, blunting calls for greater government oversight of

moving images and foreclosing the possibility of a state guarantee against disparagement

on screen. The battles waged, ideas developed, and structures of self-regulation

established between 1915 and the late 1930s would shape how marginalized groups

would continue to shape seek to intervene in moving images in pursuit of fair

representation for decades to come.

Races Watch With Hawk-Like Eyes

In 1914, a year before *The Birth of a Nation* premiered, a front-page article in the

Chicago Defender condemned a one-reel comedy called *Levinsky's Holiday* (Majestic,

1913), which had recently screened at one of the theaters lining "The Stroll," the city's

black leisure thoroughfare. In the film, the titular Jewish clothing dealer, Ike Levinsky,

gains entry to a carnival by impersonating the Bearded Lady and then agrees to become

the target in a "Hit the Nigger" game—prompting his son, Jakey, to sell rotten eggs to the

crowd. The film "shows a Jew on a frolic," explained the *Defender*, the influential

decade-old African American newspaper, adding, "'Hit the Nigger' is Levinsky's delight

and runs through the film." An editorial inside the paper was somewhat more specific

about the nature of the "film insult," explaining, "In one of the scenes they showed a group of men throwing balls at the head of a colored boy protruding from a hole in a canvas on which was painted in large letters 'Hit the Nigger.'" The *Defender* charged that the city's board of motion picture censors, which lacked a black member—"every race [is] represented but the Afro-American"—had permitted "the race to be assaulted and ridiculed." It also criticized the picture's black audiences, who "laughed and applauded," rather than complaining. The *Defender* at once pleaded for equity and equal representation for African Americans in city government ("we too should appeal … to have a representative on the moving picture board of censors," the editorial suggested) and invoked other minority groups to summon African Americans themselves to greater vigilance rather than passive acceptance. "It used to be 'Hit the Jew' or 'Down with the Irish,'" the *Defender* asserted, "but alert members of those races watch with hawk-like eyes any attempt to belittle their people."[18]

A film like *Levinsky's Holiday* epitomized the richly multicultural world of the early cinema, one saturated with ethnic and racial content—and caricature.[19] The *Defender*'s response, in turn, hints at the many currents that coursed together within marginalized groups' emerging concerns about fair representation on the movie screen. Group leaders and intellectuals looked outward to stake claims to equal rights as citizens,

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[18] The initial description of *Levinsky's Holiday* above is drawn from from Patricia Erens, *The Jew in American Cinema* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984), 36–37. On the *Defender*'s coverage, see "'Hit the Nigger' New Film Insult," *Chicago Defender*, February 28, 1914; Untitled editorial, *Chicago Defender*, February 28, 1914; Anna Everett, *Returning the Gaze: A Genealogy of Black Film Criticism, 1909-1949* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001), 55–56. On the *Defender* itself, see Patrick Scott Washburn, *The African American Newspaper: Voices of Freedom* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2006), chapter 4.

[19] Although the *Defender* declared, "There was nothing about the picture to give offense to the Jewish race," later scholars, at least, deemed the film an "offensive" example of Jewish caricatures on screen in this period. Lester D. Friedman, *Hollywood's Image of the Jew* (New York: Frederick Ungar, 1982), 23; Herman, "Views of Jews," 33.

even as they turned inward to encourage cultural self-assertion and uplift their fellows.

Their targets and tactics were carried over from other realms of culture (especially from

efforts to use public protest and theatrical censorship laws to combat "caricature" on the

popular stage), even as motion pictures' evident appeal and apparent influence offered

novel challenges and new opportunities in the pursuit of progress. Jews saw in Irish

Americans, and African Americans saw in both groups, inspiring models of alertness and

action against "ridicule" and caricature, even as each group's specific history and

relationship to the motion picture industry gave rise to distinct—and sometimes

conflicting—goals regarding representation on screen.

The *Defender*'s criticism of African American audiences' willing acceptance of

Levinsky's Holiday suggested the class tensions that were one driver of worries regarding

moving images. At a moment when new migrants poured into U.S. cities—largely poor,

rural people, whether from Eastern and Southern Europe or the American South—a

growing Irish American middle class, assimilated Jews with Central European

backgrounds, and Northern black "old settlers" sought to assert group leadership and

present a respectable image to outsiders.[20] Culture was a crucial venue for such efforts:

as migrants embraced the emerging urban culture of spectator sports, vaudeville

entertainments, popular song, and motion pictures, minority elites looked on nervously,

often echoing concerns about the morality and respectability of such amusements.[21]

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[20] On Irish, Jewish, and black (im)migration and the intragroup conflicts that resulted, see Meagher, *The Columbia Guide to Irish American History*, chapters 4–5; Gerald Sorin, *A Time for Building: The Third Migration, 1880-1920* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992); James R. Grossman, *Land of Hope: Chicago, Black Southerners, and the Great Migration* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989).

[21] For an example of this dynamic where motion pictures were concerned, see Caddoo, *Envisioning Freedom*, chapter 4.

These specific anxieties played out amid a more general attention to the political potential of cultural production. European immigrant newspapers, fairs and festivals, religious rituals, literature, and vernacular theater at the turn of the century were permeated, as Matthew Frye Jacobson has argued, by "ideals of nationalism," and by the 1920s, the urban North witnessed an efflorescence of both Yiddish and African American theater, literature, and other expressive culture, designed to demonstrate and actualize the uplifting power of cultural self-representation.[22]

Interventions in motion pictures had their most direct antecedents in similar efforts targeting the popular stage. The *Defender*'s demand that Chicago's film censorship board "suppress" *Levinsky's Holiday* and other "moving pictures that breed race hatred," its call for African American representation on that censorship board, and its admiring reference to the "hawk-like eyes" of the Irish and Jewish "races"—these all evoked what M. Alison Kibler has described as the "overlapping campaigns against racial ridicule" that unfolded in the early twentieth-century. In these campaigns, Irish, Jewish, and African American leaders alike attempted to banish ethnic and racial caricatures from the stage by employing direct action, moral suasion, economic boycotts, and especially— to the extent they could be bent to the purpose—state and local theatrical censorship laws. In the movies' earliest years, when films were often screened alongside live

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[22] Matthew Frye Jacobson, *Special Sorrows: The Diasporic Imagination of Irish, Polish, and Jewish Immigrants in the United States* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995). On Yiddish culture, see Henry L. Feingold, *A Time for Searching: Entering the Mainstream, 1920-1945* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992), 62–83. The vast literature on the Harlem Renaissance or New Negro Renaissance includes Nathan Irvin Huggins, *Harlem Renaissance* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1971); David L. Lewis, *When Harlem Was in Vogue* (New York: Penguin Books, 1997); Henry Louis Gates, Jr. and Gene Andrew Jarrett, "Introduction," in *The New Negro: Readings on Race, Representation, and African American Culture, 1892-1938*, ed. Henry Louis Gates, Jr. and Gene Andrew Jarrett (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007). For an interpretation that focuses on "race, class, and cultural contestations between white observers, black cultural producers, critics, activists, reformers, and—centrally—black migrant consumer patrons," see Baldwin, *Chicago's New Negroes*.

entertainments, such campaigns provided a pairing of target (caricature) and tactic (censorship) that was simply transferred to the new medium. They also served as an important nexus for interaction among the three groups.[23]

By the late nineteenth century, middle-class Irish Americans expressed opposition to stock Irish stage characters that seemed to threaten their social and political advancement, while Irish nationalists sought to rally their fellows against the "stage Irish" as a way of encouraging Celtic identity and pride. Irish activists disrupted performances and rioted at plays and vaudeville performances in the 1900s. The Irish Abbey Theater's 1911 tour of the United States, performing John Millington Synge's play *The Playboy of the Western World*, prompted especially intense protest from Irish American organizations and periodicals, and indecency investigations by local officials. The "Anti-Irish Players League" in Chicago claimed that 8,000 people signed its petition, and the United Irish-American Societies of New York resolved "to drive the vile thing from the stage" with the help "of every decent Irish man and woman and the Catholic Church whose doctrines and devotional practices are held up to scorn and ridicule in Synge's monstrosity." In addition to disrupting performances of the play, Irish protestors sought to convince government officials both that the play "aggravates racial or religious prejudices" and that by depicting Irish women as sexually aggressive, it was both inaccurate and indecent. They had somewhat greater success with the latter argument, as censorship laws tended to focus on indecent performances and threats to the public order; the players were detained briefly.[24]

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[23] Kibler, "Paddy, Shylock, and Sambo," 259.

[24] Some Irish Americans did support the Abbey Theater, seeing it as an *antidote* to "the coarse and stupid burlesque of the traditional stage Irishman, who has, for years, outraged every man and woman of

Following the Irish example, leaders of Jewish communal organizations kept close watch on what they termed the "stage Jew." Rabbi M. M. Eichten encouraged listeners to "take a lesson from the Irishman in banishing the caricatures of his race from the theatre" in 1911. In 1913, Jewish leaders in Chicago sought advice from a local Irish-American activist and created an Anti-Stage Ridicule Committee "to keep watch for coarse caricatures of the Jew on the stage and to protest against them"; its German-Jewish organizers boycotted particularly offensive performances, as well those deemed indecent or "low," and thus a threat to "the race."[25] Likewise, as in the *Defender*'s 1914 attack on *Levinsky's Holiday*, African Americans in the 1910s cited Irish and Jewish activities as inspiration. The pioneering black theater and film critic Lester Walton of the *New York Age* implored readers to follow the lead of the Irish and the Jews who had taken on the "stage Irishman" and "stage Jew."[26] In 1911, the same year the Irish protested *Playboy* and Jewish leaders encouraged their followers to follow their lead, black Chicagoans demanded the mayor ban Thomas Dixon's play *The Sins of the Father*, a summation of his trilogy of works celebrating the Ku Klux Klan. In 1914, fulfilling the *Defender*'s plea

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Celtic ancestry." But opposition predominated. Ibid., 262–264; Maureen Murphy, "Irish-American Theater," in *Ethnic Theatre in the United States*, ed. Maxine Schwartz Seller (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1983), 228–220; Maureen Murphy, "From Scapegrace to Grásta: Popular Attitudes and Stereotypes in Irish American Drama," in *Irish Theater in America: Essays on Irish Theatrical Diaspora*, ed. John P. Harrington (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2009), 31–32; Jacobson, *Special Sorrows*, 84; Curran, *Hibernian Green on the Silver Screen*, 11–13.

[25] "Calls Shylock Caricature: Rabbi Eichten Protests at Stage Representations of the Jew," *New York Times*, November 6, 1911; "To Boycott the Stage Jew: Chicago Meeting Votes to Work for Reform Through the Box Office," *New York Times*, April 25, 1913; "To Eliminate Stage Jew: Organized Protest in Chicago Against Coarse Caricatures," *New York Times*, June 13, 1913; Kibler, "Paddy, Shylock, and Sambo," 264–265; Matthew Frye Jacobson, *Whiteness of a Different Color: European Immigrants and the Alchemy of Race* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), 183; Harley Erdman, *Staging the Jew* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1997), 150–153. For background on the "stage Jew," see Ibid.; Louise A. Mayo, *The Ambivalent Image: Nineteenth-Century America's Perception of the Jew* (Rutherford, NJ: Farleigh Dickinson University Press, 1988), 83–83.

[26] Everett, *Returning the Gaze*, 56; Cripps, *Slow Fade to Black*, 40.

in the wake of *Levinsky's Holiday*, the African American minister Archibald J. Carey was named to the city's Film Censor Board.[27]

If the campaigns against "racial ridicule" on stage borrowed freely from one another in their tactics and their anxieties about group respectability, they also revealed, as Kibler demonstrates, fundamental differences in the three groups' social positions and outlooks. For instance, African Americans had mobilized against Thomas Dixon's earlier play *The Clansman*—the source of *The Birth of a Nation*—as early as 1906. As they did so, they had to struggle, as Irish and Jewish leaders did, to adapt to their purposes existing prohibitions on theatrical immorality and threats to public order. But they also had to contend with measures designed expressly to forbid productions sympathetic to African Americans. Across the South, censorship laws singled out productions that excited "racial prejudice," provisions that targeted not racist content but instead works perceived as favorable to African Americans, especially staged versions of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Thus, efforts to mobilize against Dixon's *The Clansman* required complicated strategic decisions regarding how to distinguish African American demands for censorship from those of racist whites, and whether to utilize existing laws targeting "radical prejudice" but enacted with racist intentions. Moreover, as Kibler notes, "Irish activists … turned to anti-Semitic theories of cultural control in their campaign against the Stage Irish," with one editorial, for instance, calling "gross caricatures of the Irish … part of a propaganda, conducted mainly by Jews, to hold the Irish up to contempt."[28] The tensions and collisions evident in the campaigns against ethnic and racial caricature on

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[27] Baldwin, *Chicago's New Negroes*, 124–125; Caddoo, *Envisioning Freedom*, 136. On the play, see Thomas Dixon, *The Sins of the Father: A Romance of the South* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2004).

[28] Kibler, "Paddy, Shylock, and Sambo," 267–271, 275.

stage were amplified as motion pictures matured into an established and extremely popular form of entertainment; censoring caricatures was but one part of each group's emerging understanding of fair representation in motion pictures.

The earliest legal restrictions on representations of African Americans on screen had white supremacist, rather than antiracist, goals. After the black heavyweight boxer Jack Johnson defeated his white opponent Jim Jeffries in 1910, states and localities quickly passed measures to block exhibitions of films of the Reno prizefight, and the federal Sims Act banned the transportation of all fight films across state lines. These restrictions and the debates they prompted helped to reorient African Americans' concerns about motion pictures—which had focused on the propriety of motion picture exhibitions and their commercialization in the "colored theater"—toward a struggle for the right to fair representation on screen. The fight over the Johnson films constituted, as Cara Caddoo has argued, a generative moment for "the belief that visual self-determination and fair representations on-screen were essential to civic equality and belonging." This belief, evident in the *Defender*'s call for black representation on Chicago's censorship board, was further solidified during the protests against *The Birth of a Nation*, which often condemned the film as a "libel" and a violation of rights, and incorporated demands for black self-representation and citizenship rights.[29] The campaign against the film also helped to foster the growth of black-produced films, which sought to fulfill this demand for self-representation outside of formal political channels.[30]

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[29] Caddoo, *Envisioning Freedom*, 117–118, 163–165.

[30] On the race film industry, see, e.g., Cripps, *Slow Fade to Black*, chapter 3; Baldwin, *Chicago's New Negroes*, 128–154; Caddoo, *Envisioning Freedom*, chapter 7.

By the 1920s, although African Americans lacked both the political power and the motion picture industry influence to shape screen content in any consistent way, the New Negro Renaissance helped to foster what Anna Everett describes as "a fledgling black film movement," with extensive commentary on film in African American magazines and newspapers, characterized by both celebrations of black achievements in motion pictures and criticism of film stereotypes and the industry's racism. This commentary grew more intellectually sophisticated and more polarized into the 1930s, as the arrival (and expenses) of sound film decimated the black-owned firms that had produced films with black casts, and elevated Hollywood to a dominant position in the motion picture world. Reckoning with this stark reality of a white-controlled industry, and with the marginality of African Americans in the film capital, some black intellectuals advocated efforts to improve and reform Hollywood's product, while others demanded non-commercial alternatives that would attend to questions of racial and social injustice. The debates unfolded from the pages of *The Crisis*, the NAACP's journal, to black newspapers and radical journals backed by the Communist Party.[31] Even as African Americans pursued new possibilities available during the New Deal era to intervene in the content of other media of mass communications—especially the radio—representation in moving images became a subject of constant discussion in the black public sphere.[32]

Just as the campaign against *The Birth of a Nation* played an important role in the organizational growth of the NAACP, Jewish concerns about the movies helped to spur

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[31] Everett, *Returning the Gaze*, chapters 3–4.

[32] On these other efforts, see Barbara Dianne Savage, *Broadcasting Freedom: Radio, War, and the Politics of Race, 1938-1948* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999); Lauren Rebecca Sklaroff, *Black Culture and the New Deal: The Quest for Civil Rights in the Roosevelt Era* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009).

the creation of the Anti-Defamation League, which cited "the caricaturing and defaming of Jews … in moving pictures" in announcing its creation in 1913, and reported a year later that it had taken the "Motion Picture Field" as its focus, as "the most pressing problem" facing the organization. The ADL promoted a model censorship ordinance that included a prohibition on defamation of a religious sect, and it developed a particularly close relationship with the censorship board in Chicago, where it was headquartered. However, it also came quickly to conclude that appealing directly to moviemakers themselves was the best means of altering how Jews were represented on screen. That many in the motion picture industry were themselves Jews shaped this relationship from the start; industry Jews were natural allies in the eyes of ADL leaders (even as some movie makers charged the ADL with being "supersensitive" and superfluous), yet they pursued dialogue quietly in light of already common anti-Semitic charges of Jewish conspiracies to dominate culture.[33]

By the late 1920s and 1930s, the growing movement for the moral reform of motion pictures reshaped Jewish leaders' priorities. While curtailing derogatory representations of Jews remained a goal, the task of disproving charges that Jewish "control" of Hollywood was responsible for immorality in the movies now took precedence. Amid Adolf Hitler's ascent to power in Germany in 1933 and the crescendo of agitation for movie reform in the U.S. around the same time, Jewish communal leaders built new organizational alliances with film industry executives and sought through them to discourage entirely most overt references to Jews and to antisemitism on screen. In March 1934, Leon Lewis, a former national secretary of the ADL and the group's

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[33] Herman, "Views of Jews," 34–38; Kibler, "Paddy, Shylock, and Sambo," 264–266.

representative in Los Angeles, created the Community Committee (later renamed the Community Relations Committee, or LACRC) to serve as an umbrella group for area Jewish organizations, including the ADL and the American Jewish Committee. Lewis was secretary of the new committee, which was chaired by Mendel Silberberg, an attorney and Republican political operative with close personal and professional connections in the motion picture studios. Lewis and Silberberg, in turn, convened a number of Jewish studio executives into the LACRC's "Uptown" or Motion Picture Committee (MPC). Via the MPC and its monthly meetings, the executives, newly concerned about the peril facing American Jews, helped to fund the LACRC's activities and consulted directly with Jewish communal leaders about questions related to the motion picture industry. Later that year, for instance, the ADL's national director encouraged MPC members and other Jewish executives to curtail antisemitic images on screen but also to take steps to eliminate the "immoral" films that he characterized as a threat to all American Jews.[34]

Irish concerns about their representation in moving images, like Jewish ones, found early and influential institutional expression. But Irish Americans targeted ethnic caricature mostly as part of the broader moral critique of the movies undertaken by Catholic lay and religious leaders. The highly-organized Catholic activity around the movies starkly evident in 1927 during the fight over *The Callahans and the Murphys* originated during World War I. In 1917, the church's new National War Council raised moral objections to the anti-prostitution training films being shown to soldiers. In an

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[34] Herman, "Views of Jews," 78–90. On Jewish debates during the 1930s regarding how—or whether—to depict Jews in the movies, see Carr, *Hollywood and Anti-Semitism*, 202–210; Herman, "Views of Jews," chapter 3.

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Brian J. Distelberg, Visibility Matters: The Pursuit of American Belonging in an Age of Moving Images, Ph.D. dissertation, Yale University, 2015. Copyright © 2015 by Brian Joseph Distelberg. All rights reserved. Available for download at http://briandistelberg.com/writing/dissertation/. Please direct any inquiries, including requests to republish or otherwise use this work, in whole or in part, to the author at briandistelberg.com.

early suggestion of the lasting intersections between Catholic religious and Irish ethnic concerns, the same group complained that a plot in one of the films featuring an unmarried Irish maid who became pregnant and murdered her lover was unrealistic. After the war, the Council was rechristened as the National Catholic Welfare Conference, created its Motion Picture Committee, and enlisted Charles McMahon to consult with motion picture producers and write about films in the organization's newsletter. For much of the 1920s, McMahon published a monthly "white list" of recommended movies, while the International Federation of Catholic Alumnae's Motion Picture Bureau, under Rita McGoldrick's leadership, also reviewed and recommended films it deemed suitable for schoolchildren and for adults. Both McMahon and McGoldrick had close relationships with the industry, working as paid consultants on films dealing with the Church. Although McMahon's committee lost its NCWC funding by decade's end, the IFCA's list of films appeared in twenty-three newspapers and was read on a multi-city radio program, and the MPPDA subsidized the costs of mailing and McGoldrick's travel.[35]

Yet by the end of the decade a small network of Catholic clergy and laymen centered in Chicago had grown dissatisfied with existing efforts to improve the moral quality of the motion pictures. They included Fr. FitzGeorge Dineen, a member of the city's censorship board; Martin Quigley, the publisher of the *Motion Picture Herald*, a trade paper for exhibitors; George W. Mudelein, Chicago's cardinal; and Joseph Breen, a journalist and public relations man who had worked for Quigley and the Chicago diocese. Quigley doubted the effectiveness of local censorship and public protest: both primarily

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[35] Walsh, *Sin and Censorship*, 10–35, 50–51. See also Couvares, "Hollywood, Main Street, and the Church."

affected theater operators—his readers—rather than those who actually controlled films'

content, and neither produced long-term change. Instead, he argued that the movies

could be lastingly aligned to a Catholic outlook by intervening before and during

production. What was needed was a document articulating that outlook. In 1929, the

Chicago group recruited Fr. Daniel Lord, a St. Louis-based Jesuit priest who had served

as Cecil B. DeMille's Catholic adviser on *The King of Kings*, to draft a set of proposed

guidelines, based on ideas provided by Quigley. Lord's "Code to Govern the Making of

Motion and Talking Pictures" charged the movies with "special MORAL

OBLIGATIONS" due to their "mobility, popularity, accessibility, emotional appeal,

[and] vividness." In order that "no picture should lower the moral standards of those who

see it," it discouraged glorification of "evil," adultery or extramarital sex, and crime and

lawbreakers, and it forbade obscene language, nudity, and suggestive dancing. Among

the specific guidelines offered toward the end of Lord's draft code—just after the

prohibition on showing "places … associated with sexual life or sexual sin"—was one

related to "national feelings." "The just rights, history, and feelings of any nation," it

declared, "are entitled to consideration and respectful treatment"—neatly if somewhat

obliquely weaving fairness toward ethnic minorities into the code's broader moral

vision.[36]

Between the 1910s and 1930s, the critiques of motion pictures articulated by Irish,

Jewish, and African Americans, and the organizing undertaken by members of each

group in response, both overlapped and diverged. Each group developed similar

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[36] This summary draws from Gregory D. Black, *Hollywood Censored: Morality Codes, Catholics, and the Movies* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 35–39; Walsh, *Sin and Censorship*, 54–59; Thomas Doherty, *Hollywood's Censor: Joseph I. Breen and the Production Code Administration* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), 38–44. The draft document is reprinted in Black, *Hollywood Censored*, 302–308.

objections to the prevalence of caricature and ridicule on screen, and a similar awareness, born out of battles against stage and screen stereotypes, that only intervention at the point of production could reliably secure change. But notwithstanding these shared understandings, these circumstances of these groups were fundamentally different. Formidable legal, economic, and political barriers precluded African American influence over motion picture content and lent the pursuit of such influence particular urgency. Moral reformers' allegations of malign Jewish domination of the movie industry fostered intense caution and circumspection among Jews both within and outside Hollywood. And the entwining of Irish ethnic with Catholic moral concerns produced a vision that, by 1930, influential lay and religious leaders stood poised to compel motion picture producers to embrace.

The Stereotyped Impressions of the Movies

Even as many Irish, Jewish, and African Americans came by the early 1930s to understand representation in motion pictures as a matter of crucial importance, the movies' capacity to foster racial and ethnic prejudices also became a preoccupation of the growing expert discourse on the medium's power. Politicians and moral reformers were instinctively convinced of the harmful influence of motion pictures from their earliest years. But by the late 1920s and 1930s, social scientific investigations of motion pictures had reconfirmed these popular understandings, claiming to provide empirical evidence of the medium's ability to shape the behavior of movie audiences. Social scientists' conclusions were influenced by several factors: growing concerns over the power of mass media propaganda in the wake of its widespread use during World War I, anxieties about

social order amid the period's social transformations, and the rise of behaviorism in psychology. But they also reflected a related shift in understandings of "race" prejudice, one that saw intolerance as learned behavior rather than innate instinct. Social scientists attended closely to the movies' apparent effect on audiences' attitudes toward racial, national, and religious minorities, and those eager to sound the alarm about the movies' harmful influence pointed eagerly—sometimes opportunistically, sometimes earnestly—to findings that stereotypes on screen fostered prejudice off screen.

Critics of the movies shared what became a common-sense view that motion pictures—even more so than other new, inexpensive sources of entertainment and information that appeared around the same time, such as cheap novels and newspapers and the vaudeville theater—possessed an influence that was certainly unprecedented and, if misused, very likely dangerous. Movies were cheap and widely accessible, transcending boundaries of class, age, and literacy. They were especially popular with "foreign" immigrants, and these groups seemed to control their production and exhibition. And moving images seemed to have an irresistible power, especially over they young. As early as 1909, the reformer Jane Addams described the "direct influence" of the movies, citing a case where three boys, inspired by a Western they had seen, plotted the lassoing and murder of a local milkman. The motion picture's "influence is incalculable," New York State's Motion Picture Commission declared in 1922, noting its special appeal to young people, "the illiterate, the moron, the defective and to the degenerate." One congressional sponsor of a 1926 bill to establish federal censorship of

motion pictures sought "to purify this great fountain of influence at its source, so as to prevent its poisonous and devastating overflow upon the plastic youth of America."[37]

Critics' claims regarding the impact of motion pictures had roots in the broad struggles for social and cultural power that characterized early twentieth-century America.[38] But reformers' and politicians' worries regarding "plastic" audiences molded by the movies' "influence" found expression through concepts emerging in the human and social sciences of the same decades. Fears of the "mimetic potential of cinema," as Lee Grieveson has shown, can be traced to the concerns about imitation, hypnosis, and the power of suggestion that influenced the emerging disciplines of psychology, sociology, and social psychology, and especially those disciplines' emphasis on controlling group behavior so as to manage social problems and maintain social order. Early studies of motion pictures thus highlighted the movies' potential to influence audiences' behavior and emphasized their threats to social order. In his 1916 book *The Photoplay: A Psychological Study*, for instance, Harvard University psychologist Hugo Munsterberg argued that the movies possessed an unparalleled "intensity" and "penetrating influence" that "must be fraught with dangers." A 1920 investigation by John Broadus Watson and Karl Lashley of the use of films in anti-venereal disease campaigns similarly stressed the threat that dramatizing such subjects might over-

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[37] Lee Grieveson, "Cinema Studies and the Conduct of Conduct," in *Inventing Film Studies*, ed. Lee Grieveson and Haidee Wesson (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008), 11 (on Addams); [New York] Motion Picture Commission, *Annual Report of the Motion Picture Commission*, Legislative Document No. 64 (Albany, NY: J.B. Lyon, 1922), 9–11; Garth Jowett, Ian Charles Jarvie, and Kathryn H. Fuller, *Children and the Movies: Media Influences and the Payne Fund Controversy* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 28 (on the 1926 bill).

[38] See, e.g., Couvares, "Hollywood, Main Street, and the Church," 284–285, for an account emphasizing moral concerns; Sklar, *Movie-Made America*, 122–124, for an analysis emphasizing class conflict.

stimulate and sexually excite audiences. Other studies in the 1920s described how attending movies discouraged children from being "good citizens" and encouraged "antisocial," delinquent, and criminal behavior.[39]

The same trends in the human and social sciences that prompted such accounts of the motion pictures were simultaneously altering how Americans thought about racial prejudice. Along with the demise of scientific racism, the rise of behaviorist psychology, and of the accounts of child development that built upon it, produced a new understanding that racial and ethnic prejudice was not an innate instinct, but was instead something children learned from their parents and other adults. The idea "that children were born free from prejudice," as Diana Selig puts it, "became a staple of the social science literature." Hunting for sources of prejudiced ideas, social scientists naturally turned toward the movies. In 1928, for instance, the sociologist Emory Bogardus wrote of the "repulsive effects" produced by racist motion pictures and thus urged an end to minority villains.[40]

Indeed, understandings of prejudice as a learned behavior, and of motion pictures as powerfully influential, often entwined. The two were notably paired in the journalist Walter Lippmann's 1922 study of the modern mass media, *Public Opinion*, which first popularized the term "stereotypes" as a descriptor of clichéd perceptions of ethnic and racial groups. Modern society was so large and complex, Lippmann argued, that most people could not experience all of it directly. Instead, they increasingly relied on images of the world conjured from second-hand information—preconceptions, whether regarding

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[39] Grieveson, "Cinema Studies and the Conduct of Conduct," 3–16. Munsterberg quoted in Jowett, Jarvie, and Fuller, *Children and the Movies*, 21.

[40] Diana Selig, *Americans All: The Cultural Gifts Movement* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008), 19–38. Bogardus quoted in Ibid., 103–04.

ideologies like Marxism and capitalism or the character of national, racial, religious, and political groups, that were often misleading or insufficient. These powerful preconceptions—stereotypes—then shaped how people understood even what they did personally observe, intervening between "the data of our senses" and "the intelligence." Stereotypes, in other words, were a root of prejudice, for they tended to incorporate "preference," and they were difficult to dislodge. As Lippmann saw it, the second-hand information available was growing increasingly authoritative, as photography supplemented and supplanted the written and spoken word. The "moving picture," especially, was an "aid to visualization" of historically unique power, not only because the movies "seem utterly real," but also because they are nearly effortless. "[O]n the screen," he wrote, "the whole process of observing, describing, reporting, and then imagining, has been accomplished for you. Without more trouble than is needed to stay awake the result which your imagination is always aiming at is reeled off the screen." *The Birth of a Nation* underlined his point: Griffith's heroic images of "white horsemen," however "wrong" and "pernicious," would unavoidably shape the understanding of anyone who entered the film with only a "hazy notion of … the Ku Klux Klan."[41]

In the early 1930s, the social scientific study of motion pictures reached an early apex with what became known as the Payne Fund studies. In 1928, the Rev. William H. Short, a critic of the movies who had just compiled and privately published a volume of anti-movie writing, launched an effort to develop more persuasive, empirical evidence of motion pictures' shortcomings and ill effects, the better to support calls for a federal film censorship body. Short headed an organization known eventually as the Motion Picture

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[41] Walter Lippmann, *Public Opinion* (1922; repr. New York: Free Press, 1965), especially 60–65.

Research Council (MPRC) and, with the financial support of the philanthropic Payne Study and Experimental Fund, he recruited Ohio State University professor W. W. Charters to direct investigations by sociologists, psychologists, and other scholars. The research Short and Charters initiated was unprecedented in its depth and scope. Beginning in 1933, eight volumes ultimately appeared, collectively titled *Motion Pictures and Youth*, that explored with varying degrees of nuance films' content, the frequency of children's attendance, and the effect of the movies on young people's minds, bodies, and behavior. Preceding them was *Our Movie Made Children*, a summary of the research intended for wide circulation and partly serialized in *McCall's* magazine in late 1932. Over the objections of some of the researchers, the author, a freelance writer named James Forman, followed the anti-movie line of the Payne Fund studies' leaders and described them as proof of the movies' dire impact on youth. Existing motion pictures, he claimed, were responsible for everything from delinquency, crime, and sexual immorality to anxiety and insomnia among children. Forman's polemical summation proved far more popular than the reports upon which it was based.[42]

Several of the Payne Fund studies' investigators designed experiments to assess how motion pictures shaped young people's attitudes about society, and their research seemed to confirm that the movies could, in certain circumstances, profoundly influence how audiences thought about different racial and ethnic groups. In the most relevant

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[42] Jowett, Jarvie, and Fuller, *Children and the Movies*, xv–108. Drawing on previously-unavailable archival materials related to the MPRC and the Payne Fund, Jowett, Jarvie, and Fuller offer an exhaustive account of the Payne Fund origins, conduct, internal politics, and aftermath of the studies, as well as a number of previously-unpublished documents relevant to the investigations. See also William H. Short, *A Generation of Motion Pictures: A Review of Social Values in Recreational Films* (New York: The National Committee for the Study of Social Values in Motion Pictures, 1928); Henry James Forman, *Our Movie Made Children* (New York: Macmillan, 1933); Sklar, *Movie-Made America*, 134–140; Grieveson, "Cinema Studies and the Conduct of Conduct," 17–21.

study, L. L. Thurstone, a University of Chicago psychologist, and Ruth C. Peterson, a Chicago graduate student, surveyed high school students in small towns in Illinois about their attitudes toward a controversial topic (war, gambling, capital punishment, prohibition of alcohol), or toward a national or racial group, then arranged for them to receive tickets to "a motion picture which has been judged as having affective value on the issue in question," and finally repeated the survey for the students who saw the film. In Geneva, Illinois, for instance, students were asked to agree or disagree with a series of twenty-six statements about Chinese people, which Thurstone and Peterson had coded on a scale from most "favorable" ("The Chinese are superior to all other races") to least ("I hate the Chinese"). Among students who then saw the film *Son of the Gods* (First National, 1930), in which "the interpretation of Chinese life and culture is friendly," a "very striking" improvement in average attitude occurred. In Crystal Lake, a town where the superintendent of schools reported that "very few of the children had known or even seen Negros," Thurstone and Peterson tested *The Birth of a Nation*. When surveyed the day after seeing the film, which the researchers' report noted "has been considered as powerful anti-Negro propaganda," students' overall average "attitude" toward "the Negro" recorded a sharp drop, "the largest effect found in any of the experiments we conducted." When Thurstone and Peterson returned to these towns five months later and surveyed students again, they found that the respective positive and negative effects of the films had diminished only slightly. "These subsequent measures of attitudes showed that the effect of a motion picture on attitude persists, although there is some return toward the position held before the picture was presented," their report concluded.[43]

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[43] Ruth C. Peterson and L. L. Thurstone, *Motion Pictures and the Social Attitudes of Children* (New York: Macmillan, 1933), xv–xvii, 18–21, 35–38, 53–55, 60–61, 66; Jowett, Jarvie, and Fuller,

As striking as Thurstone and Peterson's results were, the other Payne Fund investigation to focus closely on racial and ethnic views was far less conclusive. That study, by Yale University professor Mark May and graduate student Frank Shuttleworth, attempted to measure the cumulative effect of the movies on children's behavior and attitudes. Regarding children's racial and ethnic outlooks, May and Shuttleworth hoped to demonstrate that those who attended movies frequently "have different attitudes … toward Mexicans, Chinese, Spaniards, Arabs, Russians, Japanese, Italians, and Frenchmen" than those who attended rarely. Instead, though, the researchers' surveys revealed differences in attitudes toward only a few of these groups. And in some cases these differences were "just the opposite of what has been charged by critics of the movies."[44]

As distilled and popularized by Forman, though, the Payne Fund researchers' findings provided conclusive evidence for the movies' tremendous power to influence racial and ethnic attitudes and foster prejudice. Forman's summary highlighted Thurstone and Peterson's study and described their *Son of the Gods* and *The Birth of a Nation* experiments at length, minimized the May-Shuttleworth investigation, and leavened the mix with a generous helping of alarmist metaphor. "The virgin unmarked slates" of the children's minds "had been all but indelibly written upon with a pencil of peculiar force," he declared. "The motion picture, which can be a tremendous power for good, can as obviously be a powerful force for evil, depending upon its content and

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Children and the Movies, 61–76. Thurstone and Peterson screened a 1931 print of *The Birth of a Nation* that included a new soundtrack.

[44] Frank K. Shuttleworth and Mark A. May, *The Social Conduct and Attitudes of Movie Fans* (New York: Macmillan, 1933), esp. 100–101; Jowett, Jarvie, and Fuller, *Children and the Movies*, 59–83.

use."[45] Later in the book, he stirred together Thurstone and Peterson's careful

conclusions about the effects of specific films with a handful of quotations drawn from

autobiographical essays written by high school and college students at the request of

University of Chicago sociologist Herbert Blumer. In the statements, the students reveal

how the movies have prompted fear and disgust of "Chinamen." One "Negro high-

school boy" reported, for example, "I think all Chinamen are crooks because I have seen

them in the underworld of pictures so often." More dramatically, a "college girl"

confessed, "I never pass by our Chinese laundry without increasing my speed, glancing

apprehensively through the window to detect him (the Chinaman) at some foul deed,

expecting every moment one of his white slave girls to come dashing out of the door."

Such sentiments, Forman wrote, illustrated what Thurstone and Peterson had "proved"—

namely, "how relatively permanent are the stereotyped impressions of the movies written

upon the brains, how fecund they are in resulting mental attitudes." The Payne Fund

studies, he continued, had proven "that the movies are actually *molding* [children's]

habits of mind, their imagery, their outlook on and adjustment to life."[46]

    Although other writers and scholars would criticize both the Payne Fund studies'

methodology and their deployment in service of the drive for film censorship in the

1930s, there was broad agreement about both the formidable power of the motion

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[45] Forman, *Our Movie Made Children*, 122–27. Forman provides a shorter summary of the less-conclusive May-Shuttleworth study, before contrasting its "technique" unfavorably with that of the Thurstone-Peterson study. Ibid., 131–33.

[46] Forman, *Our Movie Made Children*, 158–63. Emphasis in original. The quotes were drawn from Herbert Blumer, *Movies and Conduct* (New York: Macmillan, 1933). For background on Blumer's research, and Thurstone's criticisms of his and May's studies, see Jowett, Jarvie, and Fuller, *Children and the Movies*, 71–90. These historians note that Blumer was "one of the most antimovie of the PFS researchers," and their research reveals "disturbing" alterations of his informants' biographical data in *Movies and Conduct*. Ibid., 79, 237–41.

pictures, in general, and perhaps especially, regarding the medium's ability to influence audiences' views of different social groups. The playwright William J. Perlman, a skeptic of censorship who edited a 1936 volume on the outcry over film content called *The Movies on Trial*, declared in its introduction, "The influence of the screen for good or evil cannot be overestimated."[47] And the University of Chicago philosopher Mortimer Adler, despite criticizing many of the Payne Fund studies in *Art and Prudence*, his 1937 attack on applied social science research, conceded that the May-Shuttleworth and Thurstone-Peterson studies had merit. The journalist Raymond Moley, commissioned by the movie producers to summarize Adler's argument in a volume titled *Are We Movie Made?*, called the latter study, in particular, "thoroughly sound and fair." It "shows by some thoroughly scientific methods," Moley wrote, "that human sympathies are enlisted through strong and simple motion pictures. This is, of course, what we all believed, but the Thurstone-Peterson study also gives some reliable evidence of the persistence of a change of attitude thus created." But reasonable findings like these, he concluded, merely confirmed "existing opinion" about the power of the movies. By the mid-1930s, movies' influence over audiences, and especially their capacity to amplify prejudice, was axiomatic.[48]

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[47] William J. Perlman, *The Movies on Trial: The Views and Opinions of Outstanding Personalities Anent Screen Entertainment Past and Present* (New York: Macmillan, 1936), viii. Perlman believed "the trouble with the movies is not that they are indecent but that they are generally vapid and inane," and favored self-regulation over government censorship, but his volume brought together a range of views on the matter.

[48] Mortimer Jerome Adler, *Art and Prudence, a Study in Practical Philosophy* (New York: Longmans, Green, 1937); Raymond Moley, *Are We Movie-Made?* (New York: Macy-Masius, 1938), 36–39, 54. On Adler and Moley, see Jowett, Jarvie, and Fuller, *Children and the Movies*, 8. As Grieveson notes, by the time the Payne Fund studies were published, the MPPDA's Production Code "had already incorporated in its preamble the logic underpinning the studies." Grieveson, "Cinema Studies and the Conduct of Conduct," 22.

Pointing to the permanence of the movies' "stereotyped impressions" of racial minorities—the "change of attitude" that motion pictures could produce—became at once a convenient way for critics of the movies to decry their power, and for their defenders to grant the obvious fact of their influence even while criticizing censorship. Meanwhile, social scientists' findings largely confirmed what minority groups themselves had already come to believe and loudly asserted in the course of their protests of caricatures on screen and their pursuit of fair representation in the movies. But for concerned progressives, at least, the Payne Fund studies and their findings provided a guide to how they might work to combat prejudice. The educator Rachel Davis DuBois, for instance, developed curricula that encouraged teachers to help students identify and analyze movie stereotypes, and she sought to leverage the motion picture medium toward constructive ends by calling for films featuring heroic African- and Jewish American historical figures.[49] In 1937, *The Crisis* published as "The Movies and Race Relations" a paper that had been delivered by Edgar Dale, the author of a Payne Fund volume titled *How to Appreciate Motion Pictures*, and the leading advocate for teaching young people to be "discriminating" movie watchers. In his presentation, Dale cited both his own work and the Thurstone-Peterson experiments in endorsing "practical steps … to control, in some measure the depiction of other races and nationalities on the screen so as to further rather than retard, harmonious relations with other peoples."[50]

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[49] Selig, *Americans All*, 103–04.

[50] Edgar Dale, "The Movies and Race Relations," *The Crisis*, October 1937, 296. The presentation, to the Williamstown Institute of Human Relations, was originally titled "The Motion Picture and Inter-Group Relations." On Dale, see John Nichols, "Countering Censorship: Edgar Dale and the Film Appreciation Movement," *Cinema Journal* 46, no. 1 (Fall 2006): 3–22. During World War II, as will be discussed in Chapter 2, Dale would provide advice to the NAACP's Walter White in advance of his negotiations with Hollywood producers.

Entitled to Consideration and Respectful Treatment

By the time *The Crisis* published Dale's remarks, one practical step had already been taken: a new system of motion picture industry self-regulation that in practice did indeed functioned to "control … the depiction of" certain "races and nationalities" in the movies. In the campaigns against *The Birth of a Nation*, *The Callahans and the Murphys*, and *The King of Kings*, African American, Irish, and Jewish protestors had turned to local and state censorship laws. But such laws proved poorly tailored to the motion picture industry's unique modes of production and distribution, suited for demanding only the alteration or withdrawal of a specific picture after it had been completed. By contrast, the industry's irregular use of paid consultants on religious matters, and the Anti-Defamation League's more formal arrangement with the Motion Picture Producers and Distributors of America, showed the potential of intervening during the production process. During the mid-1930s, new concessions offered by producers in response to the demands of the movie reform movement seeking to "stop the sewage at the source" effectively expanded the ability of some minority ethnic groups to intervene in motion pictures at the point of production, rather than through protest, negotiation, or censorship afterward.[51]

Specifically, by 1934 the motion picture industry had embraced the Motion Picture Production Code drafted by the group of Catholic clergy and laymen in Chicago, and it had created a strong mechanism to enforce it, the Production Code Administration (PCA). The Catholic Church had, meanwhile, launched a powerful new movie-monitoring group of its own, the National Legion of Decency, which pressured the

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[51] The "sewage" remark was made by Martin Quigley, quoted in Walsh, *Sin and Censorship*, 58.

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industry to keep the commitments it had made. This new regime of self-regulation and external oversight—the system governed by the Code, enforced by the PCA, and guaranteed by the Legion—aimed to raise what the Code described as the "moral standards" of movie content. Nevertheless, it also reshaped the movies representations of racial, ethnic, and religious minorities in important ways. It aided Irish Americans, as well as some other European immigrant groups, in their pursuit of fair representation and an end to caricatures on screen. It also directly encouraged distorted representations of other marginalized groups, especially African Americans. And, in defusing the broader prospect of federal censorship, it diminished the possibility of any national version of the strictures against disparaging racial and religious groups that were part of some local censorship ordinances; instead, it offered an alluring, if often imperfectly understood, new model of how offering clear rules, and then persuading and pressuring the industry to voluntarily embrace them, might shape what appeared on screen.

By the start of the 1920s, reformers advocating greater oversight of motion pictures had succeeded in establishing four statewide censorship boards and numerous local ones. The Supreme Court had affirmed, in the 1915 case *Mutual Film Corporation v. Industrial Commission of Ohio*, that motion pictures did not enjoy First Amendment free speech and free press protections. And many reformers had lost faith in the National Board of Review, the voluntary monitoring group endorsed by the movie producers. The General Federation of Women's Clubs, one of the Board's biggest backers, withdrew its support in 1918 and began to press for the expansion of censorship at the state level. In 1921, despite the producers' announcement of a "Thirteen Points" agreement to improve the morality of movie content, state legislatures considered over one hundred bills to

restrict the industry and New York, a crucial exhibition market, enacted a new censorship law. Producers faced an expanding, uneven patchwork of differing rules and standards, mostly related to films' moral content. In 1922, attempting to head off additional state and local censorship laws and the growing possibility of a federal one, the producers organized the MPPDA, hired Will Hays to lead it, and initiated a series of tepid self-regulation measures. In 1924, Hays promoted a new set of standards called "The Formula." In 1926, the Hollywood-based MPPDA affiliate, the Association of Motion Picture Producers, created an enforcement body called the Studio Relations Committee (SRC). And in 1927, the SRC's head published a list of guidelines to the most common local censorship regulations, known as the "Don'ts and Be Carefuls." Still, the pressure from reformers remained strong.[52]

Meanwhile, by decade's end, the motion picture industry also faced other daunting challenges. The studios were burdened by the costs of producing and screening films using new synchronized sound technology, which quickly became the industry's standard after the success of *The Jazz Singer* (Warner Bros., 1927). Following shortly after was a sharp drop in attendance with the onset of the Great Depression. Increasingly, studios depended on funding from, and were thus subject to oversight by, Wall Street banks and other Eastern financiers.[53] Fears about the greater influence of sound film,

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[52] Black, *Hollywood Censored*, 7–18, 29–35; Walsh, *Sin and Censorship*, 9–10, 23–28, 49; Doherty, *Hollywood's Censor*, 34–37. In a few instances, local ordinances did provide a mechanism for banning films that censors determined encouraged racial or other inter-group prejudice. See Stokes, *D. W. Griffith's The Birth of a Nation*, 158–59; Kibler, "Paddy, Shylock, and Sambo," 270–73.

[53] David Bordwell, Janet Staiger, and Kristin Thompson, *The Classical Hollywood Cinema: Film Style and Mode of Production to 1960* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), 318; Schatz, *The Genius of the System*, chapters 5–9; Sklar, *Movie-Made America*, 152–167; Scott Eyman, *The Speed of Sound: Hollywood and the Talkie Revolution 1926-1930* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1997).

combined with states seeking to fill empty coffers with licensing revenue, had prompted a new round of proposed state censorship bills.[54]

It was at this moment that Catholic motion picture reformers seized the opportunity to strike a deal with the industry. Catholics, as they saw it, enjoyed considerable leverage over Hollywood. The faithful were concentrated in the big cities where most studio-owned first-run theaters were located. The church's diocesan newspapers comprised a national network with a weekly circulation of six million. And its decision-making—about, for instance, launching a boycott of movies deemed immoral—was centralized. Furthermore, Chicago's Cardinal Mundelein had a close business relationship with Halsey Stuart and Co., a bank that had helped to finance the movie industry's conversion to sound technology. After negotiations between Martin Quigley, the *Motion Picture Herald* publisher, and members of Hays' staff at the MPPDA, in early 1930 the members of the MPPDA agreed to follow a list of guidelines based on those that Fr. Lord and his Chicago collaborators had authored. The document gained renown as the "Hays Code"—a slight of hand that concealed its Catholic origins.[55]

In the wake of this victory, the Code's Catholic advocates were initially optimistic.[56] But amid the economic crisis of the Depression, competition from radio broadcasting, and efforts to exploit the possibility of sound, the early years of the 1930s witnessed an eruption of films that one historian describes as "unbridled, salacious,

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[54] Doherty, *Hollywood's Censor*, 45.

[55] Black, *Hollywood Censored*, 37, 40–42; Walsh, *Sin and Censorship*, 58–62; Doherty, *Hollywood's Censor*, 45–46.

[56] See, e.g., Black, *Hollywood Censored*, 62; Walsh, *Sin and Censorship*, 67.

subversive, and just plain bizarre." The Code's proponents quickly grew dismayed as Hollywood offered rapid-fire, innuendo-filled dialogue; film adaptations that brought the "sophisticated" worlds of literature and the Broadway stage to wider audiences; and new film genres dealing with the gritty realities of Depression-era life, like gangster and "fallen woman" pictures.[57] To Catholics who had expected that the letter of the Code would be followed, some of the problems appeared to be structural. The SRC was charged with affirming that completed films met the Code's requirements, but it could not compel the studios to share scenarios and scripts in advance. If it rejected a film, producers could appeal the verdict to a jury comprised of other producers, who typically overturned it. Joseph Breen, the former Chicagoan who had taken a job as an assistant to Hays, had an inside view of the enforcement mechanism at work. Even as he served as the MPPDA's intermediary to Catholics, he also worked from within to stoke Catholic dissatisfaction with its enforcement of the Code.[58]

By late 1933, several forces were combining to place the motion picture industry under intense scrutiny and pressure. That year saw the publication of *Movie-Made Children*, James Forman's summation of the Payne Fund research. It also witnessed debates over new movie censorship bills in Congress, and the passage of the New Deal's National Industrial Recovery Act, which created a National Recovery Administration Code Authority for the Motion Picture Industry that included critics of the movies among its members, and which threatened federal regulation of a range of the industry's

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[57] Thomas Doherty, *Pre-Code Hollywood: Sex, Immorality, and Insurrection in American Cinema, 1930-1934* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 2.

[58] See Black, *Hollywood Censored*, 62–104; Walsh, *Sin and Censorship*, 66–94; and especially Doherty, *Hollywood's Censor*, 46–62.

practices, including movie content.[59] But the most threatening cloud on the horizon was the coming together of an organized, public Catholic attack on the movies. The Knights of Columbus, the National Council of Catholic Men, and the Catholic Daughters of America lodged protests as early as 1932, and in November 1933, the Catholic bishops created an Episcopal Committee on Motion Pictures to study the industry and tasked its members with organizing a Legion of Decency. By the next spring, millions of Catholics were pledging publicly to "remain away from all motion pictures except those which do not offend decency and Christian morality." Philadelphia's Cardinal Dougherty went even further, ordering Catholics there to boycott all movies. The Legion's campaign was quickly endorsed by Protestant and Jewish groups.[60] By late 1935, the Legion had established a national headquarters and worked out a system of widely publicized ratings that deemed certain films acceptable and others "condemned" and ostensibly off limits to Catholics; it lived on until the mid-1960s.[61]

The tumult the movie industry trade papers dubbed the "storm of '34" forced crucial changes in Hollywood. Breen had already, by the end of 1933, effectively ascended to leadership of the SRC, a post he assumed officially early in the new year, and he immediately pressed producers to hew more closely to the Code's dictates. In June 1934, the MPPDA made a series of alterations to the Code's enforcement mechanisms to aid him in this task. The SRC was scrapped, replaced by a Production Code

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[59] Black, *Hollywood Censored*, 149–56; Walsh, *Sin and Censorship*, 78; Doherty, *Pre-Code Hollywood*, 8, 319–320, 322–325; Doherty, *Hollywood's Censor*, 58–62.

[60] Black, *Hollywood Censored*, 71, 162–169; Walsh, *Sin and Censorship*, 87–104; Doherty, *Pre-Code Hollywood*, 320–322; Doherty, *Hollywood's Censor*, 56–58, 66–70.

[61] For detailed accounts of the debates among Catholic leaders over the Legion's direction and structure during 1934 and after, see Black, *Hollywood Censored*, 220–223; Walsh, *Sin and Censorship*, 118–143.

Administration that reported directly to MPPDA officials in New York—who held the industry's purse strings—rather than to producers in Hollywood. The PCA was granted the authority to review not only finished pictures but also stories and scripts before they were filmed. Appeals to the jury of producers were ended, and a "seal" system was created, under which pictures lacking PCA approval could not play in MPPDA-member theaters.[62]

The motion picture industry's embrace of the Code and then the creation of the PCA had both immediate and long-term implications for marginalized groups' struggle for fair representation in the movies. In the short term, it produced a system of strong preproduction oversight and collaborative script doctoring, headed by a conservative Irish Catholic, guided by a Code that explicitly prohibited "ridicule" of "any religious faith" and cautioned, just as Lord's draft had, that "the just rights, history, and feelings of any nation are entitled to consideration and respectful treatment."[63] Moreover, as the historian Ruth Vasey has argued, the PCA was invested in and worked to enforce an "industry policy" that, among other things, aimed to avoid offending audiences in foreign markets, at a time when such markets accounted for approximately 35 percent of studios' gross revenues.[64]

The combination of the Code's call for "respectful treatment" and the "industry policy" of avoiding offense resulted during the 1930s in films that increasingly represented foreign people and ethnic diversity with imprecision and ambiguity—what

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[62] Walsh, *Sin and Censorship*, 106–107; Doherty, *Pre-Code Hollywood*, 2–10, 325–330; Doherty, *Hollywood's Censor*, 60–70.

[63] For these provisions within the text of the Code, see Doherty, *Pre-Code Hollywood*, 364.

[64] Ruth Vasey, *The World According to Hollywood, 1918-1939* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1997), 6–8.

Vasey terms "an amorphous category of the alien"—when they did so at all. Diplomatic

pressure and lobbying by Catholic leaders helped to ensure certain European immigrant

groups, including Irish Americans, were more fairly represented on screen. For instance,

Italian Americans unhappy with the gangster movies common early in the 1930s

channeled complaints through the Italian embassy, resulting in characters like the

gangster Nick Brown in *The Roaring Twenties* (Warner Bros., 1939), whose possible

Italian background was indicated only by his propensity for eating spaghetti. Meanwhile,

Fr. John Devlin, the Los Angeles diocese's consultant to the industry on Catholic issues

beginning in 1933, and head of the Los Angeles Legion of Decency, used his position to

police representations of the Irish as drunkards and brawlers. Irish characters remained a

presence on screen, but in balanced ways, with Irish priests and policemen serving as

counterweights to Irish gangsters.[65]

 For Jewish and African Americans, the repercussions of the Code and the broader

"industry policy" were more complicated. Breen, especially in his writing to and for

fellow Catholics in the years just before his elevation to leadership of the PCA,

exemplified the antisemitic sentiments that suffused the movement to morally reform the

movies and enforce the Code. Simultaneously, after Hitler's rise to power in January

1933, the industry's desire to avoid offending the sensibilities of foreign markets meant

avoiding Jewish content and anti-Nazi storylines entirely—tendencies Breen encouraged.

While Jewish caricatures largely disappeared from the screen, but so too did Jews of any

sort. By the early 1930s, partly in response to the antisemitism threading through the

Code regime and its rise, Jewish communal leaders in Hollywood had resolved to

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[65] Ibid., chapters 4 and 5; Doherty, *Hollywood's Censor*, 181; Walsh, *Sin and Censorship*, 215–219; Curran, *Hibernian Green on the Silver Screen*, 40–52.

discourage both unambiguous representations of Jews and direct condemnations of antisemitism on screen; once in place, the Code and its enforcement ironically facilitated this very goal.[66]

For African Americans, the Code formalized the existing inclination of both the MPPDA and the individual motion picture studios to avoid films that might be rejected by Southern exhibitors or censors. The MPPDA added to the Catholic-drafted Code an explicit prohibition on depictions of "miscegenation (sex relationship between the white and black races)," and went on to interpret this rule broadly to discourage films that depicted interracial relationships, advocated racial integration, suggested that African Americans were social equals to whites, or dramatized racial bigotry. Worried that Fredi Washington's light-skinned character in *Imitation of Life* (Universal, 1934) implied that "miscegenation" had occurred in the past, Hays advised against the film's production. The best that might be said for African Americans' treatment by the PCA under Breen was that it banned the epithet "nigger."[67]

Even as it advantaged some groups and disadvantaged others in the short term, however, the era of the Code had longer-term effects for the pursuit of fair representation on screen. The Code's very existence further substantiated the claims made by

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[66] Doherty, *Hollywood's Censor*, 199–216; Herman, "Views of Jews," chapter 3. See also Thomas Doherty, *Hollywood and Hitler, 1933-1939* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013); Ben Urwand, *The Collaboration: Hollywood's Pact with Hitler* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2013).

[67] Vasey, *The World According to Hollywood, 1918-1939*, 137–140; Doherty, *Hollywood's Censor*, 233–236. For the "miscegenation" rule, see Doherty, *Pre-Code Hollywood*, 363. As feminist and gay critics would point out decades later, the Code also prohibited "sex perversion or any inference to it" and valorized "the sanctity of the institution of marriage and the home," with the effect of dramatically limiting depictions of homosexuality and of women's lives on screen. See, e.g., Vito Russo, *The Celluloid Closet: Homosexuality in the Movies* (New York: Harper & Row, 1981); Lea Jacobs, *The Wages of Sin: Censorship and the Fallen Woman Film, 1928-1942* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1991). For these prohibitions, see Doherty, *Pre-Code Hollywood*, 362–363.

reformers, experts, and ethnic and racial minorities regarding the movies' powerful influence. Even to those groups impacted negatively by its provisions, meanwhile, the Code and the events that had led to its adoption and enforcement offered a well-publicized model for how one might intervene effectively in Hollywood: a clear set of rules endorsed by producers, a regulator empowered to enforce them, and a formidable outside pressure group.[68] Both because of the Code's apparent effectiveness and because its adoption succeeded in blunting calls for federal censorship of motion pictures, this model would be an important one in coming decades for African Americans and other marginalized social groups.

<div align="center">❖</div>

In the quarter century after the 1915 premiere of *The Birth of a Nation*, motion pictures ascended to the forefront of American mass entertainment. Simultaneously, the pursuit of fair representation on the movie screen was taken up, and varyingly defined, by diverse racial, religious, and ethnic minority groups. By the 1930s, pressure from a broad range of moral reformers and politicians produced a sophisticated system of industry self-regulation, one that also allowed Irish Americans and some other European ethnic groups some ability to moderate the most crass screen caricatures. Other social groups—Jews and, especially, African Americans—faced sharper challenges in pursuing and achieving fair representation.

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[68] For a discussion of early publicity for the PCA, see Doherty, *Hollywood's Censor*, 70–76. The Code's text was published as early as 1937, in Olga J. Martin, *Hollywood's Movie Commandments: A Handbook for Motion Picture Writers and Reviewers* (New York: H.W. Wilson, 1937).

Nearly twenty-five years after *The Birth of a Nation* debuted, MGM and producer David O. Selznick presented another epic set in the American South around the time of the Civil War. *Gone With the Wind*, the motion picture sensation of 1939, marked the persistence of racial stereotypes and distorted accounts of the nation's racial past in American movies.   Like the earlier picture, it was a technical achievement, its scale, scope, and Technicolor cinematography marking the medium's maturity at the height of the studio era. And like *The Birth of a Nation*, *Gone With the Wind* prompted black concern, debate, and ultimately protests over its treatment of African American characters and of racial issues. While the film was in production, the *Pittsburgh Courier* and *Los Angeles Sentinel* newspapers rallied readers to letter-writing campaigns and threatened boycotts targeting the frequent use of the word "nigger" in the 1936 Margaret Mitchell novel upon which the film was based. (Partly owing to the PCA's intervention, it did not appear in the film.) After the picture's release, reviewers on the political left, both black and white, condemned its romantic depiction of slavery. Picketers at some theaters held signs reading, "You'd be sweet too under a whip!" and shouted, "Negroes were never docile slaves."[69]

And yet, *Gone With the Wind*'s production, its content, and its reception also provided evidence of changes under way. With Asia and Europe already at war, Selznick professed "no desire to produce any anti-Negro film," and cited "these fascist-ridden times" in deciding to jettison the book's approving account of the Ku Klux Klan and references to lynching. Selznick, a Jew, assured the NAACP's executive secretary

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[69] Thomas Cripps, *Making Movies Black: The Hollywood Message Movie from World War II to the Civil Rights Era* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 18–23; Leonard J. Leff, "Gone With the Wind and Hollywood's Racial Politics," *The Atlantic* 284, no. 6 (December 1999): 106–14.

Walter White that, "as a member of a race that is suffering very keenly from persecution these days, I am most sensitive to the feelings of minority people." The pledge came in a correspondence between Selznick and White—who had ascended to leadership of the organization in 1931—that represented a sharp departure from the NAACP-led protests of *The Birth of a Nation* two decades earlier, and was part of a concerted effort by the film's producers to guard against black objections and appeal to black audiences. When Hattie McDaniel, the African American performer who portrayed the enslaved woman Mammy, received an Academy Award in 1940 for best supporting actress, the presenter of the prize declared proudly that the recognition "enables us to embrace the whole of America … an America that almost alone in the world today recognizes and pays tribute to those who give her their best, regardless of creed, race, and color." If such sentiments and such gestures owed in part to the success of African American struggles for fair representation over preceding decades, they also reflected the emerging racial liberalism of the New Deal and the nascent politics of unity of a nation soon to be at war.[70] These forces would make the 1940s a time of rapid transformation in—and growing attention to—African Americans' pursuit of fair representation on screen.

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[70] Cripps, *Making Movies Black*, 18–23; Leff, "Gone With the Wind and Hollywood's Racial Politics"; Kenneth Robert Janken, *White: The Biography of Walter White, Mr. NAACP* (New York: New Press, 2003), 266–267; Jenny Woodley, *Art for Equality: The NAACP's Cultural Campaign for Civil Rights* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2014), 132–137. For McDaniel's Academy Award presentation, see *Hattie McDaniel Winning Best Supporting Actress*, accessed February 7, 2015, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e7t4pTNZshA.

Chapter 2

Citizenship in the World of the Movie

In early October 1943, as World War II raged in Europe and the Pacific, writers from across the United States and around the world gathered on the campus of the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) to attend the Writers' Congress. The three-day event was sponsored jointly by UCLA and the Hollywood Writers' Mobilization (HWM), an alliance of eight unions representing newspaper, film, and radio writers as well as publicists, script readers, cartoonists, and lyricists. Its goal was to help attendees use their talents in "the winning of the war" and in the attainment of such liberal, if vaguely sketched, postwar goals as "the unity of the United Nations" and "a just and lasting peace." The speakers and guests seated on stage during the Congress's opening session on Friday evening, October 1, suggested the power of these ideals and the common push for victory to bring together odd political bedfellows. Novelists, military officers, Hollywood producers, federal bureaucrats, and actors looked on as the president of the University of California, Robert G. Sproul, and the chairman of the HWM, the screenwriter Robert Rossen—the former a Republican, the latter a Communist—welcomed attendees. The organizers of the Congress then read a message from President Roosevelt, and a series of representatives from the Allied nations greeted the crowd.[1]

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[1] *Writers' Congress: The Proceedings of the Conference Held in October 1943 under the Sponsorship of the Hollywood Writers' Mobilization and the University of California* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1944), 3, 617; "Writers [sic] Congress 1943," October 1, 1943, Group II, Box A-277 [Part 18, Series B, Reel 17, Folder 658], Papers of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (Bethesda, MD: University Publications of America, 1982–2001) (hereafter, NAACP).

Among those taking the podium after these introductions was the NAACP's executive secretary, Walter White. White began by endorsing the Congress's significance and embracing its statement of purpose, noting that the movies' influence made writers' work crucial. "In a sense," he declared, "the importance of those media by which ideas are formed and propagated is more crucial than the making of guns and planes. Men shoot guns and fly planes because of ideas, good or evil, which the spoken and written word and the image on the screen have planted in the minds of the gun-shooters and plane-flyers." Of special concern to White were the "ideas" of racial hierarchy and imperialism, for which "Hitler and Goebbels" only deserved "part of the blame." For too long, White said, "producers and writers of Hollywood and of the Anglo-Saxon world" exalted "empire and colonial imperialism and race superiority." Moreover, "even yet one hundred and fifteen million Americans each week and movie-goers in other countries have been fed pictures which, in their portrayal of certain groups, have created resentment among those so pictured and smug convictions of their own 'superiority' among the white people of the world. Chinese were shown as laundrymen, South Americans as gigolos, Negroes as fat, funny and feeble-minded." Only if such stereotypes were eliminated, White argued, could "misconceptions" among the world's peoples be destroyed, a "world free of racial and religious hatred" made, and true peace achieved.[2]

White's address to the Writers' Congress—and his very presence as a featured speaker, sharing the rostrum with a high-ranking representative of the federal government's Office of War Information (OWI) and Y. Frank Freeman, a top Paramount

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[2] "Remarks by Walter White," October 1, 1943, Group II, Box A-277 [Part 18, Series B, Reel 17, Folder 658], NAACP.

executive—suggest how World War II decisively transformed marginalized groups' pursuit of fair representation in motion pictures. The war drew together political moderates, liberals, and radicals alike, within and beyond Hollywood, behind the shared goal of victory and the common rhetoric of Americanism. The United States confronted both the racist, anti-Semitic propaganda of Hitler's Germany and Japanese efforts to stoke resentment against Western imperialism and white supremacy. The movies, as the period's most popular mass cultural form, became crucial disseminators of ideas, and American race relations a subject of intense concern.[3] Thus, in a stark departure from preceding decades, fair representation of African Americans in the movies received unprecedented and sustained attention from white Americans with significant political and cultural power. Its pursuit became a way to demonstrate commitment to domestic racial progress; to indicate egalitarianism toward non-white allies in Asia, Africa, and South America; and to voice opposition to Nazism. By the time the Writers' Congress convened in 1943, the particular and still-distinct agendas of a range of individuals and organizations had intersected to focus on how minority groups, especially African Americans, were represented on screen. Both during the war and immediately afterward, optimistic advocates sought ambitiously to craft guidelines and build permanent institutions that might curtail stereotypes on screen and ensure that blacks and other

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[3] On movie attendance during the war years, see Clayton R. Koppes and Gregory D. Black, *Hollywood Goes to War: How Politics, Profits, and Propaganda Shaped World War II Movies* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 1–2. Overviews of American motion pictures during World War II include Koppes and Black, *Hollywood Goes to War*; Thomas Doherty, *Projections of War: Hollywood, American Culture, and World War II*, rev. ed. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999); Mark Harris, *Five Came Back: A Story of Hollywood and the Second World War* (New York: Penguin Press, 2014). On American racial politics during World War II, see, e.g., Ronald Takaki, *Double Victory: A Multicultural History of America in World War II* (Boston: Little, Brown, 2000); Gary Gerstle, *American Crucible: Race and Nation in the Twentieth Century* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2002), chapter 5.

minalities received what one supporter described evocatively as "citizenship in the world of the movie."

Yet just a few years after the Writers' Congress convened, any reunion of the speakers who populated its opening-night dais would become inconceivable. As the war's end approached in 1945, as fissures deepened between the United States and its erstwhile Soviet ally, and as charges of "red" influence in Hollywood grew in volume, non-communist liberals in the Screen Writers' Guild (SWG) terminated the union's subsidy of the Mobilization, which dissolved two years later, in 1947.[4] Walter White continued to lobby allies in Hollywood to do away with stereotypes in the movies, but by 1949, amid Red Scares and blacklists, he deprecated as mere "lip service" the support that Robert Rossen and other radical screenwriters had offered during the war. White cast his lot, instead, with the industry's anticommunist liberals, who joined a crusade against Hollywood communism that spanned the political spectrum from the American Jewish Committee and Anti-Defamation League to the Knights of Columbus and Legion of Decency on the Catholic right.

World War II energized and elevated the pursuit of fair representation for African Americans on screen, and that quest would remain more vigorous and more visible after the war than it ever had been before. The last years of the decade saw the release of a series of Hollywood movies that explored questions of racial and religious tolerance. As the movement for black civil rights gained momentum and the Cold War dawned, visibility in moving images would increasingly seem crucial to being fully American. But the Cold War's rapid undoing of the short-lived convergences of World War II also

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[4] Larry Ceplair and Steven Englund, *The Inquisition in Hollywood: Politics in the Film Community, 1930-1960* (Garden City, NY: Anchor Press/Doubleday, 1980), 230–231.

meant the foreclosure of the most ambitious visions and interventions plotted during the war—of a role for the federal government in discouraging screen stereotypes, of lasting alliances among different minority groups with similar concerns, and of durable non-governmental institutions to advocate fairness for minorities on screen, provide them a permanent voice in Hollywood, and advocate for their integration into the world depicted by American motion pictures.

The Work in Hollywood Is So Important

Walter White's prominent advocacy for fairer representation of both African Americans and other "certain groups" in motion pictures at the 1943 Writers' Conference marked the culmination of two years during which the pursuit of fair representation of African Americans on screen was both dramatically intensified and reframed. A diverse array of advocates for curtailing stereotypes, "broadening" black images, and integrating African Americans into motion pictures now presented these goals as crucial to national unity and Allied victory, and thus inseparable from American patriotism. These advocates—White and his NAACP colleagues, leaders in the Office of War Information and its Bureau of Motion Pictures, and the liberal and radical artists, entertainers, and writers, both black and white, who were active in such organizations as the National Negro Congress, Entertainment Industry Emergency Committee, and Hollywood Writers' Mobilization—differed in precisely what they sought from Hollywood and in how they asked for it. Nevertheless, their intersecting concerns meant that the importance of black visibility in the movies was during these years discussed, debated, and embraced more widely than ever before.

While no individual produced this transformation alone, White is an ideal guide through it. A reporter, essayist, and novelist himself—and possessing, in his biographer's words, "an indefatigable capacity for socializing"—White had been a fervent promoter of the Harlem Renaissance beginning in the 1920s, and believed strongly in the power of culture to transform white misconceptions regarding African Americans. As the NAACP's executive secretary since 1931, he prioritized building strong relationships with white elites and creating a powerful national organization to lobby for black progress.[5] White was thus an industrious lobbyist and tireless networker in pursuit of his own particular goals regarding African American representations in motion pictures. Because they ranged so widely, his activities in the early 1940s—set within those of his many correspondents, collaborators, and allies—illuminate the dynamics that brought him to the rostrum of the Writers' Congress in 1943.[6]

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[5] See Kenneth Robert Janken, *White: The Biography of Walter White, Mr. NAACP* (New York: New Press, 2003), esp. xii–xvi, 89–128. On White, see also Thomas Dyja, *Walter White: The Dilemma of Black Identity in America* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2008).

[6] This chapter builds upon studies that have examined this crucial moment in the history of African Americans and motion pictures from several different angles. It differs from these earlier accounts, most importantly, by situating and contextualizing the efforts of White and the NAACP within the activities of a range of other left and progressive organizations concerned with both black representation on screen specifically and minority representation generally, thereby highlighting how fair representation became a priority of the wartime Popular Front, how its efforts were stymied by the postwar Red Scare, and how these transformations each inflected the longer trajectory of fair representation on screen as an ideal in American political and cultural life.

The most extensive account of White's work in Hollywood during this period is provided by film historian Thomas Cripps, who has argued that World War II and its aftermath were a turning point in the evolution of black film images, with wartime circumstances forging alliances between black leaders, liberal politicians, and Hollywood opinion-shapers and producing a "freshened liberal culture" that preceded and presaged the integrationist politics of the civil rights era. See Thomas Cripps, *Making Movies Black: The Hollywood Message Movie from World War II to the Civil Rights Era* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), especially chapter 2. White's lobbying is also examined in Janken, *White*, chapter 9; Dyja, *Walter White*, 156–169; and, most recently, in Jenny Woodley, *Art for Equality: The NAACP's Cultural Campaign for Civil Rights* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2014), 127–189. A recent reframing of his work as part of a broader wartime project of the NAACP's national office to become "the nation's chief black public relations operation" is offered in Brenna Wynn Greer, "Image Matters: Black Representation Politics and Civil Rights Work in the Mid-Twentieth Century United States" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Wisconsin-Madison, 2011), 31, 57–73.

White's interest in Hollywood percolated following his consultations with David O. Selznick during the production of *Gone With the Wind*. Over the next several years, he became increasingly convinced that altering the "picture of Negro life" presented in motion pictures was an urgent task. "The work in Hollywood is so important," he wrote in 1940, that it should take priority in determining when he traveled to the West Coast. That year, White struck up a correspondence with Leon Lewis, who headed the Jewish Community Relations Committee in Los Angeles and had convened its Motion Picture Committee; canvassed "moderate" Southern newspaper editors about their readers' attitudes toward films featuring black performers; and began building relationships with producers, directors, and actors in the film industry. But it was the U.S. Senate's 1941 investigation of "warmongering" and "propaganda" in Hollywood that, in a roundabout fashion, both helped to ensure that African American concerns about the movies would receive particular attention during the war and provided White with the ally who would initially facilitate his wartime lobbying of white Hollywood decision-makers.[7]

Clayton R. Koppes and Gregory D. Black, meanwhile, emphasize efforts by the OWI to alter "Hollywood's portrayal of people of color" as a crucial component of the government's work to secure the support of African Americans, and situate those efforts within the broader campaign to shape Hollywood's output in order to favorably mobilize public opinion. See Clayton R. Koppes and Gregory D. Black, "Blacks, Loyalty, and Motion-Picture Propaganda in World War II," *Journal of American History* 73, no. 2 (1986): 383–406; Koppes and Black, *Hollywood Goes to War*, chapter 6. Similarly focused on the role of the OWI and other federal agencies, taking these as an example of the New Deal's numerous interventions in culture in support of black civil rights, is Lauren Rebecca Sklaroff, *Black Culture and the New Deal: The Quest for Civil Rights in the Roosevelt Era* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009), chapter 6. Other treatments of the period include Leonard C. Archer, *Black Images in the American Theater: NAACP Protest Campaigns—Stage, Screen, Radio and Television* (Brooklyn, NY: Pageant-Poseidon, 1973), chapters 6–7; Doherty, *Projections of War*, chapter 9; Anna Everett, *Returning the Gaze: A Genealogy of Black Film Criticism, 1909-1949* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001), chapter 5; Brian Dolinar, *The Black Cultural Front: Black Writers and Artists of the Depression Generation* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2012), chapter 1.

[7] On Lewis, see, e.g., Walter White to Leon L. Lewis, December 5, 1940, Group II, Box A-279 [Part 18, Series B, Reel 20, Folder 1], NAACP; Walter White to Leon L. Lewis, January 7, 1941, Group II, Box A-279 [Part 18, Series B, Reel 20, Folder 1], NAACP. On White's 1940 letters to Southern editors, which described a film scenario he had developed about an African chieftain and his American descendants, see, e.g., Walter White to Grover Hall, April 11, 1940; Walter White to Jonathan Daniels,

The September 1941 hearings, called at the urging of the isolationist senators Gerald P. Nye of North Dakota and Bennett Champ Clark of Missouri, were ostensibly meant to probe the major motion picture studios' monopoly and the ways this monopoly restricted the viewpoints on the European conflict presented in theaters. But they were distinguished by the isolationists' repeated insinuations that Jews "controlled" Hollywood and were engaged in a conspiracy to use this influence to steer the United States into war. Although the investigation was called off after the December attack on Pearl Harbor, the hearings' antisemitic overtones seemed to confirm what Lewis and other Jewish communal leaders in the film capital had asserted throughout the 1930s: that any work to combat antisemitic content in motion pictures was best done quietly, behind the scenes, and that explicit on-screen condemnations of Nazi antisemitism—indeed, depictions of identifiably Jewish characters—were best avoided, at the risk of stoking further hostility toward Hollywood Jews.[8] During the war, accordingly, Jewish leaders endorsed generic appeals for tolerance, celebrating pictures like *It Happened in Springfield* (Warner Bros., 1944), a short dramatizing the diversity education curriculum in Springfield, Massachusetts; *The House I Live In* (RKO, 1945), another short featuring Frank Sinatra condemning young bullies who targeted their victim's (unnamed) religion; and *Tomorrow the World* (United Artists, 1944), a feature film telling the story of an

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April 11, 1940; Walter White to Virginius Dabney, April 8, 1940; Walter White to James N. Chappell, April 11, 1940; Walter White to George Fort Milton, April 11, 1940; and responses—all in in Group II, Box A-275 [Part 18, Series B, Reel 15, Folder 257], NAACP. On White's growing list of Hollywood contacts, see, e.g., Walter White to Walter Wanger, October 22, 1940, Group II, Box A-280 [Part 18, Series B, Reel 21, Folder 82], NAACP; Walter White to Archer Winston, January 27, 1942, Group II, Box A-279 [Part 18, Series B, Reel 20, Folder 1], NAACP.

[8] Koppes and Black, *Hollywood Goes to War*, chapter 2; Felicia Deborah Herman, "Views of Jews: Antisemitism, Hollywood, and American Jews, 1913-1947" (Ph.D. dissertation, Brandeis University, 2002), 159–162.

American family who adopt a young Nazi boy and attempt to eradicate his bigoted attitudes toward a number of minority groups.[9] These preferences to avoid candid treatments of antisemitism helped to make the treatment of African Americans on screen an index of and a way of exploring American attitudes toward minorities generally.

The Senate's 1941 inquisition prompted Hollywood executives to recruit Wendell Willkie, the 1940 Republican presidential nominee, to defend the industry. A racial liberal, Willkie had courted White's endorsement during his unsuccessful campaign, and although White remained a Roosevelt supporter, the two met after the election and became friendly—"one of the three or four closest and richest friendships of my life," White wrote in his memoirs. The movies were a focus of their conversations. In White's telling, in addition to informally advising Willkie during the hearings to highlight the isolationist senators' antisemitism as a means of discrediting them, he also mentioned that motion pictures were "perpetuating and spreading dangerous and harmful stereotypes of the Negro." Willkie agreed to help address this latter concern, declaring, "I ought to have a tiny bit of influence right now—I don't know how long it will last—with the moving picture people. Let's go out to Hollywood and talk with the more intelligent people in the industry to see what can be done to change the situation."[10]

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[9] Herman, "Views of Jews," 108–164, 172–184; Koppes and Black, *Hollywood Goes to War*, chapter 2.

[10] Walter White to Melvyn Douglas, December 3, 1941, Group II, Box A-279 [Part 18, Series B, Reel 20, Folder 1], NAACP; Walter White to Beatrice Buchman, January 14, 1942, Group II, Box A-279 [Part 18, Series B, Reel 20, Folder 1], NAACP; Walter White to Orson Well[e]s, January 22, 1942, Group II, Box A-279 [Part 18, Series B, Reel 20, Folder 1], NAACP; Walter White to Mr. and Mrs. Wilkie Mahoney, January 24, 1942, Group II, Box A-279 [Part 18, Series B, Reel 20, Folder 1], NAACP; White to Winston, January 27, 1942; Walter White to Dorothy Parker, February 2, 1942, Group II, Box A-279 [Part 18, Series B, Reel 20, Folder 1], NAACP; Walter White, *A Man Called White: The Autobiography of Walter White* (New York: Viking, 1948), 198–200.

The next year, Willkie—who in April 1942 also became chairman of the board of directors of Twentieth Century-Fox—helped to arrange a pair of meetings between White and Hollywood leaders. In advance of the gatherings, White discussed his strategy with a New York-based film producer and scholar named Sidney Kaufman. Kaufman's notes, rendered as an "informal speech" and mailed to White in California, suggest how White's critique of Hollywood had broadened beyond a mere condemnation of "dangerous and harmful stereotypes," and how its formulation had been reshaped by the coming of the war. Kaufman headlined the typescript "Race – A Basic Issue In This War." German and Japanese racial propaganda, the notes argued, must be answered with "remorseless relentless assertion" of "our national traditions of fair play and equality," and this response demanded changed depictions of African Americans in the movies. Producers must end "abuses" that "compromise the relations of the people who make this Republic": depictions of African-Americans as superstitious, as villains, and as inferior innocents ("the uncle and mammy attitude"). Films should avoid "narrow realism"—decontextualized depictions of black illiteracy or poverty—in favor of "rounded and sympathetic truth." "We ask," Kaufman's notes continued, "that the Negro be given citizenship in the world of the movie. Let us try to 'naturalize' him so that he occupies his rightful place, his just proportion of normal wholesome American life." Just as African Americans cited the United States' declared war aims and the exigencies of the wartime world to demand fair treatment in employment and in military service, the war provided a rationale not only to end stereotypes, but also to integrate African Americans into motion pictures and thereby into "American life."[11]

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[11] Sidney Kaufman, "Race - A Basic Issue In This War," February 1942, Group II, Box A-279 (Part 18, Series B, Reel 20, Folder 1), NAACPm. These notes accompanied Sidney Kaufman to Walter

White's first Hollywood meeting in Willkie's company took place in February 1942, after he attended the Academy Awards as Willkie's guest. At the Biltmore Hotel, White and Willkie met with the independent producer and Academy president Walter Wanger, Fox vice president Darryl Zanuck, and several others. They were heard sympathetically—Zanuck, White claimed, somewhat implausibly declared, "I make one-sixth of the pictures made in Hollywood and I never thought of this until you presented the facts"—and the men agreed further action was needed. Zanuck and Wanger offered to help set up another conference with "all of the Hollywood producers" and recommended speaking to the Screen Writers and Screen Actors guilds as well.[12]

White and Willkie brought their message to this larger audience in July, days after Willkie addressed the NAACP's annual convention in Los Angeles. At the cafeteria on the Fox studio lot, seventy industry figures, including producers, leaders of the creative guilds, and studio executives, gathered to hear White's and Willkie's entreaties. Willkie appealed to the consciences of Hollywood Jews, arguing, White later reported, "that they should be the last to be guilty of doing to another minority the things which had been done to them." White, meanwhile, invoked the influence of motion pictures—"this great medium which reaches the eyes and minds as no other medium in the history of the world has done"—and told the moguls, "You can make a magnificent contribution, which you

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White, February 18, 1942, Group II, Box A-279 [Part 18, Series B, Reel 20, Folder 1], NAACP. On African Americans' pursuit of the "Double V," see, e.g., Takaki, *Double Victory*, chapters 2–3; Beth Tompkins Bates, *Pullman Porters and the Rise of Protest Politics in Black America, 1925-1945* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001), chapter 7; Patricia Sullivan, *Lift Every Voice: The NAACP and the Making of the Civil Rights Movement* (New York: New Press, 2009), chapter 7.

[12] Walter White to Sara Boynoff, March 12, 1942, Group II, Box A-274 [Part 18, Series B, Reel 15, Folder 20], NAACP; Walter White to Melvyn Douglas, March 12, 1942, Group II, Box A-279 [Part 18, Series B, Reel 20, Folder 1], NAACP; Walter White to Harold Gunn, March 12, 1942, Group II, Box A-279 [Part 18, Series B, Reel 20, Folder 1], NAACP; Walter White to Leon L. Lewis, March 18, 1942, Group II, Box A-279 [Part 18, Series B, Reel 20, Folder 1], NAACP.

have already started to make, by correcting the misinformation which is the basis of the entire problem of the Negro race. By avoiding the perpetuation of the stereotypes and broadening the treatment, you can lessen the load of misunderstanding from which the Negro is suffering."[13]

Several days later, Zanuck wrote attendees to thank them for coming, to second "Mr. Willkie's arguments that a Democracy must live up to its protestations of equality," and to both endorse and interpret White's double-barreled "program" for Hollywood. "What he is actually asking for," Zanuck explained,

> is that Negroes be used in motion pictures in the same manner in which
> they occupy positions in life: some are heroic, some are not; some are
> serious minded, others are comedians; some are industrious, some are
> lazy; some hold highly responsible positions, some of course are in menial
> occupations. In other words, they are just like all other human beings.
> There is no objection to using the Negro occasionally for comedy, but he
> would like to have them used as often as possible in the more heroic roles
> – in the positions which they occupy in real life, as normal and integral
> parts of the American and world scenes. All this should be done, of
> course, without any direct or indirect suggestion of propaganda."

Responses to Willkie's and White's speeches and Zanuck's subsequent letter were overwhelmingly positive, an August NAACP press statement declared. "Executives high in importance in the motion picture industry," it trumpeted, "are almost unanimous in

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[13] Arch Reeve, untitled press release, July 18, 1942, Group II, Box A-279 [Part 18, Series B, Reel 20, Folder 165], NAACP; White, *A Man Called White*, 201–202; Untitled NAACP press release, July 27, 1942, Group II, Box A-275 [Part 18, Series B, Reel 15, Folder 400], NAACP; "Film Executives Pledge Better Roles for Negroes at Conferences With NAACP Secretary," July 31, 1942, Group II, Box A-278 [Part 18, Series B, Reel 18, Folder 654], NAACP.

giving assurances that Negroes will be given roles more in keeping with their normal place in American life."[14]

The messages White delivered at his Hollywood meetings in 1942 exemplified both the specific objectives of his work there and the impulses underlying his longstanding desire for racial uplift and integration in and through culture. As his language at the July luncheon suggested, he saw a problem demanding a twofold solution: the subtraction of bad, stereotyped representations and the addition of good ones. "Stereotypes," for White, invoked a category of film roles he typically referred to in correspondence and press statements alike with a shorthand phrase, "comic or menial." He sometimes offered a few additional specifics, as in brief references to a "comic figure or servant" and to "menials or buffoons," or in his statement at the luncheon condemning the "restriction of Negroes to roles with rolling eyes, chattering teeth, always scared of ghosts, or to portrayals of none-too-bright servants." [15] But he mostly painted in broad strokes, denouncing depictions of African Americans as backward, superstitious, and inferior. White's sketch of positive alternatives was similarly rough, usually associating "broadened treatment" with varying combinations of "normal," "human," and "integrated." African Americans should be shown as "normal human being[s]," he said, they should play "normal characters of human life" and "normal and integral parts," and

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[14] Darryl F. Zanuck to Eddie J. Mannix, July 21, 1942, Group II, Box A-275 [Part 18, Series B, Reel 15, Folder 400], NAACP; "Film Executives Pledge to Give Negroes Better Movie Roles," August 21, 1942, Group II, Box A-278 [Part 18, Series B, Reel 18, Folder 654], NAACP; George S. Schuyler, "Views and Reviews," *Pittsburgh Courier*, September 5, 1942.

[15] White to Lewis, December 5, 1940; White to Buchman, January 14, 1942; Untitled press release, July 27, 1942, Group II, Box A-278 [Part 18, Series B, Reel 18, Folder 654], NAACP.

films should aim for "normal integration of Negroes."[16] He advocated for adding black

characters to all films, from "a few well dressed, intelligent Negroes in crowd scenes up

to inclusion of Negroes as principals in films"; his oft-cited ideal was the stoic young

black clerk and law student unjustly accused of murder by Bette Davis's character in *In*

This Our Life (Warner Bros., 1942).[17]

As at the 1942 Hollywood meetings, White suggested regularly that the movies'

pervasive global influence meant these goals were a vital part of the U.S. war effort and

were essential to harmonious domestic and international race relations—which he

insisted were themselves interconnected. His Writers' Congress address, in envisioning

"a world free of racial and religious hatred, a world free of vicious and fictitious notions

of the superiority of one race over another, [and] a world free of imperialism and

colonialism," pressed the point especially hard. But from the war's earliest days, White

argued stereotypes must be eliminated and treatment broadened in order to remove a

"sore spot" hampering black support for the Allies not only in the United States but also

in the Caribbean and Latin America. White's integrationism existed alongside an acute

concern regarding the place of non-white people in the broader wartime world and the

ways they were affected by American movies. Zanuck's reference to "the American and

world scenes" was an apt one.[18]

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[16] Walter White to Tom O'Connor, September 23, 1942, Group II, Box A-275 [Part 18, Series B, Reel 15, Folder 400], NAACP; Walter White to Kyle Crichton, April 13, 1942; Zanuck to Mannix, July 21, 1942 (paraphrasing White); Walter White to Walter Wanger, April 7, 1942, Group II, Box A-280 [Part 18, Series B, Reel 21, Folder 82], NAACP.

[17] Walter White to Edwin Embree, October 30, 1942, Group II, Box A-279 [Part 18, Series B, Reel 20, Folder 165], NAACP.

[18] White to Mahoney, January 24, 1942; White to Winston, January 27, 1942; Walter White to Will H. Hays, February 4, 1942; Reeve, untitled press release; "White Says Movies Can Solve Their Negro Problem," *NAACP Bulletin*, October 1943. On White's increasing anticolonialism during the war, see Janken, *White*, chapter 9.

The staff in the NAACP's national office played an important role in White's lobbying of Hollywood leaders, both by garnering publicity for his work and by reviewing individual pictures for him.[19] (As he admitted to a *New York Post* film critic before first venturing to Hollywood with Willkie, others "have more time to go to the movies than I."[20]) But White's work also relied on innumerable letters, telegrams, and conversations that aimed to gather information, solve problems, and persuade powerful leaders to see things his way. Praising White in 1942, the black editorialist George Schuyler wrote, "Undoubtedly one of the greatest lobbyists in America, he is a speaking acquaintance with practically everybody who is anybody," and "he has always been indefatigable in turning these associations to the advantage of Negroes." White diligently employed his growing list of Hollywood connections, asking guidance from local Jewish leaders like Lewis and the attorney Mendel Silberberg, writing studio production chiefs for information on "pictures now in production or contemplated in which Negroes are included," soliciting gossip from industry journalists and public relations men, arranging private New York screenings of films of interest, and peppering executives, producers, and stars with notes and telegrams of praise and gratitude. When problem films were released or rumored, White went directly to the top. He wrote to Louis Mayer requesting a copy of the script of an MGM biopic of Andrew Johnson said to impugn the abolitionist Thaddeus Stevens (*Tennessee Johnson*, 1942), for instance, and he encouraged Harry

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[19] Greer, "Image Matters," 57–73. Greer's account offers a corrective to the notion that the movies were solely White's priority—"Walter's thing," as his successor Roy Wilkins later recalled. Thomas Cripps, "'Walter's Thing': The NAACP's Hollywood Bureau of 1946—A Cautionary Tale," *Journal of Popular Film and Television* 33, no. 2 (Summer 2005): 119. On White's work in the broader context of the wartime NAACP, see also Sullivan, *Lift Every Voice*, 285.

[20] White to Winston, January 27, 1942.

Warner to "take appropriate action" against the cartoon short *Coal Black and the Sebben Dwarfs* (Warner Bros., 1943).[21]

That White learned of *Tennessee Johnson* from the *Daily Worker* and its film critic David Platt suggests the diversity of his correspondents and his eager participation in the revived wartime Popular Front alliance between liberals and leftists.[22] He also looked avidly to the federal government, closely tracking rumors regarding the creation of the Office of War Information (OWI) and its Bureau of Motion Pictures (BMP), writing to Lowell Mellett soon after he was appointed to lead the former to protest "the manner in which negroes are habitually depicted on the screen," thrilling that officials from the Office of the Coordinator of Government Films "were keenly alive to the question of the treatment of the Negro in films and eager to do something about it," and quickly forging a relationship with Nelson Poynter, who headed the BMP's Hollywood

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[21] On White's elite-centered approach, see Schuyler, "Views and Reviews"; Janken, *White*, xiv. On his interactions with Lewis and Silberberg, see Sidney Wallach to Leon L. Lewis, November 7, 1940, Group II, Box A-279 [Part 18, Series B, Reel 20, Folder 1], NAACP; Walter White to Leon L. Lewis, February 5, 1942, Group II, Box A-279 [Part 18, Series B, Reel 20, Folder 1], NAACP; White to Lewis, March 18, 1942; Walter White to Mendel Silberberg, August 5, 1942, Group II, Box A-279 [Part 18, Series B, Reel 20, Folder 165], NAACP; Mendel Silberberg to Walter White, August 28, 1942, Group II, Box A-279 [Part 18, Series B, Reel 20, Folder 165], NAACP. For his correspondence with production chiefs, publicists, and journalists, see, e.g., Walter White to Darryl Zanuck, November 2, 1943, Group II, Box A-280 [Part 18, Series B, Reel 21, Folder 191], NAACP; Walter White to Arch Reeve, August 5, 1942, Group II, Box A-279 [Part 18, Series B, Reel 20, Folder 165], NAACP and, generally, correspondence in Group II, Box A-274 [Part 18, Series B, Reel 15, Folder 20], NAACP. Documentation of screenings and notes of congratulation includes Walter White to Preston Sturges, April 22, 1942, Group II, Box A-279 [Part 18, Series B, Reel 20, Folder 1], NAACP; Walter White to Harry Warner, August 24, 1942, Group II, Box A-275 [Part 18, Series B, Reel 15, Folder 400], NAACP; Walter White to Bing Crosby, November 28, 1944, Group II, Box A-275 [Part 18, Series B, Reel 15, Folder 693], NAACP. On *Tennesse Johnson* and *Coal Black*, see, respectively, Walter White to Louis B. Mayer, August 3, 1942, Group II, Box A-277 [Part 18, Series B, Reel 18, Folder 253], NAACP; Walter White to Harry M. Warner, April 28, 1943, Group II, Box A-275 [Part 18, Series B, Reel 15, Folder 567], NAACP. For more on *Coal Black*, see Christopher P. Lehman, *The Colored Cartoon: Black Representation in American Animated Short Films, 1907-1954* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2007), 76–79.

[22] David Platt to Walter White, August 4, 1942, Group II, Box A-277 [Part 18, Series B, Reel 18, Folder 253], NAACP. For more on the *Tennessee Johnson* controversy, see Thomas Cripps, "Movies, Race, and World War II: 'Tennessee Johnson' as an Anticipation of the Strategies of the Civil Rights Movement," *Prologue* 14, no. 2 (1982): 49–67; Koppes and Black, "Blacks, Loyalty, and Motion-Picture Propaganda," 393–96; Cripps, *Making Movies Black*, 69–72.

office, inviting him to the NAACP's convention in Los Angeles and turning to him for advice.[23]

The OWI and BMP waged a vigorous wartime government propaganda campaign that incorporated what the historians Clayton Koppes and Gregory Black term "an intensive, unprecedented effort to mold the content of Hollywood's feature films." At least for a time, this effort included among its goals fairer representation of African Americans on screen. Throughout the war, and particularly in 1942 and early 1943, the OWI leveraged its control over film stock, export licenses, and exhibition in areas under Allied occupation to intervene in the moviemaking process and attempt to bring films broadly into line with the government's wartime propaganda goals. Progressive outsider journalists led the effort—Mellett was a former Washington editor and Poynter, the publisher of the *St. Petersburg Times*—and they quickly grew impatient with the vengeful tone and strained topicality of the war-related features released in the first months of fighting. In response, the OWI assembled in the summer of 1942 the first draft of its Government Information Manual for the Motion Picture Industry, which reflected a liberal, internationalist view of the war's purpose and recommended that films emphasize to American audiences themes of "democracy," home front "unity," and the diversity of the fighting forces. Like Jewish leaders in Hollywood, the OWI cast Nazism as a broad

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[23] Lowell Mellett to Walter White, December 26, 1941, Group II, Box A-275 [Part 18, Series B, Reel 15, Folder 257], NAACP; Sara Boynoff to Walter White, March 16, 1942, Group II, Box A-274 [Part 18, Series B, Reel 15, Folder 20], NAACP; Sara Boynoff to Walter White, March 24, 1942, Group II, Box A-274 [Part 18, Series B, Reel 15, Folder 20], NAACP; Walter White to Sara Boynoff, April 1, 1942, Group II, Box A-274 [Part 18, Series B, Reel 15, Folder 20], NAACP; Walter White to Sara Boynoff, April 22, 1942, Group II, Box A-274 [Part 18, Series B, Reel 15, Folder 20], NAACP; Walter White to Nelson Poynter, July 6, 1942, Group II, Box A-279 [Part 18, Series B, Reel 20, Folder 165], NAACP; Walter White to Nelson Poynter, July 30, 1942, Group II, Box A-279 [Part 18, Series B, Reel 20, Folder 165], NAACP; Nelson Poynter to Walter White, August 29, 1942, Group II, Box A-279 [Part 18, Series B, Reel 20, Folder 165], NAACP.

threat to these American values but discouraged specific attention to the persecution of Jews in Europe. Through the second half of 1942, ideologically sympathetic screenwriters and directors embraced the OWI's guidelines, and the BMP increased its pressure on producers, eventually requesting they submit all finished scripts, synopses, and treatments for review by the Hollywood office's analysts before filming.[24] The BMP's reign in Hollywood was short-lived, however. By 1943, conservative and Southern congressmen, supported by film industry executives who resented the government's interference, slashed the OWI's budget and sharply curtailed the film activities of its Domestic Branch. Power in Hollywood shifted to the Overseas Branch, which enforced a simplified propaganda line focused on international audiences.[25]

As Koppes and Black document, the OWI's "behind-the-scenes campaign to get Hollywood studios to improve their handling of racial issues on the screen" was its most ambitious effort to ensure black support for the war.[26] Its agenda on racial matters was relatively modest: its officials discouraged White from objecting too strenuously to *Tennessee Johnson*, for instance, and they approved the all-black musicals *Cabin the Sky* (MGM, 1943) and *Stormy Weather* (Fox, 1943) despite his objections that they presented segregated fantasy worlds. Still, the interventions of the BMP did soften the racist characterization of Reconstruction in *Tennessee Johnson*, and the Bureau also helped to kill proposed remakes of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and *The Birth of a Nation*, as well as a musical version of *Gone With the Wind*. Perhaps most crucially—in contrast to Walter White's generalized recommendations of "normal characters," and his private lobbying

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[24] Koppes and Black, *Hollywood Goes to War*, vii–viii, 50–69, 105–108.

[25] Ibid., 134–141.

[26] Koppes and Black, "Blacks, Loyalty, and Motion-Picture Propaganda," 391.

for film biographies of the scientist George Washington Carver and the Free French leader Félix Éboué that made unlikely commercial prospects—the BMP encouraged the inclusion of individual black characters in so-called "platoon" films like *Bataan* (MGM, 1943), *Crash Dive* (Fox, 1943), *Sahara* (Columbia, 1943), and *Lifeboat* (Fox, 1944).[27] Even if limited and short-lived, the BMP's interventions during the war's first years further provided further support to claims that improving fairly representing African Americans on screen aided the cause of Allied victory.

This notion was one increasingly subscribed to across the resurgent alliance of liberals and radicals that emerged in Hollywood and throughout the entertainment industry with the coming of war and the wartime alliance between the United States and the Soviet Union. Progressive writers, performers, and intellectuals sought to support the war effort and to emphasize its anti-fascist, democratic aims. For many of them, seeking to transform how motion pictures depicted minorities, especially African Americans, became a crucial part of this task. A series of meetings and conferences organized by the Hollywood Writers' Mobilization on the West Coast and the Entertainment Industry Emergency Committee (EIEC) and the National Negro Congress (NNC) in New York together fostered a network of concerned activists who came to understand racial stereotypes in popular culture, and especially in the movies, as a direct threat to the ability of the United States to win the war.

The NNC, the labor-oriented African American organization created in 1936 amid the Popular Front of the 1930s, turned toward cultural activism during the war. After the

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[27] Ibid., 392–406; Doherty, *Projections of War*, 216–217; "Will Not Refilm 'Birth of Nation,'" *Pittsburgh Courier*, December 5, 1942. The difficult search for genres and formulas within which to incorporate African American characters is a recurring theme in Cripps, *Making Movies Black*, esp. chapter 3. On White's lobbying, see Walter White to Edwin Embree, March 4, 1943, Group II, Box A-279 [Part 18, Series B, Reel 20, Folder 253], NAACP.

Nazi-Soviet Pact of 1939, the communist sympathies of many of its top officials became a liability. The black labor leader A. Phillip Randolph dramatically surrendered its presidency at its Third Congress in 1940, and as the U.S. mobilized for war, key local and national leaders moved into defense industry jobs and the military, and Randolph's March on Washington Movement co-opted the cutting edge of black protest politics. Yet, although the NNC no longer boasted a mass constituency, its remaining members pressed on, placing greater emphasis on cultural issues—including the role played by motion pictures in the oppression of African Americans.[28] During the 1940 Third Congress, attendees gathered for a "Panel on Cultural Freedom," where a talk by the poet and scholar Sterling Brown offered an extended analysis of *Gone With the Wind.* Brown highlighted the film's use of common African American stereotypes and argued that the servility of its ostensibly "good Negroes" communicated the message, "Subordinate … the Negro is o.k. Equal, the negro is dangerous." He concluded, "Now Hollywood is not going to show for a very long time any other type of picture."[29] Within a few years, however, change appeared more possible. During the summer of 1943, the NNC began preparations for "a one-day cultural institute … on 'Negro Culture in Wartime,'" stating, in part, "We wish to encourage the recent indication of more understanding and positive

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[28] In 1943, the NNC's new president, Max Yergan, moved its headquarters from Washington to New York, and thus from the nation's political to its cultural capital. Activities were centered in the national office, rather than the weakened local councils. John Baxter Streater, "The National Negro Congress, 1936-1947" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Cincinnati, 1981), esp. chapter 7; Cicero Alvin Hughes, "Toward a Black United Front: The National Negro Congress Movement" (Ph.D. dissertation, Ohio University, 1982), esp. chapter 6. For a recent, thorough account of the NNC's cultural activism, see Dolinar, *The Black Cultural Front*, chapter 1.

[29] "Panel on Cultural Freedom" [transcript], April 28, 1940, Series II, Box 21, Folder 47 [Part I, Reel 21], National Negro Congress records, 1933–1947 (Bethesda, MD: University Publications of America, 1988) (hereafter, NNC). During the question period that followed, someone identified in the transcript as "Carlton Morse"—likely the dramatist Carlton Moss—promoted a petition prepared by the Hollywood League for Democratic Action that charged filmmakers with violating the Motion Picture Production Code by depicting "the Negro … as a dop, stable boy, convict, rapist, always a happy, inferior content to remain a servant."

portrayal of the Negro through the Hollywood film industry, pressing for production of more of the better films, and continuing to take issue with the dishonest stereotyping that has been prevalent."[30]

Meanwhile, the deadly race riot in Detroit in late June 1943 helped to turn the attention of white liberals and leftists in the entertainment industry toward racial issues, and ultimately toward the representation of African Americans in film. Immediately after the riot, an ad hoc Entertainment Industry Emergency Committee (EIEC) was created to coordinate a nationwide radio broadcast over the CBS network, titled "An Open Letter to the American People," that discouraged racial violence and encouraged national unity. With Walter White's close involvement, the committee's East Coast supporters then plotted their next steps, further galvanized by a second outbreak of racial violence in Harlem. At an early August gathering, the committee entertained suggestions for a range of activities geared toward "cementing unity and deepening racial understanding," including rallies in New York and additional radio shows.[31] EIEC members also forged links with the NNC's cultural initiative, attending its meetings and discussing how operations might be coordinated or combined.[32]

Simultaneously, the West Coast-based members of the EIEC folded their operations into the HWM, which expanded its attention to African Americans and other

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[30] Jessie Scott Campbell to Max Yergan, July 19, 1943, Series II, Box 31, Folder 9 [Part II, Reel 1], NNC; Max Yergan to Walter White, July 23, 1943, Series II, Box 31, Folder 9 [Part II, Reel 1], NNC.

[31] "Entertainment Industry Emergency Committee Progress Report," August 1943, Group II, Box A-248 [Part 18, Series B, Reel 14, Folder 307], NAACP. On the Detroit and Harlem riots, see Janken, *White*, 275–277; Sullivan, *Lift Every Voice*, 278–280.

[32] Jessie Scott Campbell, "Cultural Committee Meeting" [minutes], August 10, 1943, Series II, Box 31, Folder 9 [Part II, Reel 1], NNC.

minority groups.[33] The Screen Writers Guild had created the HWM the day after the

Japanese attack on Perl Harbor, with the aim of enlisting thousands of writers across

industries in support of the war effort. Screenwriters dominated the Communist Party's

Hollywood branch in the 1930s and 1940s, and party members played a consequential

role within the HWM. But the HWM attracted politically diverse support, benefiting

from both the communists' wartime emphasis on "Americanism" and from its own

narrow focus on victory.[34] The HWM had already begun to plan the Writers' Congress

to be held that October, and the screenwriter Marc Connelly, a friend of White's who was

organizing the Congress, invited him to attend and "speak on any aspect of racial

tolerance you choose."[35] White accepted and agreed to serve on the Congress's advisory

committee, and he was quickly enlisted for a new "panel on Negro and other minority

problems" planned by the screenwriter Ring Lardner, Jr.[36]

The "Minority Groups" session of the Writers' Congress in October 1943

provides an especially vivid glimpse of the convergence of progressive interest in the

representation of minority groups, generally, and of African Americans, specifically, in

the movies. The panel, which was "moved from a smaller room … in order to

accommodate the overflow crowd," began with a series of speakers who offered

background on the oppression of various minorities, including African Americans, Jews,

and Filipinos. The screenwriter Samuel Ornitz discussed the roots of antisemitism in

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[33] "Entertainment Industry Emergency Committee Progress Report."

[34] On the HWM, see Ceplair and Englund, *The Inquisition in Hollywood*, 186–190.

[35] Marc Connelly to Walter White, July 17, 1943, Group II, Box A-277 [Part 18, Series B, Reel 17, Folder 658], NAACP.

[36] Walter White to Marc Connelly, August 26, 1943, Group II, Box A-277 [Part 18, Series B, Reel 17, Folder 658], NAACP; Ring Lardner, Jr. to Walter White, August 27, 1943, Group II, Box A-277 [Part 18, Series B, Reel 17, Folder 658], NAACP.

universal terms, likening it to "discrimination against any race"; asserting that

"indifference to minorities" enabled Nazi persecutions of Jews, Poles, and Greeks alike;

and declaring, "All minorities are lumped together and it is time for them to fight

together." White's extemporaneous talk, by contrast, offered specific examples of how

African Americans were persecuted: military segregation and discrimination against

black soldiers, the Detroit and Harlem riots, and the power of Southern representatives in

Congress.[37]

The second half of the session, which connected the oppression of minorities to

screen stereotypes and charged writers with remedying the situation, similarly paired a

general overview of "minorities" and a specific analysis of African American caricatures.

UCLA anthropologist Harry Hoijer explained, "minorities are universally the subjects of

what may be called ethnic myths or stereotypes." After some time defining the concept,

he concluded, "At least one barrier, and a formidable one, to mutual understanding and

cooperation between minorities and other components of the urban community is found

in the racial and ethnic stereotype. And it is precisely here … that the writer, and

particularly the screenwriter, can be most useful." If writers could educate and organize

themselves "to insist on the elimination of any material supporting a stereotype," they

could begin the work of tearing down this "barrier."[38] Screenwriter Dalton Trumbo

reviewed American writers' history of "character clichés" in their depictions of Irish,

black, Mexican, Chinese, and Slavic people. Then he narrowed his discussion to focus

on African Americans on film. Taking a historical perspective, he argued that American

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[37] "Writers' Congress: Minority Groups Session," October 4, 1943, Group II, Box A-277 [Part 18, Series B, Reel 17, Folder 658], NAACP.

[38] *Writers' Congress*, 483–487.

cinema's two landmark achievements, *The Birth of a Nation* and *Gone With the Wind*, were "anti-Negro pictures" that incorporated Civil War mythology, with the films that came between them featuring only "turgid floods of sickening and libelous treacle." He endorsed the depictions of African Americans in recent films like *In This Our Life* and *Bataan*, and noted that the biographies of "distinguished Negroes" offered considerable "dramatic material." Trumbo concluded on a similar note to Hoijer: writers must learn to do better, and must organize to ensure they could.[39] During the discussion period, White offered an unsurprising endorsement of the importance of education. Many people in the entertainment industry, he said, "have done things which have made the lot of minorities more difficult—not because they are vicious, but because they do not know the facts and they had not taken the trouble to find them out."[40]

The most audible discord with the converging chorus of concern about the image of African Americans in the movies in 1942 and 1943 came from some black performers, including the Oscar-winner Hattie McDaniel, who had carved for themselves a niche in Hollywood playing mostly the sort of roles as maids and servants that White seemed to denigrate in his public criticisms of "menials." These performers resented, particularly, White's highly publicized lobbying campaign, which barely consulted them or considered their interests. The various forms their opposition to White took, and the motives that underpinned it, will be explored in detail in Chapter 5 but, crucially, many black performers nevertheless shared in the belief that the representations of African Americans on screen must change, and they acted accordingly. The ferment of the

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[39] Ibid., 495–501.

[40] "Writers' Congress: Minority Groups Session," 7–8.

wartime years provided a range of venues for doing so, and black performers were active participants in the NNC, EIEC, and HWM. Beginning in 1944, several also played leadership roles in an organization initially called the Committee for Unity in Motion Pictures and later the Interracial Film and Radio Guild (IFRG), which among other activities promoted a platform opposing stereotypes and encouraging the wider casting of black actors.[41]

Enmeshed within Hollywood's revived Popular Front, the IFRG further evidenced the solidifying consensus among liberals and radicals in the film capital about the crucial importance of fair representation of African Americans on screen. This consensus, which would have been unimaginable just a half decade earlier, now seemed to promise, despite the travails of the BMP, the prospect of lasting change. One key, its constituents seemed to agree, was that screenwriters and others who created motion pictures be organized and educated.

A Bureau … in Hollywood

The participants in the "Minority Groups" session at the Writers' Congress—along with many other wartime liberals and radicals—eagerly took up this task. The initial remedy for the problems diagnosed at the session, they believed, was the drafting of what White termed "some definite statement … to serve as a guide for writers, directors, and other workers in the middle of the motion picture industry." Another attendee, whose name was not recorded in notes on the session, urged "as many writers as can" to cooperate in "the work still to come—to work out the code—get it accepted by

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[41] See Chapter 5 for a thorough discussion of actors' conflicts with White, and of the IFRG.

all the concepts [*sic*] in the Industry."[42] The session's participants accordingly drafted a resolution calling for "a permanent committee … which shall seek ways and means of familiarizing all writers with minority problems and with honest and truthful ways of presenting the Negro, the Jew, the Mexican, the South American, and all foreign nationals," and suggested that this committee should "draw up a Code of Practice analyzing all objectionable epithets and phrases and modes of characterization and urge their elimination." Although the Congress as a whole did not vote on this proposal, it endorsed a broader pledge (presented by White) to fight "every attempt to bind the free spirit of man with the chains of bigotry and ignorance," and it approved a plan to extend the work of the Congress through a series of seminars, including a "Seminar on Minority Problems."[43]

The participants' eager embrace of a "permanent committee" and a "Code of Practice" was one example of the numerous projects during and after the war to create durable institutions to ensure the fair representation of African Americans and other marginalized groups in the motion pictures. During the middle years of the war, writers and performers affiliated with the HWM, NNC, and EIEC worked diligently to draft "codes" that might guide their own work and that of their colleagues in depicting blacks and other minorities. In 1945 and 1946, Walter White sought to establish an NAACP "bureau" in Hollywood that would oversee the movies and provide advice on an ongoing

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[42] "Writers' Congress: Minority Groups Session," 7–8. Both White and the unnamed attendee referred to this idea as "Lillian Hellman's." As Hellman was not a panelist at the session, the two might have been referring to her role in drafting a "voluntary code" on behalf of the EIEC, discussed further below.

[43] Writers Congress 1943, "Report of Resolutions Committee," October 1943, Group II, Box A-277 [Part 18, Series B, Reel 17, Folder 658], NAACP; "Writers Pledge to Fight Bigotry," October 15, 1943, Group II, Box A-277 [Part 18, Series B, Reel 17, Folder 658], NAACP; *Writers' Congress*, 626–627.

basis. The next year witnessed an abortive effort at creating a grand coalition of African

American, Jewish, and liberal membership organizations to monitor the movies as well as

other forms of media for "stereotypes." These projects were surely energized by the

proximate example of the BMP's Hollywood office and the guidelines offered in its

Government Information Manual. But even if only implicitly, they drew—like the BMP

and its Manual themselves—on the models that had been created during the 1930s: the

Code and its guidelines for motion picture content, the Production Code Authority and its

careful policing of scripts before their production, and the Legion of Decency and its

ability to shape the moviegoing behavior of a broad swath of audiences. None of these

projects, however, achieved the success of those models in successfully altering the

dynamics of power in Hollywood or securing greater influence for minority groups and

their allies over screen content. Instead, like the OWI itself, they succumbed to

resistance from Hollywood leaders, limited financial resources, and the rapidly shifting

politics of the war and postwar years.

Efforts to create a minority "code" seem to have originated with radical

screenwriters, who had embraced the BMP's Government Information Manual

enthusiastically, and whose long struggles to organize and unionize had been driven in

part by battles with Hollywood producers for a greater say in the moviemaking process.[44]

In July 1943, the screenwriter Milton Merlin, representing the HWM at a meeting of the

NNC's cultural initiative, advocated "a code for the treatment of Negroes and other

minority groups in films." Afterward, the NNC announced "an eight point program …

for the full integration of Negro artists in all aspects of American cultural life." One of

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[44] Koppes and Black, *Hollywood Goes to War*, 70; Ceplair and Englund, *The Inquisition in Hollywood*, chapters 1–2.

the eight points called for both "a code by Hollywood screen writers that would outlaw all derogatory references to the Negro people and the appointment of a Negro to the Hays office [enforcers of the Motion Picture Production Code] to act on the treatment of Negro characters in the movies," another idea in circulation during these years.[45]

Around the same time, the EIEC also embraced the idea of "a set of minimum principles, or volunteer code … for the industry's guidance in the treatment of racial subjects." The black actor Clarence Muse—who had headlined the NNC's July cultural meeting—was among the initial half dozen members appointed to a committee to work on the EIEC's "code," along with the playwrights Maxwell Anderson and Lillian Hellman, and the president of the Radio Writers Guild, Peter Lyon.[46] In subsequent months, the NNC pushed for a greater role in the project. In mid-August, several additional black artists and NNC staff members were appointed to join the EIEC's code-writing committee.[47] In late October, an unsigned letter from "the cultural group in Harlem" offered "suggestions" to Lyon for making a draft of the code "the most accurate possible expression of the needs and desires of minority groups in their struggle for an honest portrayal of their culture."[48] Later that year, the NNC created a Committee for Democratc Culture which, it proposed, would coordinate existing efforts to fight stereotypes in culture, promote "the democratic ideal," and create opportunities for black

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[45] NNC Press Release, "Clarence Muse Calls for Democracy in Film Industry," July 30, 1943, Series II, Box 31, Folder 10 [Part II, Reel 1], NNC.

[46] "Entertainment Industry Emergency Committee Progress Report."

[47] Campbell, "Cultural Committee Meeting" [minutes]. Langston Hughes was also appointed to the "code" committee in absentia, but demurred. See Jessie Scott Campbell to Langston Hughes, August 11, 1943, Series II, Box 31, Folder 9 [Part II, Reel 1], NNC; Langston Hughes to Jessie Scott Campbell, August 12, 1943, Series II, Box 31, Folder 9 [Part II, Reel 1], NNC.

[48] Unsigned letter to Peter Lyon, October 26, 1943, Series II, Box 31, Folder 9 [Part II, Reel 1], NNC.

artists; its motion picture subcommittee would cooperate with the EIEC, the HWM, the

NAACP, and the Negro Actors Guild to assist in the creation of the code and would

"work closely with Hollywood writers and producers" to suggest material, offer "critical

appraisals," and "campaign against" bad films.[49] The Committee's members included

black performers and scholars as well as white writers and producers affiliated with the

EIEC.[50]

As the EIEC's code-writing effort proceeded in late 1943 and early 1944, the

HWM's Seminar on Minority Problems, led by a committee including Merlin, Ring

Lardner, Muse, the black actor Canada Lee, and the black dramatist Carlton Moss,

drafted its own "code to guide the writer in his treatment of minorities."[51] Two different

versions of a "Declaration of Principles" were thus published in 1944: one attributed to

the HWM's "Minority Problems" seminar and published in the proceedings of the

Writers' Congress in 1944, and the other reportedly approved by a vote of five hundred

EIEC members in late May.[52] Both documents reflected the wartime moment, suggesting

that racial issues threatened national unity and the prospects for victory, and thus required

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[49] "Memorandum," November 1943, Series II, Box 42, Folder 42 (part 1) [Part II, Reel 11), NNC; "Proposals Made at Max Yergan's Office," November 18, 1943, Series II, Box 42, Folder 42 (part 1) [Part II, Reel 11), NNC; "Proposal for the Establishment of a Committee for Democratic Culture," n.d. [c 1942, Series II, Box 31, Folder 9 [Part II, Reel 1], NNC; Fredi Washington, "Outline for Main Report to Be given by Fredi Washington at the Cultural Meeting...," n.d. [Fall 1943, Series II, Box 31, Folder 9 [Part II, Reel 1], NNC; Outline of suggested prospectus for Cultural Committee, n.d. [Fall 1943, Series II, Box 31, Folder 10 [Part II, Reel 1], NNC.

[50] Elsie Jackson, "Draft of Minutes," November 28, 1943, Series II, Box 31, Folder 10 [Part II, Reel 1], NNC.

[51] Evidence is scanty, but the seminar also convened at least once to discuss a script in progress. Clarence Muse to Walter White, March 22, 1944, Group II, Box A-275 [Part 18, Series B, Reel 15, Folder 693], NAACP.

[52] "Show People's Campaign: Depict Negro Truthfully," *PM*, May 24, 1944, Group II, Box A-248 (Part 18, Series B, Reel 14, Folder 307), NAACP; "Decent Break for Negro Demanded by 500 'Names' In Entertainment Field," *Trade Union Service Newspapers*, June 3, 1944, Group II, Box A-248 [Part 18, Series B, Reel 14, Folder 307], NAACP.

attention from those who created motion pictures. The specific emphases of the two codes differed, however. The EIEC's, crafted in cooperation with the NNC, focused specifically on African Americans: the "Negro citizen" who "has too often been denied his constitutional rights and privileges." This "Negro problem" threatened "our national effort." The EIEC code offered a specific list of "don'ts" regarding black images in motion pictures. "Pre-Civil War lies about the Negro" should be avoided, for "the Negro is not a man with a razor in his hand, or a woman with a handkerchief on her head; they are not happy-go-lucky illiterates, clowns, cowards, superstitious, ghost-ridden, liquor-drinking, chicken-stealing, watermelon-eating, jazz-crazed Aunt Jemimas or Uncle Toms who at their worst are villains and at their best slavish admirers of their white superiors." The film industry and "the decent southerner" should ally to fight the constraints on black film representations there. In contrast, the HWM's code, more deeply rooted in the leftist politics of Hollywood screenwriters, was more abstract and more ideological. It broadly condemned "philosophies of race hatred and national superiority" and never mentioned African Americans specifically. Its ten recommendations encouraged in general terms consciousness of individual uniqueness and common humanity, respect for different cultures, avoidance of "racial clichés and caricatures," and skepticism regarding the "existing order of racial relations." It was emphatically global in outlook, calling on writers to draw from "the history and the current struggles for freedom of races and national groups the world over" and to make a "positive contribution to the goal of a democratic and peaceful world."[53]

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[53] Untitled draft of "Code," May 1944, Group II, Box A-248 (Part 18, Series B, Reel 14, Folder 307), NAACP; *Writers' Congress*, 629–630. Interestingly, opposition to racial discriminatory practices in entertainment was one area of overlap between the two codes, perhaps reflecting the roles played by black performers in the creation of each. The EIEC declared that black performers and artists should not be

Little seems to have come of either code. Neither was taken up by the producers

in the way the Production Code had been, and the organizations that had drafted the two

documents, rather than becoming the potent and permanent forces in Hollywood they

hoped they might be, would instead soon be swamped by the rising tide of

anticommunism. Meanwhile, although Walter White endorsed the idea of a code at the

Writers' Congress—and indeed had earlier requested (without success) that he be

appointed to lead a NNC committee to work on the effort—his primary interest lay

elsewhere.[54] After contemplating possible mechanisms for achieving fair representation

for African Americans in the movies as early as 1942, he latched on to the idea of

stationing an "independent" outside figure in Hollywood, nursing this possibility

throughout the remainder of the war and seeking to implement it as the war concluded.[55]

Before and during his 1942 visits to Hollywood, White researched the movie

industry's existing regime of voluntary censorship and entertained proposals for how the

Production Code might be adapted to serve his goals. From Sidney Kaufman, he

borrowed "several books dealing with film codes and censorship."[56] The Ohio State

University film scholar Edgar Dale, the former Payne Fund studies investigator, offered a

series of ideas White might broach with the moguls, including both expansion of the

Production Code to forbid "unfair treatment of the minorities or races" (slightly stronger

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excluded from the theater, radio, and music, and the HWM forswore "all discrimination in employment within the entertainment industry."

[54] Walter White to Max Yergan, July 27, 1943, Series II, Box 31, Folder 10 [Part II, Reel 1], NNC; Untitled agenda of "Cultural Meeting," July 28, 1943, Series II, Box 31, Folder 9 [Part II, Reel 1], NNC. White does not seem to have cooperated closely with the NNC's new cultural efforts in the months that followed.

[55] For the most detailed existing overview of this project, see Cripps, "'Walter's Thing'."

[56] Kaufman to White, February 18, 1942; Sidney Kaufman to Walter White, January 19, 1948.

language than its existing call for "consideration and respectful treatment" of "any nation") and a "cooperative" monitoring organization "something like the Anti-Defamative [*sic*] League" to which producers would report "on the treatment of minorities" in motion pictures. (Dale also suggested "special awards" for directors and producers who featured "intelligent and sympathetic characters"—an idea that both White and the NAACP as a whole would adopt years later.)[57] From Hollywood, David Selznick proposed that the NAACP fund a staff member to work in the "Hays Office" and vet all scripts with black characters.[58]

Modification of the Production Code was likely never a real possibility, and White and most other producers rejected Selznick's proposal—White because he saw the situation demanding not "deletion" but rather the expanded incorporation of African Americans, and the producers because of stated concerns about "censorship" that were likely a proxy for their habitual resistance to any expansion of outside control over their decision-making.[59] Instead, in the wake of his July 1942 conference with producers, White contemplated spending as long as six months in Hollywood himself to personally "finish the job." But after Production Code enforcer Joseph Breen and several other correspondents actively discouraged this plan, and the moguls declined to extend the "official" invitation he sought, he scrapped these plans. [60]

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[57] Walter White to Edgar Dale, February 6, 1942; Edgar Dale to Walter White, February 14, 1942, Group II, Box A-275 [Part 18, Series B, Reel 15, Folder 787], NAACP.

[58] [Handwritten Notes on Negroes in Movies], February 1942; White to Boynoff, March 12, 1942.

[59] White to Boynoff, March 12, 1942; Zanuck to Mannix, July 21, 1942; Edwin Embree to Walter White, October 28, 1942, Group II, Box A-279 [Part 18, Series B, Reel 20, Folder 165], NAACP; White to Embree, October 30, 1942.

[60] On his plans, see Walter White to Bette Davis, July 27, 1942, Group II, Box A-279 [Part 18, Series B, Reel 20, Folder 165], NAACP; Walter White to Joseph Breen, July 27, 1942, Group II, Box A-275 [Part 18, Series B, Reel 15, Folder 400], NAACP; White to Poynter, July 30, 1942; White to

Nevertheless, White remained enthusiastic about the notion of designating someone of "complete independence" to provide "advice when needed regarding scripts and the treatment of Negroes in the films." Cautioning that such a person must be "neither seeking jobs nor attempting to sell scripts or the services of actors and writers," he analogized his or her function to that of the British embassy providing "expert advice regarding a picture dealing with England or Englishmen."[61] As the idea continued to germinate, White realized "a fairly decent salary" would be required so that the representative could "remain uncontaminated and untempted."[62] His interest grew in direct relation to his frustration with films like *Tennessee Johnson* and *Cabin in the Sky*.[63] Funds were the stumbling block. Were they available, he declared privately in February 1943, the NAACP would already have set up "a modest office" in Hollywood "with a highly-competent person in charge of it"—not unlike the bureau in Washington, D.C., that the NAACP had created in 1941. Indulging himself, White expounded on his wish list for such a bureau and sketched the benefits he imagined it bringing: the representative "should be impressive enough to be able to convince producers not only that they should keep out objectionable scenes and characterizations of the Negro, but that they should include Negroes in as many films of American life as possible. I am convinced that

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Silberberg, August 5, 1942. On the discouraging response, see Poynter to White, August 29, 1942; Silberberg to White, August 28, 1942.

[61] Walter White to Langston Hughes, September 2, 1942, Group II, Box A-305 [Part 18, Series B, Reel 23, Folder 45], NAACP; Langston Hughes to Walter White, September 28, 1942, Group II, Box A-305 [Part 18, Series B, Reel 23, Folder 45], NAACP.

[62] White to Embree, October 30, 1942; Walter White to Edwin Embree, November 20, 1942, Group II, Box A-279 [Part 18, Series B, Reel 20, Folder 165], NAACP.

[63] Walter White to Edwin Embree, February 13, 1943, Group II, Box A-279 [Part 18, Series B, Reel 20, Folder 253], NAACP.

within a very few years, we could materially influence not only the opinion of America, but of the world concerning the Negro if we are able to do this."[64]

As the war concluded, White finally sought to make his dream of a Hollywood representative a reality. In August 1945, he wrote to over 100 NAACP donors and allies, seeking reactions to—and pledges of financial support for—a new strategy "to speed up the change of treatment of Negroes in moving pictures." The NAACP, he proposed, should establish "a bureau … in Hollywood which would be a source of information, criticism and suggestions to the film industry." White noted carefully that the bureau would not only recommend material for deletion, but would also call attention to "what could constructively be added to pictures in order to give a truer representation of the Negro." The need was urgent, and the failure to act sooner meant that "much of the advantage gained" from White's earlier trips to Hollywood "has consequently been lost."[65]

White fleshed out his increasingly ambitious plan over the following weeks. An interracial committee comprising "representatives of the public, producers, script writers, directors, and technician" would advise the bureau, and this group would create a panel to review scripts and pre-screen films. The NAACP's *Bulletin*, with a circulation over half a million, would present brief reviews of any film featuring African Americans or other "minority races," accompanied by the contact information of its producer and an implicit invitation of mass feedback. The bureau, White argued, would not censor films, but through this latter function, build an audience conscious of the nuances of racial

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[64] Walter White to Hallie Douglas Wright, February 18, 1943, Group II, Box A-279 [Part 18, Series B, Reel 20, Folder 334], NAACP. On the Washington bureau, see Sullivan, *Lift Every Voice*, 243.

[65] Walter White, August 1945, Group II, Box A-277 [Part 18, Series B, Reel 17, Folder 408], NAACP.

representation: it would "help create a more perceptive audience of film goers" that would, presumably, refuse to patronize bad films.[66] The members of a (largely white) committee appointed to study the proposal joined other White allies in, first, underlining the importance of quality personnel capable of independence and well regarded enough to forge contacts at all levels of the industry and, second, suggesting that the bureau intervene early in the film making process and present itself as an information service rather than a censor.[67]

White's vision for the bureau was lofty, but the obstacles it faced when he departed for Hollywood in January 1946 to further promote the plan were numerous. White had gathered pledges of just over $1,000 annually—far less than the estimated annual budget of $12,000 to $15,000.[68] The man he had identified the "ideal person for the job" of Bureau head, the poet and New Deal bureaucrat Frank Horne, had declined to take it, citing a desire to continue his work on housing issues.[69] Sterling Brown, White's new pick, was amenable but would not be available until the following May.[70] And in

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[66] Walter White, "Memorandum for the Files," August 30, 1945, Group II, Box A-277 [Part 18, Series B, Reel 17, Folder 408], NAACP; Walter White to Edwin Embree, September 14, 1945, Group II, Box A-277 [Part 18, Series B, Reel 15, Folder 408], NAACP; Walter White to Lena Horne, September 19, 1945, Group II, Box A-277 [Part 18, Series B, Reel 17, Folder 408], NAACP; Walter White to Arthur Garfield Hays, October 17, 1945, Group II, Box A-277 [Part 18, Series B, Reel 17, Folder 408], NAACP.

[67] Thomas W. Young to Walter White, September 3, 1945, Group II, Box A-277 [Part 18, Series B, Reel 17, Folder 408], NAACP; June Blythe to Walter White, October 13, 1945, Group II, Box A-277 [Part 18, Series B, Reel 17, Folder 408], NAACP; "Minutes of Luncheon Meeting of Group of Persons Invited by the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People to Discuss the Advisability of Establishing a Hollywood Bureau," October 17, 1945, Group II, Box A-277 [Part 18, Series B, Reel 17, Folder 408], NAACP.

[68] "Minutes of Luncheon Meeting ... to Discuss the Advisibility of Establishing a Hollywood Bureau"; "Proposed Functions of Hollywood Bureau," October 17, 1945, Group II, Box A-277 [Part 18, Series B, Reel 15, Folder 408], NAACP.

[69] Frank S. Horne to Walter White, November 19, 1945, Group II, Box A-277 [Part 18, Series B, Reel 17, Folder 408], NAACP.

[70] Walter White to Edwin Embree, December 11, 1945, Group II, Box A-277 [Part 18, Series B, Reel 15, Folder 408], NAACP.

Hollywood, the bureau proposal drew hostile reactions from a number of black actors. Ultimately, the lack of adequate funding, compounded by the noisy conflict with some African American performers, killed the Hollywood bureau proposal, although White still harbored hopes for its eventual creation as late as his 1948 autobiography.[71]

The Hollywood bureau imagined by Walter White eventually grew to include an effort to organize the behavior of African American movie audiences, not unlike the Catholic Legion of Decency, although to very different ends. Several even more ambitious and ultimately even more ephemeral versions of this idea were floated a year later. In February 1947, the fledgling *Ebony* magazine responded to the release of *Song of the South*, Disney's adaptation of Joel Chandler Harris's Uncle Remus stories, with an editorial titled "Needed: A Negro Legion of Decency." Acknowledging that White's proposal had "died a-borning," the editors maintained that something like it was essential. They argued that the ideal "body" would appeal to all races in its effort to improve how African Americans were represented on screen. "It should be more than a Negro organization," they declared. "With broad interracial membership all over the country, with potent boycotts hitting the box office when it counts, with publicity-wise campaigns to counter Dixie indifference, with across-the-desk interviews with Hollywood bigwigs, an all-American Legion of Decency could turn the tide and win respect and admiration rather than contempt and derision for the Negro when he appears on screen."[72]

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[71] White, *A Man Called White*, 202.Walter White, *A Man Called White: The Autobiography of Walter White* (New York: Viking, 1948), 202. Again, White's conflicts with black performers in Hollywood will be explored in greater detail in Chapter 5. The precise fate of White's plans is not clearly documented. In February 1947, as indicated below, *Ebony* magazine mentioned the plan but suggested it had "died a-borning.'"

[72] "Needed: A Negro Legion of Decency," *Ebony*, February 1947.

If *Ebony* sought a somewhat more vigorous version of White's proposed project, an undertaking reported in *Variety* the same month was an order of magnitude more sweeping in its aspirations. Under the headline "Inter-Faith and Inter-Racial Body to Scan Radio-Pix-Press on 'Stereotypes,'" the trade paper wrote, "A move is on foot to weld together 50 minority organizations representing some 40,000,000 Americans in a permanent front to act as a corrective democratic force in radio, films, the legit stage, newspapers and all other media of expression." *Variety* listed the American Jewish Committee, the NAACP, and the Council for Democracy as the "chief backers of the proposed drive" and indicated that the organization would focus initially on the radio.[73] A report by the Associated Negro Press the next month added that CIO, the AFL, B'nai B'rith, the Federal Council of Churches, the American Jewish Congress, the Catholic Interracial Council, and others were all potential additional sponsors of the project, listed an "organizing committee" made up of radicals including Peter Lyons, who had headed the EIEC's code committee.[74] Surviving details of this proposed project are few, but a formalized interracial, interreligious cultural monitor along these lines, linking numerous organizations and concerned with a range of media, did not in fact appear during the postwar years.

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[73] "Inter-Faith and Inter-Racial Body to Scan Radio-Pix-Press on 'Stereotypes,'" *Variety*, February 19, 1947.

[74] "50 Organizations Back NAACP Anti-Stereo Drive," *Atlanta Daily World*, March 9, 1947. Others listed were Robert Heller, a CBS radio producer who would later be blacklisted; Arnold Perl (spelled here "Pearl"), who would also be blacklisted, and would later write, with James Baldwin, the screenplay that became the basis for Spike Lee's *Malcolm X*; and Hope Spingarn, daughter of former NAACP president Joel Spingarn. On Heller, see Bonnie S. Brennen, *Qualitative Research Methods for Media Studies* (New York: Routledge, 2012), 116. On Perl, see Anne Thompson, "Malcolm, Let's Do Lunch," *Mother Jones*, August 1991.

The failure of each of these ambitious efforts to institutionalize the pursuit of fair representation in motion pictures stands in striking contrast to a successful project launched at roughly the same time by Jewish leaders affiliated with the National Community Relations Advisory Council (NCRAC), an umbrella structure for Jewish communal groups that had been created during the war. In late September 1946, a group of representatives from the NCRAC's member agencies began meeting to explore ways the mass media could be used to foster tolerance. Disquieted by the soon-to-be-released *Abie's Irish Rose* (United Artists, 1946), a comedy of Irish-Jewish intermarriage produced by Bing Crosby that depicted its young protagonists' parents using traditional Jewish and Irish stereotypes, the NCRAC's committee quickly narrowed in on "the use of motion picture films in the community relations program" and "the effect of some Hollywood films on community relations."[75] The committee resolved that it should seek both to "eliminate unfortunate stereotypes of the Jews as well as false conceptions such as those perpetuated through Passion Plays and the like" and—in a departure from Jewish leaders' wartime stance—to encourage additional "sympathetically drawn … characters" in "full-length pictures on the lives of distinguished Jewish personalities or on Jewish themes" as well as incidental, non-stereotyped Jewish characters in feature films generally. It also concluded that the national Jewish organizations it represented ought to oversee the work currently performed by the Community Relations Committee in Los Angeles (LACRC), Leon Lewis, and Mendel Silberberg. Yet, just as Walter White had discovered when plotting his bureau, the committee determined that only persuasion at

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[75] Jules Cohen, "Minutes of Meeting of Committee on Mass Approach," September 30, 1946, National Jewish Community Relations Advisory Council Records, I-172 (hereafter, NJCRAC Records), box 40, folder 1, American Jewish Historical Society (hereafter, AJHS). On *Abie's Irish Rose*, see Herman, "Views of Jews," 184–189.

the point of production could effect the addition of Jewish characters; that the industry's decentralized decision-making would require establishing contacts on all the "various levels in the industry"; and that Hollywood's resistance to "outside interference" must be overcome.[76]

Despite facing some similar obstacles, what came to be called the Motion Picture Project (MPP) succeeded where White did not. The MPP struck a compromise between national, East Coast leaders and interested local people in Hollywood: the NCRAC and LACRC entered "a coordinated relationship with the motion picture industry in behalf of the American Jewish community," the MPP added representatives from Los Angeles and took responsibility for overall policy, and the NCRAC agreed to fund the salary of a liaison to the industry who was acceptable to the LACRC and who would work out of its offices.[77] The man tapped by the NCRAC to fill the role of MPP executive director, John Stone, was not an outsider but a Hollywood veteran—a retired screenwriter and producer, a leader in Los Angeles's Jewish community, and by his own account both a twenty-year friend of Production Code enforcer Joseph Breen and well-known face to producers,

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[76] "Minutes of a Meeting of Committee on Mass Media," December 27, 1946, NJCRAC Records, box 40, folder 1, AJHS; L. Roy Blumenthal et al., "Memorandum on Community Relations Program with the Motion Picture Industry," March 1947, NJCRAC Records, box 40, folder 1, AJHS; Herman, "Views of Jews," 168–172, 184–193. At an NCRAC Executive Committee Meeting on June 17, 1947, the AJC's John Slawson opined, "motion pictures were a matter of national concern to the Jewish community" and "there should be some national instrumentality whereby a coordinated approach could be made." The Los Angeles group "could not speak with the same authority or make the same claim to representativeness that a national body could." "Record of Discussions and Agreements Reached in the NCRAC in the Development of the Motion Picture Project," n.d. (but after March 4, 1948), NJCRAC Records, box 40, folder 1, AJHS.

[77] Isaiah Minkoff, "Memorandum to Executive Committee Re: Recommendations Regarding Relationships with the Motion Picture Industry," December 9, 1947, NJCRAC Records, box 40, folder 1, AJHS. On the MPP's various names, see Herman, "Views of Jews," 190.

writers, and directors.[78] Stone began his work in September 1948, and the MPP

continued in one form or another at least into the 1970s.[79] Although Stone was advised

as he began his work to assist "other [minority] groups whenever possible or practical,"

he was cautioned that such work should be "only incidental to his major responsibility."[80]

The MPP—a narrowly targeted project to lobby behind the scenes for fairer

representation of Jews in the movies, aided by the numerous existing connections

between Hollywood producers and power brokers and Jewish communal organizations

both in and beyond Southern California—inserted itself with relative ease into the motion

picture industry. The projects proposed by advocates for African Americans and other

minorities, in contrast, foundered. The difficulties they encountered were several;

African Americans, even during the war, had substantially less influence within

Hollywood, and the ambitions of blacks and their allies were generally grander. But

perhaps most importantly, advocacy for fair representation of African Americans on

screen was during the war years tightly linked to the political and cultural left—an

association that would soon become a major liability.

The Accused Have Rendered Only Lip Service

Indeed, these divergent ambitions and divergent fates cannot be understood apart

from the complicated and shifting politics of the postwar years, both in and beyond the

motion picture industry. On the one hand, these years witnessed an extension and

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[78] Jules Cohen, "Summary of Interview between the National Agencies and John Stone," July 27, 1948, NJCRAC Records, box 40, folder 1, AJHS; "John Stone Report - No. 1," September 9, 1948, NJCRAC Records, box 43, folder 5, AJHS.

[79] Herman, "Views of Jews," 224–28.

[80] "John Stone Report - No. 1."

expansion of the liberal sentiments regarding the rights of minority groups that had characterized the war years. A coalescing "intergroup relations" movement, comprising a constellation of new religious, ecumenical, and civic initiatives, supported by organizations like the NAACP, AJC, and the Anti-Defamation League, sought to combat prejudice and intolerance.[81] Yet, with the emergence of the Cold War with the Soviet Union, these years also witnessed an intensifying and broadening assault on the left, with members of the Communist Party, as well as many progressives and liberals, persecuted and prosecuted as threats to national security.[82] In this time of simultaneous liberal possibility and increasing anticommunism and antiradicalism, struggles for fair representation of African Americans in the movies that had thrived amid the wartime Popular Front and had been energized by the commitment of radical screenwriters and other activists were now disrupted, frustrated, and ultimately reoriented. Walter White, again, best personified the effects of changing times, making in Hollywood the same pivot that he and the NAACP executed on the wider stages of national and international politics. With liberals and radicals in the motion picture world now increasingly at odds, rather than in harmony, White cast his lot decisively with the former, seeking progress where it could be found—which generally meant on the movie industry's terms.[83]

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[81] On this movement, see Stuart Svonkin, *Jews Against Prejudice: American Jews and the Fight for Civil Liberties* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997). On the broader environment of racial liberalism in the postwar years, and its limitations, see, e.g., Gerstle, *American Crucible*, chapter 6; Mary L. Dudziak, *Cold War Civil Rights: Race and the Image of American Democracy*, 2nd ed. (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2011).

[82] See, e.g., Ellen Schrecker, *Many Are the Crimes: McCarthyism in America* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1998); Landon R. Y. Storrs, *The Second Red Scare and the Unmaking of the New Deal Left* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2012).

[83] For accounts of White's, and the NAACP's, broader turn in the late 1940s away from alliances with the left and toward a robust anticommunism, see Janken, *White*, 313–323; Sullivan, *Lift Every Voice*, 346–370.

The most striking evidence of a liberal spirit in postwar Hollywood were the "pro-tolerance" films produced in the final years of the decade. Notable examples included *Crossfire* (RKO, 1947), a low-budget film noir about the murder of a Jewish man by an antisemitic veteran. Following shortly thereafter was *Gentleman's Agreement* (Fox, 1947), in which Gregory Peck's magazine reporter went undercover as a Jew in order to write an expose of antisemitism. *Gentleman's Agreement* won the Best Picture Academy Award in 1947, and *Crossfire* was also nominated. A handful of pictures from both major studios and independent producers then addressed the "problems" of African Americans: *Pinky* (Fox, 1949), in which a young African American woman who had passed as white in the North returned to her Southern hometown; *Lost Boundaries* (Louis De Rochemont/Film Classics, 1949), another passing story, this one based on the real-life Johnston family of New Hampshire; *Home of the Brave* (Stanley Kramer/United Artists, 1949), about the harassment experienced by a black soldier; *Intruder in the Dust* (MGM, 1949), an adaptation of William Faulkner's novel of the previous year; and *No Way Out* (Fox, 1950), in which Sydney Poitier, in his feature film debut, played a doctor confronting a racist patient.[84]

These movies appeared even as Hollywood's Red Scare dawned. The film capital was no stranger to conservative charges of communism and subversion, which became common during the Popular Front of the 1930s. The U.S. House Committee on Un-American Activities (HUAC), under the leadership of Texas congressman Martin Dies, drew up lists of alleged "subversives" in 1940, and Jack Tenney of the California

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[84] On these films, see, e.g., Cripps, *Making Movies Black*, chapter 8; Matthew Frye Jacobson, *Whiteness of a Different Color: European Immigrants and the Alchemy of Race* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), 125–131; Everett, *Returning the Gaze*, 303–307; Jennifer E. Langdon, *Caught in the Crossfire: Adrian Scott and the Politics of Americanism in 1940s Hollywood* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008).

legislature's Joint Fact-Finding Committee on Un-American Activities investigated "Reds in movies" in 1941. In 1943, Tenney sought the cancellation of the Writers' Congress, calling it "Communist-inspired." (When White heard the charge, the *Los Angeles Daily News* reported a the time, his "jaw dropped and his only comment was an incredulous, 'Oh, no!'")[85] Opposition to communism, and charges that Democrats tolerated it, were a key theme of Republican campaigns in 1944; the same year, a coalition of Hollywood conservatives organized the Motion Picture Alliance for the Preservation of American Ideals (MPAPAI) to aggressively pursue communists in the industry and publicly invited HUAC to return to the film capital.[86]

HUAC did so in the spring of 1947, with its new chairman, the Republican J. Parnell Thomas of New Jersey, quietly hearing the allegations of MPAPAI members—a prelude to issuing subpoenas on September 21, 1947 to forty-three industry figures, including nineteen radicals. Of these, eleven were called to testify at Congressional hearings in late October. After refusing to answer questions about their present and past membership in unions and the Communist Party, ten were charged with contempt of Congress, including Dalton Trumbo, Samuel Ornitz, Ring Lardner, Adrian Scott, and Edward Dmytryk. Although the hearings were then suspended—not to resume until 1951—support from both producers and Hollywood liberals for the "Hollywood Ten" quickly collapsed. In November 1947, producers agreed to the Waldorf Statement, which announced the firing of those of the Ten then under studio contract and initiated the

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[85] Ceplair and Englund, *The Inquisition in Hollywood*, 155–59; "Now's Time to Insure Decent World, Social Leader Says," *Los Angeles Daily News*, September 30, 1943, Group II, Box A-277 [Part 18, Series B, Reel 17, Folder 658], NAACP.

[86] Ceplair and Englund, *The Inquisition in Hollywood*, 200–14. See also Victor S. Navasky, *Naming Names*, 3rd ed. (New York: Hill and Wang, 2003).

blacklist, a vow to "not knowingly employ a Communist or a member of any party or group which advocates the overthrow of the Government of the United States by force or by illegal or unconstitutional methods." In the wake of the Waldorf Statement, the historians Larry Ceplair and Steven Englund conclude, "the atmosphere of censorship and intimidation engendered by the Thomas Committee engulfed the film-making capital."[87]

The NCRAC's Motion Picture Committee, crucially, emerged in 1947 and 1948 concurrent to this swelling anticommunism and the attendant collapse of radical activism in Hollywood. It was populated, furthermore, by committed anticommunists. Mendel Silberberg played a key role in crafting the Waldorf Statement, and by the early 1950s, the LACRC had become a vital cog in the "clearance" apparatus for Jewish film industry employees alleged to be communists.[88] Allen Rivkin, a screenwriter who would later succeed John Stone as head of the MPP in the 1960s, helped to lead the Screen Writers Guild's purge of Communist Party members, and he served as president of the Motion Picture Industry Council, another body for exposing and "clearing" communists.[89] Ensuring that films did not equate Jews with communists was one of Stone's preoccupations during his first months on the job for the MPP in 1948 and 1949. Stone secured, for instance, a guarantee that "any Communists incidental to the plot" of *I*

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[87] Ceplair and Englund, *The Inquisition in Hollywood*, chapters 8 and 10.

[88] Ibid., 329; Navasky, *Naming Names*, 110.

[89] Ceplair and Englund, *The Inquisition in Hollywood*, 292–93, 359.

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Married a Communist (RKO, 1949) would "have no name that can even remotely be construed as Jewish."[90]

In contrast, the Popular Front organizations that had agitated for fairer representation of African Americans on screen fell victim to the growing anxieties about communism as early as 1945. Indeed, a concern regarding such issues began to emerge as evidence of unorthodox political commitments. The Writers' War Board, an East Coast version of the HWM, had its funding cut off by the OWI in mid-1945 in part because its work against minority stereotypes was seen as non-germane, and the OWI itself was shut down not long afterward. The same year, after a battle between liberals and radicals over its necessity in peacetime, the Screen Writers Guild ceased supporting the HWM, and the organization dissolved two years later.[91] The EIEC likewise disbanded for lack of financing.[92] The NNC was sapped by staff resignations and defections by CIO unions that were beginning to cut their ties to alleged communists. In 1946, it again proposed a "Cultural Division" that would encourage black employment in the arts, monitor "the treatment of minority groups" in a range of media and "take steps to correct" any "prejudicial material," and offer "historically and socially accurate information regarding the Negro people to artists and writers interested in the theme"; the group held a conference in New York in March 1947 to kick off the initiative.[93] But by

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[90] John Stone, "Report No. 2," October 15, 1948, NJCRAC Records, box 43, folder 5, AJHS; John Stone, "Report No. 8," March 4, 1949, NJCRAC Records, box 43, folder 5, AJHS.

[91] Ceplair and Englund, *The Inquisition in Hollywood*, 230–31; Koppes and Black, *Hollywood Goes to War*, 323.

[92] White, *A Man Called White*, 231–232.

[93] Paul Robeson, Carl Van Doren, and Margaret Webster to Leon Kroll, June 13, 1946, Series II, Box 42, Folder 42 (part 1) [Part II, Reel 11], NNC; Edward E. Strong to NNC Council Officers and National Board Members, April 25, 1947, Series II, Box 71, Folder 31 [Part II, Reel 35], NNC.

late 1947, the NNC dissolved into a similar organization, the Civil Rights Congress, leaving no further record of its cultural initiative.[94] Although IFRG activities are documented as late as 1948, an FBI report in 1946 declared that "many [of its key supporters] have records of Communist activity," and the organization seems not to have survived the decade.[95] By 1950, indexes of "subversives" such as the publication *Red Channels* were labeling as communists scores of individuals who had been active in liberal or radical organizations during the war.[96]

As many of the organizations that had sought to alter the screen images of African Americans crumbled, Walter White scrambled to calibrate his ongoing Hollywood lobbying to the altered political terrain. Tracing his and the NAACP's interactions with HUAC's Hollywood hearings and the case of the Hollywood Ten between 1947 and 1949 offers a revealing portrait of White's growing tendency to minimize and often dismiss entirely the contributions made by the Ten and others publicly accused as communists— even when they had been vocal wartime supporters of fair representation for African Americans in the movies—and to insistently celebrate instead the work of "non-communist" Hollywood liberals.

White was conscious of the broad brush with which anticommunists painted, and of its potential to tar his allies and perhaps himself. In the two months surrounding the first hearings of Thomas's committee in 1947, White was repeatedly, sharply, and publicly critical. Before the hearings began, he dispatched a cautionary telegram on the

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[94] Hughes, "Toward a Black United Front," 224–229.

[95] FBI Report, March 12, 1946, 6–7, Bureau File #100-138754, Volume 8 [Reel 2], Communist Activity in the Entertainment Industry: FBI Surveillance Files on Hollywood, 1942-1958 (Bethesda, MD: University Publications of America, 1991).

[96] Ceplair and Englund, *The Inquisition in Hollywood*, 386–388.

NAACP's behalf to Thomas, forwarded widely to Hollywood leaders and the press. He

warned the committee "against penalizing any producer, writer, director, actor or actress

who has worked to change the dangerous stereotyped treatment of minorities in films,

particularly of the Negro." He claimed that accusations of communism against the

"many thoughtful, patriotic, non-communist Americans in Hollywood" concerned with

this issue was a "trap bigots have laid."[97] After the hearings, he appealed to a number of

the film industry's top producers and executives to stand firm against what he starkly

termed "almost … a legislative lynching." The congressmen's goal, White alleged, was

"terrorizing the moving picture industry into fear of presentation of thoughtful, intelligent

pictures on domestic and international matters." Further, some committee members were

motivated, as they had been in 1941, by "vicious anti-Semitism," all part of a "pattern of

bigotry" that targeted African Americans in the past and would target the film industry in

the future if its leaders did not stand firm.[98] He made the same linkages in a column for

the *Chicago Defender*, likening the "mob spirit" of the hearings to a race riot, calling the

committee's actions "terrorism," and suggesting that in the hearings' wake "the American

pattern of so-called freedom will have been weakened particularly so far as minorities are

concerned."[99]

From the start, White repeatedly offered the caveat that the NAACP, and he

personally, opposed communism, and he even called for Hollywood communists,

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[97] Walter White to Thurgood Marshall and Roy Wilkins, October 16, 1947, Group II, Box A-274 [Part 18, Series B, Reel 15, Folder 147], NAACP; Walter White to Roy Wilkins, October 16, 1947, Group II, Box A-274 [Part 18, Series B, Reel 15, Folder 147], NAACP; Walter White to Eric Johnston et al., October 20, 1947, Group II, Box B-73 [Part 18, Series A, Reel 3, Folder 60], NAACP.

[98] Walter White to Nicholas M. Schenck, November 7, 1947, Group II, Box B-73 [Part 18, Series A, Reel 3, Folder 60], NAACP; Walter White to Walter Wanger et al., November 6, 1947, Group II, Box A-274 [Part 18, Series B, Reel 15, Folder 147], NAACP.

[99] Walter White, "People, Politics and Places," *Chicago Defender*, November 8, 1947.

fascists, "or anybody else serving a foreign government or doing anything which is treasonable" to be "ferreted out and punished." But he declared the communist presence in Hollywood "microscopic" and their interest in shaping film content as natural as that of the Legion of Decency, the National Association of Manufacturers, and the NAACP itself.[100] In a glowing review of *Gentlemen's Agreement* he praised Darryl Zanuck, who produced the film, and several other Hollywood producers, directors, and writers who were not HUAC-alleged communists, including Allen Rivkin, for being "intelligent and brave enough to utilize the screen against intolerance." But White also observed that "some of the writers and producers who have recently been pilloried by the House un-American Affairs Committee [*sic*] as 'Communist' have been almost solely the individuals who have fought racial stereotypes in moving pictures." White had "no means of finding out if writers like Dalton Trumbo or Ring Lardner, Jr. are either communists or fellow travelers," he continued, but he commended their work against "bigotry" on film.[101]

Behind the scenes, however, White was hedging. Leslie S. Perry, the national legislative counsel in the NAACP's Washington bureau, proposed that the national organization and its branches formally oppose contempt of Congress citations for the ten writers called to testify at the hearings, making arguments similar to those White had voiced in his columns and letters. In response, White privately confided to NAACP president Arthur Spingarn that, despite his "sympathy" for the nineteen, "there is no doubt that some of the men who have been cited are unquestionably members of the

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[100] Ibid.

[101] Walter White, "A Fine Film," November 14, 1947, Group II, Box A-275 [Part 18, Series B, Reel 16, Folder 1], NAACP.

Communist Party." White and Spingarn, with Thurgood Marshall, ultimately decided that Perry's proposal would be "somewhat outside [the] scope of [the] Association's program."[102] During 1948, even as the American government indicted the leadership of U.S. Communist Party, White helped to pull the NAACP behind Harry Truman's campaign for reelection, rejecting the candidacy of Henry Wallace, and embracing the Cold War as a justification for African American civil rights.[103] Late that year, the board of the NAACP Legal Defense Fund, of which White was a member, overruled Marshall, who had agreed to support Trumbo and John Howard Lawson with a friend-of-the-court brief that argued "that the defendants happened to be in the group of Hollywood writers who had attempted to give the Negro a fair break in pictures and that immediately after they were cited for contempt Hollywood struck from the script of all pending productions all favorable remarks concerning Negroes." Supporting the two screenwriters, the board argued, was "not within our field."[104]

When Trumbo and Lawson pressed on to the U.S. Supreme Court in 1949, however, the board did permit Marshall to weigh in on the writers' petition for review, in

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[102] Leslie S. Perry to Walter White, November 11, 1947, Group II, Box A-274 [Part 18, Series B, Reel 15, Folder 147], NAACP; Walter White to Arthur B. Spingarn, November 13, 1947, Group II, Box A-274 [Part 18, Series B, Reel 15, Folder 147], NAACP; Walter White to Leslie S. Perry, November 14, 1947, Group II, Box A-274 [Part 18, Series B, Reel 15, Folder 147], NAACP.

[103] Sullivan, *Lift Every Voice*, 356–370; Janken, *White*, 313–319.

[104] Charles H. Houston to Thurgood Marshall, October 7, 1948, Group II, Box B-73 [Part 18, Series A, Reel 3, Folder 60], NAACP; Thurgood Marshall to Charles H. Houston, October 27, 1948, Group II, Box B-73 [Part 18, Series A, Reel 3, Folder 60], NAACP; Thurgood Marshall to Charles H. Houston, December 20, 1948, Group II, Box B-73 [Part 18, Series A, Reel 3, Folder 60], NAACP; Thurgood Marshall to Walter White, December 20, 1948, Group II, Box B-73 [Part 18, Series A, Reel 3, Folder 60], NAACP. Marshall had made the same assertion the previous year in a memo to Roy Wilkins, and seems to have been greatly interested in the film issue, commissioning a memo from NAACP assistant special counsel Marian Wynn Perry that listed each Hollywood Ten defendant's involvement with "movies in which the question of racial or religious prejudice has been frankly dealt with." Thurgood Marshall to Roy Wilkins, October 30, 1947, Group II, Box B-73 [Part 18, Series A, Reel 3, Folder 60], NAACP; Marian Wynn Perry to Thurgood Marshall, December 22, 1948, Group II, Box B-73 [Part 18, Series A, Reel 3, Folder 60], NAACP.

a joint NAACP and AJC *amicus* brief.[105] "A great number of motion pictures to the

production of which the petitioners contributed, have consistently shown the Negro

minority group in a truer light than it had previously enjoyed," the brief declared. "These

pictures were among the first to portray an unstereotyped Negro."[106] At the time, White

was in the midst of yearlong leave of absence from the NAACP, taken in anticipation of

his controversial divorce and remarriage to a white woman.[107] But he still protested the

move. In doing so, he now offered an account of the Ten's contributions to the cause of

fair representation for African Americans on film that differed in striking ways from the

one he presented just two years earlier. White's ire was prompted by both a dispatch in

the Communist Party's *Daily People's World* that touted the brief, and complaints he

heard from Rivkin and other Hollywood liberals while on a trip to the West Coast.[108]

"Communists are ballyhooing the statement," White declared in a letter to Marshall that

was shot through with anxiety about "infiltration of our branches out here." But his

worries extended beyond communist propagandizing, as he grew increasingly attuned to

the sensibilities of his non-communist allies. "A great many people who are neither

Communist nor anti-Communist and have been fighting for more decent picturization of

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[105] Thurgood Marshall to Bartley C. Crum, September 28, 1949, Group II, Box B-73 [Part 18, Series A, Reel 3, Folder 60], NAACP; FHW to Thurgood Marshall, October 19, 1949, Group II, Box B-73 [Part 18, Series A, Reel 3, Folder 60], NAACP.

[106] Quoted in The Tattler, "Hollywood Beat," *People's Daily World*, October 31, 1949, Group II, Box B-73 [Part 18, Series A, Reel 3, Folder 60], NAACP.

[107] Janken, *White*, chapter 11.

[108] The Tattler, "Hollywood Beat"; Walter White to Allen Rivkin, December 12, 1949, Group II, Box B-73 [Part 18, Series A, Reel 3, Folder 60], NAACP.

the Negro on the screen," he added, "are annoyed at the quotation of the NAACP saying that the Hollywood Ten are the only ones who have worked on this issue."[109]

Marshall replied curtly with a copy of the NAACP's brief, implying that the quotation in question was taken out of context, and suggested "the work done by the individuals involved in the Hollywood Ten … was well documented." But White strongly disagreed. Hollywood liberals, he wrote,

> point out that except for a few speeches like that of Dalton Trumbo at the
> World Writers' Conference in 1941 or 1942 [*sic*] all the accused have
> rendered only lip service while non-Communists have made pictures like
> 'Home of the Brave,' 'Intruders in the Dust' [*sic*], 'Pinky' and other
> pictures and documentaries already made or to be made. They resent the
> Communists or alleged Communists being given credit for something
> which they had nothing whatever to do with.[110]

In a letter to Rivkin, belatedly seeking support for his claims, White lumped Trumbo's address in with the rest of the "lip service," asking,

> Am I correct in my impression that all that has been done by any of the
> Hollywood Ten are speeches like the one made by Dalton Trumbo at the
> World Rights Conference in 1941 or 42 [*sic*]? In other words, have they
> only made statements of what ought to be done while the non-Communists
> were doing the job? I want to be absolutely fair to them and give them
> credit for what they have done but at the same time to document my own

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[109] Walter White to Thurgood Marshall, November 16, 1949, Group II, Box B-73 [Part 18, Series A, Reel 3, Folder 60], NAACP.

[110] Ibid.; Thurgood Marshall to Walter White, November 23, 1949, Group II, Box B-73 [Part 18, Series A, Reel 3, Folder 60], NAACP.

conviction, if it be correct, that the real work has been done by those who have not been charged with being members of the Communist party.[111] Notwithstanding White's desire "to be absolutely fair," his recollections were faulty and his present "impression" departed sharply from his own past sentiments. If Trumbo had offered "only lip service," White had once showered these words with praise and acknowledged their importance. After the Writers' Congress in 1943—neither the name nor date of which White could recall correctly in 1949—White wrote Trumbo expressing "deep appreciation" for his "superb paper … on movie stereotypes." Trumbo's address, he asserted, had obviated the need for the other presentations offered on minority groups during the panel Lardner had organized. As recently as 1947 he had called Trumbo's speech "the ablest and most courageous of its kind with which I am familiar."[112] But such praise could no longer be reconciled with White's commitment to anticommunism and his alliances with Hollywood's "non-Communists." Circumstances demanded White reduce his valuation of the Ten's contributions, and somewhat disingenuously neglect how those doing "the real work" in 1949 had the distinct advantage of not having been banned from working at all for the previous two years.

As his approving citations of *Home of the Brave*, *Intruder in the Dust*, and *Pinky* in his letter to Marshall indicate, circumstances also required White to at least tacitly accept that the "non-Communists" were, indeed, "doing the job." Doing so involved, first, setting aside his previous praise of films like *Crossfire* and *Body and Soul* (United Artists, 1947)—a film noir of corruption in boxing, starring Canada Lee as the

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[111] White to Rivkin, December 12, 1949.

[112] Walter White to Dalton Trumbo, October 25, 1943; White, "A Fine Film."

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protagonist's noble, tragic trainer—which he had previously judged the two best films on "race relations" of 1947. Dmytryk and Scott, both members of the Ten, were respectively director and producer of *Crossfire*, and *Body and Soul*'s cast and creative staff included a number of leftists, among them its director Robert Rossen, subpoenaed but not called to testify by HUAC in 1947.[113] It also required simplifying the complex reception he actually afforded the films on racial issues released in 1949: reactions more nuanced than the celebration he offered in his letters to Marshall and Rivkin at the end of that year. To be sure, he praised *Home of the Brave*, *Intruder in the Dust*, and *Lost Boundaries* fulsomely, but he also acknowledged shortcomings including *Home*'s poor acting and the use of white actors to play the light-skinned black family in *Lost Boundaries*.[114] Most strikingly, White was very sharply critical of *Pinky*, both throughout its development and production and after it appeared in theaters. In September 1948, after having read the script and shared it with a number of colleagues, he wrote its producer, Darryl Zanuck, that the story offered a dated, quiescent picture of race relations, and he forwarded a number of more specific complaints from his associates.[115] Zanuck replied with a lengthy but firm rejection of White's advice, and

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[113] White served that year as a judge for the film component of *Ebony* magazine's "Race Relations Awards," selecting *Body and Soul* and *Crossfire* as his top choices. (*Crossfire* won.) J. Unis Pressley to Walter White, October 1, 1947; Walter White to J. Unis Pressley, October 7, 1947; J. Unis Pressley to Walter White, December 1, 1947; "Ebony Awards for 1947," *Ebony*, January 1948. White also praised *Crossfire* in his *Defender* column. Walter White, "People, Politics and Places," *Chicago Defender*, August 23, 1947.

[114] Walter White, "New Pattern in Movies: 'Home of the Brave' Is Praised for Handling of Race Relations," *Herald-Tribune*, May 15, 1949; Walter White, "Do Race Pictures Denote New Hollywood Attitude?," *Chicago Defender*, August 20, 1949; Walter White, "Praise for a Hollywood Thriller," November 1949.

[115] Walter White to Darryl Zanuck, September 5, 1948, Group II, Box A-279 [Part 18, Series B, Reel 19, Folder 516], NAACP.

White confided to another correspondent that the film was "pretty bad."[116] Upon its

release, even the normally-upbeat *Ebony* magazine warned that the film's "casting of

Ethel Waters as an out-and-out Dixie mammy and Nina Mae McKinney as a razor-toting

hussy is certain to offend Negroes" and noted White's complaints to Zanuck.[117]

That White listed the *Pinky* as an example of "non-Communists … doing the job"

in Hollywood just several months later suggests the powerful influence anticommunism

had on how he assessed the depictions of African Americans in motion pictures. With

the left increasingly embattled in and beyond Hollywood, anticommunist liberals became

his indispensable allies, and compromise became essential. Even as the quest for fair

representation continued, it would never again be so deeply rooted in the political left as

it was during World War II.

In September 1949, an NAACP staff member politely corrected a newspaper

report that Zanuck would receive an award from the organization, writing, "the NAACP

has not and does not plan to present an award to Mr. Zanuck for the film, 'Pinky.'"[118]

Even in 1950, White again acknowledged in his *Defender* column that he "was not half

[as] enthusiastic about 'Pinky' as Darryl Zanuck and the majority of the critics."[119] In

1951, however, HUAC once again turned its attention to Hollywood. Committee

members, repentant witnesses, and private "smear and clear" groups fingered scores of

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[116] Darryl Zanuck to Walter White, September 21, 1948, Group II, Box A-279 [Part 18, Series B, Reel 19, Folder 516], NAACP; Walter White to William L. White, November 18, 1948, Group II, Box A-277 [Part 18, Series B, Reel 18, Folder 87], NAACP.

[117] "Pinky," *Ebony*, September 1949.

[118] Henry Lee Moon to Leonard Lyons, September 30, 1949, Group II, Box A-279 [Part 18, Series B, Reel 19, Folder 516], NAACP.

[119] Walter White, "'No Way Out' A Picture Scarcely Without Equal," *Chicago Defender*, August 26, 1950.

actors, screenwriters, and directors—communists, fellow travelers, and non-communist liberals alike—forcing them either to "name names" or face the blacklist.[120] It is perhaps not surprising, then, that by 1952, White spent a number of months corresponding with his ally Rivkin to plan a fundraising dinner where two prominent producers "who have stuck their necks out" would be presented with "some non-cliché expression of thanks for what they have done." The plan harkened back to Edgar Dale's suggestion a decade earlier. Zanuck was one of the two slated honorees.[121]

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In late June 1951, the NAACP gathered for its annual convention in Atlanta, Georgia. Delegates approved over a dozen resolutions on topics ranging from education to veterans' benefits to the income tax. Two in particular stood out. One insisted that membership in the Communist Party was wholly incompatible with "the cardinal principle of the NAACP[, which] is to support and strengthen American democracy by winning completely equal rights for all people regardless of race." It called for local branches to take further action to implement the organization's existing policy, adopted a year earlier, of excluding communists from membership. Another resolution condemned "radio and television programs … which depict the Negro and other minority groups in a stereotyped manner." Such stereotypes, the resolution declared, strengthened prejudice

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[120] See generally Ceplair and Englund, *The Inquisition in Hollywood*, chapter 11.

[121] See Walter White to Allen Rivkin, September 16, 1952, Group II, Box A-276 [Part 18, Series B, Reel 16, Folder 835], NAACP and subsequent correspondence in the same folder. Despite White's and Rivkin's enthusiasm for the idea, the dinner does not appear to have occurred, but the notion was revived in the NAACP Image Awards in the 1960s, as Chapter 5 will discuss.

and thus impeded the work of the NAACP; the sponsors and promoters of programming featuring them should be protested and, if necessary, boycotted.[122]

The immediate target of the latter resolution was the new television version of the radio comedy *Amos 'n' Andy*, which premiered on CBS during the convention, reigniting debates over the program that had played out intermittently since its 1928 radio debut. For its critics, Walter White foremost among them, the show offered an irredeemably vicious depiction of African Americans, and particularly middle-class black professionals, as "lazy, amoral, dishonest, and stupid." That such depictions were televised posed a particular threat, an NAACP statement alleged, for "there is no other show on nation-wide television that shows Negroes in a favorable light," and television, unlike radio, offered "a living, talking, moving *picture* of Negroes" that would, for millions of white adults and children who rarely encountered African Americans in real life, seem a "true one."[123]

The coincidence of the two resolutions at the 1951 convention suggested the mixed legacies of the preceding decade, and forecasted the changes to come. In the space of ten years, the goal of fair representation of African Americans in moving images, and

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[122] "Summary Minutes NAACP 42nd Annual Convention," June 30, 1951, Group II, Box A-48 [Supplement to Part 1, 1951-1955, Reel 3, Folder 929], NAACP; "Advance Resolutions Report," July 26, 1951, Group II, Box A-49 [Supplement to Part 1, 1951-1955, Reel 4, Folder 407], NAACP. See also Melvin Patrick Ely, *The Adventures of Amos 'n' Andy: A Social History of an American Phenomenon* (New York: Free Press, 1991), 213–242. On the 1950 convention, see Sullivan, *Lift Every Voice*, 370.

[123] With many other African Americans expressing fondness or, at worst, indifference for the show, a mass movement against it failed develop. Top NAACP officials, led by White, fruitlessly pressed CBS and the show's sponsor, Schenley Distillers, to end the program in the months that followed. *Amos 'n' Andy* was eventually cancelled in 1953 due to declining viewership, but it immediately and lucratively entered syndication reruns on stations throughout the United States. NAACP, "Why the 'Amos "N" Andy' TV Show Should Be Taken Off the Air," August 15, 1951, Group II, Box C-130 [Part 26, Series B, Reel 6, Folder 470], NAACP. For background on the NAACP's campaign and the reception of the televised *Amos 'n' Andy* show, see Thomas Cripps, "Amos 'n' Andy and the Debate over American Racial Integration," in *American History, American Television: Interpreting the Video Past*, ed. John E. O'Connor (New York: Ungar, 1983), 33–54; Ely, *The Adventures of Amos 'n' Andy*, 194–244.

its crucial importance to "American democracy," had gained a new and lasting prominence in the consciousness of many Americans of all races. But the alliances that had linked liberals and radicals and that had nurtured and supported this goal in Hollywood had fractured irreparably. And now, motion pictures themselves faced growing threats to their preeminence from antitrust lawsuits, declining attendance and profits, and most crucially, television, which would by the mid-1950s be present in over half of American homes.[124] Meanwhile, even as NAACP members convened in Atlanta, judges in South Carolina and Kansas weighed two of the five challenges to racial segregation in education that would result, three years later, in the Supreme Court's 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* decision that rebuked *Plessy v. Ferguson* and the doctrine of separate but equal and launched a new phase of the black freedom struggle.[125] As the 1950s dawned, African Americans and soon other groups inspired by their civil rights movement would grapple with a new world of moving images and its implications for belonging in a fast-changing America.

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[124] On television's rate of penetration, see Drew Casper, *Postwar Hollywood, 1946-1962* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2007), 23.

[125] Sullivan, *Lift Every Voice*, 404–412. Also noting the simultaneity of the *Brown* litigation and the *Amos 'n' Andy* resolution is Woodley, *Art for Equality*, 116.

Chapter 3

Intricate, Mysterious, but Implacably Real Relationships

Over five months in late 1960 and early 1961, the journal *The Progressive*
presented in installments a long essay titled "The New Negro on Screen." Its author, the
film critic Martin S. Dworkin, probed "the role of the Negro in recent and current films,"
as an introduction by the journal's editors put it. But he did much more as well. Writing
six years after the Supreme Court's ruling in *Brown v. Board of Education*—and eleven
years after the final decree in another case, *United States v. Paramount*, which required
the major movie studios to divest their theater holdings—Dworkin acknowledged
sweeping changes in both American society and its motion pictures. As the civil rights
movement prompted a renewed contest over the scope of federal power, and as blacks
continued to migrate to Northern cities and joined an integrated American military, the
"wartime patriotism regarding matters of race and religion" had given way to "what may
be an historic crisis in the American conception of what it is to be an American," a "crisis
of belonging or identity." The motion picture business, meanwhile, had experienced "the
cataclysms of postwar change, especially television, the statutory separation of studios
and theater circuits, and the diaspora of masses from cities to suburbs and exurbs."
Americans "evidently were developing new habits of seeking entertainment." Against
this background, Dworkin argued that "the role of the Negro" was changing as well.
"The films of the 1950's," he wrote, "reveal a willingness—or, at least, a readiness—to
picture and to accept the Negro as a figure of strength, decency, or even a wistfully

superior attainment." African Americans on film were, increasingly, figures of both realism and heroism.[1]

The length, detail, and comprehensiveness of Dworkin's essay marked changes of a different sort, transformations under way in where and how the question of race in the movies was examined. Originally projected to comprise two parts, the essay was subsequently extended to three, then four, and finally to five; an apologetic editors' note explained that this "distinguished student of the movies" was having "difficulty in coping with his massive researches on the subject."[2] Dworkin ranged far and wide, back into earlier decades of black film history, across the Atlantic to the cinemas of Europe and Africa, and through dozens of recent American films. This familiarity with foreign cinema and with American films of earlier decades bespoke Darwin's embrace of "archaeological study in film societies," a mode of inquiry and a set of institutions emerging into their own in the postwar years.[3] Although Dworkin's concerns about the place of African Americans on screen were hardly novel, his careful, historicized assessments of many dozens of motion pictures, presented for a large, largely white audience, indicated the emergence of new approaches to film study and film criticism.

Perhaps the most striking feature of Dworkin's essay was his effort to reckon with the *connections* between the on-screen and off-screen transformations he traced. That

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[1] Martin S. Dworkin, "The New Negro on Screen," *The Progressive*, October 1960; Martin S. Dworkin, "The New Negro on Screen," *The Progressive*, November 1960; Martin S. Dworkin, "The New Negro on Screen," *The Progressive*, December 1960; Martin S. Dworkin, "The New Negro on Screen," *The Progressive*, January 1961; Martin S. Dworkin, "The New Negro on Screen," *The Progressive*, February 1961. The quotations here come from the October, December, and January installments.

[2] Dworkin, "The New Negro on Screen," January 1961.

[3] Dworkin, "The New Negro on Screen," November 1960. Dworkin mentioned film societies in connection with *The Birth of a Nation*, where its inclusion in programming was often controversial. See Melvyn Stokes, *D. W. Griffith's The Birth of a Nation: A History of "the Most Controversial Motion Picture of All Time"* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 249.

there were connections he was certain. "The movies," he wrote, "are deeply and crucially implicated" in the present crisis. But how? At one point, Dworkin suggested equivocally that motion pictures simultaneously mirrored and shaped society, writing, "The movies both symbolize and effectuate a revolution in the imagination and behavior."[4] Mostly, though, he leaned toward the former, suggesting that Hollywood created what the audience "desired and appreciated," or "what people care enough about to want to pay to see," answering to "the subliminal urges, good and evil, that are roused to seek fulfillment, complete and symbolic, in forms of entertainment made famous and available."[5] Thus, changes in the movies were an index of a shift in attitudes that was under way, as "white people everywhere … prepar[ed] themselves for more than statutory equality of the races." For this "interpretation," he insisted in the concluding paragraph of his final installment, "the testimony is so overwhelming." And yet, a few sentences earlier, he broached the question with greater uncertainty, writing, "There are intricate, mysterious, but implacably real relationships between the rise of subservient classes and peoples in modern times and the evolution of the technological arts of popular entertainment."[6]

In the postwar decades, intellectual conversations regarding the relationships between moving images and the place of historically marginalized groups in American life proliferated. Dworkin's language—"intricate, mysterious, but implacably real relationships"—captures well the mix of ambiguity and conviction that characterized these conversations. The notion of an "implacably real" connection between screen and

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[4] Dworkin, "The New Negro on Screen," November 1960.

[5] Dworkin, "The New Negro on Screen," October 1960.

[6] Dworkin, "The New Negro on Screen," February 1961.

society was of course as old as the motion pictures themselves. Faith in and fear of the movies' powerful influence, including on attitudes toward racial, ethnic, and religious minorities, had underpinned efforts to protest and censor motion pictures between the 1910s and 1930s, had received seeming confirmation in the Payne Fund studies and been endorsed in the Motion Picture Production Code in the early 1930s, and had propelled interventions to transform Hollywood during and after World War II. But in the thirty or so years following the war's end—a period characterized by startling and rapid transformations in both American society and American mass entertainment—unprecedented attention was brought to bear on untangling the intricacies and mysteries of these relationships, specifically and particularly where questions of belonging were concerned. As evident in the long essay by Dworkin, a white film critic and instructor at Teachers College in New York, these developments resulted partly from increasing interest in such questions among sympathetic scholars and other experts keen to play a part in combatting prejudice and intolerance. But it was ultimately members of historically marginalized groups themselves—especially African American activists and intellectuals, both university-trained and self-taught—who led the way in placing "images" at the heart of American popular conversation. These individuals drew freely upon emerging fields of scholarly inquiry, a burgeoning and multifaceted skepticism toward mass media, and the critical traditions associated with the period's social movements in order to produce new intellectual frameworks in which the visibility of marginalized groups in moving images mattered crucially to their belonging in America.[7]

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[7] Biographical information on Dworkin can be found on a website maintained in tribute to him at http://metacog.org/dworkin/.

This story begins in the immediate postwar years, when social scientists eager to reduce hatred and discrimination allied themselves with liberal lay people who shared these goals and were convinced of the value of expert guidance. Together they sought to theorize the nature of prejudice and assess the power of the mass media to combat it. Although affirming the influence of motion pictures on their audiences, their experiments nevertheless fostered doubt about the potential of even well intentioned movies to promote tolerance toward minorities. Soon, however, the circumstances in which these postwar investigations occurred were fundamentally altered—by a reconfiguration of mass entertainment itself, as the motion picture industry faltered and television ascended; by changes in the study of these media, as humanistic modes of criticism became the primary approach to the movies both inside and outside the academy, while television became the new preoccupation of social scientists and reformers; and by revolutions in society at large, as the African American civil rights movement brought to prominence black critical voices and a rhetoric of "image," and inspired other identity-based social movements that drew upon their example.

The intellectual consequences of these transformations are especially evident in two modes of inquiry that flourished in the 1960s and 1970s. One was the critical history of movie images, an approach taken by a series of popular books that traced histories of how African Americans, women, gays and lesbians, and other minority groups had been represented in American motion pictures. Fusing the tools of humanistic film study and the commitments of identity-driven criticism, these books introduced to a wide audience a critical perspective on American film history that in its sweep and scope condemned the movies' power to warp American reality. A second was the methodical monitoring and

analysis of television content, a method of research and activism developed by social scientists and reformers alike, and quickly used to document how television—when it did not ignore African Americans, women, and other minorities altogether—recycled and repeated damaging representations of them. The fruits of television monitoring were presented in reports, legal briefs, and scholarly articles with a range of specific aims, but the practice almost always bolstered the conviction that television's relentless stream of images had an inescapable—and for minorities, devastating—influence on viewers. Both critical film histories and television monitoring suggested, ultimately, systemic failures by the motion picture and television industries that only thoroughgoing reform and greater power for and participation by minority groups could redress.

The postwar decades witnessed sprawling conversations about film and television, mass media and mass entertainment, prejudice and propaganda, and ideology and influence, conversations that ranged from college classrooms to civil rights meetings and campus protests, and from academic journals to pop sociology and the press, both mainstream and alternative. Within those conversations, however, it is possible both to isolate a persisting certitude that moving images shaped patterns of American inclusion and exclusion and to identify important changes in how, where, and by whom that certitude was expressed. Between the late 1940s and the 1970s, marginalized groups steered both scholarly and popular discussions of moving images beyond narrow debates regarding influence, prejudice, and tolerance—although these ideas retained their salience—and toward a broad indictment of motion picture and television images as crucial, "implacably real" causes of their systematic disempowerment.

The Film Should Be Put To The Test

If, during World War II, national unity came to seem a prerequisite to victory, in the dawning years of the atomic age, harmony both within and beyond America's borders became for many an inescapable necessity. Americans, the Harvard psychologist Gordon Allport wrote in 1946, were "shivering with dread lest human solidarity prove too feeble to control the forces human ingenuity has unleashed." To secure that solidarity would require an attack on prejudice. "Although fallacious personification of evil in the form of human scapegoats has always been an outstanding trait of human nature," he argued, "it does not follow that the tendency cannot be diminished, or at least controlled." Children were "entirely free from prejudice" at birth; prejudice was a product of cultural conditioning. So, although it would not be easy, a "united attack by every responsible agency and every responsible scientist," by the whole sweep of society's institutions and its leaders and trained experts, might conquer the powerful "misconceptions" that fed prejudice and transform "the surrounding culture" in which they festered. The war's hard lessons were cause for caution. And yet, Allport was optimistic. Speaking of and for his fellow social scientists, he concluded, "In our manner of approaching problems of group character and group conflict, if in no other way, marked progress is being made."[8]

Allport offered this congratulatory call to action in the foreword to *Controlling Group Prejudice*, a volume in the Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science. As its essays vividly evince, the entwined challenges of defusing racial and religious prejudice and fostering tolerance of difference preoccupied liberal social

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[8] Gordon W. Allport, "Foreword," in *Controlling Group Prejudice*, ed. Gordon W. Allport, Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science, v. 244, March 1946 (Philadelphia: American Academy of Political and Social Science, 1946), vi–vii.

scientists and intellectuals in the immediate postwar moment. In this time of mingled

elation and uncertainty, they saw both a pressing need and a prime opportunity to address

what the University of Chicago sociologist Louis Wirth called, in the title of his

contribution to the volume, "The Unfinished Business of American Democracy."[9]

Working together with leaders in the intergroup relations movement, social scientists

sought to comprehend the nature of prejudice and to engineer proven, effective strategies

for defeating it.[10] One result of their efforts was a new round of expert efforts to assess

the effects of motion pictures, and other media of mass communication, on the fortunes

of minority groups. The results of this collaboration were ambiguous. While the

attempted wartime interventions in Hollywood had been characterized by a conviction

that fair representation on screen was crucial to full citizenship, and by a confidence in

the salutary effects of eliminating stereotypes and showing minorities in a positive light,

the new understandings of prejudice and of the workings of moving images on audiences

that were developed by social scientists and (predominantly-Jewish) advocates for

intergroup understanding cast doubt on the efficacy of the movies as a tool for fighting

intolerance.

Contributors to *Controlling Group Prejudice* explored the prospects for action to

combat prejudice in education, employment, housing, and the armed services and other

federal bureaucracies. They outlined agendas for scholarly research on race relations and

prejudice. And they specifically considered the role of "communication and

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[9] Louis Wirth, "The Unfinished Business of American Democracy," in *Controlling Group Prejudice*, ed. Gordon W. Allport, Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science, v. 244, March 1946 (Philadelphia: American Academy of Political and Social Science, 1946).

[10] Stuart Svonkin, *Jews Against Prejudice: American Jews and the Fight for Civil Liberties* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), 1, 28–31.

entertainment" in fostering tolerance. Writing on "Motion Pictures, the Theater, and

Race Relations," John T. McManus and Louis Kronenberger, critics for the left-wing

newspaper *PM*, distilled the general outlook of wartime supporters of change in

Hollywood while also echoing some of Walter White's preoccupations when it came to

improving depictions of African Americans. After lauding Hollywood's "conscious

effort to bring about a better understanding among most races and groups in this

country," including its work to combat "anti-Semitic, anti-British, and anti-Soviet

thinking," the two added, "Not nearly so encouraging a record can be reported

concerning Hollywood's contribution toward full citizenship and integration for the

American Negro." They cited familiar complaints: while some good films had resulted

from the politicking of Wendell Willkie and the NAACP, and "the use of standard

stereotypes has declined sharply," filmmakers still appeased racist southern audiences by

using black "talents" in easily-cut musical numbers and segregating them in all-black

films, and "some Negro performers who are themselves stereotypes ... are still doing

business in their old stances." But overall, McManus and Kronenberger declared, "the

old mess has been cleaned up considerably. What remains to be got under way is a real

start in a positive direction." Like Walter White and most of his wartime allies,

McManus and Kronenberger took for granted the positive influence that motion pictures

could have, if properly composed. "The American entertainment film medium," they

declared in at the start of their essay, "could be and perhaps should be one of the Nation's

most effective means of dispelling group prejudice." [11]

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[11] John T. McManus and Louis Kronenberger, "Motion Pictures, the Theater, and Race Relations,"
in *Controlling Group Prejudice*, ed. Gordon W. Allport, Annals of the American Academy of Political and
Social Science, v. 244, March 1946 (Philadelphia: American Academy of Political and Social Science,
1946), 152–58. The echoes of White's preoccupations—not only his disdain for "performers who are

That McManus and Kronenberger were among the volume's contributors suggests the alliances that continued to link liberals and leftists in the first years after the war; that it was these journalists who were tasked with addressing motion pictures reveals how social scientists had yet to return their attention the movies and their effects on minority groups in the systematic fashion of the Payne Fund studies of the 1930s. But essays in the volume examining other media came from university affiliates, and these struck a somewhat more cautious note. For instance, Lyman Bryson and Dorothy Rowden, writing on radio, urged cooperation with experts on race and education in designing anti-prejudice and pro-tolerance programming, so as to appeal effectively to a public that seemed content with stereotypes. "With the help of educators, social scientists, and all those who want unity and understanding, taste can be improved and tolerance fostered," they concluded.[12]

Their tone reflected concerns about the prospects for combating prejudice through the mass media that had been building within the intergroup relations movement. In September 1946, the American Council on Race Relations (ACRR) convened a three-day workshop on public relations for participants from forty organizations, along with "social scientists, media experts, and professional public relations counsel." Several speakers cast doubt on key assumptions underlying the project. One described studies demonstrating that countering prejudiced sentiments with "facts" was only sometimes

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themselves stereotypes" but also his desire for heroic biopics of individuals like George Washington Carver—in McManus and Kronenberger's essay are striking, and its certainly possible that they relied on his input in writing it.

[12] Lyman Bryson and Dorothy Rowden, "Radio as an Agency of National Unity," in *Controlling Group Prejudice*, ed. Gordon W. Allport, Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science, v. 244, March 1946 (Philadelphia: American Academy of Political and Social Science, 1946). On their backgrounds, see Svonkin, *Jews Against Prejudice*, 216n14.

effective, and that mere "contact" between members of different groups was as likely to exacerbate prejudice as to mitigate it. Another offered preliminary data indicating that prejudiced people tended to willfully misinterpret messages encouraging tolerance, finding in them confirmation of their existing views—what soon became known as the "boomerang" theory. A third suggested that "ordinary propaganda and educational methods" could not reach the "deep rooted psychological factors that contributed to prejudice." Summarizing the meeting in an essay the next year, June Blythe, the former director of the ACRR's Information Service—and one of the experts with whom Walter White had consulted regarding his Hollywood bureau—wrote that "a ferment of doubt, discussion, and self-criticism is bubbling among the inter-group agencies as, indeed, it is among all who are concerned with the communication media as a dynamic influence on our way of life." Intergroup agencies must heed the lessons of existing social science research, she argued, and further research was badly needed.[13]

Underlying the doubt and discussion were emerging new understandings of the nature and causes of group prejudice. In 1944, the American Jewish Committee's (AJC) new Department of Scientific Research launched the Studies in Prejudice project, in cooperation with the German-exile Institute of Social Research. The project eventually produced five volumes, published in 1949 and 1950, the most influential of which took a sociopsychological approach, casting susceptibility to antisemitism and other prejudiced attitudes as a personality disorder. In the introduction to *The Authoritarian Personality*, for instance, Theodor Adorno and his coauthors invoked "the rise of an 'anthropological'

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[13] June Blythe, "Can Public Relations Help Reduce Prejudice?," *The Public Opinion Quarterly* 11, no. 3 (Autumn 1947): 342–60; Svonkin, *Jews Against Prejudice*, 53–54. See also, Paul F. Lazarsfeld, "Some Remarks on the Role of Mass Media in So-Called Tolerance Propaganda," *Journal of Social Issues* 3, no. 3 (Summer 1947): 17–25. Lazarsfeld's essay, like Blythe's, summarizes the state of research and identifies similar concerns.

species we call the authoritarian type of man." The studies, collectively, popularized the notion that all varieties of prejudice sprang from the same root, that prejudice was connected to antidemocratic and reactionary political ideologies, and that such views were ultimately irrational and pathological.[14] While Allport had confidently ascribed prejudice to cultural conditioning in 1946, in his 1954 textbook *The Nature of Prejudice*, he would declare that "it is only with in the nexus of personality" that prejudice's origins lay—and that stereotypes are "primarily rationalizers," not causes. "While it does no harm (and may do some good) … to reduce them in media of mass communication," Allport wrote, "it must not be thought that this attack alone will eradicate the roots of prejudice."[15]

With shifting understandings of prejudice as a background, concerned social scientists moved quickly to answer the call for further research on the motion pictures, producing during the late 1940s and early 1950s the greatest volume of such work since the days of the Payne Fund studies. Franklin Fearing, a UCLA psychologist, helped in 1945 to create the journal *Hollywood Quarterly*, which provided a home for some of this research. Its roots were in the political left—it emerged directly from the Hollywood Writers' Mobilization and its 1943 Writers' Congress and aimed to encourage a "politicized, socially responsible cinema"—and in its early years it published and promoted sociological investigations of the movies.[16] The American Academy of

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[14] Svonkin, *Jews Against Prejudice*, 29–40; Theodor W. Adorno et al., *The Authoritarian Personality* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1950), ix.

[15] Gordon W. Allport, *The Nature of Prejudice* (Cambridge, Mass: Addison-Wesley, 1954), xvi, 204.

[16] Eric Smoodin and Ann Martin, eds., *Hollywood Quarterly: Film Culture in Postwar America, 1945-1957* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), xi–xvi.

Political and Social Science, meanwhile, published a full volume on the movie industry in 1947, including contributions with titles such as "An Anthropologist Looks at the Movies," "Need for Statistical Research," and "Audience Research in the Movie Field."[17] Others brought psychological approaches to bear. In 1947, Siegfried Kracauer's *From Caligari to Hitler: A Psychological History of the German Film* probed the German unconscious as evident in its films, and two years later, in a UNESCO-funded study on "national types" in Hollywood film, he argued again for the powerful influence of "audience desires, acute or dormant."[18] Fearing, summarizing in 1947 what was known about the "profoundly important relationships between motion pictures and human behavior," embraced a somewhat similar perspective, rejecting straightforward accounts of "propaganda" and emphasizing the necessity of understanding the viewer's background and "needs" in order to determine how he or she "used" a movie's content. And yet he despaired at how little was known with certainty. "As an eminent psychologist once asked the author," he wrote, "if you could make any kind of a film you wished, with complete control of content and an unlimited budget, and you wished to affect anti-Negro or anti-Semitic attitudes, *what kind of film would you make?* Where would you begin to alter the stereotype?" The question, he acknowledged, was "embarrassing." He—"we"—had no good answer.[19]

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[17] Gordon S. Watkins, ed., *The Motion Picture Industry*, vol. 254, Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science (Philadelphia: American Academy of Political and Social Science, 1947).

[18] Siegfried Kracauer, *From Caligari to Hitler: A Psychological History of the German Film* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1947); Siegfried Kracauer, "National Types as Hollywood Presents Them," *The Public Opinion Quarterly* 13, no. 1 (April 1949): 53–72.

[19] Franklin Fearing, "Influence of the Movies on Attitudes and Behavior," in *The Motion Picture Industry*, ed. Gordon S. Watkins, Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science, vol. 254, November 1947 (Philadelphia: American Academy of Political and Social Science, 1947), 70–79.

Such doubts formed the intellectual context in which Hollywood's series of "pro-tolerance" films—including *Crossfire*, *Gentleman's Agreement*, *Pinky*, *Lost Boundaries*, *Home of the Brave*, *Intruder in the Dust*, *No Way Out*—appeared between 1947 and 1950. For some, these films indeed represented the final fulfillment of the wartime progress in Hollywood, together constituting an effective brief for tolerance. A cartoon published in the *New York Amsterdam News* in 1950, accompanying a celebratory article that previewed *Broken Arrow* (a Fox Western that depicted Native Americans sympathetically) and extolled the success of "other adult hits," vividly illustrated one common understanding of how pro-tolerance films worked. An airplane, its wings made of film stock and its cockpit a projector, dropped oversized bombs labeled *Broken Arrow*, *Crossfire*, *Gentleman's Agreement*, *Lost Boundaries*, and *Pinky*. This filmic ordinance plunged toward a series of crumbling brick walls, labeled "Racial Prejudice," "Discrimination," "Distrust," "Misunderstanding," and "Intolerance." Motion pictures, in this view, could demolish the edifice of prejudice. The cartoon offered a vivid illustration of what communication researchers would soon term, derisively, the "hypodermic needle" or "magic bullet" theory of mass media's power. And, in fact, it was studying precisely these films that helped to convince experts on prejudice and mass communication that this theory was fatally flawed.[20]

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[20] Cartoon accompanying "Movies Are Growing Up!--Here's Proof," *New York Amsterdam News*, August 5, 1950. An industry publicist could very well have written the unattributed article. The cartoon makes quite literal what the historian Fred Turner characterizes as "an essentially ballistic model of communication." Recent scholarship asserts that such labels—e.g., "hypodermic needle"—were unfair caricatures of earlier research, perhaps strategically deployed to bolster the claims of methodological sophistication in new work. Fred Turner, *The Democratic Surround: Multimedia and American Liberalism from World War II to the Psychedelic Sixties* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013), 60; W. Russell Neuman and Lauren Guggenheim, "The Evolution of Media Effects Theory: A Six-Stage Model of Cumulative Research," *Communication Theory* 21, no. 2 (2011): 171–172; Jefferson Pooley, "The New History of Mass Communication Research," in *The History of Media and Communication Research: Contested Memories*, ed. David Park and Jefferson Pooley (New York: Peter Lang, 2008), 43–69.

The first of the films, the film noir of antisemitic murder *Crossfire*, prompted the fiercest debates among such experts. Rivalry between the two leading Jewish organizations—the Anti-Defamation League (ADL), which endorsed the film, and the AJC, which had opposed it even when it was in production—sharpened the disagreements. The reasons for their dispute were many, ranging from historical differences in strategy and constituencies to the contentious negotiations then under way regarding the creation of what became the Jewish organizations' collaborative Motion Picture Project in Hollywood.[21] But, in a reflection of the vogue for expert authority, Jewish leaders mobilized social scientific expertise and research methods in waging their battle.

For Eliot E. Cohen, the founding editor of the AJC's magazine *Commentary*, the expert consensus urged caution. In his August 1947 "Letter to the Movie-Makers," he drew from the reactions of unnamed "psychiatrists, psychologists, sociologists, and others with substantial experience in research and action programs in the field of anti-Semitism and allied problems" who had viewed *Crossfire*. Cohen led off by invoking experts whose reactions were "definitely negative," suggesting that "hardboiled" films, full of depravity and perversity, created an "unhealthy atmosphere" liable to "set reverberating group and class prejudices and loyalties" in unpredictable ways; in hardboiled prose of his own, he imagined how an antisemitic audience member might sympathize with the murderer's perspective ("What the hell kind of justice is that" for the police to pursue and, ultimately, kill "a soldier, who fought for his country, just for

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[21] On this background, see Jennifer E. Langdon, *Caught in the Crossfire: Adrian Scott and the Politics of Americanism in 1940s Hollywood* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), chapter 7; Felicia Deborah Herman, "Views of Jews: Antisemitism, Hollywood, and American Jews, 1913-1947" (Ph.D. dissertation, Brandeis University, 2002), chapter 4.

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roughing up some smart-aleck Jew, and when the soldier was blind drunk and on a tear?"). Cohen asked ominously, "Can you be sure that anti-Semites won't react this way?" He then acknowledged that "few" experts held to this extreme line, but added that the rest seemed to be ambivalent, at best, about the positive effects the film could have. Antisemitism was a "tricky disease" that could "flare epidemically," and, introducing a different metaphor, when it came to "the host of problems raised by a dramatic film like *Crossfire* … on their own admission, [experts] sail uncharted seas."[22]

After rehearsing the litany of cautionary lessons recently learned about "changing real human attitudes…by propaganda"—that antisemitism was a deeply rooted personality trait, that propaganda's intended targets often evaded its messages, that the public was becoming "sophisticated as to sources, sceptical [sic] as to motives"—Cohen fired directly at the movie industry. Too little was known about the "whole moral *effect*" of movie drama, too much was uncertain in the relationship of audiences to movies, and the medium remained too immature to achieve its new, "high-minded aims." Cohen was certain that the movies possessed awesome influence; indeed, they were "the most powerful medium yet devised for the communication of art and enlightenment to a mass audience." Yet he feared that in its still-"primitive" state, this influence was mostly for ill. He called on "the movie-makers" to raise their ambitions—"in a democratic society, if art is to influence people, it must, before anything else, be art"—and perhaps more importantly to draw on the input of experts on social problems and to use "the scientific testing techniques and methods of the content analysts and communications experts, who have been developing the relatively new science that studies how public understanding

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[22] Elliot E. Cohen, "Letter to the Movie-Makers: The Film Drama as a Social Force," *Commentary*, August 1947.

and behavior attitudes are influenced." In its closing attack on Hollywood, Cohen's essay distilled both the suspicion and fear with which many postwar liberals would come to look upon mass culture, and the trust they increasingly placed in "scientific testing" and expertise.[23]

Meanwhile, to justify the ADL's support for *Crossfire*, its program director Frank N. Trager, along with Louis E. Raths, a professor of education at New York University, conducted a study claiming to demonstrate the film's success in improving attitudes toward Jews. In the view of Trager and Raths, *Crossfire* in general, and especially a monologue delivered in the film by the heroic detective who tracks down the murderer, presented a "historically true and psychologically sound" account of prejudice as pathological, and its various manifestations as ultimately interrelated. "This analysis of prejudice has been validated by the social scientists," they wrote. The two gave little credence to the possibility of audiences identifying with the antisemitic villain, but granted that it was hard to know how the film would affect audiences. Although the "small group of experts" they assembled—psychologists, an educational sociologist, a veteran broadcaster—"unanimously agreed that the film was indeed a worthy one," they too were "hesitant in anticipating or predicting audience reaction. They felt that the film should be put to the test."[24]

And so it was: Trager and Raths screened *Crossfire* for Ohio high school students, testing them before and after regarding their sense of their friends' opinions on a range of matters, including their attitudes toward Jews. On this front, they found "no adverse

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[23] Ibid. Emphasis in the original.

[24] Louis E. Raths and Frank N. Trager, "Public Opinion and Crossfire," *Journal of Educational Sociology* 21, no. 6 (February 1948): 345–68.

trend is apparent. The evidence is in the direction of diminishing intolerance, but the difference is small." Subsequent interviews with a smaller group of students confirmed that reactions to the film were positive, as did survey cards distributed to adult audiences in Boston and Denver. "For nearly all the individuals who saw it, *Crossfire* was an experience that ended to produce favorable reactions. These changes were small, but the effects they produced were uniformly in a direction that could be described as favorable."[25]

Overall, Trager and Raths made a very modest claim for *Crossfire*: it was not damaging, and although it was not particularly influential on its own, a series of such films might be. "It initiates a learning process," they concluded. "It does not change anyone's basic attitudes; but it is one more instrument—many are needed—which can help in that learning process which ultimately will make of America a richer and fuller democratic society."[26] If Trager and Raths were modest about the film's effects, they were confident in their "test." (Similarly, RKO's Dore Schary, who oversaw the film's production, replied to Cohen in a "Letter from a Movie-Maker," emphasizing that the film wasn't intended to "cure" hard-core antisemites, but instead to "insulate" others from its threat. "We consulted more than one expert in the making of *Crossfire*," he added. "We talked to many."[27])

In the following months and years, other films in the cycle were subjected to such "scientific testing," with mixed results. In 1948, Irwin C. Rosen, a psychologist at the

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[25] Ibid.

[26] Ibid.

[27] Dore Schary, "Letter from a Movie-Maker: 'Crossfire' as a Weapon Against Anti-Semitism," *Commentary*, October 1947.

University of Pittsburgh who sought to "measure the effectiveness" of *Gentleman's Agreement*, concluded that the film produced some change "in a direction of increased tolerance toward Jews" as measured by a standard questionnaire for quantifying antisemitism—even though, when asked directly, most participants denied that their views had changed.[28] Yet Daniel Wilner, a doctoral student of Franklin Fearing's at UCLA, conducted a study that confirmed that many "high-prejudice individuals" who saw *Home of the Brave* were indeed able to "evade" the movie's message.[29] *Commentary* published an analysis of *No Way Out* by psychologist Martha Wolfenstein and political scientist Norman Leites, subtitled "Two Social Scientists View 'No Way Out,'" which identified "certain negative elements"—moments and images likely to activate viewers' "unacknowledged nightmares about the Negro"—"that might well counteract, *on a deeper level*, the good intentions of the movie-makers."[30]

The renewed attention by social scientists to the movies in the late 1940s and early 1950s did not long outlast the cycle of pro-tolerance films that psychologists, sociologists, and communication experts viewed so skeptically. But the conversations

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[28] Irwin C. Rosen, "The Effect of the Motion Picture 'Gentleman's Agreement' on Attitudes Toward Jews," *The Journal of Psychology* 26, no. 2 (1948): 525–36. Twelve years later, the sociologist Russell Middleton also found the film reduced both antisemitism, and to a lesser degree, "anti-Negro prejudice." Russell Middleton, "Ethnic Prejudice and Susceptibility to Persuasion," *American Sociological Review* 25, no. 5 (October 1960): 679–86.

[29] Franklin Fearing, "A Word of Caution for the Intelligent Consumer of Motion Pictures," *The Quarterly of Film Radio and Television* 6, no. 2 (December 1951): 154–156.

[30] Martha Wolfenstein and Nathan Leites, "The Study of Man: Two Social Scientists View 'No Way Out': The Unconscious vs. the 'Message' in an Anti-Bias Film," *Commentary*, October 1950. In the early 1950s, Gerald Weales, a young white student of film and theater, conducted interviews in Atlanta regarding three race-related films that were screened there (*Pinky* was banned by the local censor, and no theater was willing to show *No Way Out*); eschewing "scientific sampling," he spoke mostly to "the articulate, intellectual segment of the population," concluding that "those whites and Negroes who would like these films to be educationally effective" found "that they are only so in a limited way." Gerald Weales, "Pro-Negro Films in Atlanta," *Phylon* 13, no. 4 (1952): 298–304. Weales's essay was reprinted from *Films in Review*.

initiated during these years among academics and activists regarding the influence of moving images generally, and regarding specifically the intricate relationships between the representation of marginalized groups on screen and their fortunes off screen, would continue, greatly transformed, in the years that followed.

A New Image

The extent and swiftness of these transformations was evident in a perhaps unexpected place: an episode of the television situation comedy *Bewitched* that aired in October 1964. The episode, set in the days leading up to Halloween, depicted the efforts of Samantha and her fellow witches to convince both her ad-man husband, Darrin, and a candy manufacturer who has retained his services, not to rely upon stereotypes of witches as ugly, old hags. Their campaign culminates in a middle-of-the-night protest in the unsuspecting executive's bedroom, complete with a sign reading "We Demand a New Image" and the declaration "We're a protest group." They succeed in convincing the company to use a "gorgeous" witch instead. Beginning in the late 1940s, changes in American media, in scholarly and intellectual approaches to understanding it, and in minority activism began to unfold, changes that ultimately converged to bring far greater public attention than ever before to the notion that visibility mattered—so much so that by the mid-1960s a politics and a rhetoric of "image" could be both (affectionately) parodied and endorsed on a popular television program.[31]

One crucial set of changes reshaped motion pictures, which lost their once-dominant position in American entertainment even as a new culture of critical

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[31] William Asher, "The Witches Are Out," *Bewitched* (ABC, October 29, 1964).

appreciation blossomed around the movies. The cycle of pro-tolerance films of the late

1940s appeared just as the motion picture industry was on the brink of tremendous

change. In May 1948, resolving longstanding federal antitrust charges, the eight largest

studios were forced to give up their theater chains and end the practice of "block

booking," or bundling films in distribution. Simultaneously, as the U.S. population grew

rapidly more suburban, and with television competing for their time and attention, movie

audiences plummeted nearly fifty percent from their 1946 peak. The economies of scale

that once made film production profitable, with ticket sales and guaranteed rental fees for

cheap, formulaic "programmers" and "B movies" subsidizing the costs of big-budget and

"prestige" films, collapsed. Studios responded by drastically reducing production and

sharply cutting the number of actors and other personnel kept under contract. Vertical

integration gave way to a new system in which studios financed and distributed movies

whose creators, cast, and crew were assembled by independent producers on a picture-by-

picture basis. And, over the course of the 1960s, due in part to the industry's struggles

and the substantial changes in its organization, the once-mighty Production Code

Authority saw its power diminished, with the Code scrapped altogether in 1968.[32]

As Hollywood weathered challenges to the supremacy it had once enjoyed,

serious attention to the movies nevertheless burgeoned, both within the expanding world

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[32] Thomas Schatz, *The Genius of the System: Hollywood Filmmaking in the Studio Era* (New York: Pantheon, 1988), 411–481; Robert Sklar, *Movie-Made America: A Cultural History of American Movies*, rev. ed. (New York: Vintage Books, 1994), chapters 16–17; Drew Casper, *Postwar Hollywood, 1946-1962* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2007); Denise Mann, *Hollywood Independents: The Postwar Talent Takeover* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008); Christopher Anderson, *Hollywood TV: The Studio System in the Fifties* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1994). On the decline of the Code, specifically, see Stephen Vaughn, *Freedom and Entertainment: Rating the Movies in an Age of New Media* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), chapter 1; Thomas Doherty, *Hollywood's Censor: Joseph I. Breen and the Production Code Administration* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), chapters 13–14.

of higher education and outside it. On the whole, it bore little resemblance to the

"scientific testing" of the late 1940s; rather, scholars and critics approached film as art,

and probed its history. New channels of non-commercial distribution and exhibition

emerged, enabling and promoting a practice of critical, informed movie watching. New

York's Museum of Modern Art (MOMA), which had established its Film Library in

1935, played an important role. Its collection and preservation of films marked a radical

departure for a medium more commonly treated as disposable (used film stock was often

recycled), and its holdings were a crucial source of programming for the numerous local

film councils and film societies established after World War II, which had accelerated the

proliferation of inexpensive 16mm projectors.[33] Campus film societies, in particular,

boomed; around five thousand of them existed by the late 1960s, a more-than twentyfold

increase from the early 1950s. Their popularity helped to prompt the growth of

university courses on film and film studies departments. By the 1971-1972 academic

year, 2,392 such courses were offered at American universities; there had been just 244

nine years earlier.[34] Off campus, art house and repertory movie theaters emerged in

major cities, offering foreign and avant-garde films, nostalgia-tinged retrospectives from

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[33] Haidee Wesson, "Studying Movies at the Museum: The Museum of Modern Art and Cinema's Changing Object," in *Inventing Film Studies*, ed. Lee Grieveson and Haidee Wesson (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008), 121–48. See also, Charles Acland, "Classrooms, Clubs, and Community Circuits: Cultural Authority and the Film Council Movement, 1946–1957," in *Inventing Film Studies*, ed. Lee Grieveson and Haidee Wesson (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008), 149–81.

[34] The statistics are cited in Michael Zyrd, "Experimental Film and the Development of Film Study in America," in *Inventing Film Studies*, ed. Lee Grieveson and Haidee Wesson (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008), 189–190.

Hollywood's classical era, and surveys of national cinemas. Television also aired older

Hollywood movies.[35]

Writing about film proliferated. Journals such as *Films in Review* and *Film

Culture* provided venues for it, and trade publishers released both series of "little books"

on the movies and major works, such as Andrew Sarris's *The American Cinema* (1968).[36]

"In the decade since 1965 … probably more books have been published on motion

pictures than in the previous seventy years," the historian Robert Sklar estimated,

introducing his own contribution to that corpus, the 1975 survey *Movie-Made America: A

Cultural History of American Movies*.[37] Although the film culture that flourished during

the 1960s and into the 1970s was notably influenced by and preoccupied with European

cinema (especially the French New Wave) and experimental American filmmaking, it

also incorporated a new attention to American film history. In this realm, Haden Guest

has identified "a tradition of American film scholarship grounded in patient, evaluative

listmaking."[38]

Within the academy, over the course of the 1950s, the film historians Lee

Grieveson and Haidee Wasson write, "cinema study was increasingly intertwined with

the humanities, divorced from the social sciences." Grieveson and Wasson trace this

evolution in the emerging discipline's self presentation: the Society of Cinematologists,

founded in 1958 to bring together those studying film inside the academy and those

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[35] Haden Guest, "Experimentation and Innovation in Three American Film Journals of the 1950s," in *Inventing Film Studies*, ed. Lee Grieveson and Haidee Wesson (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008), 235–63.

[36] Ibid.; Mark Betz, "Little Books," in *Inventing Film Studies*, ed. Lee Grieveson and Haidee Wesson (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008), 319–50.

[37] Sklar, *Movie-Made America*, 383.

[38] Guest, "Experimentation and Innovation in Three American Film Journals of the 1950s," 255.

working outside it at film societies and archives, renamed itself the Society for Cinema

Studies in the early 1960s, "jettisoning the scientific tinges of 'ology'" and further

embracing humanistic criticism and interpretation as its core intellectual approach.[39] The

fate of *Hollywood Quarterly* is also indicative. The University of California Press took

over sole responsibility for it when the Hollywood Writers' Mobilization dissolved in

1947. To better reflect its eclectic, catholic approach, it took the name *Quarterly Review*

of Film, Radio, and Television in 1951. But in 1958, facing declining subscriptions, the

journal was re-launched as *Film Quarterly*, shedding the "sociological" aspirations of its

predecessor and focusing mostly on film as art.[40]

Even as film studies moved away from its roots in the social sciences, embracing

humanistic modes of interpretation and analysis, worries about cinema's effect on

audiences persisted for its practitioners. As Grieveson has argued, where social scientists

like those who had conducted the Payne Fund Studies had seen motion pictures as

"contributing to the breakdown in social control and order," both intellectuals of the

Frankfurt School and liberal social critics of the 1940s and 1950s saw "cinema as *leading*

to social control." For them, the movies did not only shape the behavior of audiences,

they also shaped their very subjectivity, molding them into an obedient mass. By the

1970s, academic film scholars were drawing upon critical theory, emerging feminist

critiques, the psychoanalytic thought of Jacques Lacan, and the structuralist Marxism of

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[39] Lee Grieveson and Haidee Wesson, "The Academy and Motion Pictures," in *Inventing Film Studies*, ed. Lee Grieveson and Haidee Wesson (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008), xii–xiv.

[40] Smoodin and Martin, *Hollywood Quarterly*, xi–xii. See also, Eric Smoodin, "The History of Film History," in *Looking Past the Screen: Case Studies in American Film History and Method*, ed. Jon Lewis and Eric Smoodin (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007); Shyon Baumann, *Hollywood Highbrow: From Entertainment to Art* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007).

Louis Althusser to explore film's power to construct subjectivity, the nature of spectatorship, and the workings of identification within the audience.[41]

Yet beyond the academy, the questioning ethos that defined the new film culture assumed a more basic, if not always as precisely articulated or theoretically sophisticated, understanding of the powerful influence of the movies. After all, the very institutions that comprised this culture had their origins in conscious efforts to cultivate in viewers— especially in young people—a critical attitude that would inoculate them against the manipulative power of motion pictures. Such was the intent of the earliest film education programs in the 1930s, and of the Rockefeller Foundation in funding much of the MOMA Film Library's work. By extracting movies out of their original commercial context and making them instead into objects of re-viewing, discussion, research, and critique, postwar film culture offered an implicit account of their power to do ill when consumed in the traditional fashion.[42]

Traditional commercial movie going, meanwhile, was itself being transformed. During the postwar years, both the discipline of film studies within the academy and the flourishing film culture outside of it were to some degree casting a glance backward at a medium that was struggling with television's explosive ascent to primacy in the landscape of mass media in the United States. Present in less than one percent of U.S. homes in 1948, televisions penetrated over a third by 1952, over half by 1955, and over four-fifths by the end of the decade. During its earliest years, in part due to a three-and-

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[41] Lee Grieveson, "Cinema Studies and the Conduct of Conduct," in *Inventing Film Studies*, ed. Lee Grieveson and Haidee Wesson (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008), 22–26; Philip Rosen, "Screen and 1970s Film Theory," in *Inventing Film Studies*, ed. Lee Grieveson and Haidee Wesson (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008), 264–97.

[42] Grieveson, "Cinema Studies and the Conduct of Conduct," 22; Wesson, "Studying Movies at the Museum: The Museum of Modern Art and Cinema's Changing Object," 128–130.

a-half-year federal freeze on in the issuing of new broadcast licenses, television was a largely urban and Northern medium. But with the lifting of the freeze in 1952, stations appeared nationwide, and by mid-decade primetime evening programming was dominated by three national networks. Over the course of the 1950s, this programming changed considerably, as dramatic anthology and vaudeville-style programs aired live from New York and created by sponsors to fill purchased airtime were progressively supplanted by filmed genre series produced in Hollywood, supplied to the networks by independent production companies and by new TV divisions of the major movie studios. By the 1957-1958 season, over seventy percent of prime-time programs originated in Hollywood.[43]

In the 1960s, television solidified its hold. By the end of the decade, it was a mature, wildly popular entertainment medium—a daily average of 62.1 percent of homes used television during the 1969-1970 season. It had become Americans' primary information source—44 percent of Americans deemed TV reliable for news by 1969 (compared to 21 percent for newspapers), and its coverage of events including the civil rights movement and the war in Vietnam was influentially shaping American politics. Effectively synonymous with the three networks that dominated the industry, television was characterized by zero-sum struggles among these three corporations, waged through the dual strategies of "least objectionable program" and "segmented audience scheduling." These strategies cooperated to homogenize programming and narrow its

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[43] Erik Barnouw, *Tube of Plenty: The Evolution of American Television*, 2nd rev. ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), chapters 3–4; William Boddy, *Fifties Television: The Industry and Its Critics* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1990); Michele Hilmes, *Hollywood and Broadcasting: From Radio to Cable* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1990); Anderson, *Hollywood TV*; J. Fred MacDonald, *One Nation Under Television: The Rise and Decline of Network TV*, rev. ed. (Chicago: Nelson-Hall, 1994), chapters 3–6; Casper, *Postwar Hollywood*; Gary R. Edgerton, *The Columbia History of American Television* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), chapters 4–5.

scope. Networks emphasized profitability; affiliates balked at extending evening newscasts from a half hour to an hour and tended to fill non-network airtime with syndicated gossip and game shows, rather than locally-oriented programming. But the networks continued to together draw about 90 percent of prime-time viewers into the 1970s.[44]

Television elicited intellectual responses quite different from those that greeted motion pictures in the postwar period—ones rather similar, instead, to those that greeted the youthful motion picture medium in the 1920s and 1930s. Whereas the movies by the 1960s prompted a growing culture of appreciation and retrospection, television spurred a movement for regulation and reform. Whereas the movies became the subject of humanistic criticism and interpretation within the academy, television became a field for social scientific research. But just as assumptions regarding the movies' influence underpinned the former developments, fears of television's effects impelled the latter. And just as film studies and the broader film culture grew up in tandem with one another, so too did efforts to reform television and efforts to study its impact.

Television's ascendance coincided with, and further fostered, a deep suspicion of mass culture among liberal intellectuals and opinion leaders. The new medium quickly confronted objections from reformers who deemed television's content disappointingly commercialized—especially in light of early aspirations that the medium would serve as a new tool for education—and potentially dangerous. Concerned viewers formed organizations to monitor television violence and other offensive content; Congressional investigations probed its contributions to juvenile delinquency and the 1959 scandals

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[44] MacDonald, *One Nation Under Television*, 200–201, 209; Edgerton, *The Columbia History of American Television*, 243.

involving fixed quiz shows; and the industry sought to parry criticism by creating a

vague, voluntary "Code of Good Practice," and within each network, departments of

"standards and practices." In 1961, incoming Federal Communications Commission

(FCC) chairman Newton Minow summarized liberal elite discontent with television in his

"vast wasteland" speech. Calling television "the most powerful voice in America," he

declared, "when television is bad, nothing is worse." [45]

Meanwhile, television became a central concern of the emerging scholarly

discipline of mass communication studies, which had grown out of research conducted by

psychologists, sociologists, and political scientists, as well as what one historian dubs

"the scraps of journalism schools and speech departments." By the late 1960s,

communication studies had begun to find an institutional home within dedicated

academic departments and schools of communication.[46] Befitting its disparate origins,

the field incorporated varied research methodologies and theoretical approaches. One

prominent focus of study was audiences and mass media effects, where leading

researchers posited that broadcast media's power to shape attitudes was relatively weak.[47]

However, another approach, quantitative content analysis, ultimately produced a body of

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[45] Donald L. Guimary, *Citizens' Groups and Broadcasting* (New York: Praeger, 1975), 35; Barry G. Cole and Mal Oettinger, *Reluctant Regulators: The FCC and the Broadcast Audience* (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1978), 65; Kathryn Montgomery, *Target: Prime Time: Advocacy Groups and the Struggle Over Entertainment Television* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 13–21; Robert W Morrow, *Sesame Street and the Reform of Children's Television* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005), 5–28. For Minow's speech, see Newton N. Minow, "Television and the Public Interest," *American Rhetoric*, May 9, 1961, http://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/newtonminow.htm.

[46] On the limited and somewhat contentious historiography of communication study, see Pooley, "The New History of Mass Communication Research." See also Pamela J. Shoemaker and Stephen D. Reese, *Mediating the Message: Theories of Influences on Mass Media Content* (White Plains, NY: Longman, 1996), chapters 2–3.

[47] On the history of claims regarding media effects, see Frank Esser, "Media Effects, History of," *The International Encyclopedia of Communication*, ed. Wolfgang Donsbach, (Oxford: Blackwell, 2008); Neuman and Guggenheim, "The Evolution of Media Effects Theory."

scholarly research that supported a robust conception of television's power. In 1954, an analysis by Sydney W. Head of television drama programs offered an early example of this methodology. Head concluded that, "far from subverting the accepted conservative values of society, television reflects them with almost slavish fidelity." Television, he added, "this most pervasive and intimate of the mass media … will add tremendously to cultural inertia."[48]

A similar argument was elaborated by George Gerbner, who became dean of the Annenberg School of Communication at the University of Pennsylvania in 1964 and who, in 1968, created the Cultural Indicators project, which annually monitored a representative week's worth of television programming to produce the raw material for subsequent analysis. For Gerbner and his colleagues, this "message system analysis" supported the refinement of an approach to the study of television that became known as "cultivation research." Cultivation theory emphasized the ways broad assumptions about the nature and shape of society were produced by prolonged exposure to patterns of repeated messages and content in television entertainment. Gerbner was himself most renowned for his studies of televised violence, including those conducted for the presidential commission on violence appointed by Lyndon Johnson and for the U.S. Surgeon General, but his approach and the Cultural Indicators data were taken up by those with a range of concerns regarding television content. Gerbner's roots were in the

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[48] Sydney W. Head, "Content Analysis of Television Drama Programs," *The Quarterly of Film, Radio, and Television* 9, no. 2 (December 1, 1954): 193.

political left, and cultivation research was broadly sympathetic with, and often specifically allied to, the work of reformers.[49]

Alongside changes in motion pictures, the rise of television, and evolutions in intellectual approaches to each, an additional factor reshaping how the relationships of screen and society were understood—perhaps the most crucial one—was the black civil rights movement. The quickening of the long African American freedom struggle during World War II and then especially in the 1950s and 1960s invigorated traditions of black criticism of black representation on screen, bringing these ideas to much larger audiences than ever before.

The urgency of the war years fostered several extended explorations of blacks in motion pictures by sympathetic, left-leaning whites, most notably the white British film critic Peter Noble's 1948 book *The Negro in Films*.[50] It also occasioned increasingly comprehensive assessments by black intellectuals. Foremost among these was a study by Lawrence D. Reddick, curator of the New York Public Library's Schomburg Collection, who in 1944 produced an investigation of one hundred films "which have included Negro themes of Negro characters of more than passing significance," and determined that seventy-five were "anti-Negro" (or "limited to the stereotyped conceptions of the Negro in the American mind"), thirteen were "neutral," and twelve were "definitely pro-Negro,"

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[49] For background on Gerber and cultivation theory, see Michael Morgan, "Cultivation Theory," *The International Encyclopedia of Communication*, ed. Wolfgang Donsbach, (Oxford: Blackwell, 2008); Associated Press, "George Gerbner, 86, Researcher Who Studied Violence on TV, Is Dead," *New York Times*, January 3, 2006, http://www.nytimes.com/2006/01/03/obituaries/03gerbner.html; "Biography," *George Gerbner Archive, Annenberg School of Communication*, accessed January 26, 2015, http://web.asc.upenn.edu/gerbner/archive.aspx?sectionID=18.

[50] Peter Noble, *The Negro in Films* (London: S. Robinson, 1948). Other examples include Columbia University Bureau of Applied Social Research, *How Writers Perpetuate Stereotypes: A Digest of Data* (New York: Writers' War Board, 1945); Victor Jeremy Jerome, *The Negro in Hollywood Films* (New York: Masses & Mainstream, 1950).

offering "roles of heroism, courage and dignity."[51] Similarly, Leon Hardwick, in an early issue of *Hollywood Quarterly*, provided a list of wartime films in which "colored artists" had played "better and more dignified roles."[52]

Over the next decade, as Hollywood's treatment of African American characters expanded and became more self-consciously positive, black critics periodically took to the pages of liberal magazines and new film journals to offer often skeptical assessments of these developments, their historical contexts, and their relation to wider social changes, and to suggest a need for black perspectives in film. Ralph Ellison, reviewing the various pro-tolerance films of 1949 for *The Reporter*, argued that the movies had historically reaffirmed deeply-rooted myths of black inferiority, and that the new films reflected the increasingly confused ways "whites think and feel about Negroes." They provided white audiences emotional catharsis by tackling topics that were a source of white guilt, even as they each employed "ingenious devices for evading the full human rights of their Negroes," by obscuring concrete acts of racism (in *Home of the Brave*), shifting racial blame (in *Lost Boundaries*), and presenting characters with false choices (in *Pinky*).[53] Writing in *Commentary* in 1955, James Baldwin similarly suggested that the all-black musical *Carmen Jones*, a retelling of the opera *Carmen*, ultimately prompted questions about "the interior lives of Americans," who were "very deeply disturbed" when it came to the challenging terrain where race, class, and sex intersected. In contrast

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[51] L. D. Reddick, "Educational Programs for the Improvement of Race Relations: Motion Pictures Radio, The Press, and Libraries," *The Journal of Negro Education* 13, no. 3 (Summer 1944): 367–89.

[52] Leon H. Hardwick, "Negro Stereotypes on the Screen," *Hollywood Quarterly* 1, no. 2 (January 1946): 234–36. For further discussion of black film criticism during the 1940s, see Anna Everett, *Returning the Gaze: A Genealogy of Black Film Criticism, 1909-1949* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001), chapter 4.

[53] Ralph Ellison, "The Shadow and the Act," *The Reporter* 1 (December 6, 1949): 17–19.

to the assertion in the editors' introduction that the film "has been widely acclaimed … as evidence that Hollywood has admitted Negroes to full citizenship," Baldwin offered a subtler and far more critical reading. "The fact that one is watching a Negro cast interpreting *Carmen* is used to justify their remarkable vacuity, their complete improbability, their total divorce from anything suggestive of the realities of Negro life," he wrote. He provided a similarly critical review of the film version of *Porgy and Bess* in 1959: "a white man's vision of Negro life," with a director who "*cannot* know anything about his company if he knows nothing of the life that produced them."[54] Albert Johnson, a cofounder of the *Quarterly*, used a 1959 essay titled "Beige, Brown, or Black," to identify a "*gradual* succession of films about Negro-white relationships" that emerged in the wake of the *Brown* ruling in 1954, and to argue that an absence of African Americans with a hand in the production of the films made them often "as incredible to Negro spectators as…to white."[55]

With the rise of a distinctly cultural phase of the black freedom movement by the middle 1960s, along with the concurrent development of university black studies programs, discussions of blacks in moving images became more common still, both inside and outside of the academy. At least eight doctoral and masters dissertations relating to some aspect of African Americans in motion pictures were produced during the 1950s and 1960s, and a lightly revised dissertation by Edward Mapp, a graduate of NYU's mass communication doctoral program, was published by the Scarecrow Press in

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[54] James Baldwin, "Life Straight in De Eye," *Commentary*, January 1955; James Baldwin, "On the Horizon: On Catfish Row," *Commentary*, September 1959.

[55] Albert Johnson, "Beige, Brown or Black," *Film Quarterly* 13, no. 1 (Autumn 1959): 38–43.

1972 as *Blacks in American Film: Today and Yesterday*.[56] Thomas Cripps, a white

scholar who was a pioneer of black film studies, published at least half a dozen articles

on blacks and other minority groups in film and television beginning in 1962,

culminating in 1977 with his book on "The Negro in American Film" during the first four

decades of the century.[57] Peter Noble's book was brought back into print.[58] Academic

conferences and symposia considered black images in film, and *Freedomways* devoted a

special issue in 1974 to *The Black Image in the Mass Media*.[59] Discussion of the movie

images featured in the work of figures as diverse as Baldwin (who published his long

essay *The Devil Finds Work*, on his relationship with the movies, in 1976), Malcolm X

(who recalled "being the only Negro in the theater" at a screening of *Gone with the Wind*,

and that "when Butterfly McQueen went into her act, I felt like crawling under the rug"),

and Bill Cosby (whose 1968 television special *Black History: Lost, Stolen, or Strayed*

explored black stereotypes on film).[60]

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[56] Edward Mapp, *Blacks in American Films: Today and Yesterday* (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press, 1972). The count of other such dissertations and theses comes from Ibid., 13–14.

[57] Thomas Cripps, *Slow Fade to Black: The Negro in American Film, 1900-1942* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977). For examples of Cripps's writing, see Thomas R. Cripps, "The Reaction of the Negro to the Motion Picture 'Birth of a Nation,'" *Historian* 25, no. 3 (1962): 344–62; Thomas R. Cripps, "The Death of Rastus: Negroes in American Films since 1945," *Phylon* 28, no. 3 (September 1967): 267–75; Thomas Cripps, "Paul Robeson and Black Identity in American Movies," *Massachusetts Review* 11, no. 3 (1970): 468–85; Thomas R. Cripps, "The Unformed Image: The Negro in the Movies Before 'Birth of a Nation,'" *Maryland Historian* 2, no. 1 (1971): 13–26; Thomas Cripps, "The Noble Black Savages: A Problem in the Politics of Television Art," *Journal of Popular Culture* 8, no. 4 (1974): 685–95.

[58] Peter Noble, *The Negro in Films* (New York: Arno Press, 1970).

[59] These included a conference on "The Negro Film Image" and a "Symposium on Black Images in Films, Stereotyping, and Self-Perception as Viewed by Black Actresses," which took place in Boston in 1974. Regarding the former, see Daniel J. Leab, *From Sambo to Superspade: The Black Experience in Motion Pictures* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1975), 199. The latter was reproduced in *The Black Image in the Mass Media* [special issue of *Freedomways*, v. 14, no. 3] (New York: Freedomways Associates, 1974).

[60] James Baldwin, *The Devil Finds Work: An Essay* (New York: Dial Press, 1976); Malcolm X and Alex Haley, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, paperback edition (New York: Grove Press, 1966), 32; "Black History: Lost, Stolen, or Strayed" (CBS, September 1968), http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pRqvygZECLM.

By the 1960s and 1970s, new approaches to critically studying motion pictures and television, together with the vivid example of African American analysis of and objections to screen stereotypes, prompted an explosion of published writing and public discussion, both within and outside the academy, regarding the "images of" numerous minority groups in movies and television. These new studies were all rooted in a conviction that these images were immensely powerful and, for marginalized groups, immensely damaging. In 1973, Marlon Brando tapped Native American activist Sacheen Littlefeather of the National Native American Affirmative Image Committee to accept his Academy Award on his behalf, and she began by criticizing "the treatment of American Indians today by the film industry."[61] Studies appeared with titles such as *Toms, Coons, Mulattoes, Mammies, and Bucks: An Interpretive History of Blacks in American Films*; *Popcorn Venus: Women, Movies, and the American Dream*; *From Reverence to Rape: The Treatment of Women in the Movies*; *From Sambo to Superspade: The Black Experience in Motion Pictures*; *The Latin American Image in American Film*; and *On Visual Media Racism: Asians in the American Motion Pictures*—and, into the 1980s, *Images of the Mexican American in Fiction and Film*, *The Celluloid Closet: Homosexuality in the Movies*, *Hollywood's Image of the Jew* and *The Kaleidoscopic Lens: How Hollywood Views Ethnic Groups*.[62] Two symposia in the late 1970s brought

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[61] *Marlon Brando's Oscar® Win for "The Godfather,"* 2008, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2QUacU0I4yU.

[62] Donald Bogle, *Toms, Coons, Mulattoes, Mammies, and Bucks: An Interpretive History of Blacks in American Films* (New York: Viking Press, 1973); Marjorie Rosen, *Popcorn Venus: Women, Movies, and the American Dream* (Coward, McCann & Geoghegan, 1973); Molly Haskell, *From Reverence to Rape: The Treatment of Women in the Movies* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1974); Leab, *From Sambo to Superspade*; Allen L. Woll, *The Latin Image in American Film* (Los Angeles: UCLA Latin American Center Publications, University of California, 1977); Eugene Franklin Wong, *On Visual Media Racism: Asians in the American Motion Pictures* (New York: Arno Press, 1977); Arthur G. Pettit, *Images of the Mexican American in Fiction and Film* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1980); Vito Russo, *The Celluloid Closet: Homosexuality in the Movies* (New York: Harper & Row, 1981); Lester D. Friedman,

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together scholars writing about ethnic groups in film and television.[63] Some sense of the

sheer volume of such writing—and its focus on African Americans—is evident in

bibliographies compiled on the subject. One, published in 1987, counted 662 books,

dissertations, and journal and periodical articles dealing with African Americans in

movies and television.[64]

New social movements that emerged in the 1960s and took up the pursuit of fair

representation—the women's movement, the gay and lesbian movement, the Chicano

movement—drew upon and developed critical traditions of their own. Women associated

with the Popular Front during the 1940s had called attention to the circumscribed

representation of women in motion pictures and other media, particularly regarding their

labor within and beyond the home.[65] In the early 1960s, Betty Friedan's *The Feminine*

Mystique offered an enormously influential account of the tremendous power of the

"image" of women elaborated in American mass culture after World War II, arguing that

it forged the "chains in her own mind and spirit" that trapped the American woman in the

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Hollywood's Image of the Jew (New York: Frederick Ungar, 1982); Randall M. Miller, ed., *The Kaleidoscopic Lens: How Hollywood Views Ethnic Groups* (Englewood, NJ: Ozer, 1980).

[63] Their proceedings were published as *Ethnic Images in American Film and Television*, Public Papers in the Humanities (Philadelphia: Balch Institute, 1978).

[64] Allen L. Woll and Randall M. Miller, *Ethnic and Racial Images in American Film and Television: Historical Essays and Bibliography* (New York: Garland, 1987). A 2003 bibliography counted 478 English-language books alone that discussed ethnic, racial, or national imagery in American feature films, the vast majority of them published after 1970. Marsha J. Hamilton and Eleanor S. Block, *Projecting Ethnicity and Race: An Annotated Bibliography of Studies on Imagery in American Film* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2003).

[65] The Office of War Information's film reviewers were largely women, and they urged moviemakers to depict women's work as valuable in its own right, not merely in the context of the wartime emergency. Elizabeth Hawes, an left-wing activist, author, and clothing designer, criticized in her 1948 book *Anything But Love* the straitened prescriptions offered by women's magazines and advertisements. Clayton R. Koppes and Gregory D. Black, *Hollywood Goes to War: How Politics, Profits, and Propaganda Shaped World War II Movies* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 144–146; Daniel Horowitz, *Betty Friedan and the Making of the Feminine Mystique: The American Left, the Cold War, and Modern Feminism* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2000), 129–130.

role of housewife. The book consolidated and popularized existing notions of mass

culture's power and potential danger while reorienting them within a new, explicitly

feminist context, and it helped to set an agenda for the liberal feminist movement.[66]

When the National Organization for Women was founded in June 1966, its statement of

purpose, written by Friedan, declared in part, "We will protest, and endeavor to change,

the false image of women now prevalent in the mass media, and in the texts, ceremonies,

laws, and practices of our major social institutions. Such images perpetuate contempt for

women by society and by women for themselves." Of the seven task forces it established

that October, one was named "Image of Women."[67]

Meanwhile, gay men and women active in homophile organizations from the

1950s onward carefully followed and tentatively sought to shape media coverage of gay

life, and discussed and critiqued representations of homosexuality in fiction and on

screen in the homophile press.[68] After 1969, gay and lesbian activists of the Stonewall

generation combined aggressive direct action with intensive behind-the-scenes pressure

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[66] Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique* (New York: Norton, 1963), 31, 34. See Joanne Meyerowitz, "Beyond the Feminine Mystique: A Reassessment of Postwar Mass Culture, 1946- 1958," *The Journal of American History* 79, no. 4 (March 1993): 1457. For an assessment of *The Feminine Mystique* that emphasizes the centrality of advertising and magazines to Friedan's case, and her "recurrent rhetoric of manipulation and brainwashing," see Rachel Bowlby, "'The Problem with No Name': Rereading Friedan's 'The Feminine Mystique,'" *Feminist Review*, no. 27 (October 1, 1987): 61–75. Just as *The Feminine Mystique* was, in Meyerowitz's words, "remarkably rooted in postwar culture" and "the prevailing popular discourse" on questions of women and gender, it both reflected and helped to buttress the period's common understanding of mass culture as powerful and potentially dangerous. Meyerowitz, "Beyond the Feminine Mystique," 1481. See also Patricia Bradley, *Mass Media and the Shaping of American Feminism, 1963-1975* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2003), 17–18.

[67] National Organization for Women, "Statement of Purpose," 1966, http://www.now.org/history/purpos66.html; "Highlights from NOW's Forty Fearless Years," accessed November 24, 2013, http://www.now.org/history/timeline.html; Allison Perlman, "Feminists In The Wasteland: The National Organization for Women and Television Reform," *Feminist Media Studies* 7, no. 4 (2007): 46. A number of the women who helped to found NOW, and who were active in its New York branch, had backgrounds in media and public relations. Bradley, *Mass Media and the Shaping of American Feminism*, 34–40.

[68] Martin Meeker, *Contacts Desired: Gay and Lesbian Communications and Community, 1940s-1970s* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), esp. chapter 4.

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to influence how major periodicals, broadcasters, and movies depicted gay people and their lives, working through groups like New York's Gay Activists Alliance and creating new organizations, including the Gay Media Task Force.[69] Media-related activism by Americans of Mexican descent similarly entered a vigorous new phase in the late 1960s, as a diverse range of organizations under the broad umbrella of the Chicano movement protested motion pictures, television programs, and other media that depicted Mexican Americans as poor, lazy, stupid, or "sneaky"—perhaps most famously, the "Frito Bandito" character that Frito Lay began using in 1967 in advertisements for corn chips.[70]

But for each of these groups, African Americans were a crucial point of reference, the black experience providing often-cited authority buttressing these groups' own assertions. (Jews were referenced too, but somewhat less often.) The lesbian activist Loretta Lottman, for instance, compared gay images in the mass media in the mid-1970s to "the treatment blacks received before the civil rights movement took effect in the early 1960's and a conscious effort was made to avoid stereotypical treatment of blacks in film." Similarly, Nancy Stanley, a leading feminist activist on television issues, argued that "just as the media used to cast black men as porters, waiters, and song-and-dance men, television today casts women as sex symbols, wives, and mothers." In a note, she elaborated:

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[69] David Eisenbach, *Gay Power: An American Revolution* (New York: Carroll & Graf, 2006); Larry Gross, *Up From Invisibility: Lesbians, Gay Men, and the Media in America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), 40–55; Montgomery, *Target: Prime Time*, 51–47; Kathryn Montgomery, "Gay Activists and the Networks," *Journal of Communication* 31, no. 3 (1981): 49–57.

[70] Chon A. Noriega, *Shot in America: Television, the State, and the Rise of Chicano Cinema* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), chapters 2–3. On earlier activism by the leftist Asociación Nacional México-Americana, see Mario T. García, *Mexican Americans: Leadership, Ideology & Identity, 1930-1960* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1989), 215–217.

The modern media image of women is startlingly similar to that presented of the

black man a decade ago. In place of Stepin Fetchit, shuffling and bowing his way

through life, we have simpering Doris and Lucy. In place of Amos and Andy,

living in their own ghettoized world, we have the heroines of the soap operas,

fretting over their lives in isolation in the suburbs. Except for the fact that in

recent years blacks have more often been ignored than presented in any capacity,

discriminatory treatment of the two groups is very much the same.

And Thomas Martinez, author of a position paper on Mexican Americans in advertising,

declared, "Today, no major advertiser would attempt to display a black man or woman

over the mass media in a prejudiced, stereotyped fashion. … Yet, these same advertisers

who dare not show 'step'n fetch it' characters, uninhibitedly depict a Mexican

counterpart, with additional traits of stinking and stealing."[71] These gay and lesbian,

feminist, and Mexican American activists conceived of their oppression as a new

variation of that once experienced by blacks. They looked to African Americans, and to

other minority groups, for strategies of resistance. When NOW created its Task Force on

Image of Women, its members promised to use "all the forms of protest and pressure

which have been effective in abolishing the stereotyped images of Negroes and Jews."

Newton Deiter, the chairman of the Gay Media Task Force, wrote that he hoped that the

"process of involvement which brought about the honest presentation of Black, Chicano,

Native American, and female characters, [in television] without stereotyping, will bring it

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[71] Loretta Lotman to Arthur B. Krim, June 27, 1975, GMTF records, #7315, box 1, folder 5, Division of Rare and Manuscript Collections, Cornell University Library; Nancy E. Stanley, "Federal Communications Law and Women's Rights: Women in the Wasteland Fight Back," *Hastings Law Journal* 23 (November 1971): 16–17; Thomas M. Martínez, "Advertising and Racism: The Case of The Mexican-American," *El Grito*, June 1, 1969, 9–10.

about for gay people as well."[72] That NOW activists in 1967 and Dieter in 1976 described these other groups as having *already* succeeded is striking—members of those other groups would certainly not have agreed—but their references to "protest and pressure" and a "process of involvement" suggest the magnitude of attention routinely given minority and marginalized groups' condemnations of stereotyped and unfair images by the 1960s and 1970s.

Postwar film culture, the discipline of mass communication studies, the movement for television reform, and identity-based criticism of motion pictures and television together created an environment rich with persuasive evidence of the important relationships between moving images and marginalized groups. Two modes of inquiry in particular—critical histories of movie images and methical analyses of television content—played crucial roles in crystalizing the notion that American moving images, past and present, actively worked to enforce the social and political marginalization of a range of social groups. A fuller account of each of these modes of inquiry helps to reveal how marginalized groups themselves drew upon, engaged with, and redirected scholarly and popular conversations to puzzle through questions regarding the "real relationships" between a changing screen and a changing society, and thereby advance and transform the pursuit of fair representation in both media.

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[72] "Task Force on Image of Women in Mass Media," February 1967, NOW Records, MC 496, folder 47.4, Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute, Harvard University; Newton E. Deiter, "The Last Minority: Television and Gay People," *Television Quarterly* 13, no. 3 (Fall 1976): 69–72.

Defined, Recorded, Reasoned With, and Interpreted

In 1969, a young black journalist named Donald Bogle proposed to his colleagues at *Ebony* magazine that he write a profile of Butterfly McQueen—the *Gone with the Wind* actress who had so mortified Malcolm X. His colleagues were aghast, dismissing McQueen and her fellow "old time actors as toms and mammies." Their reaction, Bogle wrote several years later, "simply pointed out the sorry state of black film history in America. There was no history." Most African Americans were unfamiliar with the circumstances under which black film performers had labored, and their attitudes toward them were condescending, at best. To remedy the situation, Bogle declared in the preface to his 1973 book *Toms, Coons, Mulattoes, Mammies, and Bucks*, "The past had to be contended with. It had to be defined, recorded, reasoned with, and interpreted." Of course, as Bogle acknowledged one page later with a discussion of Peter Noble's 1948 book, his was not the first book-length account of African American images on screen. But for Bogle, Noble's book was woefully inadequate, failing to distinguish between black performers and the stereotyped characters they played. Bogle identified "the essence of black film history" in "what certain talented actors have done with the stereotype." His investigation of this history had changed his "perspective" and transformed his "consciousness." "I have been liberated," he wrote.[73]

Bogle's book—which was subtitled *An Interpretive History of Blacks in American Films*—heralded the arrival of a new phenomenon: comprehensive, critical histories of marginalized groups' depictions in American motion pictures, written by members of those groups and published to a wide readership. The same year would witness Marjorie

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[73] Donald Bogle, *Toms, Coons, Mulattoes, Mammies, and Bucks: An Interpretive History of Blacks in American Films*, paperback edition (New York: Bantam Books, 1974), vii–ix, xii–xiii.

Rosen's *Popcorn Venus: Women, Movies, and the American Dream*, soon followed by Molly Haskell's *From Reverence to Rape: The Treatment of Women in the Movies* (1974) and, a few years later, Vito Russo's *The Celluloid Closet: Homosexuality in the Movies* (1981). Although each book had its own particular aims, all of them would promise, and would seek to effect, a transformation in their readers' consciousness when it came to the movies and their history. They were crucially indebted both to the vibrant cultures of film criticism and appreciation that had emerged by the late 1960s (although they eschewed the commitments to critical theory and continental philosophy that had begun to characterize academic film study by the time of their writing) and to the black critical tradition energized by the civil rights movement. Drawing together the resources and evaluative impulses of film culture and the activist commitments of identity-based critical traditions, these books presented and consolidated influential narratives of American motion pictures' long tradition of denigrating, stereotyping, and excluding marginalized groups. They popularized a critical account of American film history.

To be certain, these books lacked any formal connection with one another, and they were not intended to constitute a coherent intellectual intervention on the subject of marginalized groups and the motion pictures. Their arguments and approaches varied. Bogle aimed both to illuminate the stereotyped roles black actors had played—building upon the typology of such roles enumerated in his book's title—and to recuperate and recapture those actors themselves. Rosen traced a linked history of women's position in American society and depiction on screen, particularly in the realms of work and sex, highlighting how the latter distorted the reality of the former. Haskell, concerned more squarely with film and less directly with broader social trends, offered a declension

narrative of decline: if films had always bolstered the "big lie" of women's inferiority, Hollywood's classical period had also paradoxically produced real-life women—female stars—who "projected … images of emotional and intellectual power," power that dissipated as the studio system fractured and male directors came to dominate the industry.[74] For Russo, effeminacy and invisibility were the key analytic terms; he argued that the movies had long disparaged male effeminacy and had struggled to keep homosexuals invisible during the reign of the Production Code, only to distort and denigrate them once the Code gave way in the late 1960s.

However, the books had striking commonalities as well. At their core, all were products of the postwar film culture. Film archives, repertory theaters, and televised reruns of old movies permitted each author to methodically screen many dozens of relevant films and to produce volumes heavily illustrated with stills and production photos. Institutions like MOMA and the Library of Congress, the authors acknowledged, made their books possible.[75] Rosen and Russo each completed film studies coursework.[76] And although the authors did not engage extensively with one another's work in print, nor did their analyses tend to consider the possible intersections of racial,

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[74] Haskell, *From Reverence to Rape*, 8.

[75] See Bogle, *Toms, Coons, Mulattoes, Mammies, and Bucks*, 1974, vii–viii; Rosen, *Popcorn Venus*, [6]; Haskell, *From Reverence to Rape*, [iv]; Russo, *The Celluloid Closet*, [ix]. Moreover, these institutions may have helped to weave connective threads among the projects. Russo, for instance, worked in the circulation department of MOMA's film library from 1971 through 1973, and wrote in his acknowledgments that "the idea for this book took shape" during that time. It certainly seems possible that he crossed paths with Bogle, Rosen, or Haskell while they were conducting research for their own projects. On Russo's work at MOMA, see Michael R. Schiavi, *Celluloid Activist: The Life and Times of Vito Russo* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2011), 102–104.

[76] On Russo, see Schiavi, *Celluloid Activist: The Life and Times of Vito Russo*, 66, 88. On Rosen, see "Marjorie Rosen," *LinkedIn*, accessed February 8, 2015, https://www.linkedin.com/pub/marjorie-rosen/7/585/584; "Professor Rosen Named Faculty Fellow," *Lehman E-News*, April 20, 2009, http://www.lehman.edu/lehman/enews/2009_04_20/feat_rosen.html.

gender, and sexual stereotyping, they were conscious of participating in a broader conversation about images of marginalized groups in the movies. Rosen, for example, suggested that *Popcorn Venus* constituted a needed addition to existing investigations of such topics as "blacks in film, [and] Indians in film." Russo cited Haskell's book, posing his "big lie" ("we do not exist") as a corollary of hers, and analogized the "pattern of oppression" facing gays in the movies to "the one suffered by blacks, long typified on screen as simpletons and domestics."[77]

Each of the four authors offered a subjective analytical perspective rooted in his or her personal identity. Bogle, Rosen, and Haskell framed their books with personal anecdotes, invoking youthful fascinations with the movies and then turning to questions of his or her own raised consciousness. For Bogle, seeing *Carmen Jones* at age six inaugurated an affection for black actors that repeatedly collided with the "apathy" and disapproval of black peers who objected to the characters they played; after the experience at *Ebony*, he determined to recover "[his] own cultural heritage." The work ultimately became "a statement on the development of my own consciousness," as he worked out the "problems and difficulties as well as pleasures" he derived from black images on screen. For Rosen, it was at *Pinocchio* that "the screen world" first "created for me a secret garden, a special haven"; film became a way of understanding and structuring relationships with others. "Movies were such a formative part of my life," she wrote, "that for years I never questioned the visions of reality they presented." Haskell opened with her "first idol," Margaret O'Brien, and then recounted her budding consciousness during adolescence of the gap between her own self-conception and others

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[77] Rosen, *Popcorn Venus*, 9; Russo, *The Celluloid Closet*, xii, 35.

expectations, and the similar "whore-virgin dichotomy" in films. Of the four, only Russo
did not offer a similar anecdote, but he indicated clearly at the close of his short
introduction that he counted himself among the group whose presence in America—"*our*
existence"—Hollywood had denied.[78]

The book's subjective perspectives lent their analyses a somewhat ambivalent
relationship with the past. Consider, for instance, the contrast between Bogle's book and
a near-contemporary one, Daniel J. Leab's *From Sambo to Superspade: The Black
Experience in Motion Pictures*, published two years later. Leab, a white academic
writing about African Americans in film, was sharply critical in his analysis of
Hollywood's depiction of blacks on screen, but he left little room for nuance. For Leab,
African Americans were largely victims of their film depictions; black actors were not, in
any real sense, actors in the story he told. Bogle perceived something more nuanced,
born of his skepticism about the characterizations that appeared on screen but also his
identification with the performers playing these roles, and he described a history "in
which actors have elevated kitsch or trash and brought to it arty qualities if not pure art
itself." Similarly, Haskell asked readers to recognize the "inventive victories" of the
classical era's performers, which she deemed "the foundation of [women's] present
claims to independence."[79] Such identification was a key feature of "images of"
criticism, which was, after all, structured around the author's search—frustrated though it
may have been—for recognizable images on screen. Even at their most condemnatory,

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[78] Bogle, *Toms, Coons, Mulattoes, Mammies, and Bucks*, 1974, v–xiii; Rosen, *Popcorn Venus*, 7;
Haskell, *From Reverence to Rape*, v–xii; Russo, *The Celluloid Closet*, xii.

[79] Leab, *From Sambo to Superspade*; Bogle, *Toms, Coons, Mulattoes, Mammies, and Bucks*, 1974,
viii; Haskell, *From Reverence to Rape*, 31.

these books were inflected by a desire to mark a long history of presence and to identify redeemable antecedents if they could be found.

Such quests were framed against sharp-edged indictments of Hollywood's present offerings. "I think all of us ask ourselves despairingly just how far American movies have progressed in the past half-century in recording the black experience accurately or sensitively," Bogle wrote. "In some ways it does not look as if we have progressed at all."[80] Haskell called the decade preceding her book's publication "from a woman's point of view … the most disheartening in screen history," with "the roles and prominence accorded women … show[ing] no signs of improving."[81] Russo characterized the films that followed the final end of the Code in 1968 as a "Hollywood horror show" and, with few exceptions, "abysmally offensives sops to a bigoted public."[82] Setting contemporary movies alongside a transformed and transforming social reality, these books found the former deeply lacking, full of both backlash and persisting bias.

They placed such indictments, though, in historical perspective, positioning themselves within carefully calibrated narratives of continuity and change. On the one hand, the sorry state of contemporary motion pictures confirmed how the movies had systematically enforced the marginalization of African Americans, or women, or gays and lesbians all along. Such were the stark assertions with these books opened and closed:

- "all black actors … have played stereotyped roles,"

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[80] Bogle, *Toms, Coons, Mulattoes, Mammies, and Bucks*, 1974, 326.

[81] Haskell, *From Reverence to Rape*, 323.

[82] Russo, *The Celluloid Closet*, 184.

- "the Cinema Woman is a Popcorn Venus, a delectable but insubstantial hybrid of cultural distortions,"

- "we have had an industry dedicated for the most part to reinforcing the lie," and

- "There have never been lesbians or gay men in Hollywood films. Only homosexuals."[83]

Yet in between such stark declarations, the authors outlined careful typologies of stereotypes and roles; they sorted, compared, and contrasted individual depictions; and they traced shifts and trajectories from one decade or era to the next. They revealed, if only implicitly, possibilities for change and they took a certain pleasure in placing the films of decades past within a broader critical perspective.

What these books did not do was to wade deeply into the thorny question of precisely how motion pictures shape society, and vice versa. The authors tended to invoke an interdependent relationship between the two. Rosen, for instance, argued both that "Hollywood's values have influenced a gullible Public" and that "an image … is molded from prevailing audience attitudes," and she concluded by pondering how "movies unconsciously or consciously define and reflect us." Russo similarly characterized the movies as "a reflector of society," yet also wrote of "the negative effects of what homosexuals learn about themselves from the distortions of the media." Haskell described movies as "looking glasses into the past, being both cultural artifacts

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[83] Bogle, *Toms, Coons, Mulattoes, Mammies, and Bucks*, 1974, viii–ix; Rosen, *Popcorn Venus*, 10; Haskell, *From Reverence to Rape*, 2; Russo, *The Celluloid Closet*, 246.

and mirrors," but also described the movie industry as a "propaganda" apparatus.[84] Although Haskell and Russo did pinpoint specific causes for changes in film images over time (the breakup of the studio system, the fall of the Code), Bogle and Rosen tended not even to go that far, instead favoring the passive voice or writing generally of "Hollywood" or "the movies," rather than identifying anyone in particular as the creators of film content. Introducing his five core interpretive categories, for example, Bogle wrote, "All were character types used for the same effect: to entertain by stressing Negro inferiority," while in the 1930s, "Hollywood had found a new place for the Negro" as servants. Similarly, Rosen wrote of the silent films of the 1920s, "Films hadn't succeeded in keeping women in the kitchen…but now the industry had a fair chance of stopping her at the factory gates, beauty salon doors, and lingerie counters."[85]

Rather than attempting to measure the effect of film stereotypes on audiences or to place blame for their existence, these books instead embraced a vocabulary of collective psychology. The movies were expressions of "our dream life," as Haskell put it, and movie women "generally emerge as the projections of male values … the vehicle of men's fantasies, the 'anima' of the collective male unconscious, and the scapegoat of men's fears." Russo wrote of a film history shaped by a "closet mentality," in which "the true nature of homosexuality haunted only the dim recesses of our celluloid consciousness." In Bogle's account, "Hollywood satisfied" the "masochistic cravings" of white audiences in the immediate postwar period with pro-tolerance films, and audience "quirks, their insecurities, and their guilt feelings created more surely than anything else"

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[84] Rosen, *Popcorn Venus*, 9, 388; Russo, *The Celluloid Closet*, 189, 176–177; Haskell, *From Reverence to Rape*, xii, 2.

[85] Bogle, *Toms, Coons, Mulattoes, Mammies, and Bucks*, 1974, 2, 47; Rosen, *Popcorn Venus*, 85.

this "cycle of penetrating motion pictures."[86] More than anything else, for the authors of

these books, the movies were products of the collective fears and preoccupations of some

amalgamation of those who worked in the industry that created them, the performers who

acted in them, and the audiences who viewed them.

While the precise mechanics of this relationship were rarely specified, its

nationality was definitive. This collective consciousness was an *American*

consciousness—indeed the "American Dream," a term Rosen invoked in her book's

subtitle and that was also central to early salvos by both Haskell (who called Hollywood

"the propaganda arm for the American Dream machine") and Russo (who wrote, "As

expressed on screen, America was a dream that had no room for the existence of

homosexuals.") [87] For each of these authors, America and Hollywood were the primary

frames of reference, and the connection between the two was taken as a natural and

obvious one.

Finally, these books offered a broadly similar prescription for change:

marginalized groups must gain greater control over their own representation. Bogle

proposed the Senegalese filmmaker Ousmane Sembène as a model. Like he did, the

"new black cinema" should forego "types" and "articulate the contemporary black man's

mind, his point of view, his aspirations and goals." Rosen declared, "It is time to start

utilizing feminine resources," while Haskell summoned women in the industry, female

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[86] Haskell, *From Reverence to Rape*, 39–40; Russo, *The Celluloid Closet*, xii, 6; Bogle, *Toms, Coons, Mulattoes, Mammies, and Bucks*, 1974, 201–202. Bogle also frequently employed a language of psychopathology to characterize the roles black actors played: the 1940s were a decade characterized by "Negro Entertainment Syndrome," and black female performers like Lena Horne and Hazel Scott by "sex-object syndrome" (Russo also described a "closet syndrome"); "blackface fixation … afflicted many of the players" in the all-black musical Cabin in the Sky. Ibid., 178–181; Russo, *The Celluloid Closet*, 164.

[87] Haskell, *From Reverence to Rape*, 2; Russo, *The Celluloid Closet*, xii.

actors, audiences, and women's groups all to enlist in the task of producing "modern equivalents" of the "camaraderie, the much-vaunted mutual support among women" that she celebrated in the films of the 1930s and 1940s period. Russo was perhaps most sour, declaring "the bottom line is the nature of the film industry itself" while celebrating independent, gay-produced films. But even he ended with a call for change in Hollywood, demanding its gays and lesbians come out, for "Invisibility is the great enemy."[88] Whether such representational control could be attained within the existing Hollywood system remained an open question.

These books together played a crucial role in popularizing widely a minority-identified, politicized, critical account of American film history that asserted that American motion pictures with their exclusions and their slanders were a lynchpin in the marginalization of American minorities (and implied, conversely, that incorporation and fair representation was a signal aspect of national belonging). Rather than worrying over the question of the movies' effects, these books took their power to be self-evident, proved by the long histories they traced. In a moment when these social movements were engaged in recovering group histories and asserting themselves as the proper representatives of their own interests, these books embraced the tools and techniques of film criticism and history to root complaints about individual present-day images in broader contexts, staking and substantiating a claim that unfair, damaging representations were systemic problems. They served as, called for, and justified an expanded political consciousness; a critical approach to motion pictures, present and past; and a restructuring of power in the motion picture industry.

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[88] Bogle, *Toms, Coons, Mulattoes, Mammies, and Bucks*, 1974, 344; Rosen, *Popcorn Venus*, 388; Haskell, *From Reverence to Rape*, 369–371; Russo, *The Celluloid Closet*, 240–246.

To Determine Empirically

Meanwhile, another mode of inquiry that began to emerge in the early 1960s substantiated a similarly broad set of claims against television. Methodical monitoring and analysis of how television represented African Americans emerged early in that decade, springing from alliances between scholars and interracial groups of concerned reformers. For two weeks in April 1962, for instance, more than sixty volunteers affiliated with the New York Society for Ethical Culture watched television with pen and paper in hand and "a clock or watch present." Each time a "Negro" appeared on screen, the volunteer recorded the "type of program," "type of appearance," and how long it lasted. Of the 308 half-hour blocks of programming the volunteers monitored on the city's three leading television stations, only 89 featured an African American. In about 30 percent of those instances, he or she appeared "in the role of a performer (musician, singer, or dancer)"; in about 15 percent, "as domestic or attendant"; and in about 10 percent, "in sports activity, usually as caddies." (The balance were "in white-collar role[s], including in audience," or in "other and unknown roles.") Blacks appeared on most music-related shows and over half of news and informational programs, but in none of the children's programs or westerns monitored, and only a couple of times in "daytime serials."

The monitoring effort, initiated by the Society's Committee on Integration, resulted in a report coauthored by Lawrence Plotkin, the committee's cochairman and a professor of psychology at the College of the City of New York. "It appears that in more than half of his appearances on television, the Negro is cast in traditional, stereotyped

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roles," the report declared, and "it would seem that programs designed primarily for women [i.e., soap operas] and children systematically exclude the presence of the Negro from the American scene." The data all added up to this: "the television industry is not keeping abreast of the changing American social scene." Amid intensifying agitation for black civil rights, the "discrepancy between the Negro as a focal point for national interest and his fictional depiction" was profound, and damaging. Yet this "general educational problem of the Negro image conveyed to millions of homes," could be solved easily, and television's considerable power redirected to do great good. "Here, with vision," the report asserted, "the television industry could serve its Nation well by portraying the emergent Negro as he really is or in treating the historical past as it really existed."[89]

As the Society's report made clear in its opening paragraphs, the monitoring project's aim "to determine empirically the frequency with which Negroes appear on television" and "how the Negro is depicted" was rooted in preexisting assumptions regarding "television's educational impact in forming attitudes and molding opinion" for "millions of Americans." It also sprang from a sense that such depictions were at the heart of the broader problem of race in the United States; given the "increasing concern and discussion about the image of the Negro on television," the volunteers sought to "observe at first hand one dramatic aspect of the Nation's most painful ethical dilemma, the treatment of the Negro as a second-class citizen." And the fruits of that observation served only to confirm the understandings that had prompted it. "As a psychologist,"

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[89] Lawrence Plotkin and Douglas Pugh, *The Frequency of Appearance of Negroes on Television* (New York: New York Society for Ethical Culture, 1962). The report is reproduced in United States Congress, House of Representatives, Committee on Education and Labor, *Employment Practices in the Performing Arts*, October 29-November 2, 1962, 87th Congress, 2nd Session (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1963), 22–27.

Plotkin testified later that year before a Congressional subcommittee considering black employment in television, "the impact [of television] in forming attitudes and forming opinions in probably what is America's foremost national problem, is beyond calculation." Combining bold claims about television's powerful effect on viewers with empirical data produced by systematic monitoring of television content—and asserting a close connection between television images and American citizenship—the Society's report previewed ideas about television and strategies for transforming it that would be widely embraced in succeeding years not only by African Americans, but also by other marginalized groups. If the books on "images of" groups in motion pictures popularized a critical approach to the film past, content monitoring and analysis provided a tool for critically viewing the televisual present.

It was a tool developed collaboratively by reformers and scholars responding both to the nature of the television medium and to the government regulations to which it was subject. By the mid-1960s, American television was characterized by the joint monopoly of the three major networks, which together held the affiliation of about 85 percent of the country's more than 700 broadcast stations. But it was these individual broadcasters, rather than the networks, which were licensed by the Federal Communications Commission and subject to its regulations, which were animated by the standard set forth in the Communications Act of 1934: "public interest, convenience, and necessity."[90] (The networks were affected only in their capacity as owners of five broadcast stations each, in major television markets.) Television stations were required to renew their licenses every three years, ostensibly providing an occasion to evaluate each licensee's

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[90] Cole and Oettinger, *Reluctant Regulators*, 4, 25–28.

adherence to FCC policies and technical standards and its service to the public interest—particularly, its efforts to ascertain community needs by interviewing local leaders and to create responsive programming. But benchmarks for evaluating applications were generally unclear or nonexistent, and renewal tended in practice to be automatic.[91] Individuals could petition the FCC to deny the renewal or transfer of a broadcast license only if they could demonstrate that they would experience economic injury or electronic interference as a result of approval.

An effort to alter this status quo began in the segregated Deep South. Two years after the Society for Ethical Culture conducted its study of African Americans on New York's television stations, the United Church of Christ's (UCC) Office of Communication initiated an effort to track discussions of race and the participation of blacks in a week's worth of programming on WLBT-TV in Jackson, Mississippi. Black residents and local NAACP activists had complained about the station's racist programming and biased coverage of the civil rights movement as early as 1955, just two years after it was first licensed by the FCC. Under the direction of the UCC's Everett Parker, and overseen by a professor of political science at Millsaps College, paid volunteers, including college students and professors, made a detailed record of "each program, each station break, each commercial or promotional announcement." The results of the monitoring effort were intended as counterevidence against the data regarding a "composite week" of programming that the station was required to submit to the FCC as part of the renewal process, and they formed the centerpiece of the UCC's challenge to WLBT's license renewal that year.

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[91] Ibid., 134–202.

The five-year legal battle that ensued ended in 1969 with the challengers'

triumph; a Court of Appeals ruling opened the FCC's license renewal proceedings to

individual citizens and citizen groups. The implications of that ruling will be explored in

greater detail in Chapter 4, but the struggle against WLBT provided a roadmap for

subsequent challengers.[92] Methodical monitoring and analysis of content played a central

role in this strategy—the Court of Appeals decision had affirmed the "probative value" of

such monitoring—and the roadmap circulated quickly within a rapidly growing network

of public interest organizations dedicated to expanding citizens' role in broadcasting.[93]

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[92] Kay Mills, *Changing Channels: The Civil Rights Case That Transformed Television* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2004), 68–75. On the WLBT case, see also Steven D. Classen, *Watching Jim Crow: The Struggles over Mississippi TV, 1955-1969* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004). On the "composite week" requirement, see Cole and Oettinger, *Reluctant Regulators*, 135–137.

[93] Cole and Oettinger, *Reluctant Regulators*, 64–68; U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, *Window Dressing on the Set: Women and Minorities in Television* (Washington, DC, 1977), 61. Less formal practices of television monitoring also enjoyed favor among activists seeking to capture a sense of the medium's content and communicate with one another about it. For instance, around the time of the Society for Ethical Culture's initial study the New York-based Committee for the Employment of Negro Performers (CENP) enjoined its members to monitor a specific set of television programs filmed in New York and record when black performers appeared, whether they were "depicted in a subservient status or in such a way as to suggest the drawing of a color line," and where missed opportunities existed to "utiliz[e] Negro performers in roles"—particularly as government employees in the public safety, civil service, education, medical, and military sectors—"which reflect the Negro's position in American life as a first class citizen." It is not clear whether the CENP cooperated in the Ethical Culture investigation, was inspired by it to start its own, or coincidentally launched its effort at around the same time. The materials in CORE's records are scanty and lack dates. See "Report to Committee," n.d , Series 5, Box 69, Folder 3 [Reel 46, File 500], The Papers of the Congress of Racial Equality, 1941–1967 (Sanford, NC: Microfilming Corporation of America, 1980) (hereafter, CORE); "Instructions for Monitoring Television Programs," n.d , Series 5, Box 69, Folder 3 [Reel 46, File 500], CORE. Monitors were also encouraged to record the program's sponsor or advertisers and seek out data about sales of the products in question among black consumers. CENP members drew on the results of these monitoring efforts when laying out their grievances before the unions and the networks. They also explored the notion that this evidence could allow them to win the ear of the FCC. Committee for the Employment of Negro Performers Newsletter No. 1, Series 5, Box 24, Folder 9 [Reel 27, File 146], CORE; "Report to Committee"; "Instructions for Monitoring Television Programs."

In the 1970s, the National Gay Task Force encouraged recipients of its media "alerts" to monitor particular episodes and series of shows likely to feature gay characters. See, e.g., Loretta Lotman, "Alert," n.d. [c. fall 1975], Gay Media Task Force (GMTF) records, #7315, box 1, folder 4, Division of Rare and Manuscript Collections, Cornell University Library.

By the 1970s, content monitoring, a tool developed partly through the initiative of black activists with the input of scholarly experts, was embraced by other social movements as a crucial element of an increasingly vigorous crusade to reshape television. In 1972, members of the National Organization for Women prepared careful empirical studies of the narrow, limited content for and featuring women on New York's WABC and Washington's WRC, the basis for blockbuster petitions to deny the renewal of those stations' FCC licences. Subsequently, NOW members honed to a fine art the systematic monitoring of television programming, with detailed instructions provided in an "FCC Kit" distributed to local branches.[94] Kathleen Bonk, who eventually helmed NOW committees on mass media, got her start in television activism by monitoring Pittsburgh television stations as part of a mass communication course at the University of Pittsburgh.[95] As the historian Allison Perlman has argued, NOW's mode of monitoring saw television "as a medium whose programming was continuous and whose impact should be gauged accordingly," in line with the ideas (published around the same time) of the Marxist critic Raymond Williams.[96]

Bonk's resume suggests how the work of these activists was closely connected to the academic studies of communication. Lawrence Plotkin—an academic if not a media scholar—had directed a second study for the Society for Ethical Culture in 1964, and two

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[94] "National Organization for Women Challenges WABC-TV License on Grounds of Blatant Sexism" [press release], May 1, 1972, National Organization for Women (NOW) Records, MC 496, folder 46.22, Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute, Harvard University; Whitney Adams, "Report on the F.C.C. Task Force," October 5, 1972, NOW Records, MC 496, folder 46.22, Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute, Harvard University; "Model Agreement Between NOW Chapter and KPIG-TV (AM-FM)," n.d., NOW Records, MC 496, folder 48.17, Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute, Harvard University. On NOW's success, see Perlman, "Feminists in the Wasteland," 424. NOW's FCC activism will be discussed in greater detail in chapter 4.

[95] Bradley, *Mass Media and the Shaping of American Feminism*, 233–234.

[96] Perlman, "Feminists in the Wasteland," 12.

more on television commercials for the NAACP later in the decade.[97] Colleagues and

students of George Gerbner's at the University of Pennsylvania, including Nancy

Signorielli and Larry Gross, would soon draw on the Cultural Indicators data to write on

television portrayals of minorities and gender roles for both scholarly and non-scholarly

audiences. By the early 1970s, students of communication began to publish research that

drew upon content analysis to assess how television presented a range of minority

groups: blacks in network newscasts, women in prime-time entertainment, the

occupational status of ethnic minorities in dramatic series, women in children's and

family programs, women in soap operas.[98] Activists drew heavily on these studies—

those described here, for instance, were all cited in a 1977 report by the U.S. Commission

on Civil Rights to support its criticisms of the depictions of women and minorities on

television. The report's director, Helen H. Franzwa, was herself a scholar of

communication.[99] (The investigation and report will be discussed in the next chapter.)

Gay activists in Philadelphia conducted systematic monitoring of television content and,

by the 1980s, developed alliances with scholars at the University of Pennsylvania to

produce "sophisticated analyses of how lesbians and gays are treated in local media."[100]

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[97] Lawrence Plotkin, *The Frequency of Appearance of Negroes in Television* (New York: New York Society for Ethical Culture, 1964); Lawrence Plotkin, *The Frequency of Negro Appearance in Televised Commercials* (New York: NAACP Legal Defense Fund, 1967); Lawrence Plotkin, *The Frequency of Negro Appearance on Televised Commercials* (New York: NAACP Legal Defense & Educational Fund, 1970).

[98] These represent some of the studies cited in the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, *Window Dressing on the Set*, 2. See also, e.g., Joseph R. Dominick and Gail E. Rauch, "Image of Women in Network TV Commercials," *Journal of Broadcasting* 16, no. 3 (Summer 1972): 259–66; Gaye Tuchman, "Women's Depiction by the Mass Media," *Signs* 4, no. 3 (Spring 1979): 528–42.

[99] Helen H. Franzwa, "Working Women in Fact and Fiction," *Journal of Communication* 24, no. 2 (June 1974): 104–9.

[100] See "Gay Media Project of Philadelphia" brochure, 1975, series V (Ephemera), folder "Gay Media Project of Philadelphia (PA)," International Gay Information Center collection, Manuscripts and Archives Division, New York Public Library. Activists affiliated with the Gay Media Project of

Within the academy, as outside it, members of historically marginalized groups and their supporters used content monitoring and analysis to substantiate statistically their already-strong sense that television routinely offered only circumscribed and distorted representations of African Americans, women, and other groups—and thus required thoroughgoing transformation.

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Between the late 1940s and the late 1960s, the intellectual conversation concerning marginalized groups and moving images underwent an enormous shift. Dramatic changes occurred in precisely how Americans understood the close relationship between the place of minorities in American society and the ways in which they were represented on screen, and in where and by whom this relationship was explored. The postwar years' social scientific studies of the success or failure of individual movies in fostering tolerance gave way, by the latter half of the 1960s, to a sprawling conversation about screen images of historically marginalized groups, and to broad indictments of the repeated misrepresentations of minorities and women, year after year in movie theaters and day after day on television screens. This consequential shift was the product of a range of factors, including evolving ways of watching and appreciating motion pictures, the rise of television and the movement to reform it, and changes in academic disciplines. Most crucially, however, the shift was the work of African American activists and

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Philadelphia may have benefitted from connections with scholars at the Annenberg School during the 1970s; scholars there cooperated with Philadelphia activists during the 1980s. See Craig J. Davidson and Michael G. Valentini, "Cultural Advocacy: A Non-Legal Approach to Fighting Defamation of Lesbians and Gays," *Law & Sexuality: A Review of Lesbian and Gay Legal Issues* 2 (1992): n. 25.

intellectuals, and of participants in other social movements inspired by the black civil

rights struggle, who together popularized influential understandings of the importance of

"images" on screen and drew unprecedented scholarly and popular attention to the pursuit

of fair representation in motion pictures and television. As a result of their efforts, the

1960s and 1970s were characterized by almost constant protests of particular movies and

television programs deemed offensive—but also by vigorous new attempts to alter

fundamental dynamics of power within the motion picture and television industries. By

the mid-1960s, changes in American politics and media had begun to open one possible

avenue toward this end: securing the aid and intervention of the federal government.

Chapter 4

The Government Has To Do Something About It

In a midtown Manhattan meeting room in late 1962, Harlem congressman Adam Clayton Powell, Jr., the chairman of the U.S. House Committee on Education and Labor, conducted five days of exploratory hearings on the topic "Employment Practices in the Performing Arts." Prominent film and television producers, leaders of theatrical unions, network and advertising executives, several top African American stars, and advocates for the interests of black performers were invited to provide "background material" that, Powell promised, would inform future Congressional action. The hearings' official ambit was broad; as related by *Show Business* publisher Leo Shull, their goal was to explore "whether there is discrimination against Puerto Ricans and Negroes in the performing arts: radio, TV, films, drama, dance, the concert world." But their immediate origins were in the grievances and activism of the Committee for the Employment of Negro Performers (CENP), a group formed earlier that year to win "equality for Negro performers" on the New York stage, as well as in television and in motion pictures. Reports on CENP's activities in the *New York Amsterdam News* had caught Powell's attention, and he enthusiastically deployed his recently acquired power as chairman—he was the only committee member present—to provide a forum for the activist performers to state their cases, and to demand that those in power explain "who is the guilty party."[1]

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[1] Shull's report was reprinted in the published version of the hearings, United States Congress, House of Representatives, Committee on Education and Labor, *Employment Practices in the Performing Arts*, October 29-November 2, 1962, 87th Congress, 2nd Session (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1963), 2–3. On the role of CENP and the *Amsterdam News*'s coverage, see Ibid., 22.

During the haphazard, "entirely informal" hearings, performers affiliated with CENP, along with other outspoken black actors and Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) staff member Norman Hill, described the influence of the stage and screen, producers' responsibility to reflect African Americans' changing place on the "national scene," and the need for new casting policies to ensure a regular presence of black extras and bit players. Sidney Poitier, Ossie Davis, and Diahann Carroll, among others, described the barriers they had confronted in their careers and the common experience of being the lone African American backstage or on set. Lawrence Plotkin of the Society for Ethical Culture presented the results of his group's recent analysis of television content. TV executives and union leaders drew attention to their existing policies prohibiting discrimination while professing a willingness to cooperate with black advocates, and industry figures like Ed Sullivan, the director Otto Preminger, and the theatrical producer Alexander Cohen attributed any underutilization of black talent to "lack of initiative," "thoughtlessness," and perhaps "subconscious" discrimination. As Dave Hepburn of the *Amsterdam News* summarized, "The actors blamed the networks and theater producers, who in turn blamed the unions and playwrights, who in turn blamed the actors themselves."[2]

During the 1960s and 1970s, as Chapter 3 described, African Americans and then other marginalized groups produced unsparing assessments of how they were unfairly represented in motion pictures and on television. Simultaneously, these groups acted to alter this status quo. They made use of numerous strategies and tactics in pursuing fairer

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[2] United States Congress, House of Representatives, Committee on Education and Labor, *Employment Practices in the Performing Arts*; Dave Hepburn, "Show Folks Duck Race Bias Charge," *New York Amsterdam News*, November 10, 1962.

representation in moving images, from pickets and protests to boycotts to direct negotiations with producers. Powell's 1962 hearings offered an early indication of two developments that would be particularly crucial in shaping the strategies that advocates developed and employed during these decades—first, the tantalizing possibility of government intervention in television and the movies on behalf of marginalized groups, and second, increased attention to the dynamic connections between screen content and "employment practices."

Powell's inquiry was likely the most significant initiative taken by the federal government since the end of World War II to support African Americans' struggle for fair representation on screen. It came at a time when the government was deepening its formal commitment to African Americans' equal citizenship, and when African Americans themselves enjoyed growing influence in Washington, D.C. Where white bureaucrats in the Office of War Information had helped to advance the wartime effort to reshape motion pictures, a black elected leader now wielded the gavel in this probe of the movies, television, and other "performing arts." Powell himself acknowledged the transformation. When the actress Hilda Simms remarked, "I'm terribly sorry [that] this thing, this investigation didn't happen 15 or 20 years ago," he joked, "I wasn't chairman then." The statement revealed Powell's self-regard, but also suggested the fast-changing political landscape. By the early 1960s, African American migration North and black voters' vital role in the postwar Democratic coalition had allowed urban black politicians like Powell to amass seniority and clout in Congress. In 1962, increasing black political power and the long movement for civil rights were about to precipitate a dramatic expansion of the federal government's obligations to enforce racial equality. African

Americans—and, soon, women, Mexican Americans, other marginalized social groups—raised their expectations accordingly.

Indeed, testimony given during the week's sessions bespoke a growing confidence that the government could and should intervene to ensure fair representation of African Americans in the entertainment industry. Powell repeatedly raised the possibility of amending the 1959 Labor Management Reporting and Disclosure Act to require theatrical unions to "fairly represent all people in the industry," although he suggested he might "bide [his] time" if the unions voluntarily took a more aggressive stand on minority casting. Regardless of the details, he promised at one point, "we will get some form of legislation out of this committee in January."[3] CORE's Hill suggested that a provision in the Communications Act of 1934 prohibiting "unjust or unreasonable discrimination" by "any common carrier" was applicable to the problem of discrimination in television casting.[4] (This was incorrect; television broadcasters, although covered by the law, were not defined as common carriers under it.) The chairman of New York's State Commission on Human Rights outlined his agency's initiatives on minority employment in the entertainment industry, but he agreed with the assertion "that the problem ... is of such a national and international significance that it falls logically, legally, and morally within the purview of the Federal Government."[5]

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[3] United States Congress, House of Representatives, Committee on Education and Labor, *Employment Practices in the Performing Arts*, 5, 14, 33, 112.

[4] Ibid., 71–72.

[5] Ibid., 63–68.

CENP's Godfrey Cambridge summarized a common sentiment when he declared, "I feel the Government has to do something about it."[6]

For Cambridge the "it" that required government redress was not only the lack of roles for black performers like himself, but also the fact that most available roles were available were in "Negro problem pictures" and in movies and programs depicting an all-black "Negro fantasy world." Powell's hearings repeatedly addressed the content of motion pictures and television alongside casting procedures and union policies. But "employment practices" provided their framework, and were their ultimate focus. This is not surprising, for labor issues were the domain of Powell's committee, and the CENP, whose politicking had prompted the hearings, was part of a deliberate effort by black performers to describe the lack of "quality," non-stereotyped roles as a problem of labor relations. (This effort will be described in detail in Chapter 5.) The Powell hearings' focus on employment practices also reflected and anticipated a broader reality: that matters of employment seemed more open to government intervention than screen content itself. Employment was already subject to government regulation, and the passage of the 1964 Civil Rights Act would soon create broad federal prohibitions on discrimination based on race, sex, and religion. Powell's hearings hinted how struggles against discrimination in employment in the television and motion picture industries, and for affirmative action in hiring, would be crucial to future efforts to ensure fair representation on screen, especially when those efforts sought to involve the government.

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[6] Ibid., 85. The testimony also revealed the transformations in federal policy already under way. An NBC executive noted that, as a subsidiary of the Radio Corporation of America, a defense contractor, the network participated in the Kennedy administration's "Plans for Progress" program to voluntarily remove racial barriers to hiring and advancement in the defense industry. Ibid., 42–43. Although the majority of attention focused on possible federal interventions, Cambridge also suggested that New York State could take minority employment into account when deciding whether to issue permits for film shoots. Ibid., 85.

Despite Powell's promises, the 1962 hearings produced no legislation. But six tumultuous years later, in the wake of the civil rights movement's dramatic legislative victories and the searing violence of assassinations and urban revolt, the federal government once again raised the possibility of intervention to reshape moving images— and once again suggested employment as the best avenue for doing so. In 1968, President Lyndon Johnson's National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders called for federal attention to the problem of race and mass communication. The Kerner Commission, as it was commonly known, argued that "the media have thus far failed to report adequately on the causes and consequences of civil disorders and the underlying problems of race relations," charging that the news media's "failing to portray the Negro as a matter of routine and in the context of the total society" had deepened "the black-white schism in this country." Although focused on news coverage, the commission's recommendations also suggested that "Negroes should appear more frequently in dramatic and comedy series" on television, and urged "programs whose subjects are rooted in the ghetto and its problems."[7]

Yet the commission explicitly foreswore any government oversight of media content, explaining that "only a press unhindered by government can contribute to freedom." Instead, it called for efforts—voluntary, not mandatory, ones—to improve content and expand black employment "in positions of significant responsibility" in news organizations. As the media scholar Chon Noriega has argued, the Kerner Commission's assessment of the news media at once "place[d] racial discrimination and growing social

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[7] "The News Media and the Disorders," in *Report of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders* (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1968), reprinted in Darnell M. Hunt, ed., *Channeling Blackness: Studies on Television and Race in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 25–45.

unrest squarely within the context of a mediated nation" and steered discussions of potential remedies toward the pursuit of equality in off-screen employment rather than a direct assault on "problematic discourse." The Kerner Commission endorsed the notion that visibility in moving images was a crucial part of national belonging, and deserving of government scrutiny. But its prescriptions, tempered by an understanding of "freedom" that made any intervention in content impossible and that made voluntary changes in hiring practices preferable, suggested the fundamental challenges that would face any advocates who attempted to enlist the government's aid in actually securing fair representation for marginalized groups in motion pictures and television.[8]

Nevertheless, in the decade that followed the Kerner Commission's report, African Americans, Mexican Americans, feminists, and other groups waged a series of vigorous efforts to do just that. Their tools of choice were the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC), the Federal Communications Commission (FCC), and the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights (CCR). Some sought to alter screen content directly, both by attempting to mobilize existing government regulations to fight "demeaning," "distorted," and "stereotyped" portrayals and by proposing new regulations to discourage such content. More often, they pursued this same end indirectly, seeking to apply laws and regulations that forbade discrimination in employment. Diversifying the leadership of motion picture studios and television networks and broadcasters, they reasoned, would result in better programming and production decisions. At best, these efforts succeeded only partly. In some cases, they failed entirely.

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[8] "The News Media and the Disorders"; Chon A. Noriega, *Shot in America: Television, the State, and the Rise of Chicano Cinema* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), 29.

These outcomes resulted, in part, from the limited powers of the federal agencies tasked with enforcing equal opportunity in employment and regulating broadcasting. Despite the legislative and legal victories of the 1960s, the leaders and staff of the EEOC and FCC were often legally unable, and sometimes politically unwilling, to make the sorts of vigorous interventions advocates sought. Such impediments evinced the power of dual faiths—in free markets and in free expression—that were at once deeply rooted in American political culture and in ascendance during these years.[9] In the late 1960s and the 1970s, a building chorus advocated the wisdom of unleashing market forces, and conservatives and liberals alike sought to deregulate vast sectors of the economy.[10] This growing skepticism of federal interventions in the marketplace owed in no small part to the government's expanded role in ensuring the equality of African Americans and other long-marginalized groups, including through affirmative action policies.[11] Meanwhile, the same years witnessed the culmination of a long push toward loosening constraints on

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[9] Chon Noriega, writing about a later period, has noted the television industry's success in wedding the "free market" to "free speech" and flexibly deploying concepts both to defend its prerogatives. Chon A. Noriega, "The Numbers Game," *Jump Cut*, no. 39 (June 1994), http://www.ejumpcut.org/archive/onlinessays/JC39folder/numbersGame.html.

[10] On the growth of free-market advocacy, see Kim Phillips-Fein, *Invisible Hands: The Making of the Conservative Movement from the New Deal to Reagan* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2009); Bethany Moreton, *To Serve God and Wal-Mart: The Making of Christian Free Enterprise* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009); Daniel T. Rodgers, *Age of Fracture* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2011), chapter 2, esp. 56–63; Angus Burgin, *The Great Persuasion: Reinventing Free Markets since the Depression* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012). On deregulation specifically, see Stephen Breyer, *Regulation and Its Reform* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982); Eduardo Federico Canedo, "The Rise of the Deregulation Movement in Modern America, 1957-1980" (Ph.D. dissertation, Columbia University, 2008).

[11] See, e.g., Thomas Byrne Edsall and Mary D. Edsall, *Chain Reaction: The Impact of Race, Rights, and Taxes on American Politics*, 3rd ed. (New York: W. W. Norton, 1991); Eric Porter, "Affirming and Disaffirming Actions: Remaking Race in the 1970s," in *America in the Seventies*, ed. Beth Bailey and David Farber (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2004). For accounts of the success of conservative politics broadly that emphasize the centrality of race, see Matthew D. Lassiter, *The Silent Majority: Suburban Politics in the Sunbelt South* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006); Joseph Crespino, *In Search of Another Country: Mississippi and the Conservative Counterrevolution* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007).

free expression, including in moving images. A series of court rulings beginning in the 1950s had dismantled apparatuses of government censorship and restrictions on obscenity, and a presidential commission in 1970 recommended (albeit with great controversy) the full decriminalization of pornography. Simultaneously, the Motion Picture Production Code was progressively relaxed until, in 1968, it was replaced altogether with a less restrictive rating system.[12] Although advocates who pursued fair representation on screen did not see themselves as censors or, necessarily, as opponents of free enterprise, their efforts nevertheless prompted a repeated clash of visions: what was fairness to them was, to others, an affront to freedom. These advocates' struggles and their frequent frustration illustrate the poignant irony of American politics in the post-civil rights era, when the growing power of previously marginalized groups within the federal government coincided with growing efforts to constrain that government's power.[13]

In each of the three major efforts to enlist the government's aid in transforming motion pictures and television, this irony was evident. In 1969, an EEOC investigation into low rates of African American and Mexican American employment in Hollywood

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[12] See, e.g., Stephen Vaughn, *Freedom and Entertainment: Rating the Movies in an Age of New Media* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), esp. chapter 1; Thomas Doherty, *Hollywood's Censor: Joseph I. Breen and the Production Code Administration* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), chapters 13–14; Robert O. Self, *All in the Family: The Realignment of American Democracy Since the 1960s* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2012), 203–209. As the controversy over the 1970 report by the President's Commission on Obscenity and Pornography suggests, the boundaries of free expression were deeply contested, from both the political left and the political right. The conflicts described in this chapter, between advocates of fair representation and critics who charged them with attacking free speech, find striking echoes in the work of some feminists in the 1970s and 1980s to oppose pornography, and in the somewhat later efforts of some universities to establish "speech codes" to protect minority students and faculty. See Ibid., 207–208; Rodgers, *Age of Fracture*, 212–214.

[13] Additionally, they reflect a second, more specific irony in the history of moving image censorship: African Americans, women, and gays and lesbians whose visibility on screen had long been constrained and skewed by both censorship laws and self-imposed industry policies were now themselves accused of censorship for promoting government regulations to encourage fairer representations.

resulted in a largely-ineffective voluntary settlement agreement, even as commissioners' assertive advocacy for greater racial diversity in "decision-making" positions prompted dismay in Congress and helped to cost the EEOC's chairman his job. In the early 1970s, organizations representing women, African Americans, Latinos, and other minorities filed hundreds of petitions asking the FCC to deny the renewal or transfer of television broadcasting licenses; although this tactic sometimes gave them leverage to negotiate changes to employment practices and programming at local stations, the FCC and the courts rejected advocates' most far-reaching claims of a right to respond to televised stereotypes. And in 1977, the CCR published a report condemning discrimination against and stereotyping of women and minorities by the television industry, and advocated stricter FCC regulation of network hiring practices and new FCC rules regarding fair portrayals of minorities and women—proposals rejected out of hand by the FCC as a "regulatory nightmare" and condemned by commentators as a recipe for censorship.

The legacies of these efforts had an irony of their own. In the course of advocates' tortuous pursuit of intervention by the federal government, the idea that visibility in moving images was essential to truly belonging in America nevertheless grew stronger and was embraced more widely. New social movements seized on this notion, as Mexican American and white feminist activists took up the legal precedents and legislative victories won by black civil rights activists and propelled the struggle for fair representation forward. And even as it became vividly clear in these years that the federal government would not, in fact, intervene directly to secure fair representation for minorities and women on screen, the government itself, from the Kerner Commission's report in 1968 to the statements of EEOC commissioners in 1969 to the CCR's detailed

study in 1977, both publicized this goal and endorsed its importance. These decades, then, were crucial ones in making fair representation in motion pictures and television at once an indispensible and an unofficial part of national belonging.

How Do You Reflect Our Nation?

The passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 might seem to have fulfilled Adam Clayton Powell's 1962 promise of "some form of legislation" to address "Employment Practices in the Performing Arts." Title VII of that landmark law forbade discrimination in employment based on "race, color, religion, sex, or national origin," and it created the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission to investigate complaints of discrimination.[14] In March 1969, the EEOC visited Los Angeles for one of a series of investigative hearings on employment conditions in various industries, setting its sights not only on aerospace and finance, but also on the motion picture studios and television networks. The hearings documented the paucity of both African Americans and Mexican Americans employed at all levels of Hollywood, and they prompted the Department of Justice (DOJ) to negotiate a voluntary two-year agreement that committed motion picture producers and Hollywood unions to reform off-camera hiring practices. Yet an assessment nine years later found minority employment gains to be "negligible."[15] And shortly following the Hollywood hearings, the EEOC's African American chairman, Clifford Alexander, resigned his post prematurely, after Senate Minority Leader Everett Dirksen (R-IL) attacked his conduct of the testimony and publicly threatened his job, and

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[14] John D. Skrentny, *The Minority Rights Revolution* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002), 85–88.

[15] California Advisory Committee to the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, *Behind the Scenes: Equal Employment Opportunity in the Motion Picture Industry*, 1978, 41.

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President Richard Nixon announced that he would not be reappointed upon the conclusion of his term.

The EEOC's Hollywood hearings and their aftermath vividly illustrated the barriers to federal intervention in the off-camera employment practices of the motion picture and television industries. They laid bare the weaknesses built into the apparatus meant to enforce Title VII, from the EEOC's limited budget to its inability (until 1972) to issue cease and desist orders. They also attracted, as the historian Eithne Quinn has argued, strong opposition from whites within the industry, who responded to the EEOC's push for affirmative action to break down deep-rooted discriminatory practices with ideas that anticipated "color-blind" conservatism.[16] And they revealed, finally, a fundamental disconnect between African American and Mexican American commissioners who saw fair representation on screen as inseparable from racial diversity in high-level managerial positions, and industry officials and Congressional critics, who objected to (and were occasionally befuddled by) this link and suggested that neither screen images nor management demographics were properly the EEOC's concern. Pursuing fair representation on screen indirectly, by securing diversity in employment off screen—the sort of approach the Kerner Commission had recommended—might have seemed a way to avoid challenging deeply cherished notions of freedom of expression. But as Alexander and his fellow commissioners discovered, it was hardly an approach free of controversy.

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[16] On the law's weaknesses, see, e.g., Nancy MacLean, *Freedom Is Not Enough: The Opening of the American Workplace* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006), 70–71; Eithne Quinn, "Closing Doors: Hollywood, Affirmative Action, and the Revitalization of Conservative Racial Politics," *Journal of American History* 99, no. 2 (September 2012): 473; Noriega, *Shot in America*, 61.

The 1969 EEOC hearings built on a longer history of advocacy against discrimination in off-screen employment in Hollywood. Not long after Powell's New York hearings—and prompted, like Powell had been, partly by greater organizing by black performers—the national office of the NAACP launched its most expansive campaign against the racial status quo in Hollywood since World War II, efforts that led to coverage in the national press of what one report in the *New York Times* termed "Hollywood's Negro Crisis."[17] Although fairer representation of African Americans on screen was a stated goal, the NAACP now confronted the situation in Hollywood as, first and foremost, a labor issue. Its attention, moreover, focused most closely not on the racial dynamics of casting (as Powell's hearings had), but instead on the integration of off-camera technical jobs. At a late-June 1963 press conference, Herbert Hill, the NAACP's national labor secretary, laid out two demands. First, films and television must "honestly" depict African Americans and "their culture and their rich experience," and end portrayals of "the Negro as an invisible man, as a menial, as a caricature, as an outworn stereotype." Second, the industry must integrate its "lily white" craft unions, opening technical jobs and apprenticeship programs to black candidates. Without quick progress on both fronts, Hill stated, the NAACP would ask the National Labor Relations Board to decertify the reticent craft unions, and it would organize protests of studios and theaters and "massive, national selective buying campaigns" of program sponsors.[18]

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[17] Murray Schumach, "Hollywood's Negro Crisis," *New York Times*, June 30, 1963.

[18] Associated Press, "Negro Leader Says Films, TV Next Targets," *Hartford Courant*, June 26, 1963; Murray Schumach, "N.A.A.C.P. Seeks Job Equality in Hollywood Film Companies," *New York Times*, June 26, 1963; Paul Weeks, "Negroes Plan Campaign to Integrate Films, TV," *Los Angeles Times*, June 26, 1963; John C. Waugh, "NAACP Scolds Hollywood on Race Practices," *Christian Science Monitor*, June 27, 1963.

Soon afterward, the NAACP's members endorsed Hill's threats in a resolution approved at the organization's annual convention in Chicago.[19]

In the negotiations that followed, Hill and his NAACP colleagues secured quick pledges of cooperation on the first point from the Association of Motion Picture Producers (AMPP), as well as the actors' and screenwriters' unions. Charlton Heston, a representative of the Screen Actors Guild, declared, "the creative people in the industry are interested in doing what the NAACP says it wants done."[20] But the organization encountered sharp resistance to their demands for racial integration from the leaders of Hollywood's craft unions, which nearly or completely excluded black members. "These are not trade unions," Hill opined. "These are medieval guilds."[21] Facing an NAACP ultimatum—the organization threatened to boycott Ford Motors, the sponsor of the NBC program *Hazel*, if no African Americans were employed on its crew that fall—the leaders of the International Alliance of Theatrical Stage Employees (IATSE) agreed to submit to their members a plan to add one African American per member union to the crew of each film or television show. Members of IATSE locals summarily rejected the plan, and

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[19] "Protests Urged Against Bias in Film, Television, Radio," July 13, 1963, Group III, Box A-110 [Part 24, Series A, Reel 25, Folder 645], Papers of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (Bethesda, MD: University Publications of America, 1982–2001).

[20] "Integration Parley Set for Today in Hollywood," *Los Angeles Times*, July 18, 1963; Murray Schumach, "N.A.A.C.P. Attacks Movie-TV Unions," *New York Times*, July 19, 1963; Paul Weeks, "Hollywood Group Starts Meetings With NAACP," *Los Angeles Times*, July 19, 1963; John C. Waugh, "Negroes Set Price to Film Industry," *Christian Science Monitor*, July 22, 1963; Murray Schumach, "Hollywood Trial," *New York Times*, July 28, 1963. For AMPP (later, Association of Motion Picture and Television Producers, AMPTP) leader Charles Boren's 1969 account of this earlier contact with the NAACP, see *Hearings before the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission on Utilization of Minority and Women Workers in Certain Major Industries, in Los Angeles, CA, March 12-14, 1969* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1969), 223.

[21] Schumach, "N.A.A.C.P. Seeks Job Equality in Hollywood Film Companies"; Weeks, "Negroes Plan Campaign to Integrate Films, TV"; Murray Schumach, "Hollywood Wary on Charges by the N.A.A.C.P.," *New York Times*, June 27, 1963; Schumach, "Hollywood's Negro Crisis"; Murray Schumach, "Stars Join Drive Against Bigotry," *New York Times*, July 15, 1963; Schumach, "N.A.A.C.P. Attacks Movie-TV Unions."

although the NAACP reiterated threats of mass demonstrations, the immediate conflict was ultimately defused.[22] The AMPP "negotiated non-discrimination clauses into union contracts," established quarterly meetings with the NAACP, and created in 1965 joint labor-management training and apprenticeship programs in nine fields, which by 1969 had brought in a very small number of black and Mexican American candidates.[23]

The NAACP's 1963 campaign perhaps explains why the EEOC included Hollywood among its targets when, in the late 1960s, it reoriented its enforcement strategy away from considering individual complaints of discrimination and instead toward industry-wide investigations.[24] The situation the EEOC discovered in 1969 was little changed from what the NAACP had confronted several years earlier. The statistics gleaned from the studio and network executives who testified before the commission, along with those compiled prior to the hearings by EEOC staff members, painted a stark picture. At the seven major movie studios, the workforce was only 4.2 percent black and 4.2 percent Spanish-surnamed in 1967, well below the rates for the Los Angeles metropolitan area overall. These percentages were even lower for jobs categorized as "white collar"; a Disney executive, for instance, admitted under questioning that none of

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[22] On the ultimatum, see Murray Schumach, "Hollywood N.A.A.C.P. Is Split On Movie-Television Job Talks," *New York Times*, July 20, 1963; Waugh, "Negroes Set Price to Film Industry." On the locals' rejection of the plan, and the aftermath, see Schumach, "Hollywood Trial"; Paul Weeks, "Film Union Rejects Negro Job Appeal," *Los Angeles Times*, July 31, 1963; Murray Schumach, "Hollywood Faces Protest on Rights," *New York Times*, August 1, 1963; Harry Bernstein, "NAACP Lashes Back at Film Craft Unions," *Los Angeles Times*, August 2, 1963; Murray Schumach, "N.A.A.C.P. Presses For Movie Jobs," *New York Times*, August 2, 1963; Harry Bernstein, "Film Unionists Seek Way to Racial Accord," *Los Angeles Times*, August 3, 1963; "Bias in Reverse? White Workers Claim Employers Now Show Favoritism to Negroes," *Wall Street Journal*, August 12, 1963; Paul Weeks, "Integration Gains Seen in Film and TV Jobs," *Los Angeles Times*, August 30, 1963.

[23] This account of events comes from Boren's testimony in 1969. *EEOC Hearings, Los Angeles, CA*, 223–224.

[24] On this shift, see MacLean, *Freedom Is Not Enough*, 107.

the company's 238 "officials and managers" was black. The television networks'

workforces in the region—largely white-collar in composition, since the networks

themselves produced little programming in Hollywood—were only 2.9 percent black in

1967 and 1.6 percent Mexican American in 1968.[25]

Like Herbert Hill and the NAACP, the commissioners and their staff focused on

the practices of the industry's craft unions, particularly the "experience roster" system,

under which the studios were contractually obligated to hire from a list of members

provided by the unions. To join the roster, one needed to first work a minimum number

of days, and then have one's application approved by a central clearinghouse and,

sometimes, union qualifications committees. As the EEOC's counsel, Daniel Steiner,

explained, "Before anyone can be hired who is not on a roster, all people on the roster

must be employed or offered employment. But some rosters contain no Mexican-

Americans or Negroes. It is not surprising that Mexican-Americans and Negroes cannot

find employment." Other features of the system also seemed to work against employing

non-whites: union questionnaires asked applicants about their fathers' vocation and

whether they were foreign born, and many of the locals required applicants to be

endorsed by three current members. Steiner argued that the experience roster system not

only functioned "to exclude minorities from jobs in the motion picture industry," but also

effectively created a closed shop, violating the restrictive provisions of the Taft-Hartley

Act of 1947. Moreover, the EEOC found, the studios and networks had done little to

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[25] Jack Jones, "EEOC to Seek Federal Suit Against TV, Film Industries," *Los Angeles Times*, March 14, 1969; "Race Bias Suit Weighed Against Movie, TV Industries By U.S. Equal Jobs Unit," *Chicago Defender*, March 29, 1969; California Advisory Committee to the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, *Behind the Scenes*, 11–12.

recruit employees in minority communities for other positions, meaning few in

managerial or professional roles came from such groups.[26]

The EEOC could declare that it had found "clear evidence of a pattern or practice

of discrimination," in violation of Title VII. But, lacking any statutory power to issue

cease and desist orders, they could only request that the DOJ explore a lawsuit under the

Civil Rights Act.[27] After a dilatory investigation—and after rejecting both a lawsuit and

a court-approved consent decree—the Nixon administration's DOJ reached a settlement

agreement with the producers' organization (now called the Association of Motion

Picture and Television Producers), television networks and motion picture studios,

IATSE, and the craft unions. Aimed at increasing minority employment in off-camera

jobs, it went into effect April 1, 1970.[28] Unions agreed to curb nepotism, create minority

training programs, expand minority recruitment, and implement temporary minority labor

pools that would be tapped at pre-determined ratios until minority workers worked "20

percent of the available work days." But the agreement was voluntary. Although

producers agreed to provide quarterly reports on progress in expanding minority

employment in union, clerical, and administrative jobs, the agreement lacked the

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[26] Roy Reed, "Movies Face U.S. Suits on Hiring Bias," *New York Times*, March 14, 1969; Jones, "EEOC to Seek Federal Suit Against TV, Film Industries"; California Advisory Committee to the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, *Behind the Scenes*, 11–13.

[27] *EEOC Hearings, Los Angeles, CA*, 227–228. See also Reed, "Movies Face U.S. Suits on Hiring Bias"; Jones, "EEOC to Seek Federal Suit Against TV, Film Industries."

[28] On the process, see Vincent J. Burke, "U.S. Plans to Prod Film Industry on Job Discrimination Charges," *Los Angeles Times*, October 19, 1969; Harry Bernstein, "U.S. May File Suit on Charge of Bias in Film and TV Hiring," *Los Angeles Times*, November 19, 1969; Harry Bernstein, "U.S. Ready to Settle Bias Case Against Movie, TV Industries," *Los Angeles Times*, February 5, 1970; Vincent J. Burke, "Film and TV Minority Job Plan in Effect," *Los Angeles Times*, April 1, 1970.

enforcement mechanisms that would have inhered in a consent decree.[29]   The assistant

attorney general who negotiated the agreement insisted, "The relief negotiated here is at

least as comprehensive and effective as that which a court would order." But several

months before the agreement was announced, the *Los Angeles Times* had quoted an

anonymous "government attorney" who called the then-prospective settlement "just

another gentlemen's agreement" with "no more teeth in it than the deals being worked

out with the construction industry, which sound good but are loaded with loopholes even

a racist could crawl through."[30]

Well before the DOJ's settlement was announced, the Hollywood investigation

had helped to cost Alexander his job. At a Senate subcommittee meeting later in March

1969, Dirksen accused Alexander of "harassing businessmen" through the EEOC's use of

industry-wide hearings, and made front page headlines by seeming to threaten

Alexander's dismissal. "We have gotten to the point where either this punitive

harassment has got to stop," Dirksen declared, "or somebody is going to lose his

authority, or I am going to the highest authority in this Government and get somebody

fired." The recent Los Angeles hearings particularly drew Dirksen's ire. He charged that

the hearings "resembled a carnival atmosphere of personal vendetta by [the] EEOC with

representatives of the business community and the union [IATSE]," intended "to be

punitive, or to show that minority persons could dish it out to the so-called

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[29] California Advisory Committee to the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, *Behind the Scenes*, 13–14.

[30] Burke, "Film and TV Minority Job Plan in Effect"; Bernstein, "U.S. Ready to Settle Bias Case Against Movie, TV Industries." See also Quinn, "Closing Doors," 481.

Establishment."[31] The White House acknowledged the next day that it had already

planned to replace Alexander as chairman with William H. Brown III, a black Republican

colleague on the Commission. Soon afterward, Alexander resigned as chairman, citing a

"crippling lack of Administration support" for the EEOC's "vital work," including the

sluggish effort by the DOJ in Hollywood. Dirksen's threat and the subsequent White

House announcement, Alexander argued, were evidence that "vigorous efforts to enforce

the law on employment discrimination are not among the goals of this Administration."[32]

Then and since, the EEOC's investigation of Hollywood in particular has been

presented as a key reason for Republican criticisms of Alexander. The black *Los Angeles

Sentinel* ran a front-page headline declaring, "Hollywood Blamed for Cliff Alexander's

Resignation." (The paper did acknowledge, though, that it had been unable to confirm

"pressure from the motion picture and communication industries.")[33] Eithne Quinn has

speculated that Hollywood leaders conveyed their grievances against Alexander to

Dirksen, perhaps via Jack Valenti, head of the Motion Picture Association of America

(MPAA), who in his former role as an aide to Lyndon Johnson had developed a working

relationship with Dirksen. As Quinn documents, in the wake of the EEOC hearings,

Valenti and other leading industry figures argued that a free labor market and "open

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[31] United States Congress, Senate, Committee on Judiciary, Subcommittee on Administrative Practice and Procedure, *Equal Employment Opportunity Procedures*, March 27-28, 1969, 91st Congress, 1st Session, 1969, 18–22. See also, David S. Broder, "Dirksen Threatens to Get Job Equality Chief Fired," *Los Angeles Times*, March 28, 1969; Marjorie Hunter, "Dirksen Upbraids U.S. Rights Official," *New York Times*, March 28, 1969.

[32] Clifford Alexander, "Text of Alexander Resignation," *Chicago Defender*, April 10, 1969; Edward P. Morgan, "Senator Dirksen and the Facts," *Washington Post*, April 6, 1969; Glen Elsasser, "Job Rights Unit Head Quits, Hits Nixon 'Lack of Support,'" *Chicago Tribune*, April 10, 1969; Roy Reed, "Job-Rights Chief Quits in Dispute on Nixon's Goals," *New York Times*, April 10, 1969; "Job Equality Chief Resigns With Protest," *Los Angeles Times*, April 10, 1969.

[33] "Hollywood Blamed For Cliff Alexander's Resignation," *Los Angeles Sentinel*, April 17, 1969.

doors" would correct any deficits in African American employment, laying blame for explicit discrimination at the feet of the unions—a position that sought to preserve producers' own prerogatives while weakening organized labor in the process.[34]

Tension was likely inevitable between a Congressional ally of the new Republican administration—particularly one who had conditioned his support for the Civil Rights Act in 1964 on restricting the EEOC's power—and a Democratic official appointed by the previous president to head that agency; it is unlikely that the Hollywood investigation was the sole cause of his displeasure.[35] What is striking, however, is the deep resistance of the studio and network officials at the Hollywood hearings, and then of Dirksen himself, to the attempts made by Alexander and his colleagues to draw attention the way minorities and women were represented in motion pictures and on television, and to link these representations to employment discrimination. The NAACP's Herbert Hill had presented in 1963 two parallel demands to depict African Americans "honestly" and integrate off-camera employment, but during the 1969 hearings, the EEOC's members and its staff suggested the two could not be separated.[36] Beginning with staff counsel Steiner's opening remarks about the "staggering influence" of film and television "on the country's image of itself" and "the world-wide image of our country," the hearings featured numerous assertions of Hollywood's power and influence, presented in the

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[34] Quinn, "Closing Doors," 474–475.

[35] See Ibid., 473.

[36] Quinn's assessment of Hollywood's labor politics calls the "powerful film industry" a "producer of hugely influential texts," but it does not probe the way such claims were deployed during the hearings. Ibid., 469, 490. Further, although it acknowledges that "job exclusion and concerns about racial representation in the film industry affected all minority groups," it takes "black-white racial politics" as its focus, and does examine the central role played by Mexican Americans in the hearings. Ibid., 468.

language of "image" that was increasingly ubiquitous in the late 1960s.[37] Alexander, along with fellow commissioner Vincente T. Ximenes, repeatedly insisted that witnesses account for the representations of both African Americans and Mexican Americans offered by the movies and television. Ximenes, especially, used the hearings as an opportunity to air complaints about portrayals of Mexican Americans. "Let me ask some questions which are important to us Mexican Americans," Ximenes addressed the very first witness, Anthony J. Frederick, Vice President of Universal City Studios. "This studio, and not just yours, but all the motion picture industry," he continued, "has not depicted the Mexican American in what I believe to be the correct image. You have depicted us as poor, sombreroed, gun-toting, barefooted Mexican Americans. Why?"[38] The query became a running theme of Ximenes's exchanges with witnesses.

Alexander, meanwhile, raised a broader point with Frederick about the "kind of movies you produce, the image you are going to project nationally and internationally," setting his concerns about on-screen images in an explicitly global frame of reference, with Hollywood's products representative of the United States on the world stage. He prodded Arthur Schaefer of Warner Bros./Seven Arts to acknowledge that half of the company's revenue was earned in the foreign market, then asked, "Are you aware that the world is about two-thirds black and brown? … How do you reflect our nation?"[39]

Others made similar points. Steiner engaged Perry Lafferty, a CBS vice president responsible for programming, in an extended discussion of the lack of Mexican Americans in television shows with contemporary settings (as opposed to in Westerns,

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[37] *EEOC Hearings, Los Angeles, CA*, 2.

[38] Ibid., 130.

[39] Ibid., 136, 178.

where they were more common).[40] Elizabeth J. Kuck, the only woman on the

Commission, at one point pivoted off of Ximenes's complaints when questioning Frank

Ferguson of Twentieth-Century Fox. "Commissioner Ximenes referred to the industry's

portrayal of the Spanish-American, and I am interested in this portrayal with reference to

the career woman," she began. After Ferguson facetiously replied, "I can offer you

Racquel Welch," Kuck urged him to "consider this aspect of the industry's portraying the

career woman more realistically."[41] Perhaps the most dramatic exchanges regarding on-

screen visibility came early in the hearings, during the testimony of Ray Martell, a

Chicano actor and activist. "They don't give a damn about dignity or self-respect,"

Martell alleged of the industry representatives present, comparing them to "war

criminals" and adding, "We are dealing with bigoted and racist dogs, that is what it is."

Prodded by Alexander to address further "the image that the motion picture community

takes," Martell spoke of its "incalculable" impact: "This is continual in that it covers all

the corners of the world and leaves a negative, lasting impression of the Mexican

American and the American Indian, and, indeed, the black man." Martell demanded that

the "Justice Department … rid this industry of its racism and discrimination against my

people by bringing about first of all the immediate cessation of any demeaning type of

production that defames, outranges [sic] and insults the Mexican Americans and the

American Indians"—although he speculated that only "direct confrontation with these

people at their studios" would produce results.[42]

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[40] Ibid., 292–296.

[41] Ibid., 205.

[42] Ibid., 142–145. Interestingly, although the mainstream press highlighted Martell's
inflammatory comments, it was only the black *Chicago Defender* that discussed the commissioners' own

In the face of the commissioners' queries about on-screen content, many of the witnesses asserted that the questions did not properly fall within their domain. Universal's Frederick declared, "I am here as a businessman, I am not a creative man." Schaefer, who was the industrial relations manager for Warner Bros., demurred, "I am not a producer of motion pictures." Frank Ferguson, counsel at Twentieth Century-Fox—despite submitting a written statement that, as Ximenes characterized it, celebrated "substantial progress in portraying members of minority groups as they actually appear on the American scene"—ultimately declared, "I cannot speak for the creative phase of the business."[43]

But Alexander and Ximenes drew connections where these witnesses drew distinctions, insisting that questions of "image" were inseparable from matters of employment. Ximenes, again, telegraphed this line of thinking in his first exchange with Frederick, wondering whether stereotypes of Mexican Americans existed "because you do not have anybody in decision-making positions that stops these things." Alexander repeatedly argued that studio boards of directors, which "set the policy" for hiring and for the "kind of movies" produced, must be diversified. Although CBS's Lafferty presented a detailed account of the network's "minority group performers" and efforts to attract more of them, he admitted the network had no Mexican American producers and that only about three percent of its white-collar workers in Los Angeles came from that group. This admission prompted Alexander to ask, rhetorically, "Where do you get your knowledge and information about the Mexican American community out here? …

critiques of minority images in the industry's product. "Race Bias Suit Weighed Against Movie, TV Industries By U.S. Equal Jobs Unit."

[43] *EEOC Hearings, Los Angeles, CA*, 130, 178, 203.

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[W]hen you are producing a show on TV depicting Mexican Americans, where do you get your information about them?" In a heated exchange with Bonar Dyer, vice president of personnel at Disney, Ximenes asserted, "What I am trying to tell you is that you need some people on your decision-making staff that can advise you of what is happening in the world, and in the nation, in regard to a very large segment of the so-called minority groups in the nation." Alexander and Ximenes insisted that only by integrating its "decision-making staff" could Hollywood hope to "represent our nation."[44]

The confusion expressed by the studio and network personnel officials in the face of the EEOC's complaints was echoed when Dirksen castigated Alexander later that month. As Dirksen built toward his threat to "get somebody fired," he grilled Alexander regarding precisely the tense moments when the Los Angeles hearings focused most closely on questions of content—moments that he suggested were excessive and non-germane. After characterizing Martell's comments, Dirksen demanded, "Is that the way you run hearings out in the field?" Alexander defended Martell's "right to speak that way," noting "there are many industry representatives on many occasions who have referred to Mexican-Americans in worse terms than dogs. And I think that is perhaps more relevant than what one complaining witness said." Pressing further on the question of "atmosphere," Dirksen demanded to know whether Alexander had in fact quizzed "one of the motion picture people" regarding which title of the Civil Rights Act dealt with equal employment. Alexander acknowledged he had, noting that the witness in question "had a specific responsibility … for equal employment opportunity within his company" and had taken "almost 2 minutes" to come up with the correct answer. Dirksen then

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[44] Ibid., 130, 136–137, 288–296, 217. Herbert Schlosser of NBC also presented a history of the network's efforts to reflect "the existence and contribution of minorities in our society." Ibid., 318–324.

mentioned that Alexander had asked witnesses whether their boards of directors included women or minorities. "Is that part of this whole package?" he asked incredulously, adding shortly thereafter, "I thought we were dealing with discrimination in employment." Although Dirksen never commented explicitly on the hearings' focus on on-screen images, his questions betrayed exasperation that was prompted at least partly by the way Alexander and his colleagues insisted on the importance of diversity among decision-makers in Hollywood, rather than confining themselves simply to attacking discriminatory practices in filling clerical and technical positions.[45]

While the broad ambitions of Alexander, Ximenes, and others encountered particular skepticism, the events that followed the 1970 DOJ settlement demonstrated the challenges of securing federal intervention to fight employment discrimination of any sort in Hollywood. Under the control of Nixon and his successor, Gerald Ford, the EEOC tasked only thee staffers to the job of monitoring compliance with the 1970 settlement agreement, and later cut that number to one; allowed the agreement to expire

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[45] United States Congress, Senate, Committee on Judiciary, Subcommittee on Administrative Practice and Procedure, *Equal Employment Opportunity Procedures*, 19–22. The question about Title VII that Dirksen mentioned was asked of Schaefer, and the exchange indicates the sometimes brusque tone Alexander did often adopt during the hearings:

> Chairman ALEXANDER. And do you know that the Congress in 1964 passed the Civil Rights Act?
>
> Mr. SCHAEFER. Yes.
>
> Chairman ALEXANDER. And do you know that title relates to employment discrimination?
>
> Mr. SCHAEFER. I am notified by memorandum only—
>
> Chairman ALEXANDER. Do you know what title of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 relates to employment discrimination?
>
> Mr. SCHAEFER. Title VII.
>
> Chairman ALEXANDER. That's right; very good.

EEOC Hearings, Los Angeles, CA, 186.

in 1974; and in 1976, ceased its monitoring efforts altogether. Neither the local EEOC

office nor any of its other units sought to reach a new, more-effective agreement with the

production companies and the unions. A 1978 study conducted by the California

Advisory Committee to the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights found little progress toward

absolute gains in employment of minorities and women by the industry (especially in

"decisionmaking positions"), faulting the still-thriving experience roster system,

insufficient industry commitment to "effective affirmative action," and the federal

government's "sporatic [sic] and weak enforcement efforts."[46]

The 1978 California study sought to keep alive the broadest ambitions of the 1969

hearings; it opened with a paean to Hollywood's "dominant role in shaping the values,

attitudes, and perception of Americans," and related somewhat imprecisely that, in 1969,

"Following the hearings, EEOC alleged that discriminatory practices existed in both

employment and portrayal of minorities and women."   Although the EEOC did not in

1969 officially charge "discriminatory practices … in … portrayal[s]," those hearings did

indeed offer an argument that the film and television industries were responsible for

fairly representing "the American scene," and that their employment practices at all

levels were inescapably linked to their ability to do so. Dirksen's angry tirade held some

truth: the hearings created a forum, with the federal government's imprimatur, in which

African American and Mexican American officials—"minority persons"—could insist

that those holding power in Hollywood hear their grievances. Where Powell had largely

asked questions at his 1962 hearings as he searched for the "guilty party," Alexander and

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[46] California Advisory Committee to the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, *Behind the Scenes*, 36–38, 41–42. The report noted percentage gains in employment for minorities and women, but set them against declining overall employment in the industry due to reduced production.

Ximenes in 1969 spoke confidently of Hollywood's legal obligation to employ a diverse workforce, its moral responsibility to "reflect" and "project" a diverse America, and the indispensible relationship between the two. Yet, Alexander's fate, and the very limited minority employment gains evident nine years later, revealed the depth of resistance to these propositions both outside and within the government.

The Tools Provided

The 1969 EEOC hearings addressed employment at both motion picture studios and television networks, but ultimately emphasized the former. Television, however, was the ascendant medium, and also one subject to greater federal regulation. By the 1970s, it received the lion's share of attention from marginalized groups pursuing fair representation on screen, including those who sought to enlist the government's aid in this struggle. Broadcast television at the turn of the 1970s enjoyed unparalleled power and influence for many Americans, serving at once as the main source of news, of community information, and of entertainment. Television's multiple roles, and the industry's peculiar organizational structure, comprising local stations organized into national networks, meant the complaints of marginalized groups regarding television were numerous and entangled: neglect of public issues important to them, mocking or condescending news coverage, lack of female and minority reporters, discriminatory employment practices off camera, and use of caricatures and stereotypes in both reporting and entertainment, all sins perpetrated by both local broadcasters and the networks.

Sorting through these varied protests, scholars have chronicled the broad movement for reform of television in the 1960s and 1970s, the responses of regulators,

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and the ultimate frustration of reformers' efforts;[47] documented the foundational

campaign by grassroots civil rights workers and their allies against Jackson, Mississippi's

WLBT-TV, which established for the first time the right of private citizens to intervene in

the Federal Communications Commission's license renewal process;[48] and analyzed the

claims articulated by African American, Chicano, and feminist activists in their dealings

with the FCC. Minority groups appealed to the FCC's power in a wide range of ways:

they petitioned it to deny the renewal of particular broadcasters' licenses, threatened

petitions-to-deny in order to extract promises of programming and operational changes

from broadcasters, pushed the Commission to expand and enforce equal employment

opportunity rules, presented grievances to commissioners at en banc meetings in

Washington and at open meetings across the country, strove to expand the number of

minority-owned broadcasters and to exploit the promise of cable television technology,

and sought to change the composition of the Commission itself by advocating for the

appointment of a black commissioner.[49]

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[47] Donald L. Guimary, *Citizens' Groups and Broadcasting* (New York: Praeger, 1975); Barry G. Cole and Mal Oettinger, *Reluctant Regulators: The FCC and the Broadcast Audience* (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1978); Kathryn Montgomery, *Target: Prime Time: Advocacy Groups and the Struggle Over Entertainment Television* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), chapter 2; Devorah Heitner, *Black Power TV* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2013), 5–11. On the failed promises of the reform movement, see Willard D. Rowland, Jr., "The Illusion of Fulfillment: The Broadcast Reform Movement," *Journalism Monographs*, no. 79 (December 1982); Erwin G. Krasnow, Lawrence D. Longley, and Herbert A. Terry, *The Politics of Broadcast Regulation*, 3rd ed. (New York: St. Martin's, 1982).

[48] Steven D. Classen, *Watching Jim Crow: The Struggles over Mississippi TV, 1955-1969* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004); Kay Mills, *Changing Channels: The Civil Rights Case That Transformed Television* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2004).

[49] Bishetta Dionne Merritt, "A Historical-Critical Study of a Pressure Group in Broadcasting: Black Efforts for Soul in Television" (Ph.D. dissertation, The Ohio State University, 1974); Cole and Oettinger, *Reluctant Regulators*, esp. chapters 7–8; Noriega, *Shot in America*, chapter 5; Patricia Bradley, *Mass Media and the Shaping of American Feminism, 1963-1975* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2003), chapter 10; Allison Perlman, "Reforming the Wasteland: Television, Reform, and Social Movements, 1950-2004" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Texas at Austin, 2007), chapters 2 and 4; Allison Perlman, "Feminists In The Wasteland: The National Organization for Women and Television Reform," *Feminist Media Studies* 7, no. 4 (2007): 413–31.

These tactics produced victories that addressed some of activists' complaints. But the most far-reaching efforts, which sought to employ the FCC's rules in order to secure fair representation and the curtailment of "stereotypes" on screen, failed. Any attempt to alter television content was difficult, due to the nature of the television medium and its regulation. Images and characterizations seen over a single day on a single station—on a morning news report, a local public affairs show, an advertisement, a network drama, and a late night airing of an old Hollywood movie—were the product of numerous decisions open to different degrees of viewer influence. But efforts to directly affect television content via the FCC's regulatory apparatus—especially through recourse to its "fairness doctrine," a strategy proposed by both Mexican American and feminist activists—were rejected as constraints on free expression. Thus, although marginalized groups succeeded in securing through the FCC some improvements in personnel and programming policies at local stations, and won in the process a measure of recognition as citizens whose appeals deserved attention, advocates' most ambitious and radical visions of a government-sanctioned transformation of television were, by the mid-1970s, foreclosed.[50]

Just a few years earlier, expectations of just such a transformation ran high. By the late 1960s, as the television historian Fred MacDonald has argued, "an unlikely convergence of interests" had pulled the FCC away from its traditional deference to broadcasters and together "[made] forceful regulation a reality." These included the

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[50] On citizenship claims, see Perlman, "Feminists in the Wasteland," 415; Noriega, *Shot in America*, 76. The efforts of gay activists to be explicitly enumerated in the FCC's ascertainment guidelines is evidence of the persisting appeal of such recognition. See, e.g., "FCC Proposes That Broadcasters Be Required To Interview Gay Leaders" [NGTF press release], July 14, 1978, National Gay and Lesbian Task Force (NGLTF) records, #7301, box 36, folder 88, Division of Rare and Manuscript Collections, Cornell University Library; "FCC Ruling Includes Gays," n.d. [1980], Bruce R. Voeller papers, #7307, box 1, folder 38, Division of Rare and Manuscript Collections, Cornell University Library.

growing pressures from liberal reformers for more enriching, less vacuous television

content; the Nixon administration's willingness to countenance regulations that might

weaken the television networks, which it saw as progenitors of biased journalism; and

challenges to broadcasters' handling of racial issues, including the WLBT case and the

Kerner Commission's report.[51] Between 1969 and 1971 alone, new regulations and laws

upset the existing order within the television industry by adding new restrictions on the

ownership of multiple media sources in the same market; limiting the network

programming that local broadcasters could air to three prime-time hours each night, so as

to free airtime for community-oriented programming; establishing new limits on

networks' financial interest in their own programming; and prohibiting television

advertisements for tobacco.[52] Most importantly, as a result of the U.S. Court of Appeals

rulings in the WLBT case, standing in FCC license renewal proceedings was now

extended to individual citizens, who could present their complaints to the FCC

commissioners, receive a formal response, and appeal the FCC's determinations to the

Court of Appeals.[53] As *Broadcasting*, an industry trade journal, observed in 1971, "The

[WLBT] case did more than establish the right of the public to participate in a station's

license-renewal hearing. It did even more than encourage minority groups around the

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[51] J. Fred MacDonald, *One Nation Under Television: The Rise and Decline of Network TV*, rev. ed. (Chicago: Nelson-Hall, 1994), 157–163. MacDonald argues that the attacks by Vice President Spiro Agnew and others were calculated efforts to gain partisan advantage, but also made legitimate critiques, partisanship aside, of the concentration of power over information and its circulation. Although critical of television journalism, the Nixon administration and its Office of Telecommunications Policy also sought simultaneously to implement broadcaster-friendly measures including the abolition of the fairness doctrine and the extension of the license period. Guimary, *Citizens' Groups and Broadcasting*, 105–110.

[52] MacDonald, *One Nation Under Television*, 184–190; Guimary, *Citizens' Groups and Broadcasting*, 83.

[53] Cole and Oettinger, *Reluctant Regulators*, 64–66, 204–205; Montgomery, *Target: Prime Time*, 23–24.

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country to assert themselves in broadcast matters. It provided practical lessons in how pressure could be brought, in how the broadcast establishment could be challenged."[54]

Catalyzed by this expansion of standing, the new tool of the "petition-to-deny," and the "practical lessons" of the WLBT case, the late 1960s witnessed the rapid development of a network of public interest organizations with similar goals of expanding citizens' role in broadcasting. The Citizens Communication Center, the Stern Community Law Firm, and the Media Access Project all provided legal representation for groups who pettioned to deny stations' license renewals. The National Citizens Committee for Broadcasting, founded in 1967 and chaired beginning in 1974 by the reformist former FCC commissioner Nicholas Johnson, served as a clearinghouse for media reformers. Johnson himself published a guidebook titled *How to Talk Back to Your Television Set*.[55] The reform impulse was at once pervasive and multifaceted, with organizations ranging from Accuracy in Media, which targeted "liberal bias," to Action on Smoking and Health, which pushed to ban tobacco commercials, to Action for Children's Television, which fought the commercialization of children's TV and promoted the "family viewing hour" during primetime.[56]

Between mid-1968 and mid-1977, citizen groups filed 360 petitions seeking to deny the renewal or transfer of 828 stations' broadcast licenses for failure to serve the public interest, whether through programming decisions, violations of equal employment rules, or inadequate ascertainment of community needs. The vast majority of challenges

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[54] "The Struggle over Broadcast Access," *Broadcasting*, September 20, 1971, 36, quoted in Montgomery, *Target: Prime Time*, 23–24.

[55] Cole and Oettinger, *Reluctant Regulators*, 64–68; Montgomery, *Target: Prime Time*, 24–26.

[56] Cole and Oettinger, *Reluctant Regulators*, 68–70, 248–288.

came from African American, Latino, and women's organizations, both from local ad-hoc coalitions and from national groups like Black Efforts for Soul in Television, the National Black Media Coalition, the Latino Media Coalition, and the National Organization for Women (NOW). Formal success was rare, as the FCC moved slowly in considering petitions, placed the burden of proof on petitioners while denying them the ability to conduct discovery, and permitted broadcasters to amend applications for renewal in order to address charges that had been raised against them.[57] Only 20 applications for renewal were designated for a hearing during this period, and only one was formally denied. Yet activists nevertheless won numerous concessions from broadcasters, who were eager to avoid the time and expense of the petition-to-deny process. Often, these included commitments to hire minority news reporters, to air community-access editorials, and to develop public affairs programming in consultation with local minority organizations.[58] For instance, in 1972, after local NOW activists threatened to file petitions-to-deny against three Pittsburgh broadcasters, the stations agreed to create women's advisory councils and to make changes to programming and employment practices.[59] In the years that followed, NOW made a science of this "'scare' strategy," with national leaders creating its "FCC Kit" for local activists, which spelled out when their area's broadcasters were due to apply for license renewal and described, in detail, how to systematically monitor program content, collect employment statistics, and

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[57] Ibid., 205–241. See also Noriega, *Shot in America*, 79.

[58] Cole and Oettinger, *Reluctant Regulators*, 231–241; Guimary, *Citizens' Groups and Broadcasting*, 65–67.

[59] Whitney Adams, "Report on the F.C.C. Task Force," October 5, 1972, National Organization for Women (NOW) Records, MC 496, folder 46.22, Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute, Harvard University.

use FCC regulations to frame their complaints. The kit also included a model voluntary agreement with an imaginary station cheekily named KPIG-TV. By mid-1974, NOW chapters won fifteen such agreements.[60]

These negotiated resolutions were the most common outcome of FCC license challenges. But some advocates hoped the FCC and its license renewal process might be used to achieve more sweeping changes: the dramatic reduction of television stereotypes and even an end to television's organization as a commercial, advertising-supported medium. These ambitions were evident in two law review articles that, in the early 1970s, mapped legal strategies relying heavily on the FCC's "fairness doctrine," a set of rules first propagated by the commission in 1949 and meant to govern how broadcasters handled "controversial issues of public importance." Nancy Stanley's 1971 article "Federal Communications Law and Women's Rights: Women in the Wasteland Fight Back" became a guide for the initial petitions to deny filed by NOW, and Mario Obledo and Robert B. Joselow's 1972 essay "Broadcasting: Mexican-Americans and the Media" sought to draw the attention of Mexican-American "community leaders and attorneys" to "the tools provided by the Federal Communications Commission."[61]

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[60] The "'scare' strategy" was invoked in Ibid. "Model Agreement Between NOW Chapter and KPIG-TV (AM-FM)," n.d., NOW Records, MC 496, folder 48.17, Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute, Harvard University. On NOW's success, see Perlman, "Feminists in the Wasteland," 424.

[61] Nancy E. Stanley, "Federal Communications Law and Women's Rights: Women in the Wasteland Fight Back," *Hastings Law Journal* 23 (November 1971): 15–53; Mario Obledo and Robert B. Joselow, "Broadcasting: Mexican-Americans and the Media," *Chicano Law Review* 1 (1972): 86, 97. The WLBT challenge had relied in part on the fairness doctrine, arguing that the station had presented only the segregationist side of the controversy over black civil rights, although the decision against WLBT turned on its failure to serve the public interest, rather than a specific fairness doctrine violation. U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, *Window Dressing on the Set: Women and Minorities in Television* (Washington, DC, 1977), 58–62. On the history of the fairness doctrine, and its use in the 1960s to target far-right radio broadcasters, see Heather Hendershot, *What's Fair on the Air?* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011), esp. 16–20.

For Obledo and Joselow, the core challenges Mexican Americans faced—disproportionate poverty, substandard housing, limited educational attainment, and underemployment—were compounded by Anglo "lack of understanding." This ignorance, in turn, was reinforced by media's "portrayals of Mexican-American stereotypes" and its "recurring caricatures of Mexicans as lazy, slovenly morons." The media's "neglect of Mexican-Americans other than the exploitation of their ethnic heritage for the sale of corn chips and chili," they argued, "is taking its toll."[62] In response, Obledo and Joselow suggested, Chicano activists ought to pursue the protections the fairness doctrine offered. The first of these—the "personal attack" rule—required broadcasters to notify and provide "a script or tape" to "an identified person or group" when "an attack is made upon" their "honesty, character, integrity or like personal qualities," and to offer "a reasonable opportunity to respond." Applying this regulation, the authors argued, "Mexican-Americans, as an identifiable group, must insist on compliance … by broadcasters who continue to air comments derogatory to the Chicano people." Converting the FCC's "identified" to "identif*iable*," they insisted that Mexican-Americans constituted a "group" under the rule's rubric, whose members must be on the alert for "anti-Chicano biases" in any aspect of a station's programming, from talk shows to commercials, and whose "community leaders" deserved an opportunity to respond.

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[62] Obledo and Joselow, "Broadcasting," 85–88. For other Mexican American critiques of the mass media, see Thomas M. Martínez, "Advertising and Racism: The Case of The Mexican-American," *El Grito*, June 1, 1969, 3–13; "Chicanos and the Mass Media," a position paper reprinted in United States Congress, House of Representatives, Committee on Interstate and Foreign Commerce, *Films and Broadcasts Demeaning Ethnic, Racial, or Religious Groups*, September 21, 1970, 91st Congress, 2nd Session (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1970), 67–101.

When denied such opportunity, those leaders ought to complain to the FCC if necessary.[63]

Obledo and Joselow further argued that the broadcasting industry's failure "to present a balanced, unbiased view of the problems of the barrio" ran afoul of the broader obligation levied by the Fairness Doctrine of encouraging "vigorous debate" on controversial issues. The authors argued that the failure "to portray the Negro as a matter of routine and in the context of the total society" that had been documented in the Kerner Report was "doubly true" for "the Mexican-American community" circa 1972. Invoking the Supreme Court's 1969 decision in *Red Lion Broadcasting v. FCC*, which affirmed the FCC's power to require licensees to "present representative community views on controversial issues," the authors argued that this "large and socially deprived portion of society about which little is known by the dominant culture beyond stereotypes propagated … by the broadcasting industry" accordingly deserved an "opportunity to respond." This, in turn, required giving Mexican Americans access to broadcasters' facilities. After recounting the FCC's foot-dragging in the WLBT case, Obledo and Joselow argued that "every Mexican-American organization" ought not only to familiarize itself with FCC rules, monitor local stations, and demand response time, but also to "apply constant pressure to the FCC itself to live up to its own articulated standards."[64]

Stanley offered an even clearer roadmap—with a more radical destination—for activists who sought to challenge the broadcasting industry. A "direct legal attack on the

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[63] Obledo and Joselow, "Broadcasting."

[64] Ibid., 92–97. See also Red Lion Broadcasting Co., Inc. v. FCC, 395 U.S. 367, 394 (1969).

broadcaster himself," she argued, was the best means for securing feminist goals in broadcast media, including the hiring and promotion of women "into policy-making positions," fair reporting of the feminist movement, consultation regarding program content, and balanced characterizations of women and representations of their "societal roles." Stanley carefully laid out how women might challenge a license renewal on all three possible grounds (community ascertainment, equal employment, and the fairness doctrine) but she devoted particular attention to the fairness doctrine, which she saw as allowing women to "challenge the very content of television programming—the biased and distorted view which television offers of women and their role in modern society." Here, Stanley made an extended argument for considering "women's role" a controversial issue subject to the fairness doctrine's provisions. Analogizing from court rulings involving African Americans and Jews, including in the WLBT case, she argued that "explicit" discussions of "a women's rights issue," or attacks on "women as a class" in the course of news coverage, quite evidently brought the fairness doctrine into play. But Stanley also weighed the "more difficult question" of "'implicit' messages" regarding women's role in society. She built her analysis on recent rulings that had granted anti-smoking advocates and environmentalists, for instance, opportunities to reply to advertisements for cigarettes and for cars and gasoline. "Women's role" was a similar sort of "controversial issue which can be raised indirectly by programming on other subjects," she argued. "Certainly if television commercials continually showed black persons as railroad porters, or 'spoofed' the civil rights movement, the commission would recognize a fairness issue immediately."[65]

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[65] Stanley, "Federal Communications Law and Women's Rights," 18–19, 43–48. Stanley acknowledged that, although "Women … would prefer to see derogatory stereotypes eliminated altogether," the FCC and

And if women's role was a controversial issue, it was certainly not handled fairly. "There is probably no other single social question on which television so uniformly and so pervasively presents a biased point of view," Stanley asserted. "In every aspect of its programming … television demeans women, stereotypes their roles, and ridicules their aspirations." The examples were manifold, from depictions of women in commercials as "subservient," "delicate," and "sex objects," to distorted news coverage of the women's movement, to the lack of independent women and women leaders in "dramatic programming." Addressing "bias" so thoroughgoing—as, Stanley argued, the fairness doctrine required—meant "American broadcasters must make monumental changes." She wrote, "Unlike most citizen groups seeking access to the media, women suffer such intense, continual discrimination that their use of the reply time requirement would radically reshape the industry." The ramifications might include the abandonment of most existing programming, an end to advertising, or perhaps even a turn away from "the technology of private commercial broadcasting" in favor of the expansion of cable television as a common carrier open to any group. In any event, the result of women's pursuit of "fair on-the-air treatment" would be "a revolution in broadcasting."[66] By taking the avenues seemingly offered by the government, Stanley suggested, it would be possible to arrive at sweeping change.

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the courts had established that "a licensee cannot be compelled to eliminate a particular program or image; this would be censorship and an infringement upon the First Amendment rights of both the licensee and the general public." Ibid., 18 n. 12. The case in question pitted the Anti-Defamation League against a radio station, KTYM, that aired a paid program with antisemitic content; the Court of Appeals upheld the FCC's decision that it could not deny renewal of the station's license for refusal to pull the program. The station had offered the ADL free equal time to respond. Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith vs. FCC, 403 F.2d 169 (1968). On feminist legal advocates' use of racial analogies during this period, see Serena Mayeri, *Reasoning from Race: Feminism, Law, and the Civil Rights Revolution* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011).

[66] Stanley, "Federal Communications Law and Women's Rights," 48–53.

NOW's New York chapter closely followed Stanley's blueprint when it petitioned to deny the renewal of WABC-TV's license in 1972. The fairness doctrine occupied a particularly prominent place in its attendant public relations efforts, with assertions about employment accordingly minimized. Leading the press release that announced the challenge were references to "'massive violations' of the FCC fairness doctrine" and "a consistent failure to cover serious women's issues and a disparaging portrayal of women's role in society as reflected in overall programming communications." After describing the mechanics of the challenge and listing several specific examples of unbalanced news coverage, the press release summarized the organization's broad demands: "In order to present the opposite side, NOW contends that WABC-TV should be required to show intelligent, independent and assertive women to counterbalance the image now portrayed."[67] At a press conference announcing the challenge, NOW circulated an eight-page packet of excerpts from its legal brief and monitoring studies. Just one page at the back of the packet detailed the station's "sex bias in employment." The bulk of it instead emphasized "blatant distortion" in news coverage, "damaging" commercials, "contemptuous" daytime programming, "discrimin[ation] against intelligent women" on talk shows, and "sex-role stereotypes" on dramatic shows. It was titled "How WABC-TV Projects a Biased Portrayal of Women's Role in Society."[68] Yet when the FCC ruled on NOW's petition in the WABC case in 1974, NOW's fairness doctrine claims found limited purchase: although the FCC granted that women's role was

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[67] "National Organization for Women Challenges WABC-TV License on Grounds of Blatant Sexism" [press release], May 1, 1972, NOW Records, MC 496, folder 46.22, Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute, Harvard University.

[68] "How WABC-TV Projects a Biased Portrayal of Women's Role in Society," May 1, 1972, NOW Records, MC 496, folder 46.22, Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute, Harvard University.

a controversial issue, it departed sharply from Stanely's analysis thereafter, declaring that the portrayal of women did not in itself constitute a "discussion" of that issue. The Commission thus determined that WABC had not violated the doctrine. While NOW may have succeeded, as Allison Perlman has argued, in "[bringing] the issue of derogatory media images of women into the public sphere," it failed to effect the "revolution" that Stanley saw as the logical outcome of the FCC's own rules.[69]

The same fate befell another petition that NOW filed at the same time, against WRC-TV in Washington, DC, a station owned by NBC. In its response to NOW's petition, WRC argued that the portrayal of women could not be considered a discussion of a controversial issue of public importance, offering as support a slippery slope narrative that foresaw complaints from "an almost inexhaustible list of population segments, interest groupings, and abstract issues." The FCC, as in the WABC case, agreed. On appeal, the Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia sided with the FCC, avoiding comment on the fairness doctrine issue but noting that the FCC could best address "fair and balanced coverage of news on women's issues" through its equal employment opportunity policies.[70]

The FCC rejected the notion that the way a group was routinely represented on television constituted a "discussion" of that group's place in society under the terms of the fairness doctrine. The FCC also declared individual instances of stereotypes effectively outside its jurisdiction, due to the protections offered by the First Amendment.

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[69] Perlman, "Feminists in the Wasteland," 420–421. Indeed, 97 percent of the 4,300 fairness doctrine complaints received by the FCC during the 1973 and 1974 fiscal years were rejected, with only 138 referred to the station for an explanation and only 19 ultimately resolved against the station. Cole and Oettinger, *Reluctant Regulators*, 123.

[70] See the summary of this case in U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, *Window Dressing on the Set*, 63–65.

Dean Burch, who served as FCC chairman from 1969 through 1974, explained in 1970 that the commission had received "126 complaints which charged racial or ethnic criticisms, ridicule or degradations" in the prior year. "Despite the offensiveness of such material," he added, "it generally enjoys the constitutional guarantees of free speech." He elaborated, "The commission long ago decided that it would not attempt to determine the limits of free speech by trying to second-guess somebody as to whether something might be anti-Semitic or anti-Mexican, and took the position that these were protected under the first amendment." Citing decisions by Frito Lay to abandon the "Frito Bandito" character that Mexican American activists had protested, and by the show *Laugh In* to curtail its jokes about Polish Americans, Burch suggested that those who were unhappy with TV caricatures should trust the good faith of broadcasters and their willingness to act voluntarily if it was demonstrated "that they either innocently or guiltily have demeaned a race or creed or whatever."[71] Commissioner Robert E. Lee had a similar message a year later: because such stereotyped portrayals were protected by the First Amendment, "we must hope and expect that the good taste and responsible judgment of broadcast licensees would prevent the broadcasting of senseless and offensive material."[72] By the mid-1970s, the FCC routinely replied to complaints about stereotypical or offensive portrayals with a form letter and a mimeographed pamphlet, titled "Broadcasts That Demean Certain Groups," which declared that the FCC's hands

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[71] Burch cited the case involving the ADL and KTYM. United States Congress, House of Representatives, Committee on Interstate and Foreign Commerce, *Films and Broadcasts Demeaning Ethnic, Racial, or Religious Groups*, 1970, 5, 27–28.

[72] United States Congress, House of Representatives, Committee on Interstate and Foreign Commerce, *Films and Broadcasts Demeaning Ethnic, Racial, or Religious Groups*, April 27-28, 1971, 92nd Congress, 1st Session (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1971), 18. See also "More Complaints Of Ethnic Slights Are Reaching F.C.C.," *New York Times*, April 28, 1971.

were tied. As the chief of the FCC's complaints branch explained, "The public is mainly interested in programming—understandably so—and our authority in the programming area is limited."[73]

We Grow Uneasy

In the late 1970s, advocates for women and minority groups sought, again, to encourage the FCC to take a more expansive view of its own power. Again, they failed, running headlong into the powerful aversion to "censorship"—as well as growing antiregulatory sentiments—both within and outside the FCC. In August 1977, the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights issued a report on "women and minorities in television" that called the FCC to action. Titled *Window Dressing on the Set*, the report contained several components: a brief for television's "dominant role in the mass communication of ideas in America today" and its attendant power and impact on viewers, a synthesis of activist writing and scholarly literature on marginalized groups and television, a new content analysis of the limited visibility and stereotyped treatment of women and numerous racial minorities in network dramatic and news programs, a detailed critique of broadcasters' inadequate equal employment and affirmative action efforts, and a summation of key past license challenges.[74] Helen Franzwa, a commission staff member who had been a professor of communication at Hunter College, directed the project; data for the content analysis came from George Gerbner's and Larry Gross's Cultural Indicators Research Project; and the NCCB and other media reform groups provided

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[73] Cole and Oettinger, *Reluctant Regulators*, 122–123.

[74] U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, *Window Dressing on the Set*.

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input and advice.[75] The result was a sort of summation of the intellectual and activist

ferment of the 1960s and 1970s, one that reflected deep frustration at what seemed to be

very limited progress. *Window Dressing on the Set* concluded that "stereotyped

portrayals," especially of women, remained prevalent in television drama; that women

and minorities featured far too rarely "as newsmakers or as news reporters" on network

news; that women and minorities were "not being fully utilized at all levels of station

management" at local broadcasters; and that the FCC had deferred to "industry self-

regulation" when it came to "portrayals of minorities and women" and had done little to

ensure that women and minorities were promoted to "positions that carry decision-

making authority and program production responsibility" at local stations.[76]

The CCR's sharp criticism of the FCC's failure on each of these "two issues

regarding civil rights in broadcasting"—employment and images—carried over into the

report's double-barreled list of recommendations. One subset of these comprised a

number of relatively technical recommendations regarding the design of FCC forms used

to report employment data, the breadth of equal employment opportunity reporting

requirements, and the procedures used to review applicants for license renewal. The

other subset—which attracted greater attention and a strongly negative reception from

both the FCC itself and opinion makers across the political spectrum—represented an

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[75] See Helen H. Franzwa, "Working Women in Fact and Fiction," *Journal of Communication* 24, no. 2 (June 1974): 104–9; U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, *Window Dressing on the Set*, 27, v.

[76] U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, *Window Dressing on the Set*, 148–149.

impassioned call for the FCC's cooperation in taking a substantially more proactive approach to the regulation of television content.[77]

First and foremost, the CCR concluded, the FCC should investigate and then propose rules regarding "the portrayal of minorities and women in commercial and public television drama." The CCR attributed this suggestion to the D.C. Court of Appeals, which while ruling against NOW in the WRC case had written that "an industry-wide problem"—the portrayal of women—"may be more appropriately aired and an industry-wide remedy formulated in a general inquiry, such as a rule-making." (The court, in turn, attributed the idea to FCC commissioner Benjamin Hooks, whose earlier opinion in the same case had indicated a preference for "an overall inquiry" rather than "multiple, ad hoc proceedings.")[78] The CCR argued that network programming, as opposed to local shows, deserved special scrutiny, devoting a chapter of *Window Dressing* to laying out this case. The "vast majority of the one-sided and derogatory characterization" that NOW had identified in its unsuccessful WRC challenge came in programming disseminated by the station's network affiliate (and owner) NBC. And, although the FCC lacked direct regulatory authority over the networks, its own investigations had shown how they controlled "the vast majority" of affiliates' programming. The networks' self-regulatory efforts had clearly failed; both their individual standards departments and the National Association of Broadcasters' self-imposed Code of Practices ostensibly forbade "stereotyped portrayals of minorities and women," yet such stereotypes persisted. To see the hopelessness of self-regulation, the CCR argued, one needed only to consider how the

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[77] The recommendations are at Ibid., 150–152. As the detailed responses to a draft of the report from the FCC's Wallace E. Johnson suggest, it found much to object to in many of the recommendations. Ibid., 172–181.

[78] National Organization for Women et al. v. FCC, 555 F.2d 1002, paragraph 27 (1977).

commercialization and frivolity of children's programming had persisted after the FCC, under pressure from Action for Children's Television to set strict rules, had instead buckled to a "counterattack" from broadcasters and advertisers and trusted industry promises to police itself. Thus, the CCR concluded, "the FCC must explore ways to require that network programming serve all members of the viewing public."[79]

In addition to this appeal for new regulations, *Window Dressing* also urged voluntary action from production companies and networks to "incorporate more minorities and women into television drama" and to promote minorities and women to "decisionmaking positions" in news departments, and it called on Congress to "empower the FCC to regulate equal employment opportunity at the networks," with the idea that this would foster diversity in "decisionmaking processes" and thus in "portrayals." But it was the call for the FCC to shape network programming that prompted the sharpest dissent. Even before *Window Dressing* was published, Wallace E. Johnson, chief of the FCC's Broadcast Bureau, registered its objections in a letter responding to a draft of the report. The CCR's suggestion, he argued, ran afoul of both the First Amendment and Section 326 of the Communications Act of 1934 (which expressly denied the FCC "the power of censorship"). It "would create a regulatory nightmare … [H]owever serious the problem may have been (or is), the suggested cure would be worse. Indeed, carried to its logical conclusion, the suggested solution could also lead to the censorship of all free speech."[80] After the report's publication, FCC Chairman Richard E. Wiley told the

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[79] U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, *Window Dressing on the Set*, 65–71, 150.

[80] Ibid., 172. See 47 U.S. Code § 326.

Associated Press, "It seems difficult to conceive how a federal agency would deal with stereotyping without becoming inevitably drawn into the role of a censor."[81]

Window Dressing encountered similar reactions beyond the FCC. Editorials in the *New York Times* and the *Los Angeles Times* criticized both the CCR's specific interpretations of such programs as *All in the Family* (the latter wrote that the report's "evidence … approached the ludicrous") and its broader recommendation of steps to limit stereotypes. These, the Los Angeles paper declared, would "raise fundamental First Amendment issues" and "impose government censorship on TV programs." The *New York Times* called the report "misguided, muddled and potentially pernicious," claiming, "If its recommendations were put into effect, they would turn the Federal Communications Commission into a censor." Although the editorial acknowledged "the image of minorities and women could be made more 'positive,'" it nevertheless resisted the CCR's proposals. "We grow uneasy," the *Times* concluded, "at the thought of the nation's television channels being turned into transmitters of federally authorized propaganda, however well-intentioned."[82] Even Hooks, who had been the first African American FCC commissioner and had left the FCC in 1977 to become executive director of the NAACP, acknowledged that the report had been "soundly thumped by the critics," and himself argued, "I do not believe the FCC should have the power to censor programming." The problem of stereotypes, he argued, should be addressed by diversifying employment; he defended what the FCC had accomplished in that area

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[81] "Rights Agency Urges Action Against TV 'Stereotypes,'" *Hartford Courant*, August 16, 1977.

[82] "As a Cure, It's a Nightmare," *Los Angeles Times*, August 21, 1977; "How 'Real' Are the Bunkers?," *New York Times*, August 21, 1977.

during his tenure, and endorsed the CCR's proposal that Congress grant the FCC the authority to oversee employment practices at the networks.[83]

In the face of such criticism, the seemingly chastened CCR sought to defend *Window Dressing*, but it was quick to emphasize that it did not, in fact, seek censorship. "This is simply not the case," the CCR's chairman, Arthur S. Flemming, wrote in an October 1977 letter to the *New York Times*. The commission had merely "recommended" an inquiry and proposed rulemaking—which, he reminded readers, had also been suggested by Hooks and the Court of Appeals; it realized well that the First Amendment and Section 326 forbade censorship. Notwithstanding the report's sharp criticism of the ineffectiveness of self-regulation, Flemming now held out as a model the FCC's earlier inquiry into children's programming, when "the FCC adopted no specific rules, preferring to monitor industry attempts to monitor itself." Flemming's letter went on to describe the need for an "inquiry to determine whether the licensees are indulging in stereotyping of women and minorities," a strikingly modest project given that *Window Dressing* had already declared they were indeed doing so, and closed with a call for "government and the private sector" to "work together" to ensure that minorities and women were "fairly and equitably represented in the exercise" of television's "awesome power."[84]

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[83] Hooks's column ran in numerous African American newspapers. See, e.g., Benjamin L. Hooks, "Timely Blast at Broadcasting Industry," *Afro-American*, September 17, 1977. Tom Shales also gave the report a somewhat more temperate hearing, disputing its interpretations of sex stereotypes on *Mary Tyler Moore* and *All in the Family*, but endorsing the value of greater diversity in decision-making positions. Tom Shales, "TV Creating Stereotypes?," *Boston Globe*, October 2, 1977.

[84] Arthur S. Flemming, "Letter: On TV, Women and Minorities: What the Civil Rights Commission Seeks," *New York Times*, October 1, 1977.

The CCR, meanwhile, hurried out a follow-up report a little more than a year later. *Window Dressing on the Set: An Update*, published in January 1979, responded to complaints that the earlier report drew on outdated data, offering new analyses of portrayals and employment between 1975 and 1977. It also sought to answer critics of the earlier report's recommendations. A new chapter, titled "TV's Effect on Viewers and the First Amendment," tried to flesh out what, precisely, the FCC ought to do. The FCC's "initial negative reaction" to the CCR's 1977 suggestion, it charged, "may have reflected an overly narrow interpretation of its authority." And yet the proposals the CCR now offered suggested how narrow that authority indeed was. The Court of Appeals, the CCR argued, had twice explicitly affirmed the FCC's discretion to conduct "industry-wide studies" in the mode of its earlier investigation of children's television, and to propose rules accordingly. What rules might the FCC develop "that would not violate the First Amendment"? The CCR sought to answer by reframing its "concerns regarding the portrayal of women and minorities" as a "lack of diversity," with the bulk of TV's minority characters, for instance, appearing on a few sitcoms and thus portrayed "in comic roles and as teenagers." The FCC could perhaps combat this "lack of diversity" in entertainment by creating requirements that the networks, and the production companies from which they acquired programming, "employ minorities and women in policymaking positions." And if the FCC determined "it is not within its power to set specific rules in this area," it could still "act to provide leadership by issuing a memorandum of opinion setting forth its recommendations for actions that broadcasters might independently take," a right to "offer suggestions" that had also been affirmed by the Court of Appeals. "It is the considered judgment of this Commission," the chapter

concluded, "that the FCC can find a way to encourage greater diversity in the portrayal of

minorities and women on television."[85]

Even this proposal—calling now for encouragement, not mandates, and which

almost completely subsumed concerns about program content within the framework of

diverse employment—met with objections from the FCC. Wallace Johnson's review of

the draft report was more cursory this time, maintaining again that the FCC "cannot allow

itself to be drawn into the role" the CCR sought for it, and rejecting the CCR's proposal

to expand its existing inquiry into the networks, which "would embroil the Commission

in the type of programming review that it must … eschew." He did not comment

specifically on its other proposals.[86] The *Wall Street Journal*'s editorial page suggested

the CCR was "trampl[ing] on" civil rights, rather than defending them. The CCR had

failed to learn "last time around just how profoundly offensive this kind of campaign is,"

the *Journal* declared sourly, "And the particular kind of government nosing around that

the Civil Rights Commission suggests—regulating TV's fantasies in order to insure that

they are politically acceptable—is especially obnoxious."[87] By 1979, momentum was

solidly behind the deregulatory projects of those like FCC commissioner Margita Eklund

White, who wrote in an op-ed responding to the first report, "I will not be a censor."

Although she was "often" disturbed by women's portrayal on television, White argued,

the solution was not greater regulation but "more communications choices," such as UHF

stations, cable and satellite TV, and "video cassettes and video discs," which would put

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[85] U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, *Window Dressing on the Set: An Update* (Washington, DC, 1979), 55–59.

[86] Ibid., 95–96.

[87] "More Window Dressing," *Wall Street Journal*, February 27, 1979.

decisions in the public's hands. "I freely admit that I am a regulator for less—rather than more—regulation. I believe the people themselves usually can articulate and achieve their needs and interests through the competitive marketplace of ideas."[88]

Indeed, the FCC began in the late 1970s not to expand but instead to scale back its regulation of television broadcasters, and that effort accelerated under the administration of Ronald Reagan in the 1980s. Ownership limits on television stations were raised from five to seven in the late 1970s and then to twelve in the 1980s. The license renewal period was extended from three to five years. Strict requirements that broadcasters air community-oriented programming and report on their efforts to the FCC at renewal time were dropped. In 1987, the FCC dropped the Fairness Doctrine—long a scourge of right wing and religious activists—and Reagan vetoed a Congressional effort to reinstate it. Reagan's FCC chairman Mark Fowler rejected the "trustee" model of broadcasting entirely, saying in 1984, "It was time to treat [broadcasters] the way almost everybody else in society does—that is, as businesses. … Television is just another appliance. It's a toaster with pictures." The FCC's equal employment policies, although deemed inadequate by the CCR, continued to produce limited gains in minority employment at broadcasters, and a new rule adopted in the 1980s encouraged diversified decision-making (but also further consolidation in the industry) by permitting some exceptions to the twelve-station ownership limit if the additional stations were "controlled by minorities or women."[89] But in a dawning conservative age, the FCC rejected entirely

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[88] Margita Eklund White, "Should FCC Watch Over What TV Watchers Watch?," *Los Angeles Times*, October 2, 1977.

[89] For a succinct account of broadcast deregulation the late 1970s and 1980s, see MacDonald, *One Nation Under Television*, 232. See also Noriega, *Shot in America*, chapter 5; and, on the fairness doctrine, Hendershot, *What's Fair on the Air?*. In April 1998, twenty percent of television and radio employees were racial or ethnic minorities, double the figure in 1971. Mills, *Changing Channels*, 263.

not only the particular interventions the CCR encouraged, but also the idea that broadcast television had civic obligations at all.

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During the 1960s and 1970s, African Americans, Mexican Americans, and feminists sought to fulfill the seeming promise that the federal government's commitments to equality might extend to the sphere of moving images. By the late 1970s, a series of efforts to enlist the government in transforming motion pictures and television, and the industries that produced them, had given unprecedented prominence to the question of fair representation on screen. Yet each effort was also met with failure and frustration. Proposals that the government intervene to ensure balance in the portrayals of women and minorities were rejected as assaults on free expression. And although diversity in the motion picture and television industries was presented by some as a more suitable goal, the most robust efforts to promote the hiring of minorities and women through federal policies—especially in managerial and "decisionmaking" positions—likewise faced strong opposition and made little headway. In a political culture that increasingly valorized a "marketplace of ideas," historically marginalized groups seeking greater visibility on screen found that, despite their initially high expectations, the federal government would not in fact be a reliable ally.

Perhaps nothing better highlights the simultaneous appeal of fair representation as a goal and rejection of government intervention to ensure it than a series of Congressional resolutions and hearings in the early 1970s. In 1970 and 1971, a group of congressmen, largely Democrats of Italian American heritage, proposed a quartet of non-binding

resolutions that decried the "demeaning" of "ethnic, racial, [and] religious groups" in motion pictures and television and demanded that studios and broadcasters set "standards" to eliminate such stereotypes.[90] The resolutions never came to a vote, but at a pair of committee hearings to consider the measures, supportive congressmen spoke passionately about the influence of motion pictures and television, especially on the young, and the threat that stereotypes posed to "brotherhood" and democracy—while also emphasizing the injuries visited upon Italian Americans and other "ethnics" by the media.[91] In their mouths, the language of fair representation became at once universal— the "injustice" of stereotypes, one congressman testified, "has reached the point that few Americans can escape being hurt by it"—and newly particular, a vehicle for the special grievances of "ethnics," a population increasingly turning away from liberalism and activist government.[92] Even as they eagerly used the platform of a Congressional hearing to demand fair representation on screen and declare its importance, they also gave voice to the political forces working against federal intervention to ensure it. Less acting in solidarity with black, Mexican American, and other minority activists than distinguishing themselves from such advocates' efforts, they foreswore "censorship" and "legislative

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[90] United States Congress, House of Representatives, Committee on Interstate and Foreign Commerce, *Films and Broadcasts Demeaning Ethnic, Racial, or Religious Groups*, 1970, 2–3; United States Congress, House of Representatives, Committee on Interstate and Foreign Commerce, *Films and Broadcasts Demeaning Ethnic, Racial, or Religious Groups*, 1971, 2–6. There were two main resolutions considered in 1969 and 1970, and a similar pair in the new 92nd Congress that convened in 1971.

[91] See, e.g., United States Congress, House of Representatives, Committee on Interstate and Foreign Commerce, *Films and Broadcasts Demeaning Ethnic, Racial, or Religious Groups*, 1970, 53, 55, 57; United States Congress, House of Representatives, Committee on Interstate and Foreign Commerce, *Films and Broadcasts Demeaning Ethnic, Racial, or Religious Groups*, 1971, 7, 9.

[92] United States Congress, House of Representatives, Committee on Interstate and Foreign Commerce, *Films and Broadcasts Demeaning Ethnic, Racial, or Religious Groups*, 1970, 55. On the white ethnic turn from liberalism, see, e.g., Matthew Frye Jacobson, *Roots Too: White Ethnic Revival in Post-Civil Rights America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006).

restriction" and condemned "movements in other quarters of Government to intimidate and harass the broadcast industry."[93] Through these hearings, as so often during the 1970s, the federal government declared visibility in motion pictures and television both indispensible and outside its control.

The ambitious efforts and transformative visions of the advocates who felt otherwise—from Clifford Alexander and Vincente Ximenes to Nancy Stanley and Helen Franzwa and other contributors to *Window Dressing on the Set*—provide a remarkable document of the very high expectations placed in government in the wake of the civil rights era, and of their ultimate disappointment. As these advocates' efforts foundered, and the avenues they pursued were increasingly narrowed if not closed entirely, those eager to secure fair representation for minority groups and women on screen increasingly sought to amass power within Hollywood and to work more collaboratively with the motion picture and television industries for changes in content and employment practices. For some, this shift in emphasis constituted a turn, a concession to the evident impossibility of imposing change from without. But this latter project also had a deep history of its own, and its advocates had their own insurgent visions.

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[93] United States Congress, House of Representatives, Committee on Interstate and Foreign Commerce, *Films and Broadcasts Demeaning Ethnic, Racial, or Religious Groups*, 1971, 12. Several Mexican American advocates testified at the 1971 hearing, and the Japanese American Citizens League submitted written testimony in 1970.

Chapter 5

The Ultimate Goals of Wider Representation

On August 13, 1967, civil rights activists gathered with television actors and

producers at the Beverley Hilton Hotel. There, "amidst the flashing of cameras," they

witnessed the presentation of "Image Awards" to the producers of nearly a dozen

television programs. Larry McCormick—a Los Angeles radio announcer and actor who

would soon become one of the city's first black television anchors—served as master of

ceremonies. Prizes were bestowed on six network series in which African American

performers had recurring roles, including CBS's *Mission: Impossible* and *Hogan's*

Heroes and NBC's *Star Trek* and *I Spy*. (The last of these was the first television drama

to star a black actor, Bill Cosby.) Accolades were also given to a handful of news, talk,

and variety programs, and to Universal City Studios for its "outstanding democratic

employment practices." A press release for the event explained, "Recognition is being

given for the steps being taken in response to a demand by Negroes for representation in

one of the more popular media of entertainment in our American Society." The

honorees, it continued, were being commended for "presenting a more favorable and

realistic image of Negroes by featuring Negroes in a continuing or recurring role."[1]

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[1] Advertisement for 1967 Image Awards, *Los Angeles Sentinel*, July 27, 1967; "Hollywood NAACP To Present Awards," *Los Angeles Sentinel*, July 27, 1967; "NAACP - The Beverly Hills-Hollywood Branch News Letter," September 17, 1967, Group IV, Box J-4 [Part 29, Series C, Reel 1, Folder 70], Papers of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (Bethesda, MD: University Publications of America, 1982–2001) (hereafter, NAACP). On McCormick, see Ron Dungee, "Newsman Larry McCormick Honored by KTLA," *Los Angeles Sentinel*, May 31, 2001; "Longtime KTLA-TV News Anchor Larry McCormick Dies," accessed December 28, 2014, http://www.blackvoicenews.com/news/37317-longtime-ktla-tv-news-anchor-larry-mccormick-dies.html. On *I Spy*, see Donald Bogle, *Primetime Blues: African Americans on Network Television* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2001), 115–125.

The 1967 Image Awards event was organized by the NAACP's Beverly Hills-Hollywood branch, which had been established five years earlier and sought to appeal to individuals "affiliated with the motion picture, television, radio, and recording industries." In his keynote speech at the dinner, Leonard H. Carter, the NAACP's West Coast regional director, observed that "considerable pressure" had produced "gradual change" in the "image of Negroes" that was offered on television, and thus "accepted … by white America." The awards were a way to recognize and encourage television's positive contributions to Americans' "new emerging awareness" of "Negroes as ordinary citizens in all avenues and aspects of life." Referring obliquely to the violence that had convulsed American cities that summer, as well as to the rebellion in Los Angeles itself two years earlier, Carter decried white racism and described the country's "race relations dilemma" as an existential threat to its future. This challenge called for a sustained "battle" not only along "the job front, the housing front, the education front," but also in "entertainment media." Accordingly, the Image Awards, he urged, should "become an annual event."[2]

The event's organizers concurred. In a report for the branch's newsletter, an official proudly described the positive coverage given by the local media and the trade press, noted that Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA) leader Jack Valenti had sent "telegraph greetings," and related one attendee's declaration that the event "was First Class—all the way." The branch had benefitted financially as well: "a profit was made." The Image Awards demonstrated, she argued, that there was much to be gained by

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[2] "NAACP - The Beverly Hills-Hollywood Branch News Letter." On the BH-H branch, see below, and Maggie Hathaway to Althea T. L. Simmons, December 11, 1961, Group III, Box C-5 [Part 27, Series D, Reel 2, Folder 351], NAACP.

recognizing and praising those in the television industry who had created recurring roles for black actors. "Long steps were taken toward the ultimate goals of wider representation of the Negro on the television screen by the appreciation shown at the 'Image Awards,'" she wrote. Going forward, she would "be watching with interest" both for the appearance of more programs featuring black characters and for casting notices seeking "Negro actors, extras and musicians."[3]

In identifying "entertainment media" as a crucial front in the battle for black freedom, Leonard Carter's remarks were consistent with the swelling condemnation of motion pictures and television by marginalized social groups and their allies during the 1960s and 1970s. This ferment was manifest in protests, boycotts, and a barrage of criticism by scholars, intellectuals, and government officials—all of which together produced a sense of "considerable pressure" and a promising environment for interventions to fundamentally reshape these media. As Chapter 4 described, some advocates sought to secure the federal government's intervention against "stereotyped" television content and in support of diversity in employment at studios, television networks, and broadcasters. Concurrently, however, others intensified an overlapping but distinct project to build up the power of historically marginalized groups within the movie and television industries, and to use that power to win changes in the content of specific programs and pictures and greater diversity in the casting of actors and the employment of off-camera personnel. Usually facilitated by individuals rooted in Hollywood, these efforts played out both in private consultations with producers and industry officials and, beginning in this period, in public rituals designed to celebrate

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[3] "NAACP - The Beverly Hills-Hollywood Branch News Letter."

positive steps taken on screen and off, acknowledge allies, build goodwill, and push for further change—events like the Image Awards.

This second project, although more multifarious, had deep roots and was in the end more enduring than the often-frustrated quest for government intervention. It differed not only in approach but also in emphasis; the "ultimate goals" of its exponents were broadly similar, but not the same. Those who engaged directly with the motion picture and television industries drew especially insistent connections between screen content and employment practices, envisioning fair representation as largely synonymous with, in the words of the Image Awards organizer, "*wider* representation." Positive and realistic images on screen could be secured in combination with steady and dignified work for minority actors, respect and influence for marginalized groups within Hollywood, and a prominent place for performers and entertainers within minority politics in the United States.

Scholars have yet to consider the history of this phenomenon in a comprehensive way. Those who have examined the interactions of minority advocates and Hollywood decision-makers in this period have emphasized mostly the perspective of television producers and networks, characterizing their negotiations with minority groups regarding program content, and the cultivation by producers of activists with Hollywood connections, as strategies for managing the problem of audience discontent and shielding themselves from protest. Most notably, the media scholar Kathryn C. Montgomery has described how television networks during the 1970s began to establish "institutionalized relationship[s]" with organizations including Nostoros, a Hispanic advocacy group founded by the actor Ricardo Montalban, and the Gay Media Task Force, which was run

by a Los Angeles-based psychologist who also served as a paid technical consultant to producers. Seeking advice from such organizations early on could head off subsequent criticism, blunting the potentially "disruptive force" of protest. Doing so also elevated "moderate" groups willing to work with and within the industry over others with more radical demands. Although such institutionalized relationships allowed certain groups some opportunity to "influence" programming, Montgomery argues, advocates could ultimately maneuver only within the existing frameworks of network television and "prevailing industry trends."[4]

Certainly, such assessments have merit; indeed, the story of the television industry's "management" of minority pressure groups has obvious antecedents in motion picture producers' informal cooperation with Catholic advocates that led to the adoption of the Motion Picture Production Code in 1930, and in the efforts of Jewish leaders with Hollywood connections to steer national Jewish organizations toward naming the former screenwriter John Stone as their liaison to the industry in the late 1940s.[5] But taking the industry's perspective obscures the outlooks, struggles, and goals of the minority performers and Hollywood professionals with whom producers most often negotiated. During the 1960s and 1970s, such individuals embraced the rhetoric of "images" and emphasized the connections between their longstanding struggles for regular employment

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[4] See Kathryn Montgomery, *Target: Prime Time: Advocacy Groups and the Struggle Over Entertainment Television* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), especially 64–74, 216–219. On Nosotros, see Ibid., 55–65; Chon A. Noriega, *Shot in America: Television, the State, and the Rise of Chicano Cinema* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), 66–67. On the Gay Media Task Force, see Montgomery, *Target: Prime Time*, chapter 5; Steven Capsuto, *Alternate Channels: The Uncensored Story of Gay and Lesbian Images on Radio and Television* (New York: Ballantine Books, 2000); Vincent A. Doyle, "The Visibility Professionals: The Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation and the Cultural Politics of Mainstreaming" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Massachusetts Amherst, 2005), 88–90.

[5] See Chapter 1 and Chapter 2, respectively.

in Hollywood and the battle for "favorable and realistic" visibility on screen. Although

not itself comprehensive, or necessarily representative, a history of the organizing

undertaken by African American actors and other professionals in Hollywood offers a

vivid illustration of this phenomenon. Between the 1940s and the 1960s, black actors

developed their own notions of fair representation and waged intermittent battles with the

national NAACP over the appropriate goals and strategies for intervening in motion

pictures and, subsequently, in television. By the mid-1960s, the actors largely won this

debate, giving issues of employment and casting practices a prominent place within the

burgeoning cultural conversation about black images on screen. Over the often-

tumultuous first dozen years of the Image Awards, distributed by NAACP's Beverly

Hills-Hollywood (BH-H) branch on a roughly annual basis after their 1967 debut, black

Hollywood professionals refined and expanded the notion of "image," which grew to

encompass not only a steady presence on screen, but also the talent of African American

actors, the success of black professionals in the world of Hollywood, and the fortunes of

the African American population as a whole. By the late 1970s, at the dawn of a new era

in American moving images, the national NAACP had wholeheartedly embraced these

varied and interconnected aims, and other marginalized groups had also adopted both this

vision of fair representation and the particular tool of the "awards program."[6]

Historians have begun to give greater attention to the crucial role of African

American entertainers in the black freedom struggles of the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s,

documenting how notable black actors and singers made important activist contributions

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[6] For a brief discussion of "awards programs," from which I borrow the term, see Montgomery, *Target: Prime Time*, 181–183. Montgomery makes in passing some claims about awards programs, especially regarding the dividends in visibility that sponsoring organizations reaped from such events, that I develop here at greater length. However, her discussion of the phenomenon is brief and does not probe awards programs or their history in any detail.

through their performances and by means of their celebrity.[7] Less attention, however, has been paid to the activism and organizing directed at the entertainment industry itself by African American actors and other black Hollywood professionals, individuals who were often lesser known and more marginal. Such men and women—character actors, bit players, and extras; aspiring producers, directors, and writers; entertainment journalists; and others at the edges of the television and motion picture industries— established organizations, wrote newsletters, marched on picket lines, agitated within unions, and eventually, planned and staged the Image Awards. In the process, they helped to reorient both the goals and strategies and the priorities and emphases of the broader struggle for fair representation of African Americans on screen—and ultimately to influence similar struggles by other marginalized groups as well.

In the 1960s and 1970s, members of historically marginalized groups vigorously sought *both* to secure federal intervention in the motion picture and television industries *and* to build their power within those industries. But as obstacles to the former grew, the latter became the main avenue open to groups seeking fair representation in motion pictures and television. To understand the history of such efforts is thus crucial to understanding how the meaning of fair representation evolved in the post–civil rights era, when it became inseparable from the "ultimate goals of wider representation" and efforts by marginalized groups to secure power within Hollywood, when the dense

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[7] See, e.g., Judith E. Smith, *Becoming Belafonte: Black Artist, Public Radical* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2014); Ruth Feldstein, *How It Feels to Be Free: Black Women Entertainers and the Civil Rights Movement* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013); Justin T. Lorts, "Black Laughter/Black Protest: Civil Rights, Respectability, and the Cultural Politics of African American Comedy, 1934-1968" (Ph.D. dissertation, Rutgers University, 2008); Waldo E. Martin, *No Coward Soldiers: Black Cultural Politics and Postwar America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005); Brian Ward, *Just My Soul Responding: Rhythm and Blues, Black Consciousness, and Race Relations* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998).

interconnections between belonging in Hollywood and belonging in America made the two seem to many increasingly synonymous.

Hard-Working Players

Nearly a quarter century before the first Image Awards presentation in 1967, on a Sunday afternoon in late April 1944, a multiracial crowd reported at 3,000 to 3,500 gathered in the auditorium of the Second Baptist Church in Los Angeles to witness the distribution of the Motion Picture Unity Awards, organized by the Committee for Unity in Motion Pictures (CUMP). In February, the young black singer and actor Caleb Peterson had launched the CUMP, promising "a nation-wide campaign against racial injustice in motion picture casting." Peterson, who had appeared as a soldier in the film *Stage Door Canteen* (United Artists, 1943), and who served on the Youth Council of the Los Angeles branch of the NAACP, drew support from many of the day's notable black movie actors, including Ben Carter, Lena Horne, Mantan Moreland, Canada Lee, and Clarence Muse.[8] During the April awards ceremony, the "goggle-eyed and thoroughly thrilled folk" in attendance saw eleven actors and screenwriters—including Horne, Carter, Rex Ingram, Dooley Wilson, and Bette Davis—honored by celebrity presenters with scrolls and trophies for "contributing most to the advancement of colored players in motion pictures." (Davis was absent due to illness; on her behalf, Hattie McDaniel accepted on her behalf a "tribute to her democratic attitude and her work in harmonizing relations between the races in Hollywood.") The studios that had produced the honored

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[8] "Drive On To Influence Movies," *Journal and Guide*, February 12, 1944.

pictures were also recognized, and white stars including Olivia De Havilland and George Murphy sat on the dais.[9]

The 1944 Unity Awards event reflected the aggressive wartime campaign against racial stereotypes in motion pictures described in Chapter 2, from its central theme of "unity" to the films for which its winners were honored, which included such deliberately inclusive combat pictures as *Crash Dive* and *Sahara*. The war, the encouragement of the Office of War Information, and the lobbying of Walter White had brought some African American actors new opportunities to play heroic characters in such war-themed films. But for black performers who had built careers playing the sorts of roles White criticized as "stereotyped" and "menial"—maids, butlers, porters, and other servants—the NAACP leader's crusade prompted fears that these parts might vanish with nothing to replace them. Partly in response, some black actors offered their own alternative vision of fair representation on screen, one in which "better roles" would be won through negotiation with screenwriters and producers and through greater respect for the steady, professional, talented work of black actors. As McDaniel declared in 1943, citing her own career as in example, "As the studios increase their respect for us as artists they will increase their respect for us as a race and more and more we will be able to help them portray us in better lights because they will consult us as our own interpretators [sic] of roles."[10]

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[9] Leon Hardwick, "Lena Horne Wins Trophy for Best Acting in 1943," *Afro-American*, April 22, 1944; Leon Hardwick, "To Honor Actors Responsible For Rise Of Negroes In Films," *Chicago Defender*, April 22, 1944; Leon Hardwick, "Lena Horne, Bette Davis To Be Honored For Work," *Journal and Guide*, April 22, 1944; "Movie Stars To Receive NAACP Merit Awards," *Pittsburgh Courier*, April 22, 1944; J. Robert Smith, "Miss McDaniel Accused of Using Offensive Epithet," *Afro-American*, April 29, 1944; Herman Hill, "Film Thespians Receive Honorary Acting Awards," *Pittsburgh Courier*, May 6, 1944; Leon H. Hardwick, "Lena Horne, Three Others Given Awards For Work In Hit Films," *Chicago Defender*, May 6, 1944.

[10] Ralph Matthews, "The Truth About Hollywood and the Race Issue from the Actors' Viewpoint," *Afro-American*, January 9, 1943.

During and after World War II, black actors promoted this alternative vision by criticizing as misguided White's heavily publicized lobbying of producers, by participating in other groups that aimed to encourage changes in the motion picture industry, and by organizing to oppose the NAACP's campaign against the *Amos 'n' Andy* television program. By the late 1950s, a committee of black performers in Hollywood succeeded in persuading the national NAACP to embrace an understanding of fair representation in which the employment of black actors and the depictions of African Americans on screen were inseparable—and to acknowledge that actors themselves were the proper intermediaries for future dealings with the motion picture and television industries.[11]

Each of Walter White's forays in Hollywood prompted criticism from African Americans in the film capital. After his initial 1942 visit, a *Los Angeles Tribune* columnist cited unnamed "Negro screen actors" predicting "nothing will be heard from White's many conferences with the film executives."[12] When he returned later that year, individuals including Muse and McDaniel voiced doubts about his efforts on the record. McDaniel declared, "I don't believe that we will gain by rushing or attempting to force studios to do anything they are not readily inclined to do." Muse criticized White for intervening as a "committee of one" while failing to consult the Screen Actors Guild

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[11] Organizing by black performers was not a new phenomenon. The Negro Actors' Guild, for instance, was founded in 1936; although it functioned primarily as a social welfare organization, it also sought to advance black performers' interests. See Jonathan Dewberry, "Black Actors Unite: The Negro Actors' Guild," *The Black Scholar* 21, no. 2 (March 1990): 2–11.

[12] Almena Davis, "How 'Bout This?," *The Los Angeles Tribune*, March 29, 1942, Group II, Box A-279 [Part 18, Series B, Reel 20, Folder 1], NAACP; Walter White to Almena Davis, April 28, 1942, Group II, Box A-279 [Part 18, Series B, Reel 20, Folder 1], NAACP; Almena Davis to Walter White, May 5, 1942, Group II, Box A-279 [Part 18, Series B, Reel 20, Folder 1], NAACP. A frustrated White sought unsuccessfully to persuade the *Tribune*'s editor Almena Davis to identify to him her sources, and he objected that his work would give black actors "more parts, better pay, and roles more typical of the Negro as he is instead of as Hollywood thinks of him."

(SAG) and its black "artists," charged him with bias against "black-skinned" actors, and defended the use of dialect "if the character is noble."[13] When White announced to a group of actors at a 1946 dinner party his plans to open an NAACP bureau in Hollywood, most of the attendees came "with hatchets," he reported to his New York colleagues, with Muse and Louise Beavers leading the criticism of his failure to consult them earlier. The *Los Angeles Sentinel* reported, "The only thing missing from Tuesday night's dinner reception for Walter White was an atomic bomb."[14]

Soon after he began his work in Hollywood, White concluded that the film capital's black actors were mostly impediments to his efforts, their complaints about his lobbying motivated by selfishness. After 1942, he habitually referred in his correspondence to the "Clarence Muses who don't want Uncle Tom roles ended."[15]

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[13] Herman Hill, "Change of Attitude in Hollywood Observed," *Pittsburgh Courier*, August 8, 1942; Clarence Muse, "Muse Presents Other Side of Film Picture," *Pittsburgh Courier*, September 12, 1942; "Big Fight To Elevate Negroes In Movies Continues," *Chicago Defender*, September 26, 1942. Accusations of colorism against White, who was very light skinned, were an occasional subtext of objections to his lobbying efforts. For instance, several years later, in the midst of his efforts to create an NAACP bureau in Hollywood, reports got back to White claiming McDaniel had summarized his attitude as: "I'm going out there and see how those black niggers can live so fine." A "disgusted" White later dismissed the accusation as a "red herring." See Lawrence F. LaMar, "Hollywood Performers Rap Walter White Plan," *New York Amsterdam News*, February 2, 1946, Group II, Box A-277 [Part 18, Series B, Reel 17, Folder 408]; Stanley B. Bats[?] to Walter White, August 19, 1947, Group II, Box A-279 [Part 18, Series B, Reel 20, Folder 334], NAACP; Walter White to John H. Sengstacke and Metz Lochard, February 21, 1946, Group II, Box A-277 [Part 18, Series B, Reel 17, Folder 408], NAACP. See also Fredi Washington, "Fredi Says...," *The People's Voice*, February 9, 1946, Group II, Box A-277 [Part 18, Series B, Reel 17, Folder 408].

[14] Walter White to Roy [Wilkins] and the Office, January 25, 1946, Group II, Box A-277 [Part 18, Series B, Reel 17, Folder 408], NAACP; "Walter White Tells Plans For Hollywood Bureau," *Los Angeles Sentinel*, January 24, 1946.

[15] See, e.g., Walter White to Catherine Freeland, February 13, 1943, Group II, Box A-279 [Part 18, Series B, Reel 20, Folder 253, NAACP. White's perspective on the disputes has been influential in scholarship on the period. Cripps, although criticizing White's "neglect of black Hollywood" and his failure to consider "his impact on their livelihoods," also describes black Hollywood as "a sort of disloyal opposition" and "a conservative anchor against White's work." Thomas Cripps, *Making Movies Black: The Hollywood Message Movie from World War II to the Civil Rights Era* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 45–48. Similarly, Stephen Vaughn writes that "Hollywood blacks … often opposed the NAACP as well as other organized efforts by Afro-Americans." Stephen Vaughn, "Ronald Reagan and the

Central to his thinking about the planned bureau was his belief that black actors, publicists, and writers were too blinded by their desire for steady employment to be sufficiently discriminating about the roles they played. For this reason, someone of "complete independence," with a salary sufficient to "remain uncontaminated and untempted," needed, must lead the bureau and provide "advice when needed regarding scripts and the treatment of Negroes in the films."[16] To White, actors' objections to the bureau reflected their "vested interest in the status quo." Because the actors were cynically interested in their "finances," they were, in the words of a *Chicago Defender* editorial that endorsed White's plans, "not capable of acting as judges of what is good and what is bad in Hollywood."[17]

Dissenting actors saw the situation differently. They were invested, certainly, as a result of their years of labor in the industry—many had gotten their starts as real-life servants to white stars, or had acted as extras before winning bit parts and supporting or even occasional starring roles. But this professional experience, in their view, gave them precisely the perspective and expertise necessary to determine correctly what to fight for, and how to get it.[18] A January 1943 feature story in the Baltimore *Afro-American*, titled

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Struggle for Black Dignity in Cinema, 1937-1953," *The Journal of African American History* 87 (Winter 2002): 83–97.

[16] Walter White to Edwin Embree, October 30, 1942, Group II, Box A-279 [Part 18, Series B, Reel 20, Folder 165], NAACP; Walter White to Edwin Embree, November 20, 1942, Group II, Box A-279 [Part 18, Series B, Reel 20, Folder 165], NAACP.

[17] Walter White, "Draft of Statement Regarding NAACP's Establishment of Hollywood Bureau," February 18, 1946, Group II, Box A-277 [Part 18, Series B, Reel 17, Folder 408], NAACP; "Hollywood And Walter White," *Chicago Defender*, February 23, 1946; Walter White, "People, Politics and Places," *Chicago Defender*, March 9, 1946. White's column ultimately tried to shift readers' attention to producers, writers, and directors, writing that the objecting actors "are more to be pitied than attacked."

[18] On the social world of black actors in Hollywood, see Cripps, *Making Movies Black*, 46–48; Donald Bogle, *Bright Boulevards, Bold Dreams: The Story of Black Hollywood* (New York: One World/Ballantine, 2005), esp. 184–213.

"The Truth About Hollywood and the Race Issue From the Actors' Viewpoint,"
concluded that the NAACP should "be guided by [the actors'] experience and
knowledge" or "keep their noses out of Hollywood."[19] As actors saw it, they merited
consultation as professionals, as members of SAG, and as leading figures in the
NAACP's own Los Angeles branch. In 1946, Muse described actors as businessmen and
as professionals, "earning bread like lawyers, doctors, and workers and deserv[ing] the
same consideration." Louise Beavers, one reporter wrote, "compared the Negro film
actress with a doctor in his diagnosis of a case and drew the conclusion that a medic
would certainly not permit an outsider to diagnosis his patient without consent." Black
SAG members, in a statement that same year that affirmed their willingness to play any
role they personally judged to be acceptable, styled themselves "hard working players."
Actors suggested that the national NAACP ought to join them in pressing the
"executives, producers, directors and writers" to make changes in what was presented on
screen.[20]

Meanwhile, through SAG and through other organizations, many black actors in
the 1940s did participate in campaigns to change the motion picture industry's practices,
including its depictions of African Americans. Muse, for instance, was associated with
the Hollywood Writers' Mobilization, the Entertainment Industry Emergency Committee,

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[19] Matthews, "The Truth About Hollywood and the Race Issue from the Actors' Viewpoint." The *Afro-American* printed responses from readers two weeks later: "Bouquets & Garlic for Hollywood Stars," *Afro-American*, January 23, 1943.

[20] Herman Hill, "Hollywood Stars Rap Interference," *Pittsburgh Courier*, February 2, 1946. For Muse's comments, see Harry Levette, "Muse Hits NAACP's Hollywood Invasion," *Atlanta Daily World*, February 7, 1946; Harry Levette, "Clarence Muse Denounces Walter White's Hollywood 'Invasion,'" *Afro-American*, February 16, 1946. For the statement of SAG members, see Harry Levette, "Don't Look Now, Walter White, But Hollywood Extras Are Back," *Chicago Defender*, April 20, 1946. On actors' suggestions to target the creators of stereotyped roles, see Herman Hill, "Hot Controversy Looms in Movie-Actor-NAACP Feud," *Pittsburgh Courier*, March 9, 1946.

and the National Negro Congress.[21] The CUMP and its successor organization, the

Interracial (later, International) Film and Radio Guild (IFRG) also provided, at least for a

time, opportunities for black performers to celebrate "unity," recognize one another's

talent, and mingle with white celebrities, studio executives, and political dignitaries. In

July 1944, Unity Award winners were toasted at a "press dinner and reception at the

Arlington Club," and an additional Unity Awards ceremony was staged the next year,

attended by Orson Welles and Bette Davis; by Horne, Muse, and a number of other black

actors; and by dignitaries from the Soviet Union, Britain, and Liberia.[22] The IFRG, led

by publicist and writer Leon H. Hardwick, and well enmeshed in Hollywood's Popular

Front, won considerable attention in the black press, promoting a platform that called for

an end to racial and ethnic stereotyping, "casting of Negroes as professional business,

artistic, and cultural figures," and desegregation of trade unions throughout the industry.

It also criticized White's lobbying in Hollywood. The scope of its activities beyond the

Unity Awards events and Hardwick's numerous press statements is difficult to ascertain

with certainty; an ally of White's in 1945 called it "more of a paper organization." By

1946, it had come to the attention of the FBI, and like other left-wing groups in which

some actors participated, it faded from view as the Red Scare descended on Hollywood

by decade's end. But during its existence, it pioneered an appealing fusion of racial

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[21] See, e.g., *Writers' Congress: The Proceedings of the Conference Held in October 1943 under the Sponsorship of the Hollywood Writers' Mobilization and the University of California* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1944), 618, 631, for the HWM; "Entertainment Industry Emergency Committee Progress Report," August 1943, Group II, Box A-248 [Part 18, Series B, Reel 14, Folder 307], NAACP, for the EIEC; NNC Press Release, "Clarence Muse Calls for Democracy in Film Industry," July 30, 1943, Series II, Box 31, Folder 10 [Part II, Reel 1], National Negro Congress records, 1933–1947 (Bethesda, MD: University Publications of America, 1988).

[22] "Sweetie Inks for 'Fleshie,'" *Afro-American*, July 8, 1944; "The Big Five in Motion Picture Circles," *Afro-American*, August 5, 1944; Leon Hartwick, "Hollywood Stars Are Given Inter-Racial Progress Awards," *Chicago Defender*, June 2, 1945; "For Interracial Harmony," *Afro-American*, June 9, 1945. A third ceremony was planned for 1948, but it is unclear whether it was actually held. "Lena Horne, Canada Lee To Receive Unity Awards," *Pittsburgh Courier*, February 21, 1948.

egalitarianism and celebration of black talent, a combination that would be resurrected in years to come.[23]

As the 1950s dawned, black actors initiated a new round of organizing, first in opposition to the NAACP's interventions in entertainment, and eventually within the NAACP itself. Shortly after the NAACP's national convention voted in 1951 to condemn the television version of *Amos 'n' Andy* for promoting stereotypes, a group of stage, radio, and film actors, as well as musicians and others in the entertainment industry, established the Coordinating Council of Negro Performers (CCNP) in New York. The CCNP opposed the NAACP's campaign as a threat to black actors' jobs, and it aimed to reconcile questions of screen content with black performers' need to find work; as the *New York Amsterdam News* reported at the time, the CCNP sought to examine "such controversial issues as questionable 'good taste' in the selection of material, [and] caricatures and stereotype characters and characterizations, and to direct attention of producers and sponsors to available colored talent."[24] The CCNP outlasted

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[23] Press statements and reports by Hardwick also described the IFRG as contemplating an affiliation with the CIO and sponsoring panel discussions, compiling and circulating analyses of films, and publishing a monthly magazine "to keep the American people informed as to the contributions of the film and radio industries to the public welfare." See "Interracial Film, Radio Guild Lists Eight-Point Plan To Improve Roles," *New York Amsterdam News*, February 10, 1945; Abe Hill, "Box-Office Vs. Social Issue Movie Problem," *New York Amsterdam News*, March 31, 1945; Peter Noble, *The Negro in Films* (London: S. Robinson, 1948), 218–222. Noble seems to have relied upon Hardwick himself for his account of IFRG activities. On the FBI, see FBI Report, March 12, 1946, 6–7, Bureau File #100-138754, Volume 8 [Reel 2], Communist Activity in the Entertainment Industry: FBI Surveillance Files on Hollywood, 1942–1958 (Bethesda, MD: University Publications of America, 1991). For criticism by allies of White (of an "Interracial Screen Guild," presumably the IFRG), see "Minutes of Luncheon Meeting of Group of Persons Invited by the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People to Discuss the Advisability of Establishing a Hollywood Bureau," October 17, 1945, Group II, Box A-277 [Part 18, Series B, Reel 17, Folder 408], NAACP.

[24] "New Group to Study Entertainment Facts," *Afro-American*, August 4, 1951. On the CCNP's opposition to the *Amos 'n' Andy* campaign, see Melvin Patrick Ely, *The Adventures of Amos 'n' Andy: A Social History of an American Phenomenon* (New York: Free Press, 1991), 218. For some of the CCNP's activities, see "Talmadge, Winchell Row Over TV Show," *Atlanta Daily World*, January 8, 1952; "[NAACP and CCNP Press Release Re: Discrimination in Casting]," n.d. [c. 1954], Group II, Box A-448 [Part 18, Series C, Reel 17, Folder 438], NAACP; "Urges NAACP Aid in Letter Drive," *New York*

both the NAACP's campaign and *Amos 'n' Andy* itself, and by 1956, Los Angeles-based performers had created their own CCNP branch.[25] In early 1957, several veterans of this group—including the actor and SAG board member William "Bill" Walker, who had declared his opposition to the *Amos* protests around the time he joined the union's board, in 1952—joined with other actors affiliated with the Los Angeles branch of the NAACP to create a branch committee for actors.[26]

From this position within the NAACP, at a time when the organization commanded national attention in the wake of the Supreme Court's 1954 *Brown* ruling, the West Coast actors succeeded in reshaping the national group's stated policy on motion pictures and television, altering it to incorporate their particular concerns regarding the limited work available to black performers in Hollywood. In April 1957, Walker's group—initially called the Continuity Acceptance Board, and later the Screen and TV Actors Committee—transmitted a five-page appeal to the national office, seeking a fresh start to relations between the NAACP and Hollywood.[27] This relationship was presently marked, in Walker's words, by "fear—mixed with hostility." Failing to consult with "actors, writers, etc." during his work in the 1940s, Walter White had, as Walker understood it, made brash demands that "Negroes were not to be portrayed as cooks,

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Amsterdam News, October 30, 1954; "Actor's Mag Blasts Anti-Tan Casting," *Afro-American*, June 7, 1952. For additional background on the CCNP, see Martha Biondi, *To Stand and Fight: The Struggle for Civil Rights in Postwar New York City* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006), 177–78.

[25] "Actors Can Handle Bdw'y Roles, Writer Asserts," *Los Angeles Sentinel*, September 13, 1956; "Actors Council Looking Forward To Active Year," *Los Angeles Sentinel*, October 25, 1956.

[26] On Walker's role within SAG, and his opposition to the NAACP's protests of *Amos*, see Ely, *The Adventures of Amos 'n' Andy*, 218; Vaughn, "Ronald Reagan and the Struggle for Black Dignity in Cinema," 90–91. Others who participated in both the CCNP and the NAACP committee were Ruby Goodwin and Milton Wood.

[27] On the "Screen and TV Actors Committee" name, see Los Angeles NAACP, press release, October 28, 1957, Group III, Box A-119 [Part 24, Series A, Reel 28, Folder 327], NAACP.

maids, chauffeurs, porters, butlers, etc.," a dictate later "modified to the position we understand is still taken—that a Negro in a menial capacity can only be portrayed if a Negro in a non-menial capacity appears in the same production." In fact, White had not set any such rule, nor could the NAACP have enforced it if he had, but Walker seemed to sincerely believe that this NAACP policy was to blame for a precipitous decline of black actors in both SAG and the Screen Extras Guild (SEG). This decline threatened actors' "bread and butter" and also meant "the black fact is disappearing from the screen in *any* capacity."[28]

Walker's group, by contrast, aimed to "establish and maintain confidence and a friendly attitude between the NAACP and production heads," in order to lay the groundwork for cooperative negotiations toward "honest, workable and healthy" solutions "that will be fruitful to all concerned." The national NAACP could help—and win the loyalty, and membership dues, of skeptical actors—by sending White's successor Roy Wilkins or *Brown* litigator Thurgood Marshall to meet with industry representatives, by renouncing its alleged "one-for-one policy," and by designating Walker's group "an official and active body" for negotiations with producers.[29] The Rev. Maurice A. Dawkins, president of the NAACP's Los Angeles branch and past co-chair of the Los Angeles CCNP, made a similar appeal to Wilkins and other national NAACP leaders, highlighting how friendlier relations with Hollywood would benefit the branch's

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[28] Bill Walker and Continuity Acceptance Board, "Petition from Hollywood," April 4, 1957, Group III, Box C-179 [Part 25, Series B, Reel 6, Folder 884], NAACP. Walker reported that SAG and SEG enrolled just 150 black actors, down from a combined 500 in 1945. This sharp decline in unionized black film actors may have resulted partly from reduced demand as studios produced many fewer films. In 1947, for instance, Hollywood studios kept 742 actors under contract; by 1956, this number was 229. Denise Mann, *Hollywood Independents: The Postwar Talent Takeover* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), 31–32.

[29] Walker and Continuity Acceptance Board, "Petition from Hollywood."

fundraising and membership drives. He allowed for the possibility that there had been

"misinterpretation … in the wake of the late Walter White's conferences in Hollywood,"

but as he reported to the national office later, the perception was widespread that the

NAACP was opposed to the depiction of black servants. For instance, a black

Hollywood actress had been cast as a maid in a new television series, but the program's

New York-based advertising agency had determined that the NAACP required them to

offset the part with a non-servant role. Instead, the producers made the character

Mexican, and after the black actress failed a screen test in this new ethnicity, she was

replaced with "a genuine Mexican."[30] For both of the West Coast leaders, a retooled

NAACP approach to Hollywood, led by black industry professionals, promised dividends

in jobs for black performers, more visibility for African Americans on "the screen," and a

stronger NAACP, with a Los Angeles branch better supported by black Hollywood.

In New York, Wilkins swiftly declared that the petition "indicates that someone

has distorted or misinterpreted the NAACP's statements and has labeled them as official

NAACP policy." Wilkins was "very anxious to clear all this up and to establish and

maintain good relations with the Hollywood personalities."[31] Six months later, in

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[30] Maurice A. Dawkins to Roy Wilkins, April 6, 1957, Group III, Box A-119 [Part 24, Series A, Reel 28, Folder 327], NAACP; Maurice A. Dawkins to Channing H. Tobias, April 6, 1957, Group III, Box A-119 [Part 24, Series A, Reel 28, Folder 327], NAACP; Maurice A. Dawkins to Thurgood Marshall, April 6, 1957, Group III, Box A-119 [Part 24, Series A, Reel 28, Folder 327], NAACP; Maurice A. Dawkins to Roy Wilkins, October 11, 1957, Group III, Box A-119 [Part 24, Series A, Reel 28, Folder 327], NAACP. Dawkins named Betty Treadwell as the actress, and *Snow Fire*, a "McGowan Brothers" production, as the series. A feature film called *Snowfire*, written and directed by Dorrell and Stuart McGowan, appeared in 1958. See "Snowfire (1958)," *IMDb*, accessed February 15, 2015, http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0147519/. In another example, a gossip columnist proclaimed in 1953 that, after Walter White's interference, thirty black extras slated to play prisoners in the B-movie *Riot in Cell Block 11* were replaced with real-life inmates and white actors in blackface. Harry Levette, "Gossip Of The Movie Lots," *Atlanta Daily World*, August 27, 1953.

[31] Roy Wilkins to Maurice A. Dawkins, April 9, 1957, Group III, Box A-119 [Part 24, Series A, Reel 28, Folder 327], NAACP. The NAACP staff in the organization's Western Regional office in San Francisco was more cautious, given the presence of longtime White antagonist Clarence Muse among the

October 1957, Wilkins addressed an evening gathering of black actors and a luncheon at the Beverly Hills Hotel hosted by the Association of Motion Picture Producers (AMPP), and attended by representatives of the television producers association and the actors', screenwriters', directors', and producers' guilds.[32] At the luncheon, he first sought to correct the record, noting "a great deal of misunderstanding" surrounding the organization's policies regarding motion pictures and, by extension, television. The NAACP had no "clear, written policy" regarding "employment of Negro actors in film roles, and on the type of material involving Negroes and the so-called race question which has found its way into motion pictures." It was not true that, as both "some figures in the industry" and some "Negro film actors" had come to believe, the NAACP censored scripts, designated which black actors should be cast, enforced a "one-for-one" policy, and rejected all black "comics, maids, [and] menials." The NAACP lacked both the capability and desire to enforce such rules. Industry executives who cited them—here, he repeated the "Mexican" maid anecdote—were merely seeking excuses for their own decisions.[33]

As for what the NAACP did seek from the movies and television, Wilkins offered a vision that was both calibrated to the immediate contexts of the Cold War and the building civil rights movement, and attuned to the worries black actors had articulated. Hollywood should "keep pace with the Negro's progress" amid the crumbling of racial

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petitioners and the "gross misstatement of the NAACP's policy and Walter's prior attitude" offered in the document. Franklin H. Williams to Tarea Hall Pittman, April 9, 1957, Group III, Box C-179 [Part 25, Series B, Reel 6, Folder 884], NAACP.

[32] Los Angeles NAACP, press release; "NAACP Studies Policy on Negro Film Roles," October 31, 1957, Group III, Box A-119 [Part 24, Series A, Reel 28, Folder 327], NAACP.

[33] Roy Wilkins, speech to AMPP Luncheon, October 25, 1957, Group III, Box A-119 [Part 24, Series A, Reel 28, Folder 327], NAACP.

segregation and of occupational and political barriers, Wilkins declared. Casting black

actors *exclusively* in "servant and comic roles … misrepresents the role of Negro citizens

in American life." It was "unrealistic," and it was "not fair to the race or to Negro

actors." Just as important, it was a dereliction of the industry's "patriotic duty"—to

provide, amid the Cold War's "great conflict between democracy and dictatorship," an

"honest, balanced picture" of American race relations, which would place events like the

school desegregation standoff then under way in Little Rock "in perspective" for

international audiences, and would affirm the new self-image of African Americans

aware of independence movements in Africa and Asia and "struggling to attain their

rightful place in the nation and the world."[34]

Wilkins' speech won a promise of cooperation from the acting head of the AMPP,

wide coverage in the black press, and personal praise from Walker, from White's old

antagonist Clarence Muse, and from other actors and Los Angeles black leaders.[35] In

March 1958, as Wilkins had promised while in Hollywood, the NAACP board formally

adopted a three-paragraph policy statement titled "Hollywood Roles for Negroes" that

echoed Wilkins' address in its emphases, repudiating any interest in censorship and

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[34] Ibid. On the Cold War imperatives that shaped American civil rights policy and fostered concerns about images of American race relations, see Mary L. Dudziak, *Cold War Civil Rights: Race and the Image of American Democracy*, 2nd ed. (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2011).

[35] "NAACP Studies Policy on Negro Film Roles"; "'Real Life' Roles in Movies, TV Sought," *Los Angeles Sentinel*, October 31, 1957; "Roy Wilkins Tells Film World To Be Realistic," *Atlanta Daily World*, November 3, 1957; "NAACP Leaders Meet With Film Heads On Jobs," *New York Amsterdam News*, November 9, 1957; "NAACP Studies Policy of Negroes in Movies," *Journal and Guide*, November 9, 1957; "More Film Roles Pledged After Hollywood Meeting," *Afro-American*, November 9, 1957; "Film Capital Blacking Out Negro Performers?," *Pittsburgh Courier*, December 7, 1957; Loren Miller to Roy Wilkins, October 28, 1957, Group III, Box A-119 [Part 24, Series A, Reel 28, Folder 327], NAACP; Bill Walker to Roy Wilkins, November 1957, Group III, Box A-119 [Part 24, Series A, Reel 28, Folder 327], NAACP; Noble Sissle to Roy Wilkins, November 27, 1957, Group III, Box A-119 [Part 24, Series A, Reel 28, Folder 327], NAACP; Roy Wilkins to William Pollard, December 23, 1957, Group III, Box A-119 [Part 24, Series A, Reel 28, Folder 327], NAACP.

calling for "a true picture of American life" that accounted for black occupational advancement and progress toward desegregation—both as "a patriotic service to the nation" and to "open up new employment to Negro performers."[36] This last point was a focus of the press statements issued by both the Los Angeles branch and the national NAACP after Wilkins's visit, and thus of the coverage that resulted in the black press. So too were other statements with direct implications for black employment in film and television: the lack of a "one-for-one" policy and the absence of opposition "to the use of Negroes in comedy roles," the variety of roles that should be open to black actors, and the need to include African Americans in crowd scenes.[37]

Even as the NAACP highlighted issues of concern to black performers, it disavowed any interest in intervening in screen content in the way White had once sought to do. Neither Wilkins' address nor the NAACP's new policy statement offered specific examples of films or television programs that satisfied the "true picture" standard, and both specifically rejected the notion of a "do's and don'ts" list or "NAACP code."[38] Wilkins' speech barely addressed television production; the policy statement ignored it entirely.[39] Apart from a defense of its "right to criticize" and a few awkwardly passive

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[36] Board of Directors minutes, March 10, 1958, Group III, Box A-119 [Part 24, Series A, Reel 28, Folder 453], NAACP.

[37] See especially Los Angeles NAACP, press release; "More Film Roles Pledged After Hollywood Meeting."

[38] In a memo whose advice Wilkins otherwise largely embraced in his address, Los Angeles attorney Loren Miller had proposed that black actors should be included "in crowd and mob scenes" like those in *Dragnet* and *Twelve Angry Men* and "roles that are colorless in the context of particular shows or movies," for example "Negro officers in the *Dragnet*, *San Francisco Beat*, FBI series, etc." Roy Wilkins to Current et al., October 21, 1957, Group III, Box A-119 [Part 24, Series A, Reel 28, Folder 327], NAACP.

[39] Television producers, but not representatives of the networks, attended the Hollywood meeting. Shortly afterward, Henry Lee Moon, the NAACP's director of public relations, wrote an NBC executive proposing a similar meeting with New York-based television executives, but there is no evidence such a meeting occurred. Henry Lee Moon to Kenneth Bilby, November 13, 1957, Group III, Box A-252 [Part 24, Series C, Reel 19, Folder 196], NAACP.

assertions at the end of Wilkins' speech (for instance, "There will continue to be scrutiny and criticism by the NAACP of the products of the film industry touching this area"), neither document suggested that the organization would be closely monitoring movies and television shows. Not long after Wilkins' visit to Hollywood, the NAACP took pains to avoid involvement in African Americans' debate over the merits of the 1959 film version of the George Gershwin opera *Porgy and Bess* (Samuel Goldwyn/Columbia), which featured many of the top black stars of the day, including Sidney Poitier, Dorothy Dandridge, and Sammy Davis, Jr.[40] In the end, Wilkins and the NAACP board implicitly rejected White's singular focus on stereotyped screen content and instead embraced black actors' longstanding alternative vision of fair representation on screen, in which negotiation by black performers both to expand the number and to improve the quality of roles available to them would produce both better visibility and more work for African Americans in Hollywood. With much to occupy its attention as the civil rights revolution gathered steam, the national NAACP effectively ceded initiative in the pursuit of fair representation to black actors themselves, just as they had requested in their 1957 appeal.[41]

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[40] Soon after the Hollywood meeting, when Poitier initially refused a role in the production, Wilkins declared the decision "personal," cited the existence of differing black views of the opera, and stated that the NAACP had "taken no position." Both in advance of the film's release and for several years after, NAACP officials reiterated the organization's indifference, challenging those who claimed it had opposed the film and often referring specifically to the 1958 policy statement. Roy Wilkins, "Statement to Time Magazine," November 22, 1957, Group III, Box A-119 [Part 24, Series A, Reel 28, Folder 327], NAACP; John A. Morsell to Jaik Rosenstein, October 29, 1958, Group III, Box A-119 [Part 24, Series A, Reel 28, Folder 453], NAACP; Henry Lee Moon to Lester Bernstein, August 6, 1959, Group III, Box A-252 [Part 24, Series C, Reel 18, Folder 756], NAACP; John A. Morsell to Thomas Waring, Jr., April 6, 1961, Group III, Box A-119 [Part 24, Series A, Reel 28, Folder 453], NAACP; John A. Morsell, April 6, 1961, Group III, Box A-119 [Part 24, Series A, Reel 28, Folder 453], NAACP.

[41] *The Crisis*, the NAACP's magazine, did publish several short pieces critical of Hollywood during this period. See "Hollywood's Phony Negro," *The Crisis*, November 1959; "Films and Bigotry," *The Crisis*, February 1960.

Positive Change in the Image of the Negro and Consequent Job Opportunities

In the early years of the 1960s, black actors seized this leadership role. As they did so, they further refined a vision of fair representation on screen that emphasized the need to cast more back actors in roles big and small. However, reflecting the growing preoccupation with questions of "image," they also insistently linked their demands for greater diversity in hiring and casting with the need for improved, true-to-life screen portrayals of African Americans, embracing the rhetoric and goal of "image change." Black performers fine-tuned and pursued this vision in three main contexts: within the NAACP in Los Angeles and Hollywood, in a rival Hollywood organization called the Hollywood Race Relations Bureau, and in a parallel campaign on the stages and screens of New York City.

In 1961, leaders of the Los Angeles branch of the NAACP, spurred on by "[a] group of Hollywood extras, actors and bit players," began to place quiet pressure on the studios over their employment policies, ultimately winning a summit meeting of producers and the creative guilds, and a blast of publicity for their cause. In February, the branch created a Hollywood Activities Committee—its relationship, if any, to Walker's 1957 committee is not clear—which decided to ask SEG and SAG to demand that the studios accept "a new hiring policy." The policy they sought would require all Hollywood productions to employ black actors and all studio departments to hire black employees, and it would permit black performers "to work as other nationalities." Members of the new body, along with representatives of the branch's labor, legal, and other committees, held a series of meetings throughout the summer and secured general

commitments of support from the two acting unions.[42] In November, they won a meeting

of at least two dozen representatives of film and television studios, creative unions,

Central Casting, and the AMPP, including its executive vice president, Charles Boren.

The closed-door meeting produced commitments from producers, screenwriters, and

directors to "portray Negroes as they exist on the American scene," backed up by an

AMPP-convened meeting of casting directors and agents and the circulation of letters in

the creative guilds.[43]

But Edward D. Warren, the new Los Angeles branch president, was apparently

not satisfied with these measures alone; he may have used the summit to raise two issues

not emphasized in the earlier summer meetings, namely on-screen portrayals of African

Americans and the exclusion of African Americans from the industry's craft unions.

Warren relayed his complaints to a *New York Times* reporter. The result was a front-page

story, headlined "N.A.A.C.P. Assails The Movie Industry," which led with Warren's

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[42] They convinced the SEG to request that "Producers … immediately take appropriate steps to assure full compliance by all casting and production offices" with an earlier 1950 agreement that stated black extras should receive "a fair percentage of all motion picture work depicting American life," particularly in crowd scenes. SAG and its parent federation, the "4As," endorsed a "Declaration of Principles against segregation and discrimination" that summer. Committee members also met with the Central Casting Corporation and the Screen Producers' Guild. M. O'Neil Shanks to Charles Boren, October 3, 1961, Group III, Box C-307 [Part 25, Series D, Reel 34, Folder 826], NAACP; M. O'Neil Shanks to Hollywood Activities Committee, October 13, 1961, Group III, Box C-307 [Part 25, Series D, Reel 34, Folder 826], NAACP; John L. Dales to Maggie Hathaway, September 27, 1961, Group III, Box A-119 [Part 24, Series A, Reel 28, Folder 745], NAACP.

[43] Althea T. L. Simmons, "Special Report [...] on Los Angeles Branch's Negotiations With the Movie Industry," December 1961, Group III, Box C-307 [Part 25, Series D, Reel 34, Folder 826], NAACP; Murray Schumach, "N.A.A.C.P. Assails The Movie Industry," *New York Times*, November 29, 1961; [NAACP Los Angeles Branch], "Highlights of 1961," 1961, Group III, Box C-187 [Part 25, Series B, Reel 9, Folder 529], NAACP; "NAACP Nixes Picketing Of L.A. Movie Houses," *Los Angeles Sentinel*, January 4, 1962. Producers made note of "demands … which were not made at the November 17 meeting": "it was not suggested that any quota system be applied to any picture or studio" and "it was not suggested that producers refrain from using Negro actors and extras in unsympathetic roles." See United States Congress, House of Representatives, Committee on Education and Labor, *Employment Practices in the Performing Arts*, October 29-November 2, 1962, 87th Congress, 2nd Session (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1963), 39.

charges of the industry's "widespread discrimination in employment and grossly unfair portrayals of the Negro's role on the contemporary scene" and included new threats that "movie and television studios might be picketed and the charges might be turned over to the California Attorney General's Office." Although Warren and the Los Angeles branch backed away from these threats—by January 1962, he declared that "important progress has been made" and spoke against picketing—the *Times* story marked a new level of mainstream attention to the issue of fair representation of African Americans in moving images. Notably, Los Angeles activists were driving the story.[44]

Meanwhile, the NAACP branch faced competition from a familiar face. Caleb Peterson, who had helped to create the CUMP during the 1940s, now served as president of a new organization, the Hollywood Race Relations Bureau (HRRB), which like the NAACP branch garnered public attention to the entwined issues of racial representation and black employment in film and television. The HRRB held a new Unity Awards event in May 1961—earning the ire of Warren and the local NAACP, who called the organization "a group of phonis [sic]"—and then went on to win wide media coverage with confrontational pickets of Hollywood studio facilities, Los Angeles theaters, and the

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[44] Schumach, "N.A.A.C.P. Assails The Movie Industry." The story also attracted the attention of the national office, which enlisted one of its West Coast field secretaries, Althea T. L. Simmons, to investigate what the Los Angeles branch had been up to. For reasons that are unclear, Warren at first resisted Simmons' requests to share the details of the branch's work, defending the secrecy of the conversations and threatening to leave the organization. See Althea T. L. Simmons to Gloster B. Current, December 14, 1961, Group III, Box C-307 [Part 25, Series D, Reel 34, Folder 826], NAACP; Simmons, "Special Report [...] on Los Angeles Branch's Negotiations With the Movie Industry"; Edward D. Warren, "Reported Meeting of NAACP and the Movie Industry," n.d. [c 1961, Group III, Box A-119 [Part 24, Series A, Reel 28, Folder 745], NAACP. The national office did have hints of the Los Angeles branch's activities previously. A telegram from Warren earlier that year that declared "we are moving in on Hollywood," prompted Wilkins to request a "detailed report," and a SAG request for a statement of the NAACP's Hollywood policy mentioned the upcoming summit of producers and unions. See Edward D. Warren to Roy Wilkins, n.d 1961, Group III, Box A-119 [Part 24, Series A, Reel 28, Folder 453], NAACP; Roy Wilkins to Edward D. Warren, May 11, 1961, Group III, Box A-119 [Part 24, Series A, Reel 28, Folder 453], NAACP; John L. Dales to Roy Wilkins, October 13, 1961, Group III, Box A-119 [Part 24, Series A, Reel 28, Folder 453], NAACP. On Warren's change of heart, see, e.g., "NAACP Nixes Picketing Of L.A. Movie Houses."

1962 and 1963 Academy Award ceremonies. The Oscars protests prompted the

Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences (AMPAS) to add black presenters to the

program.[45] In statements to the press, Peterson and other members of the group

described a mission "to protest the inadequate, unfair, unrealistic, and nebulous portrayal

of minorities in motion pictures and television by peaceful, purposeful direct action,"

which would demonstrate the desire of "the moviegoing and TV public" for more

depictions of African Americans in middle-class and white-collar occupations and for

greatly expanded use of black actors.[46] The HRRB's initiatives were subject to

Peterson's shifting whims; some of its protests, against targets as diverse as the NAACP,

the Nation of Islam, and the fire department in Peterson's hometown of Peekskill, New

York, seemed inspired by personal rivalries and eventually prompted criticism that the

HRRB was a one-man operation. (The HRRB "in reality, is Caleb Peterson," a skeptical

columnist in the black press noted.)[47] But the organization's early pickets at studios and

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[45] On the Unity Awards, see Warren to Wilkins, n.d 1961; "Group Gives Awards After Many Object," *Journal and Guide*, June 10, 1961. For coverage of HRRB pickets of studios and theaters, see "NAACP Nixes Picketing Of L.A. Movie Houses"; "Under Protest," *Los Angeles Sentinel*, January 11, 1962; "5 Los Angeles Movie Houses to Be Picketed," *Philadelphia Tribune*, January 20, 1962; "Hollywood Picketers," *Jet*, January 25, 1962; "More Studios Picketed in Race Protests," *Afro-American*, January 27, 1962. One report also describes HRRB pickets in Dayton, Ohio, in December 1961. "Dayton Pickets," *Los Angeles Sentinel*, December 21, 1961. On the Academy Awards, see "Picketing to Hit Academy Awards Show," *Los Angeles Sentinel*, April 5, 1962; Untitled photo, *Chicago Defender*, April 9, 1962; Murray Schumach, "'West Side Story' Wins Oscar as Best Film," *New York Times*, April 10, 1962; Paul C. McGee, "Pickets Jailed Hours Before Oscar Awards," *Los Angeles Sentinel*, April 12, 1962; "Protestors Sue Academy Sponsors For $1.1 Million," *Jet*, April 26, 1962; "Izzy Rowe's Notebook ...," *Pittsburgh Courier*, September 15, 1962; "Fear Violence At Oscar Awards Over Race Issue," *Chicago Defender*, March 11, 1963; "Picket Line to Greet Awards Show," *Los Angeles Sentinel*, April 4, 1963; Untitled photo, *Afro-American*, April 20, 1963.

[46] "Race Relations Bureau In Hollywood Pickets Theatres and Major Studios," *Chicago Defender*, January 27, 1962; "Hollywood Pickets Protest Unrealistic Roles in Films," *Pittsburgh Courier*, January 27, 1962; Paul McGee, "Theatricals," *Los Angeles Sentinel*, March 29, 1962; "Picketing to Hit Academy Awards Show."

[47] This characterization was offered in Dave Hepburn, "In The Wings," *New York Amsterdam News*, March 16, 1963. On Peterson's spats with the NAACP, see "NAACP Denies Charges Of Peterson on 'Image,'" *Los Angeles Sentinel*, April 18, 1963; "Finds Movies Giving Negroes 'Fair Shake,'" *Chicago Defender*, June 29, 1963; Stanley G. Robertson, "L.A. Confidential," *Los Angeles Sentinel*, July 4, 1963;

the Oscars, with numerous marchers carrying signs reading "Show the Negro as <u>Part</u> and <u>Parcel</u> of America" and "Motion Picture Industry Wake Up," suggested the appeal of its message and the breadth of the new energy within Hollywood around fair representation in the early 1960s.[48] One "militant young Negro American" active in the HRRB and arrested at its Oscars protest, Cassius Weathersby, soon afterward created another organization (nicknamed "Nutmegs," for New United Television-Movie Equity Group) that aimed at helping African Americans "get ready" for greater participation in the industry; he went on to a career as a film and television producer.[49]

Young aspirants to careers in entertainment also drove the activities of the Committee for the Employment of Negro Performers (CENP), which was launched by a group of stage actors and their allies in New York in January 1962. CENP refined both a tactical synthesis of union-focused lobbying and direct action, and a strategic synthesis that linked a push for "the true picture of the Negro as he operates in the everyday life of American society" with efforts to reform the entertainment industry's employment practices. It was by Charles Gordone, a young playwright who in 1970 would become the first African American winner of the Pulitzer Prize for drama, and Godfrey Cambridge, who would find success later in the decade as a comic actor and stand-up

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John C. Waugh, "Racial Issue Divides Filmland," *Christian Science Monitor*, July 18, 1963; "New York Beat," *Jet*, October 31, 1963; "Peekskill Warms Up Over Fire Companies," *New York Amsterdam News*, November 16, 1963; Chester West, "Westchester Wandering," *New York Amsterdam News*, November 23, 1963; Henry Lee Moon to Roy Wilkins, December 16, 1963, Group III, Box A-110 [Part 24, Series A, Reel 25, Folder 645], NAACP. For some other Peterson-led protests, see Gladwin Hill, "Negro Foes of Black Muslims Picket at Trial," *New York Times*, April 30, 1963; "Black Muslim Trial Opens in L.A.; Pickets Outside Courtroom," *Chicago Defender*, May 1, 1963; "Peekskill Warms Up Over Fire Companies."

[48] These slogans are depicted in the photograph accompanying "Hollywood Picketers."

[49] "'Nutmegs' To Get Ready for Movie Openings," *Los Angeles Sentinel*, July 26, 1962; "Black Film and TV Producers Organize," *Jet*, April 9, 1981; "Cassius Weathersby," *IMDb*, accessed August 9, 2014, http://www.imdb.com/name/nm0915780/bio.

comedian; the two men were then appearing together in the off-Broadway production of Jean Genet's play *The Blacks*. CENP worked in close cooperation with the national staff of the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) to press for changes on the New York stage, as well as in the television industry and in motion pictures.[50] "All of our actions are and will continue to be directed toward positive change in the image of the Negro and consequent job opportunities," its mission statement read. A typescript organizational history reversed this formulation: CENP's activities were "constantly directed toward achieving a *permanent* change in employment practices to benefit all Negro performers," but also to satisfy the "thinking citizens of all races and walks of life who realize the far-reaching effects of the distorted image of the role of the Negro in American society." The masthead of the CENP newsletter distilled these aims, placing the phrases "JOB OPPORTUNITIES" and "IMAGE CHANGE" side by side at the top of the page.[51]

The CENP's activities underlined its organizers belief that "job opportunities" and "the image of the Negro" went hand in hand. During 1962 alone, CENP lobbied the Actors' Equity Association, SAG, and the American Federation of Television and Radio Artists to enforce and expand their nondiscrimination rules; inked an "affirmative action" agreement with New York City Center; met with representatives of the NBC and CBS networks; joined CORE in picketing Broadway productions that lacked black performers;

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[50] On Gordone and Cambridge, see Patricia Bosworth, "From Nowhere to 'No Place,'" *New York Times*, June 8, 1969. Regarding the role of CORE, see, Committee for the Employment of Negro Performers Newsletter #2, April 15, 1962, Series 5, Box 24, Folder 9 [Reel 27, File 146], The Papers of the Congress of Racial Equality, 1941–1967 (Sanford, NC: Microfilming Corporation of America, 1980) (hereafter, CORE). For an overview of the political ferment among African American performers in New York City in the early 1960s—although it does not discuss CENP—see Feldstein, *How It Feels to Be Free*, chapter 1.

[51] Committee for the Employment of Negro Performers Newsletter No. 1, March 1962, Series 5, Box 24, Folder 9 [Reel 27, File 146], CORE; "A Brief History of the C.E.N.P.," July 9, 1962, Series 5, Box 24, Folder 9 [Reel 27, File 146], CORE; "Committee for the Employment of Negro Performers Newsletter #3," May 13, 1962, Series 5, Box 69, Folder 3 [Reel 46, File 500], CORE.

and monitored television content and its own members' careers to better understand "pattern[s] of exclusion" in the industry.[52] Late in 1962, CENP and CORE members, joined by the HRRB's Peterson, spent several hours protesting outside preview screenings of the 20th Century-Fox film *The Longest Day*, a lavish account of the 1944 D-Day invasion that lacked not only any professional black actors but also any black servicemen among the real-life U.S. soldiers used as extras. The pickets were withdrawn after its producer, Darryl Zanuck, issued a statement promising to meet with the protestors, repeating his 1942 assessment of Walter White's demands to the industry, defending his own record of "films which bear out my point of view and my deep interest in racial equality," and vowing "every effort to improve the accurate representation in casting Negroes."[53] One black columnist was unsatisfied and called for the pickets to

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[52] This account draws on the CENP newsletters cited above, as well as on various additional correspondence, documents, and ephemera in Series 5, Box 24, Folder 3 [Reel 49, File 500] and Folder 9 [Reel 27, File 146], CORE, and on Jesse H. Walker, "Theatricals," *New York Amsterdam News*, June 9, 1962; "Broadway Hit Show Picketed by CORE," *Afro-American*, June 9, 1962; Charles Gordone, "Izzy Rowe's Notebok...," *Pittsburgh Courier*, July 7, 1962; Jesse H. Walker, "City Center Agreement Integrates Negro Actors," *New York Amsterdam News*, May 26, 1962; Jesse H. Walker, "Theatricals," *New York Amsterdam News*, May 26, 1962; Untitled photo, *New York Amsterdam News*, June 2, 1962; Perdita E. Duncan, "'Fiorello' Had Negroes In Scenes," *New York Amsterdam News*, June 30, 1962.

[53] Dave Hepburn, "In The Wings," *New York Amsterdam News*, October 6, 1962; Jesse H. Walker, "Theatricals," *New York Amsterdam News*, October 13, 1962; Jesse H. Walker, "Darryl Zanuck Hit On 'Longest Day,'" October 13, 1962; "IT WAS A LONG DAY FOR NEGROES, TOO" [flyer], October 1962, Series 5, Box 69, Folder 3 [Reel 46, File 500], CORE. The outcome of that personal meeting, or even whether it actually happened, is not clear. It was listed on the agenda of a CENP meeting in late October, but the *New York Amsterdam News* columnist David Hepburn reported in early 1963 that Fox had delayed the meeting indefinitely, despite repeated entreaties from CORE, and that HRRB was to blame for agreeing, unilaterally, to cancel the pickets in the first place. "Agenda for Membership Meeting," October 28, 1962, Series 5, Box 69, Folder 3 [Reel 46, File 500], CORE; Dave Hepburn, "In The Wings," *New York Amsterdam News*, January 19, 1963; Hepburn, "In The Wings," March 16, 1963.

Vague reports had emerged as early as March 1962 of a possible marriage between the activist efforts unfolding on the two coasts, as CENP members initiated conversations with Peterson and his supporters in the HRRB about possible action against the film industry. Committee for the Employment of Negro Performers Newsletter No. 1; Louie Robinson, "West Coast Scene," *Jet*, March 15, 1962; "CORE, HRRB Push Drive For Better Movie Jobs," *Los Angeles Sentinel*, March 29, 1962. During Rep. Adam Clayton Powell's late 1962 hearings on employment issues in entertainment, the HRRB was described as CORE's Hollywood "branch." See United States Congress, House of Representatives, Committee on Education and Labor, *Employment Practices in the Performing Arts*, 73.

return. "Issuing statements to pass over contemptible and continued rebuffs is no longer acceptable," he wrote. "Embarrass them even if you can't hurt them, I say. Eventually they'll get around to remembering we are here when they're casting."[54]

The activities of the early 1960s bespoke the growing assertiveness of black performers and their allies and their increasing consensus regarding what their pursuit of fair representation entailed and how best to achieve it. The most durable organizational legacy of this new energy was the Beverly Hills-Hollywood branch of the NAACP. As Los Angeles branch members negotiated with industry officials and parried with Peterson and the HRRB in 1962, they also reorganized to support a sustained Hollywood effort. In late 1961, Maggie Hathaway, the leader of the Los Angeles branch's Hollywood Activities Committee, began to recruit members for a new, separate branch of the NAACP that would focus on the film capital. To officials in the NAACP's West Coast regional offices—who thought the Los Angeles branch had been overwhelmed by the city's burgeoning black population and had advocated breaking it up into smaller, decentralized branches better able to efficiently attract members—Hathaway's proposal was a welcome one.[55] In April 1962, just twenty years after black actors suggested Walter White and the NAACP "keep their noses out of Hollywood," and five years after they appealed to Roy Wilkins for a new start, the Beverly Hills-Hollywood branch of the NAACP was granted a charter. A photograph published later that year in the *Crisis*, featured Hathaway, clad in a ball gown and a crown, at the new branch's "installation services" at the Beverly Hilton Hotel, flanked by NAACP national board member and

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[54] Walker, "Theatricals," October 13, 1962.

[55] Tarea Hall Pittman to Gloster B. Current, confidential memo re: "The Los Angeles Branch NAACP," December 30, 1958, Group III, Box C-7 [Part 27, Series D, Reel 1, Folder 462], NAACP.

Los Angeles businessman Claude Hudson and NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund litigator James Nabrit, captured the dramatic success of Hollywood's African Americans in winning for themselves a central role in the organization's work for fair representation in moving images.[56]

The BH-H branch initially adopted the role that Bill Walker had sought for his committee five years earlier, serving as "an official and active body" in negotiations with Hollywood producers. Amid bickering among branch members—something for which the branch would become well known—the NAACP's national labor secretary Herbert Hill's took a leading role in the 1963 negotiations with Hollywood producers and unions regarding the industry's employment practices. But the agenda for his meetings with producers and industry unions reflected the priorities of black performers, treating screen portrayals and black employment as related concerns. And Hill worked cooperatively— if not always harmoniously—with local negotiators from the BH-H branch, and like the HRRB and CENP activists, the NAACP members backed up their demands with threats of public protest and economic pressure by African American filmgoers and television viewers.[57] Thereafter, members of the BH-H branch continued to meet with film and

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[56] Untitled photo, *The Crisis*, October 1962.

[57] Indeed, at its annual convention in Chicago, NAACP members urged African Americans and their allies, "pending the outcome of negotiations," to boycott sponsors of "offensive radio and television programs," and called on "NAACP affiliates to organize mass protest demonstrations at motion picture theatres." Associated Press, "Negro Leader Says Films, TV Next Targets," *Hartford Courant*, June 26, 1963; Murray Schumach, "N.A.A.C.P. Seeks Job Equality in Hollywood Film Companies," *New York Times*, June 26, 1963; Paul Weeks, "Negroes Plan Campaign to Integrate Films, TV," *Los Angeles Times*, June 26, 1963; John C. Waugh, "NAACP Scolds Hollywood on Race Practices," *Christian Science Monitor*, June 27, 1963; "Protests Urged Against Bias in Film, Television, Radio," July 13, 1963, Group III, Box A-110 [Part 24, Series A, Reel 25, Folder 645], NAACP.

To briefly summarize the branch's infighting: Hathaway resigned as president in late 1962, and Bill Lane, then serving as the chairman of the branch's labor committee, was pressing her reticent successor, the attorney James L. Tolbert, to take aggressive direct action to highlight its members grievances with the industry. Maggie Hathaway to Gloster B. Current, December 10, 1962, Group III, Box

television industry representatives and to monitor employment opportunities for African Americans, with periodic visits from Hill throughout the mid-1960s to assess the situation and, typically, criticize the pace of progress.[58] In 1969, the *Los Angeles Times* described quarterly meetings where the branch's then-president, the director Wendell Franklin, pushed the Association of Motion Picture and Television Producers (AMPTP), "the heads of every major studio, state employment officials, delegates from the actors, extras, and directors guilds, and representatives from every craft union in Hollywood" to hire more African Americans.[59] In a 1975 report on a general meeting of branch members, the *Los Angeles Sentinel* referenced the branch's "yearly task of applying pressure on the movie industry and other related entertainment powers to provide jobs for blacks."[60]

C-5 [Part 27, Series D, Reel 2, Folder 351], NAACP; Murray Schumach, "N.A.A.C.P. Is Split On Movie-TV Jobs," *New York Times*, June 13, 1963. The national NAACP's involvement would not end these disagreements: Lane eventually called for Tolbert's resignation before resigning himself, and Tolbert later left the branch presidency in 1964 after attempting to make Hathaway an adviser. Murray Schumach, "Hollywood's Negro Crisis," *New York Times*, June 30, 1963; Schumach, "N.A.A.C.P. Is Split On Movie-TV Jobs"; "Loren Miller, Now a Judge, Sells Paper," *Los Angeles Times*, June 24, 1964; Maggie Hathaway, "End of A Motion Picture Career," *Los Angeles Sentinel*, May 4, 1967.

[58] In 1963, see Paul Weeks, "Integration Gains Seen in Film and TV Jobs," *Los Angeles Times*, August 30, 1963; David C. Smith, "Rights Drive Spurs Casting of Negroes In Movies, TV Shows," *Wall Street Journal*, September 24, 1963. In 1964, Murray Schumach, "N.A.A.C.P. Scores Film Labor Units," *New York Times*, June 1, 1964; "Picture Brightens For Negro in Hollywood, TV," *Jet*, July 2, 1964. In 1966, Jack Jones and Ray Rogers, "Cooperation Lack Scored by Wilkins," *Los Angeles Times*, July 8, 1966; "Hollywood Is Accused," *New York Times*, July 8, 1966; "Jobs, 'Truthful Portrayal' NAACP Hollywood Target," *New York Amsterdam News*, July 16, 1966; "H'wood Unit of Naacp to Keep Eye on Movies, Television," *Philadelphia Tribune*, July 16, 1966; "TV-Film Industry Faces NAACP Suit," *Afro-American*, July 16, 1966; Peter Bart, "The Still Invisible Man," *New York Times*, July 17, 1966; "NAACP Turns Heat On Hollywood Film Studios," *Journal and Guide*, July 23, 1966; "Better Movie Roles Sought For Negroes," *Chicago Defender*, July 25, 1966; "NAACP Plans New Hollywood Branch Bureau," *Afro-American*, July 30, 1966.

[59] Dan Knapp, "An Assessment of the Status of Hollywood Blacks," *Los Angeles Times*, September 28, 1969. A 1967 Associated Press report also mentioned quarterly meetings. Gene Handsaker, "Negro Employment Increases in Films," *Los Angeles Times*, September 11, 1967. On Wendell Franklin, see http://www.dga.org/Craft/DGAQ/All-Articles/1101-Spring-2011/On-the-Job-With-Wendell-Franklin.aspx.

[60] Mays Andrews, "Hollywood NAACP Members Seek Unity," *Los Angeles Sentinel*, March 13, 1975. In 1971, the branch reported plans to create a "motion picture research committee," which would ask

After 1967, however, negotiations over employment and casting practices were joined on the branch's agenda by a new and much more public effort: the annual Image Awards program. The Image Awards followed in a tradition of glamorous branch events, suited to an organization that from its inception was intended to be both in and of Hollywood. When Hathaway petitioned the NAACP's regional office for permission to organize the new branch, she cited its potential to "attract hundreds of interested nationalities [sic—personalities?] who are affiliated with the motion picture, television, radio, and recording industries."[61] Of the 105 dues-paying members listed on the new group's formal charter application, 28 described their occupation as "actor" or "actress," with others listing related jobs, such as "scripter" and "studio hairstylist."[62] An NAACP press release announcing the new branch noted that its membership included the performer Sammy Davis, Jr., the actor James Edwards, and "a host of other actors, actresses, writers and musicians."[63] Early club activities included a festive November 1962 dinner with a 1,000-person, "celebrity-sprinkled audience" at the Coconut Grove at which Sammy Davis, Sr.—also a branch member, whose wife served as the branch's treasurer—was honored as "Father of the Decade."[64]

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studios to submit projects in development "so that we may study these properties, [and] report the necessary changes, thus saving the industry hundreds of dollars from bad publicity and intimidation." Bene Greene, "NAACP Notes," *Los Angeles Sentinel*, January 28, 1971.

[61] Hathaway to Simmons, December 11, 1961.

[62] "Application for Charter," March 18, 1962, Group III, Box C-8 [Part 27, Series D, Reel 3, Folder 1], NAACP; Althea T. L. Simmons to Gloster B. Current, March 27, 1962, Group III, Box C-5 [Part 27, Series D, Reel 2, Folder 351], NAACP.

[63] "NAACP Charters Hollywood Unit," April 15, 1962, Group III, Box C-5 [Part 27, Series D, Reel 2, Folder 351], NAACP.

[64] "Sammy Davis Sr. Feted," *Jet*, November 8, 1962.

The awards program that debuted in 1967—a gala dinner-dance at the Beverly Hilton—was in keeping with these earlier activities, and also with the longer history of efforts by black performers to demonstrate and celebrate their professionalism and glamour while also pursuing change. Indeed, in many key respects, the Image Awards echoed the Unity Awards ceremonies held in the 1940s (and briefly revived by the HRRB earlier the 1960s). But its name, the *Image* Awards, reflected the heightened attention of black actors—like other African Americans and like members of other marginalized groups in the United States by the end of the 1960s—to screen images and their influence. While "unity" was a rallying cry of Hollywood's wartime Popular Front, "image" was the paramount keyword of an age thoroughly shaped by visual media and moving images.

The Image That Is Created

During the formative years of the Image Awards, between 1967 and 1978, Beverly Hills-Hollywood branch leaders, members, and supporters steadily expanded their ambitions for the event. By emphasizing different aspects of the notion of "image" and making full use of the flexibility of the awards program format, they pursued simultaneously several interconnected goals regarding black representation in moving images. Organizers and supporters of the awards program focused upon three senses of "image" in particular: first, the "more favorable and realistic image of Negroes" that resulted when the producers of movies and television programs included black characters and cast black actors in their ensembles; second, the "uplifting" and "positive" images that resulted from the talent and skill of black performers and artists; and finally, the

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positive "image … created" by the Image Awards events themselves of African Americans in Hollywood, and black people in general, as gifted creative professionals. As the organizers and advocates of the Image Awards worked toward these goals, they argued that the event had become an institution indispensible to African Americans' pursuit of fair representation on screen, and to their efforts to secure not only greater power in the motion picture and television industries but also true belonging in a thoroughly mediated nation.[65]

The first two Image Awards events aimed explicitly at commending and thanking producers and other decision-makers in television and motion pictures for creating prominent roles for black actors to play, and for otherwise providing African Americans opportunities in entertainment and on screen.[66] In 1967, the awards were given mostly to the producers of television series with recurring, integrated black characters, and the organizers took care to delimit their endorsement of the winners. "The NAACP is making no attempt to rate either the quality of the shows or the quality of the performances," they cautioned, for "consideration is being given only to the Image of the

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[65] This section offers an overview and analysis of the Image Awards—and especially of the ways that their organizers and other commentators described and discussed them—during the first dozen years of their existence. It does not offer a comprehensive history of the Awards, which would necessitate further research beyond the newspaper reports consulted here. Oral history interviews, the papers of individual advocates, and potentially branch records not presently included in the microfilm edition of the Papers of the NAACP might enable a fuller account of the Awards, the many disputes over their management, and other BH-H branch activities during the 1960s and 1970s. Although the branch and the Awards were led by an evolving cast of activists over the period described here, the analysis that follows focuses on the themes and trends that characterized the Awards' objectives and self-presentation from 1967 through 1978.

[66] This notion was not new—recall Walter White's preoccupation in the early 1950s, described in Chapter 2, with a Los Angeles banquet to honor Hollywood executives Dore Schary and Darryl Zanuck, which would thank the two men for "progress which has been made in presentation of the Negro in pictures," but also "tactfully point out that the job is not yet finished." Walter White to Allen Rivkin, September 16, 1952, Group II, Box A-276 [Part 18, Series B, Reel 16, Folder 835], NAACP.

Negro as portrayed by the roles played by the Negroes in the series."[67] In 1968, the awards program's attentions expanded to include the "entertainment industry" more broadly, but the Image Awards continued to emphasize the supportive actions of media corporations; with a few exceptions, the winners were the "industrial establishments … who during the year have done the most to hire Negroes on a current and re-current basis and to portray a more favorable and realistic image of members of that race." Prizes went to the television program *Ironside*, in which Don Mitchell played a supporting role; the Mirisch Company, which produced the Oscar-winning 1967 movie *In the Heat of the Night*, starring Sidney Poitier; the black-owned Motown Records; and Xerox, which had sponsored the CBS special *Of Black America*.[68]

Even as the goals of the Image Awards broadened in the years that followed, recognition of media corporations, industry trade associations, and their leaders remained a crucial part of the event. In 1969, Charles Boren of the AMPTP was honored with the "Founders Award"; in 1970, awards recognized the NBC network and the public relations firm Rogers, Cowan and Brenner; in 1972, MCA's Lew Wasserman won a "Behind the Celluloid Image Award"; and in subsequent years, an official of the AMPTP or a studio executive was typically named honorary chairman of the event.[69] The studios

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[67] "Hollywood NAACP To Present Awards"; "NAACP - The Beverly Hills-Hollywood Branch News Letter."

[68] "Image Awards At Hilton - NAACP," *Los Angeles Sentinel*, August 8, 1968; "Valenti to Speak at Image Fete," *Los Angeles Times*, September 9, 1968; "NAACP 'Image' Awards Go To Motown, Xerox," *Philadelphia Tribune*, October 1, 1968.

[69] "Annual Image Awards Given By NAACP Unit," *Los Angeles Times*, October 14, 1969; Bill Lane, "Stars Garner Image Awards: NAACP Image Awards Gala Glitters With Stars and Kudos Galore," *Los Angeles Sentinel*, October 16, 1969; "NAACP Image Awards Show a Gala Event," *Los Angeles Sentinel*, November 26, 1970; "N.A.A.C.P. Beverly Hills Hollywood Sixth Annual Image Awards," November 1972, Part 29, Series A, Reel 12, Folder 8, NAACP. Honorary chairmen included Billy H. Hunt, CEO of the AMPTP, in 1974; Sid Sheinberg, president and COO of MCA/Universal City and vice-chairman of the AMPTP, in 1975; Daniel Melnick, senior vice president of worldwide production at MGM,

and other corporations, in turn, supported the Image Awards program—financially, by purchasing tables, and logistically, by providing equipment and expertise.[70] In 1974, for instance, the branch's president jubilantly described how Wasserman and Billy H. Hunt, chief executive officer of the AMPTP, provided "major cooperation" and "all kinds of beautiful help" in mounting the program, which had been coordinated by branch members who worked at Motown Records, Golden West Broadcasters, CBS, and as writers, producers, directors, publicists, and talent agents. In an address to the attendees that year, Hunt celebrated the "close working relationship" between his organization and the branch, which aimed "to improve the manner in which minorities are depicted on the screen."[71] The Image Awards served, from the start, as a way to maintain and strengthen this relationship.

Beginning in 1969, however, the Image Awards began to embrace the additional goal of celebrating the talent of black actors and other performers, and of recognizing excellent motion pictures, television programs, and other entertainment created by or featuring African Americans. That year, the format of the Awards shifted to more closely mirror that of events like the Academy Awards; prizes were awarded in categories including best motion picture, best television series, best director, and best male and

in 1976; and Hugh Hefner of *Playboy* in 1978. See "NAACP Image Awards Scheduled January 19," *Atlanta Daily World*, November 22, 1973; "Image Awards Gets Honorary Chairman," *Los Angeles Sentinel*, November 14, 1974; "Honorary Chairman," *Los Angeles Sentinel*, January 8, 1976; "Major Stars Host Image Awards," *Los Angeles Sentinel*, May 25, 1978.

[70] See, e.g., Bill Lane, "NAACP Image Awards Show Biggest Ever; Black National Anthem's Singing Stirs Growing Heat," *Los Angeles Sentinel*, November 19, 1970; A. S. Doc Young, "Bill Lane Predicts Success For '74 Image Awards Show," *Los Angeles Sentinel*, January 17, 1974.

[71] "NAACP Plans Image Award TV Broadcast," *Bay State Banner*, November 1, 1973; "NAACP Image Awards Scheduled January 19"; Young, "Bill Lane Predicts Success For '74 Image Awards Show"; A. S. Doc Young, "Reports on The Image Awards," *Los Angeles Sentinel*, January 24, 1974; Bill Lane, "People, Places 'N' Situwayshuns," *Los Angeles Sentinel*, January 24, 1974.

female actor, leading and supporting, on television and in motion pictures.[72] "The Image Awards," the branch president explained in advance of the 1969 event, "is akin to the Oscar, Emmy and Tony in value and stature. It is the affirmation of black artistry, talent and popularity and is the only award designed expressly for black talent."[73] In 1970, prizes were added in music and theater, and for "entertainers of the year."[74] Complementing such prizes were honorary and special recognitions that varied widely in number and kind from year to year; the 1972 event, for instance, featured sixteen such awards, and many went to black performers.[75] While organizers had initially resisted evaluating the quality of performances and programs, by the early 1970s, they spoke frequently of the Image Awards as a way of recognizing the talent and "greatness" of African American performers, and the "new and welcome 'images'" and "positive minority images" that resulted.[76]

This second sense of "image" came to the fore at a time of both excitement and anxiety regarding new opportunities for African Americans in television and, especially, motion pictures. On television, black actors in the early 1970s found fewer parts in multiracial dramatic ensembles that the first Image Awards had commended in 1967; whereas nineteen primetime series in fall 1970 featured African Americans in prominent roles, this number had fallen to ten in fall 1971. Instead, as the decade progressed, black

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[72] Lane, "Stars Garner Image Awards."

[73] "Luncheon Heralds Oct. 11 Awardsfest," *Los Angeles Sentinel*, September 4, 1969.

[74] "NAACP Names Recording Stars," *Los Angeles Sentinel*, October 15, 1970; "'Cotton' Wins 3 NAACP Film Awards," *Los Angeles Times*, November 17, 1970.

[75] "N.A.A.C.P. Beverly Hills Hollywood Sixth Annual Image Awards."

[76] For "new and welcome," see "Image Awards Set for Palladium January 18," *Los Angeles Sentinel*, December 26, 1974. For "positive minority images," see "NAACP Image Awards to Be Presented Saturday," *Los Angeles Times*, February 4, 1976.

characters appeared mainly in comedic series with mostly-black casts, such as *Good Times*, *Sanford and Son*, and *The Jeffersons*, programs that some observers argued perpetuated the longstanding restriction of black actors to primarily comedic roles. Only in 1977, with the spectacularly successful miniseries *Roots*, did television again offer numerous dramatic roles to African American performers.[77] In the motion picture industry, the year 1972 saw the appearance of *Sounder* (Radnitz/Mattel) and *Lady Sings the Blues* (Motown), well-regarded pictures with black stars that each received multiple Oscar nominations.[78] Concurrently, however, there emerged the short-lived vogue for black-oriented genre films known as "blaxploitation," which followed the initial success of *Sweet Sweetback's Baadasssss Song* (Yeah/Cinemation Industries) and *Shaft* (MGM/Shaft Productions) in 1971. As many as 25 percent of pictures released in late 1972 were geared toward black audiences. The blaxploitation trend was especially contentious among African Americans, with many black filmgoers enthusiastic about the pictures even as others condemned their focus on violence, sex, and crime; the BH-H branch and Junius Griffin, its then-president, lead a Coalition Against Blaxploitation to oppose such pictures.[79]

In this context, the organizers of the Image Awards sought both to harness and to inflect the apparent trend toward a growing presence for black characters on screen, by

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[77] J. Fred MacDonald, *Blacks and White TV: African Americans in Television since 1948*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: Nelson-Hall, 1992), chapters 10, 13–14, 17.

[78] On *Sounder*, see Feldstein, *How It Feels to Be Free*, 152. On *Lady Sings the Blues*, see Suzanne E. Smith, *Dancing in the Street: Motown and the Cultural Politics of Detroit* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), 240.

[79] Robert Sklar, *Movie-Made America: A Cultural History of American Movies*, Rev. ed. (New York: Vintage Books, 1994), 321, 329–332; Robert E. Weems, *Desegregating the Dollar: African American Consumerism in the Twentieth Century* (New York: New York University Press, 1998), 88–90. See also Eithne Quinn, "Closing Doors: Hollywood, Affirmative Action, and the Revitalization of Conservative Racial Politics," *Journal of American History* 99, no. 2 (September 2012): 482–490.

presenting the event as an authoritative articulation of black perspectives on questions of quality as well as a celebration of black creativity. In a statement in advance of the 1972 event, Griffin, who was also a Motown publicist, argued that a shift was underway "from 'Blaxploitation' to a new respect for black talent on the screen and the stage, as well as behind the cameras and behind the scenes." Through the Image Awards, he suggested, African Americans "are determining our own standards of greatness, and our own heroes in the image industries."[80] In subsequent years, even as the debate over blaxploitation faded somewhat and the branch's leadership changed, organizers persisted in yoking talent and artistry together with respect and uplift. Press statements emphasized how the Awards recognized those "who have contributed notably to the artistic and economic uplift of black minorities," those who "have exhibited innovative and creative means of uplifting the images of the minorities in the eyes of their fellow human beings," and those responsible for "the enhancement and promotion of positive black and/or minority images."[81] The notion that the Image Awards were a unique way of celebrating black talent also found expression in descriptions of the event as "a black equivalent of the

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[80] "Sixth Annual Image Awards at Palladium," *Los Angeles Sentinel*, November 16, 1972. Under Griffin's tenure as branch president—which coincided with Motown's official relocation of its headquarters from Detroit to Los Angeles, as well as with the company's production of *Lady Sings the Blues*—the branch staged a particularly lavish Image Awards event, which ran a $30,000 deficit and prompted Griffin's resignation. See Stanley Williford, "NAACP Branch Shakeup Hinted," *Los Angeles Sentinel*, April 26, 1973. On Griffin, see Smith, *Dancing in the Street*, 206–207. On Motown's relocation, see Ibid., 239–240. The appeal of Motown's brand of black entrepreneurialism to at least some branch members is evident in a report on the branch's activities from several years earlier, where the author described "one of the most delightful experiences of our lives": "a visit to the penthouse offices of Berry Gordy, creator of Motown, the most fabulous 'empire' ever built by a black man who proved that the free enterprise system is color blind." Greene, "NAACP Notes."

[81] "Image Awards Set For Palladium," *Los Angeles Sentinel*, October 11, 1973; "Image Awards Set for Palladium January 18"; "NAACP Image Awards to Be Presented Saturday."

Academy Awards" or "the 'blackside' of Oscar."[82] At a time when only two African

Americans had won Oscars for acting, and in a decade when a handful of nominations for

black actors had produced no victories, such comparisons asserted both that black

performers deserved commendation and that African Americans deserved a say in setting

the "standards" for such recognition.[83]

As the Image Awards became increasingly a showcase for and celebration of

black performers' talent, not only through the prizes distributed but also through the

black comedians and singers who hosted and provided entertainment during the

ceremonies, its organizers and supporters began to envision bringing the event itself to a

wider audience through television.[84] In the late 1970s, Image Awards organizers

mounted a serious—but ultimately unsuccessful—effort to persuade one of the major

television networks to broadcast the event nationally. The 1978 ceremony, staged under

the joint auspices of the national NAACP and the local branch, was planned with

television in mind. The organizers, the trade paper *Variety* reported two months before

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[82] Win Wilford, "Celebrities Shine - from Harlem to LA," *Bay State Banner*, January 31, 1974; Billy Rowe, "NAACP's H'wood Award Hassle Tarnish Image," *New York Amsterdam News*, November 24, 1979.

[83] See Edward Mapp, *African Americans and the Oscar: Decades of Struggle and Achievement* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2008). A convenient summary of past African American nominees for and winners of Academy Awards can be found at "List of Black Academy Award Winners and Nominees," *Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia*, accessed February 16, 2015, http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=List_of_black_Academy_Award_winners_and_nominees&oldid =647384507.

[84] The NAACP's regional director raised this possibility in his report on the 1971 event, and speculation about a televised ceremony circulated before and after the 1974 and 1975 Awards. Leroy Robinson, who had produced several past ceremonies and had been tapped to produce the 1977 Awards, campaigned for branch president in late 1976 while declaring, "The Image Awards deserves to be on television, it's that important an event." Leonard H. Carter to Gloster B. Current, December 11, 1971, Part 29, Series A, Reel 12, Folder 8, NAACP; "NAACP Plans Image Award TV Broadcast"; Lane, "People, Places 'N' Situwayshuns," January 24, 1974; Young, "Reports on The Image Awards"; "NAACP Hearing Held On Chappell Charges," *Los Angeles Sentinel*, May 8, 1975; "Image Awards Producer Plans 10th Anniversary," *Los Angeles Sentinel*, December 9, 1976.

the June event, aimed to mount the "most streamlined and disciplined show in the history of the event" in a "frank bad for [a] primetime network television slot." In this task, the NAACP consulted with AMPAS, which put on the Academy Awards; for instance, "borrowing a page from the Oscars," they decided to forbid press photography during the ceremony and instead provided a backstage press area.[85] Although the 1978 event was not ultimately televised, its organizers nevertheless presented as a dry run; on the eve of the ceremony, the *Sentinel* reported "every hope that the annual show may make the bigtime in 1979," for the networks were "watching."[86] To the organizers' chagrin, however, the evening went disastrously, with absent winners, under-rehearsed performances, and antisemitic comments by Don Cornelius, the evening's host and the producer of *Soul Train*, blaming "any Jewish television people in the audience" for the fact that the awards had not been televised. One black journalist termed the event "a six-hour orientation class in how not to produce anything," in an editorial headlined "Image Awards Not Ready for Video."[87]

Both organizers' aspirations for national television coverage and observers' criticisms of the Image Awards as "not ready" for such attention invoked explicitly a third sense of "image" that had always played a part in conversations about the event—namely, the Image Awards themselves as means of making the Hollywood community's more aware of black professionals, and of improving perceptions of the NAACP and

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[85] Will Tusher, "Strong Bid For Web Slot By NAACP Image Awards," *Variety*, March 29, 1978.

[86] Lee Ivory, "Black Americans Will Watch NAACP Image Awards Closely," *Los Angeles Sentinel*, June 8, 1978.

[87] Lee Ivory, "Image Awards Not Ready for Video," *Los Angeles Sentinel*, June 15, 1978; Gertrude Gipson, "You've Come A Long Way, Baby, But," *Los Angeles Sentinel*, June 15, 1978; Bill Lane, "People, Places 'N' Situwayshuns," *Los Angeles Sentinel*, June 22, 1978.

African Americans generally in the eyes of white Americans. Often riffing on the event's

name, commentators had drawn connections between its success and the "image" of the

branch. Congratulating the organizers of the 1974 ceremony, for instance, one writer

declared, "the NAACP branch improved its own image at least a hundred per cent."[88]

The rewards of a well-run Image Awards could be even larger if the event was televised.

The NAACP's executive director Benjamin Hooks, a reporter wrote in advance of the

1978 Awards, "was fully cognizant of the importance of the Image Award show to the

overall image of the oldest civil rights organization in America." If the Image Awards

were televised, "there is the opportunity for the NAACP to enter millions of homes in

America with a message of brotherhood and love and justice … the 'Mother Ship' might

gracefully sail the electronic waters of white American media."[89] Images of African

Americans could be improved for the better not only by distributing awards, but also by

placing that very process on screen itself.

By 1978, the Image Awards had reached a crossroads. The national NAACP had

seized joint control of the event in advance of the 1978 ceremony, after Hooks was

dismayed by the conduct of the 1977 event, his first as leader of the organization. After

the 1978 debacle, the NAACP declared the Image Awards "discontinued until further

notice."[90] This death sentence—although ultimately temporary—culminated years of

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[88] Young, "Reports on The Image Awards." The reverse could also occur. After the 1978 event, a *Sentinel* editorial moaned, "The image that is created affects every black person in this nation," reminding readers that all blacks were "lumped together" by "non-blacks." Similarly, Jim Cleaver, a *Sentinel* columnist, wrote that "white attendees at the awards were able to laugh openly at the ineptness of the offering," and declared that its problems would come to represent "all black people." "We Have a Choice," *Los Angeles Sentinel*, June 22, 1978; Jim Cleaver, "The Tragedy of a Friday Night's Travesty," *Los Angeles Sentinel*, June 15, 1978.

[89] Ivory, "Black Americans Will Watch NAACP Image Awards Closely."

[90] "Image Awards Ended," *Los Angeles Sentinel*, August 3, 1978.

turbulence for the branch and the Awards, characterized by disorganized and lengthy ceremonies, charges of financial mismanagement, alleged rigging of awards voting, and misappropriation of complimentary tickets. The branch was riven by infighting, and at least two branch presidents were forced from office after the ceremonies they oversaw. Several branch elections were invalidated by the NAACP's national office due to irregularities. The branch had always attracted forceful characters, and many members who organized the awards also worked in the industries and for the companies whose productions were honored, resulting in frequent accusations of self-interested behavior. One observer ascribed the turmoil to the "practices and policies" of the entertainment industry, which in providing scarce opportunities for black success had embittered aspiring African American professionals and pitted them against one another.[91]

On the other hand, through the initiative of black performers and professionals over the 1960s and 1970s, the Image Awards had become widely recognized as a way to work toward several interconnected goals—regarding the status of blacks in Hollywood, the visibility of blacks on screen, and the reputation of blacks in America—that together comprised the pursuit of fair representation in moving images. Progress could be made on each of these fronts, the Awards' boosters argued, through an annual awards program, ideally one televised nationally. Although they had not yet succeeded in implementing it by the late 1970s, these African American advocates had developed a vision of the

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[91] For this analysis, see Stanley G. Robertson, "'Egos:' Are They Destroying 'Us?,'" *Los Angeles Sentinel*, June 22, 1978; Stanley G. Robertson, "'Egoes:' Are They Destroying 'Us' (Part II)," *Los Angeles Sentinel*, June 29, 1978. This account of conflict in the branch is drawn largely from a survey of the *Sentinel*'s reporting during the 1970s. Exemplary and useful coverage includes Bill Lane, "NAACP Awards Stir Fuss by Participants," *Los Angeles Sentinel*, November 23, 1972; Williford, "NAACP Branch Shakeup Hinted"; "Image Awards Fury Rages On," *Los Angeles Sentinel*, July 31, 1975; Carl Coates, "Shake-up Rocks NAACP: NAACP Awards Faces Trouble," *Los Angeles Sentinel*, January 13, 1977; Rowe, "NAACP's H'wood Award Hassle Tarnish Image."

struggle for fair representation that had multifaceted aims, employed a combination of pressure and collaboration with industry officials, was conducted through familiar Hollywood idioms, and was led by black Hollywood professionals.

<p style="text-align:center">◈</p>

The nadir of the Image Awards in 1978 came roughly a year after the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights was pilloried for its proposals that the FCC more strictly regulate network television to reduce stereotypes of minorities and women and to ensure greater diversity on screen and off. Even as the NAACP pronounced the Image Awards "discontinued," the Commission was racing to publish the follow-up report that sought, in vain, to defend its earlier recommendations. If the Awards, on the one hand, and the Commission's proposed regulations, on the other, represented two possible paths toward achieving fairer representation for marginalized groups in moving images, it was clear that both roads were tortuous ones.

Yet they were not equally so. Calls to expand the federal government's oversight of the television industry were roundly rejected in a dawning deregulatory age and a time of conservative political ascendancy. The demise of the Image Awards, in contrast, was only temporary. By the late 1970s and early 1980s, the vision of fair representation that they embodied was flourishing. That vision sought to transform the movie and television industries from within by building the power of marginalized groups and thereby winning "wider representation" on screen and off screen. It was a vision that had been forged over the course of decades through the work of advocates seeking a place for themselves

within those industries. It was also a vision that anticipated—and was well suited to—an era of free enterprise, growing diversity, and cultural fragmentation.

Some indication of the broader triumph of this vision is evident in the extent of organizing by women and minority performers and professionals in Hollywood during the 1970s and 1980s, and their embrace of awards programs like the Image Awards. In the early 1970s, the Hispanic organization Nosotros began bestowing its Golden Eagle Awards. Subsequently, groups including Women in Film, the Association for Asian-Pacific American Artists, and the Alliance for Gay and Lesbian Artists also initiated awards programs. Indeed, on the same evening in June 1978 that the NAACP hosted its fete at the Century Plaza Hotel, Nosotros presented prizes at the Beverly Hilton, where the first Image Awards event had been held eleven years earlier. And earlier in the day, Women in Film hosted its second annual awards luncheon at the same hotel. Awards programs served a key function in an emerging constellation of Hollywood-based lobbying and advocacy groups that would carry forward the pursuit of fair representation in moving images in the 1980s and beyond.[92]

This project bore the traces of a long history of marginalized groups seeking their place within the movie and television industries, and of the visions such advocates developed. The case of African Americans is, again, indicative. In the early 1980s, a revived militancy swept blacks in Hollywood, sparked partly by a planned NBC

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[92] On these awards programs, see Montgomery, *Target: Prime Time*, 181–183; Capsuto, *Alternate Channels*, 173–175. Regarding the coincidence of events in 1978, see Grant Lee, "Film Clips: Dreyfuss Now the Goodby Boy," *Los Angeles Times*, June 7, 1978. On Women in Film's awards program, now known as the Crystal + Lucy Awards, see "Crystal + Lucy Awards General Information," accessed January 17, 2015, http://www.wif.org/general-information. As Vincent Doyle describes, the Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation (GLAAD), founded by New York activists in 1985 to protest the *New York Post*'s coverage of the AIDS epidemic, spawned within three years a Los Angeles branch that was closely linked to entertainment industry and that began distributing "Media Awards" in 1991. Doyle, "The Visibility Professionals," 98–122.

miniseries titled *Beulah Land*, a romantic melodrama set on a Southern planation before and during the Civil War. Although intended to capitalize on the success of *Roots*, the program harkened back more to *Gone with the Wind*; as the script circulated among prospective black actors, they grew dismayed over scenes depicting an enslaved man urging a young white boy in thick dialect to "start actin' like the maisa," an enslaved woman happily nursing a white baby, and an enslaved man despairing the fact that, when freed, "we got's to leave Beulah Land." Black performers and other entertainment industry professionals led the outcry against the show and began organizing in 1979 to prevent it from airing, mobilizing through a network of black organizations in Hollywood—the Media Forum, Concerned Black Artists for Action, Actors Speak for Life, and the League of Black Cinema Artists, as well as the NAACP's BH-H branch— and forming an ad-hoc "Coalition Against the Airing of *Beulah Land*." Members of this coalition wrote a position paper that detailed offensive passages in the script, solicited media coverage and ran advertisements in trade papers, enlisted the aid of the Congressional Black Caucus (particularly Rep. Augustus Hawkins, who represented Los Angeles) in publicizing their concerns, and won a series of meetings with NBC and producers. They persuaded the network to postpone the series' airing, convinced two affiliates not to show it when it did eventually air in fall 1980, and threatened boycotts of the program's advertisers. The Coalition evolved into a Black Anti-Defamation Coalition that served for several years afterward as a television watchdog based in Hollywood.[93]

The activists' aggressive assault on offensive screen images and their demands for more positive representations—the Coalition's position paper was subtitled "A Call to

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[93] For a detailed account of the protests, from which this summary is drawn, see Montgomery, *Target: Prime Time*, chapter 7.

Create, Nurture, and Protect Positive Black Images"—were familiar. But the campaign

against *Beulah Land* was initiated and led almost entirely by African American actors

and Hollywood professionals, and it helped to inaugurate a broader resurgence of

performer-led activism that linked issues of screen images, casting and hiring, and

minority entrepreneurship and decision-making power. In this reawakening, the Image

Awards, which were revived in 1980, became a vital tool.[94]

The ceremonies of the early 1980s featured forceful advocacy. In 1981,

organizers refused to award a prize for best actress in a motion picture, withholding the

award to highlight the lack of suitable candidates. (Cicely Tyson, in *Bustin' Loose*—

which starred and was produced by Richard Pryor—was the only black woman actor with

a leading role in an American film that year.) Instead, Benjamin Hooks used the

occasion of the ceremony to threaten an NAACP boycott of the motion picture industry,

an ultimatum that quickly secured a summit meeting with Jack Valenti and studio

executives, who provided assurances of their commitment to, as the *Los Angeles Times*

reported, "more representation for blacks in on- and off-camera roles."[95] At the 1982

Image Awards, Hooks deftly linked demands for on-screen and off-screen change, and

subtly blended the interests of African American performers and all black people. "We

are insisting that you give us a chance to present more images than those of clown[s] and

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[94] Grant Lee, "NAACP Sets 12th Annual Image Awards Show," *Los Angeles Times*, December 22, 1979.

[95] Peter J. Boyer, "NAACP Finds Shortage of Awards Nominees," *Los Angeles Times*, November 20, 1981; Dave Smith, "NAACP Boycott: More Black Roles Demanded," *Los Angeles Times*, December 8, 1981; Deborah Caulfield, "NAACP vs. Filmdom: Cease Fire," *Los Angeles Times*, January 8, 1982. See also Jesse Algeron Rhines, *Black Film/White Money* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1996), 80–81.

comedians," he said. "We can also play judges and lawyers and we will fight for that until hell freezes over!"[96]

Even as the Image Awards rhetorically linked demands for employment opportunities and improved screen portrayals, and backed them with threats to withhold black consumer power, they also sought to demonstrate the rewards of catering to black audiences and to highlight African Americans' growing influence in movies and television. In 1983, organizers took special care to celebrate the picture *D.C. Cab* (Guber-Peters/Universal), which starred Mr. T and several other black actors, and whose producers included Cassius Weathersby, one of the HRRB picketers two decades earlier. "We will make sure people go see 'D.C. Cab,'" the BH-H branch president promised. "And we will make sure that people see that 'D.C. Cab' and movies like it can make money."[97] A year earlier—when the Image Awards ceremony was for the first time taped to video, for delayed television broadcast via syndication—the President's Award went to Robert L. Johnson, who had founded the cable television network Black Entertainment Television (BET). Accepting the prize, Johnson declared, "BET's goal is to develop a national video stage to exhibit the style, vitality, and most important, the true images that reflect and represent the real character of Black America."[98] In a nation whose "video stage" would soon be occupied by a wildly popular sitcom about an African American family, and by a proliferating array of broadcast and cable channels

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[96] Deborah Caulfield, "NAACP's Image Awards Salute Black Artists," *Los Angeles Times*, December 7, 1982.

[97] Michael London, "NAACP Confers Image Awards," *Los Angeles Times*, December 6, 1983; "D.C. Cab (1983)," *IMDb*, accessed February 16, 2015, http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0085387/.

[98] "Founder of BET Receives NAACP President Award," *Philadelphia Tribune*, December 10, 1982.

seeking to cultivate women and minorities as audiences, the project Johnson outlined was

an ascendant one. Securing wider representation in moving images and in the industries

that produced them seemed ever more an indispensable part—perhaps the very essence—

of belonging in America itself.[99]

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[99] On *The Cosby Show*, see Sut Jhally and Justin Lewis, *"Enlightened" Racism: The Cosby Show, Audiences, and the Myth of the American Dream* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1992). On BET, see Beretta E. Smith-Shomade, *Pimpin' Ain't Easy: Selling Black Entertainment Television* (New York: Routledge, 2008). On Lifetime, a cable channel directed at women audiences, see, e.g., Eileen R. Meehan and Jackie Byars, "Telefeminism: How Lifetime Got Its Groove, 1984-1997," *Television & New Media* 1, no. 1 (February 2000): 33–51. On the Fox network's cultivation of black audiences, see Kristal Brent Zook, *Color by Fox: The Fox Network and the Revolution in Black Television* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999).

Epilogue

When Things Really Begin to Change

In May 2012, Vice President Joe Biden was asked on the Sunday talk show *Meet the Press* whether he was "comfortable with same sex-marriage now." President Barack Obama, who had previously stated his opposition to same-sex marriage, was already planning to announce a change of heart in advance of the fall campaign, but Biden seemed to preempt him. "The president sets the policy," he answered. "I am absolutely comfortable with the fact that men marrying men, women marrying women, and heterosexual men and women marrying [one] another are entitled to the same exact rights, all the civil rights, all the civil liberties." Pressed to reconcile this assertion with the administration's policy, Biden sidestepped into a broader meditation on the causes of growing public support for the legal equality of gay people. "I take a look at when things really begin to change, is when the social culture changes," he declared. "I think *Will and Grace*"—the sitcom focusing on the friendship of a gay man and a straight woman that aired on NBC from 1998 to 2006—"did more to educate the American public than almost anything anybody's ever done so far." Soon afterward, Obama did indeed become the first U.S. president to publicly support same-sex couples' legal right to marry. In the months that followed, he endorsed successful ballot initiatives for gay marriage in several states, and his Department of Justice became an increasingly assertive advocate in the federal courts. The next year, the U.S. Supreme Court issued pro-gay rulings in two landmark cases concerning the right to wed, including one that required the federal government to recognize gay marriages; in the following year and a half,

subsequent court decisions extended marriage rights to same-sex couples in dozens of states.[1]

For some observers, these developments indicated nothing less than victory in the long struggle for gay rights.[2] Notwithstanding the shortcomings of such reductive triumphalism, it is indisputable that the reconfiguration of civil marriage in a majority of states and in the eyes of the federal government marked a new willingness to recognize gay Americans as legitimate claimants to political power, legal equality, and full citizenship within the United States. And, at a crucial moment in that process, the Vice President of the United States casually and tellingly attributed this shift to gay visibility in television entertainment.[3] Biden's citation of *Will and Grace* in his endorsement of marriage quality, and NAACP leader Benjamin Jealous's 2008 statement linking Obama's victory with "a black president on TV," suggested both the continuing power and the ever-wider currency of the notion that fair representation on screen is vital to genuine belonging in America. Evidence of this belief abounds. Today, buoyed by corporate sponsors and television contracts, the NAACP's Image Awards, the National Council of La Raza's Alma Awards, and the GLAAD (formerly, the Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation) Media Awards celebrate the inclusion of African

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[1] "Meet the Press: Biden Breaks Down Stance on Same-Sex Marriage," *NBC News*, May 6, 2012, http://www.nbcnews.com/video/meet-the-press/47312632#47312632; Michael Barbaro, "Biden Expresses Support for Same-Sex Marriages," *New York Times*, May 6, 2012, http://www.nytimes.com/2012/05/07/us/politics/biden-expresses-support-for-same-sex-marriages.html.

[2] For a contemporary example of such triumphalism, see Linda Hirshman, *Victory: The Triumphant Gay Rights Revolution* (New York: Harper, 2012).

[3] It is worth noting that Obama, in his own, more-scripted remarks in the interview announcing his change in position, attributed his "evolution" to the "same-sex couples" he had met and who numbered among the parents of his daughters' friends. "Transcript: Robin Roberts Interview With President Obama," *ABC News*, May 10, 2012, http://abcnews.go.com/Politics/transcript-robin-roberts-abc-news-interview-president-obama/story?id=16316043.

Americans, Latinos, and lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people in motion pictures, television, and other areas of media and culture—and serve as a crucial cog in each organization's broader efforts in the entertainment industry.[4] Those advocacy groups, joined by scholars and journalists, carefully monitor, routinely report on, and doggedly advocate for improvements in diversity in motion pictures and on television.[5] Specialized websites like Shadow and Act, The Backlot, and AfterEllen cover Hollywood with a focus on the African diaspora, gay men, and gay women. The Backlot—formerly called AfterElton—once carried the slogan "Because visibility matters."[6]

This idea, seemingly omnipresent and timeless, nevertheless has a history. It took shape over a period of decades during the heart of the twentieth century, between the mid-1910s and the late 1970s. In the earliest years of motion pictures, racial, ethnic, and religious minorities sought to censor and restrict the prevalent caricatures that appeared dangerous to their social progress, and in the process, some secured greater power within the movie industry. During World War II, opposition to stereotypes was increasingly

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[4] See "Inside the Show," NAACP Image Awards, http://www.naacpimageawards.net/inside-the-show, accessed February 28, 2015; "About Us," NCLR Alma Awards, http://www.almaawards.com/about-us/, accessed February 28, 2015; "GLAAD Media Awards," GLAAD, www.glaad.org/mediaawards, accessed February 28, 2015.

[5] For some examples, see Kevin B. Lee, "Cinemetrics Extracts Statistical Data From Movies," *New York Times*, February 27, 2014, http://www.nytimes.com/2014/03/02/movies/awardsseason/cinemetrics-extracts-statistical-data-from-movies.html; Joseph Matos and Nancy Dillon, "Hispanics Net Few Roles in Major Hollywood Movies, Explosive Study on Diversity in Movies Finds," *New York Daily News*, August 4, 2014, http://www.nydailynews.com/entertainment/movies/hispanics-net-roles-major-hollywood-movies-study-article-1.1891014; GLAAD, *2014 Where We Are on TV*, http://www.glaad.org/files/GLAAD-2014-WWAT.pdf ; Esther Breger, "Primetime TV Is More Diverse Than It's Ever Been. Why Now?" *The New Republic*, August 25, 2014, http://www.newrepublic.com/article/119196/black-ish-cristela-network-tvs-diversity-push-fall; Manohla Dargis, "On Many Fronts, Women Are Fighting for Better Opportunity in Hollywood," *New York Times*, January 21, 2015, http://www.nytimes.com/2015/01/25/movies/on-many-fronts-women-are-fighting-for-better-opportunity-in-hollywood.html.

[6] On the slogan, see "The AfterElton.com Gay List," *The Backlot*, March 14, 2011, http://www.thebacklot.com/the-aftereltoncom-gay-list/03/2011/, accessed February 28, 2015.

accompanied by a more positive assertion that including and fairly representing minorities—particularly African Americans—in moving images was important in its own right. In the postwar decades, as television joined and then quickly supplanted motion pictures at the forefront of American entertainment, African Americans and other long-marginalized social groups deepened and expanded their understanding of the crucial importance of "images" on screen and the need for greater power in or over the moving image industries. Some sought, albeit with little lasting success, to establish a formal connection between fair representation in moving images and the rights of citizenship, seeking the federal government's intervention to secure changes in content and employment practices. More durable was a related but distinct project to expand the power of minority groups within the movie and television industries, in pursuit of a vision of fair representation in which a greater presence for marginalized groups onscreen and off screen served as both a means toward and an index of their belonging in America. By the late 1970s and early 1980s, this vision was championed by a growing number of Hollywood-based advocacy groups and had become a principal focus and a key strategy of numerous American social movements.

This history helps to explain how Biden—one of the highest officials in government, and although a supporter of gay rights, no activist himself—could in 2012 easily draw the causal link he did in his off-the-cuff assertion that "when things really begin to change, is when the social culture changes." But it can illuminate only so much, because, to paraphrase Biden, things really began to change beginning in the early 1980s. In subsequent decades, the combined impacts of government deregulation, corporate consolidation, and new technologies—from cable television and videocassette recorders

to networked computing—thoroughly transformed American media and entertainment. Once-clear distinctions between different forms of moving images increasingly dissolved. The large, diverse audiences once enjoyed by the movies and network broadcasts were increasingly segmented into small, more homogenous niches. American politics and society, meanwhile, were reshaped by the growing power of market fundamentalism, the reconfiguration of personal and family life in the wake of the feminist and gay liberation movements, rising rates of immigration from Latin America and Asia, and new debates over diversity and multiculturalism. Taken together, these transformations made the last thirty-five years a distinctly new period in the story of marginalized groups' pursuit of fair representation and American belonging on screen, a period that merits a history of its own.

Even so, the themes and dynamics that characterize the history that *Visibility Matters* has chronicled—the history of a widely-held conviction regarding the importance of moving images, of the persisting power of that certitude, and of its shifting emphases over time—are recognizable in American politics and culture today, a century after *The Birth of a Nation* debuted to a campaign of protest by African Americans. In early 2015, one hundred years after Los Angeles-based members of the NAACP petitioned to stop the premiere of D.W. Griffith's film, and nearly one hundred years after it became the first motion picture ever shown in the White House, Barack Obama screened another movie at the executive mansion. Directed by Ava DuVernay, an African American woman, *Selma* (Paramount, 2014) dramatized the 1965 demonstrations for black voting rights in that Alabama city, led by the Southern Christian Leadership Conference and the

Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.[7] The peculiar symmetry of the two screenings served to mark some of the enormous transformations that have reshaped American society and American entertainment over the last century. While Griffith's film depicted the nation's first Reconstruction, DuVernay's dramatized one of the turning points of its second. The former was presented by a Southern-born president who strengthened racial segregation within the federal government, and was opposed by African Americans who leveraged what political power they could muster in an effort to suppress it. The latter was screened by a black president of multiracial ancestry whose improbable political ascent would not have been possible without the real-life events the film depicted—not to mention the timely primary endorsement of the African American media celebrity and multimedia mogul, Oprah Winfrey, who appeared in the film and was among its producers.[8]

The two screenings, a century apart, also highlight enduring continuities: the crucial and complicated links between Hollywood and Washington, D.C., the connections that Americans have perceived between screen and society, and historically marginalized groups' deeply felt emotional investment in moving image representations—even at, or perhaps especially at, moments characterized by broader political mobilizations, whether against the expansion of Jim Crow and the scourge of lynching in the 1910s, or mass incarceration, police violence, and voter suppression in the 2010s. And although in very different ways, *Selma* was, like *The Birth of a Nation*, a controversial motion picture. Initially, its dramatization of civil rights protest drew it into debates regarding the impact

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[7] "Selma to Be Screened at White House," *BBC News*, January 16, 2015, http://www.bbc.com/news/entertainment-arts-30846653.

[8] Lucas Shaw, "Oprah Winfrey Joins Brad Pitt as Producer of MLK Drama 'Selma,'" *The Wrap*, January 19, 2014, http://www.thewrap.com/oprah-winfrey-joins-brad-pitt-producer-mlk-drama-selma/.

of the Supreme Court's 2013 decision striking down central provisions of the Voting

Rights Act of 1965 and then the late-2014 Black Lives Matter protests against the killings

of unarmed black men by police. Subsequently, the film became a target of criticism for

its depiction of President Lyndon Johnson.[9] But strikingly, the particular controversy

that swirled around the film beginning just before its White House screening had less to

do with its content than with its fortunes in Hollywood's awards season. When the

Academy Award nominations were announced the previous day, no nod went to

DuVernay as best director, nor to any of the film's stars, nor indeed, to any black actors

at all. Commentators churned out condemnations of the "Whitest Oscars … in nearly

two decades," and complaints filled social media under the hashtag #OscarsSoWhite.[10]

The outcry reflected the persistence of longstanding concerns regarding fair

representation and particularly the inclusion of marginalized groups in moving images,

concerns that reached back to the 1940s and grew more intense in the late 1960s and

1970s. Although the White House screening took on a new meaning as a result of the

tumult, the debate centered squarely on Hollywood itself. Focused as it was on questions

of recognition and commendation, and on what such honors reveal about the place and

power of minorities within the entertainment industries, the commotion suggested the

continued influence of the approaches that minority screen performers and professionals

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[9] See DuVernay's concise summary of the shifting conversation in A. O. Scott, "Ava DuVernay Didn't See This Coming," *New York Times Magazine*, February 22, 2015.

[10] For some of the immediate reactions, see, e.g., Kevin Fallon, "The Whitest Oscars Since 1998: Why the 'Selma' Snubs Matter," *The Daily Beast*, January 15, 2015, http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2015/01/15/the-whitest-oscars-since-1998-why-the-selma-snubs-matter.html; Joseph Neese, "Oscar nominations: Ava DuVernay, David Oyelowo of 'Selma' snubbed," January 15, 2015, *MSNBC*, http://www.msnbc.com/msnbc/selma-bright-spot-among-lack-diverse-oscar-nominees; Scott Mendelson, "Why Ava DuVernay's 'Selma' Snub Matters," *Forbes*, January 15, 2015, http://www.forbes.com/sites/scottmendelson/2015/01/15/why-ava-duvernays-selma-oscar-snub-matters/; David Carr, "Why the Oscars' Omission of 'Selma' Matters," *New York Times*, January 18, 2015, http://www.nytimes.com/2015/01/19/business/media/why-the-oscars-omission-of-selma-matters.html.

advocated as they increasingly took leadership of the pursuit of fair representation on screen. Indeed, it demonstrated what the organizers of the Image Awards had sensed as early as the 1970s: that awards programs, when they became media events themselves, could garner attention and wield powerful influence. Although the Academy Awards have always had a racial politics—*Selma*'s "snub" came in the seventy-fifth anniversary year of Hattie McDaniel's Oscar for *Gone With the Wind*—the clamor over the 2015 nominations revealed how, in today's fragmented culture, such events have a perhaps unique capacity to serve the function that motion pictures and broadcast television networks once did, creating a shared, national "space" for considering the boundaries of American belonging by forging momentary links among motion pictures, television, and social media, knitting together an otherwise fractured public conversation.[11]

Charged with responding to the #OscarsSoWhite "firestorm" was the Academy's president Cheryl Boone Isaacs—an African American movie marketer, and a member of the NAACP's Image Awards Hall of Fame. Isaacs' position indicated the gains secured by the pursuit of the particular vision of fair representation that emerged from the 1970s, one that emphasized greater onscreen and off-screen diversity and expanded power for minorities within the moving image industries. Yet the demographics of the Academy itself—overwhelmingly white and male according to a 2012 survey by the *Los Angeles*

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[11] The film critic Manohla Dargis made a similar observation regarding the 2015 Academy Awards, writing, "Now … each new movies slides into an ever-expanding visual stream in which many become lost; at the same time, paradoxically, the Oscars are bigger than ever. … The Oscars have, in their strange way, emerged as an increasingly important forum for public discourse—much of it trivial, some of it not." A. O. Scott and Manohla Dargis, "Everyone Has a Take on Movies and Prizes," *New York Times*, February 15, 2015. On "our cultural understanding of the 'network' as a ritual space for the production of the nation," and the anachronism of this notion, see Herman Gray, *Cultural Moves: African Americans and the Politics of Representation* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 6–7.

Times—and controversy over the 2015 nominations suggested the limited nature of that success.[12]

Nevertheless, the queries Isaacs fielded, and the responses she offered, bespoke the incontestable primacy of that particular vision today. Initially, she rejected a reporter's proposition that the Academy "has a problem recognizing diversity," noting that *Selma* had received a nomination in the Best Picture category. Within days, however, she elaborated that the Academy was "committed to seeking out diversity," and asserted her own desire for the Oscars to recognize more minorities, saying, "I personally would love to see and look forward to see a greater cultural diversity among all our nominees in all our categories." In another press statement, she offered an admonition to the motion industry: "It behooves Hollywood—as an economic imperative, if not a moral one—to begin more closely reflecting the changing face of America." She continued, "It matters that we pay attention to, again, the diversity of voice and opinion and experience, and that it doesn't slide, it doesn't slide anywhere except for forward."[13] Although her language of "diversity" and of "economic imperative[s]" reveals the legacies of the last four decades, the underlying sentiment that Isaacs both echoed and endorsed—the belief

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[12] On Isaacs, see John Horn, Nicole Sperling, and Doug Smith, "Unmasking the Academy: Oscar Voters Overwhelmingly White, Male," *Los Angeles Times*, February 19, 2012, http://www.latimes.com/entertainment/envelope/oscars/la-et-unmasking-oscar-academy-project-20120219-story.html. On the Academy's demographics, see Shalani Dore, "Forest Whitaker, Paris Barclay, Cheryl Boone Isaacs Honored by NAACP," *Variety*, February 18, 2014, http://variety.com/2014/film/awards/forest-whitaker-paris-barclay-cheryl-boone-isaacs-honored-by-naacp-1201110855/.

[13] Kara Warner, "Academy President Cheryl Boone Isaacs on *Selma* Snubs, Lack of Diversity," *Vulture*, January 15, 2015, http://www.vulture.com/2015/01/academy-president-on-selma-snubs-diversity.html; Jill Sederholm and the Associated Press, "Academy President Cheryl Boone Isaacs Speaks Out About Lack of Oscars Diversity," *NBC News*, January 17, 2015, http://www.nbcnews.com/news/nbcblk/academy-president-cheryl-boone-isaacs-speaks-out-about-lack-oscars-n288141; Sandy Cohen, Associated Press, "Academy President Responds To Oscar Firestorm," *Huffington Post*, January 16, 2015, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2015/01/16/oscars-diversity_n_6490770.html.

that Hollywood's "closely reflecting" a changing America is crucially important and vital

to progress—demonstrates the enduring power of an American conviction more than a

century old. As so many before her had done, she insisted that visibility matters.

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Bay State Banner

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Chicago Defender
Chicago Tribune
Christian Science Monitor
Commentary
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Ebony
Grito, El
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Jet
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