# Celluloid History:

# Postwar Society in Postwar Popular Culture

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In the beginning of Frank Capra's popular film *It's A Wonderful Life* (1946), George Bailey wants to see the world, to design bridges and new buildings for modern cities and to make a million dollars before he turns thirty. Likewise, in the beginning of Nicholas Ray's popular western *Johnny Guitar* (1954), Vienna (Joan Crawford) wants to build a modern city that she will own and control. Both George and Vienna avoid romantic involvement early in the films because the personal sacrifices necessitated by such traditional social relationships would impede their ambition to amass economic wealth and would stifle the individual liberty such material abundance allows. These films thus illustrate the intense materialism and individualism, the intense liberalism, of post-World War II American culture.

Liberalism is also contested in the films, however. Anti-liberal values of community and self-sacrifice also exist in the films, and these values serve two distinct ideological functions. In *It's A Wonderful Life*, traditional values of community and public virtue are evoked to critique the crass individualism of American liberalism and the unjust social practices that liberalism engenders. Liberal society is not opposed in the film, however; it is merely reformed. Virtuous, self-sacrificing citizens and crass, self-gratifying ones can both exist in the social order depicted in the film. The social practices of the former restrain the social practices of the latter and a harmonious social order is the result. In this film, traditional values serve a conservative ideological function. In *Johnny Guitar*,

traditional values are evoked to oppose liberal society. Liberal society cannot be reformed, so virtuous characters must exist outside of society and must struggle to develop a counter-cultural alternative to liberal social practices.

I propose that these films represent a contested cultural terrain of liberalism and radicalism. They are liberal in that they reinforce the materialistic individualism, the intense, self-interested, acquisitive liberty endemic to postwar society. They are radical in that the potential for an alternative, social-based vision of society exists, particularly in *Johnny Guitar*, which was produced when social and economic changes facilitated by the war had become further entrenched. Moreover, this cultural contestation demonstrates that the hegemony of twentieth-century liberalism is not as complete as some cultural historians would have it.

For example, John Patrick Diggins argues that liberalism became preeminent in intellectual circles and in politics as a result of the industrial economic realities of the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries. T. J. Jackson Lears argues that liberalism became so entrenched at the end of the nineteenth century among the American intellectuals he studies it was opposed only by conservative anti-modernists such as Henry Adams, who evoked many of the values and social relations of the Middle Ages as alternatives to the depravities of modern liberal society. Diggins and Lears view American culture as a total gestalt, and in the twentieth century they see that gestalt as liberal in nature. To them, the materialistic and individualistic values of American liberalism became so entrenched in the late nineteenth century they replaced the values of eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century American republicanism.[1]

In contrast to liberalism, the essence of republicanism is public virtue, the sacrifice of self-interest for the greater interest of the public good. Republicanism emphasizes the restraint of self-interested social and economic activities when those activities are antithetical to the public good. Due to this emphasis on the public good over individual liberty, society is assumed to be essentially classless: there is a universal definition of laborers that includes mechanics, farmers, small businessmen and others involved in productive activities. An idealization of social mobility and social progress is also a characteristic of republicanism, but, paradoxically, there is a suspicion of wealth as well. The belief that the individual has the right to own property, including land and tools as a means of self-sufficiency for future work and as a reward for past work, is a key element of republicanism, and the individual accumulation of wealth is not looked down upon unless the individual is corrupted by his success. This qualified value of success, as Eric Foner points out, is rooted in the Calvinist theology of the American Puritans. As a minister was called to serve God, so too were all individuals called to serve God in their occupations. Success at one's occupation was considered evidence of being one of the elect. That success, in both the Puritan and republican traditions, however, was always qualified by the elements of virtue: diligence, sobriety, frugality, public service.[2]

Republican virtue, Diggins informs us, does not exist in twentieth-century American politics, so American politics has lost its soul. He argues that in intellectual circles, the Greenwich Village rebels of the pre-World War I years came to associate virtue with New England Puritanism rather than with classical republicanism. To these intellectuals republicanism came to represent repression of individual freedom and emotion. Moreover, the First World War destroyed the patriotism of the Lost Generation intellectuals of the 1920s and, consequently, their civic virtue. According to Diggins, these developments "precluded the possibility that even the residues of republicanism would survive in twentieth-century America . . . ."[3] Similarly, Lears finds elements of republicanism in the writings of his turn-of-the-century anti-modern conservatives, but he sees the hegemony of American liberalism as so complete there is no modern counter-cultural alternative to it.[4] The two films I study here, however, demonstrate that dynamic tensions exist between liberal and republican values in post-World War II popular culture, and these cultural tensions are related to tensions between social classes. Thus, these films illustrate the fissures in American liberalism and suggest that the acceptance of liberal social practices is constantly negotiated in mass discourse.[5]

What occurs in social practice, of course, cannot be entirely deduced from any given text or set of texts. Popular films, as other historical artifacts and documents, are created under specific historical conditions and they embody aspects of those conditions. In contrast to other cultural texts, however, popular films are created to make money from ticket sales to diverse audiences. To do so, they must speak to the social experiences and concerns of those audiences. The commercialism of film, then, makes the medium a significant index of ideas extant in mass discourse, and the dominant ideologies encoded in popular films reveal large-scale social patterns.[6] Perhaps most important, as media historian Daniel J. Czitrom points out, "The act of moviegoing became a powerful social ritual for millions, a new way of experiencing and defining the shared values of peer and family."[7] For these reasons, popular films are relevant texts we can study to understand something about broad social and cultural patterns.

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It's A Wonderful Life (Liberty Films) was popular with audiences, and many critics liked it as well. Capra claimed to have received "thousands of letters" from Americans who told him the film "touched their hearts."[8] It touched many critics' hearts as well. A reviewer for Variety applauded the film's "April-air whole-someness and humanism . . . ."[9] The reviewer for Time declared, "It's a Wonderful Life . . . is a pretty wonderful movie." He went on to assert that even though the film was a fantasy it was "twice as lifelike as most Hollywood whimsies which are offered with straight faces as slices of reality."[10] The film did well at the box office, although Capra pointed out that it struggled to make a profit due to high production costs.[11] It was also nominated for Best Picture, Best Actor and Best

Director, but that year the highly acclaimed film about American GIs readjusting to civilian life, *The Best Years of Our Lives,* won all three categories.[12] As a popular postwar film, *It's A Wonderful Life* has something to tell us about American culture in a time of social change. The film illustrates the tensions between republican and liberal values in postwar American culture, and demonstrates how republican values can be sedimented in a mass-mediated text to serve an ideological end.

The main character in the film is George Bailey (James Stewart). George grew up in a typical American small town of the early twentieth century, Bedford Falls, but always wanted to go to college, see the world and make a million dollars. Due to a number of circumstances, George's plans are never realized. Instead, he remains in Bedford Falls, marries Mary Hatch (Donna Reed)—the girl who has had a crush on him since they were children—and takes over his father's position managing a small building and loan company. By remaining in Bedford Falls, George learns later from his guardian angel, he keeps the town from becoming Pottersville, a town completely owned, controlled and corrupted by Henry F. Potter (Lionel Barrymore).[13]

Through a series of flashback scenes, we view George's childhood and his early adult life, and we realize he has always made personal sacrifices for his family and his community. In 1919, when George is twelve, he saves his brother Harry from drowning and receives a bad ear in the process. He also keeps the druggist, Mr. Gower, from filling a prescription with poison. Most important, we discover that since childhood George has had a tension-filled relationship with Mr. Potter, "the richest and meanest man in the county." He has always defended his father's reputation and republican values against Potter's verbal abuses, but he is also torn himself between the values of his father and the values of Potter. George's defense of what his father stood for, and his anguish about sacrificing his own personal ambition and following in his father's footsteps, is perhaps best represented in a scene that takes place shortly after his father's death.

George is sitting in on a meeting at the building and loan association the day he is to leave for college. His father, Peter Bailey, has died and Potter wants to dissolve the building and loan. Potter attacks Peter Bailey's character. He tells the men at the meeting, "Peter Bailey was not a businessman. That's what killed him. He was a man of high ideals, so called." The issue of Ernie Bishop's (Frank Faylan) loan comes up. Potter points out that Ernie has no credit and that the bank turned down his application. George says that he approved the loan because he knows Ernie personally (he is the taxi driver waiting outside the office to drive George to the train that will finally take him out of Bedford Falls). George tells the men he can vouch for Ernie's character. Potter says, "If you shoot pool with some employee here you can come and borrow money. What does that get us? A discontented, lazy rabble instead of a thrifty working class." He then adds that Peter Bailey was a dreamer who filled people's heads with impossible ideas. George comes to his father's defense, arguing that his father kept people like Ernie out of Potter's slums:

Just remember this, Mr. Potter, that this rabble you're talking about, they do most of the working and paying and living and dying in this community. Well, is it too much to have them work and pay and live and die in a couple of rooms and a bath? Anyway, my father didn't think so. People were human beings to him. But to you, a warped, frustrated old man, they're cattle! Well, in my book he died a richer man than you'll ever be!

Potter's response, of course, is "Sentimental hogwash." The men vote against Potter and decide not to dissolve the building and loan on the condition George remain as Executive Secretary in his father's place. George is torn between following his own interests or forsaking them for the interests of the society in which he lives. He decides to put school off for another four years (he gives his brother Harry the money to go), and stays in Bedford Falls to save the building and loan and, therefore, the homes of the working-class people of the town.

This scene is significant because of the explicit tension between the self-interest of Potter and the community concerns for which George sacrifices his own interests. It is also significant because of the social positions of George and Potter. Potter is by any definition a member of the upper class. He has an extensive amount of capital invested in many businesses in the town, even in the building and loan, although he does not have a controlling interest. Potter wants to dissolve the building and loan so he can control the housing market in Bedford Falls. George, on the other hand, has always worked for a living. Although he does not drive a cab like Ernie or walk a beat like Bert the policeman, he has worked since his childhood days at Mr. Gower's drugstore. He understands the value of work and takes pride in it. It would be wrong to say that George is a member of the working class, however. He is middle class, which is apparent by his position between the capitalist Potter and working-class individuals such as Ernie.

The physical position of George's eventual home with Mary further demonstrates his social position. Potter is at one extreme: we never see him outside of and are led to believe that he lives in town. The workers, however, live in Bailey Park, which is in a field outside of town. George and Mary's house is in a position between these two extremes. It is not outside of town nor is it downtown; it is in an intermediate position. Just as George mediates the tensions between Potter and the working class, he lives in a physical position between them. Moreover, as George is in a social position between Potter and the workers, he has the values of both, and the tensions between those two classes are the tensions within George. The traditional republican values are those of the workers. The liberal values are those of Potter. Both sets of values are within George, and his social position is portrayed as that of a mediator between the two classes.

Although these tensions are within George himself, it is a mistake to conclude, as Raymond Carney does, that the film is basically "a kind of psychodrama in which each of the major characters around George externalizes

an imaginative contradiction or division of allegiance that already exists within him."[14] Such a conclusion tends to abstract the individual—in this case, George—from the social context within which he lives and develops his values. It implies that the very real conflicts and contradictions in society are merely personal psychological conflicts. It reduces *all* conflict to psychological conflict, and it leads Carney to assert that in contrast to Capra's earlier films—e.g., *Mr. Deeds Goes to Town* (1936), *Mr.Smith Goes to Washington* (1939), *Meet John Doe* (1941)—"the drama has moved away from confrontation, coercion and the attempted manipulation of a central character to become a psychodrama of contradictory imaginative tendencies within one figure."[15] Carney has uncovered one subtext to the film, the psychological tensions of postwar culture, but he has done so at too great a cost: by emphasizing characters' personal anxieties over the social relations that produce those anxieties, social relations with which audiences could identify.

Within George are two different social possibilities, but these two possibilities are not merely imagined by George. They exist within him because they historically exist outside of him in society. George grew up in the Bedford Falls of his father, a society of independent homeowners and small businesses. Potter and the concentrated capital he represents also existed in that society and had always threatened to consolidate property ownership, making the average citizens of Bedford Falls renters instead of homeowners and, in some cases, wage earners instead of independent businessmen. (The Italian immigrant Martini, for example, owns his own tavern in Bedford Falls, not in Pottersville.) That threat was always kept in check, however, by virtuous citizens such as Peter Bailey, who worked to insure families would have a degree of economic independence by owning their own homes. Peter Bailey's death portends both the death of the society he represents and, consequently, the emergent unrestrained economic activities of people like Potter. George must choose between what he believes to be best for himself —e.g., going to college, seeing the world, making a million dollars—and what is best for the society in which he lives. This is not merely an internal struggle. It is preeminently a social struggle in which George plays a mediating role.

Reluctantly, George chooses to embrace the values of his father. He and Mary wed, he makes a career of the building and loan, and they settle down in Bedford Falls and raise a family. George's new-found commitment to his father's values is most apparent in a scene that takes place in the building and loan on George's wedding day. Mary and George are leaving on their honeymoon in Ernie's taxi when Ernie notices there is a run at the bank. George gets out of the cab and goes over to the building and loan, where his uncle Billy has locked the doors and has been drinking because people want their money. Potter phones George in his office and tells him he has guaranteed all of the bank's loans at fifty cents on the dollar, which he also offers to do for the building and loan. George refuses Potter's offer and tells Uncle Billy to go out and open the front doors. He

then looks at the portrait of his father on the wall for inspiration and goes out to talk to the people in the lobby.

George tells the citizens of Bedford Falls that he does not have their money, that each of them has money tied up in the others' houses. They learn that Potter is willing to give them fifty cents on the dollar, and one of them, Tom, tries to convince the others to take it. Mary appears and offers their honeymoon money, $2,000. Tom wants every one of his $242. George tells him and the others they should take only what they need to live. "We've got to have faith in each other," he cries. Tom, however, thinks only of himself and demands his $242, which George reluctantly gives him. The others take only what they need and George tells them that they do not need to sign for it, that they should pay it back when they can. Closing time arrives and George and Mary still have two dollars of their honeymoon money. Thanks to the community values of Bedford Falls' citizens and to the self-sacrifice of George and Mary, the building and loan is kept out of Potter's corrupt hands.



**George and Mary spend their wedding day keeping the building and loan open by loaning their honeymoon money to the citizens of Bedford Falls. Photograph courtesy of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences**

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This scene is not important so much for the contrast between the self-interest of Tom and Potter and the benevolence of George and Mary, but for the public virtue the people display and for the image of an organic community the scene invokes. George tells the citizens of Bedford Falls that they share a common interest, that they have all depended upon the others for the construction of their houses. He tells them if they do not think of the greater interest of them all they will end up living in Potter's slums and paying him the rents he decides they should pay. The liberal values of Potter and Tom are evident, but they are in dialogical tension with the values of Mary and George and the majority of Bedford Falls' citizens. The negative social consequences of Potter's and Tom's liberalism are restrained by the republican values of George and Mary and the working-class citizens of the town.

In Capra's vision, of course, the virtuous individual hero, George, is socially active and the working-class citizens are socially passive. They merely follow George's lead. He tells them what to do and they do it. It would be wrong to conclude, however, that the working-class represents a great void, a mass to be manipulated by charasmatic leaders. It would be even worse to conclude that this is how audiences read the film, for it was released at a time when extensive wildcat strikes were occurring across the country, a time when working-class Americans were demonstrating their potential for direct action.[16] Working-class citizens follow George's lead in the film because their desires are his desires. They do not follow Tom's lead. The potential for working-class discontent and hostility exist in the film: working-class citizens become discontented and angry when Bedford Falls becomes Pottersville. The potential for social action exists within that anger, although Capra does not choose to emphasize it. It is ironic that Capra critiques the crass individualism of Potter while he applauds the virtuous individualism of George.

Thanks to the emphasis on community that George and Mary and the common citizens of Bedford Falls display, the building and loan survives and Bailey Park grows from a mere six houses to dozens. George follows in his father's footsteps to help his fellow citizens satisfy the "fundamental urge" his father once told him people have to own their own homes. Their happiness, self-worth and community concerns are based on their ability to have a degree of economic independence through property ownership. They lose these character-istics and values later in the film when all property is concentrated in Potter's hands.

George faces the possibility of his world falling apart when Uncle Billy meets Potter in the bank and, with a newspaper containing a story about Harry Bailey being a war hero, accidentally slips him the $8,000 deposit he is supposed to make, which Potter keeps. Uncle Billy cannot remember what he did with the money, and George does not know what to do. He even goes to Potter for a loan, but Potter tells him to get it from the "riffraff" he's so fond of. George does not know where to turn, and he ends up standing on a bridge, where he contemplates committing suicide by jumping into the icy river below. Clarence (Henry

Travers), George's guardian angel, enters the scene at this point, jumping into the river himself because he knows George will jump in to save him.

After George saves Clarence, Clarence tells George he is an angel, and shows George what would have happened to Bedford Falls and its citizens had George never lived. Mr. Gower would have poisoned a child. Harry Bailey would have drowned as a boy and would not have lived to save the lives of American GIs during the war. Most important is that George learns Bedford Falls would have become Pottersville. The town would have been full of dance halls, pool rooms and strip joints. And the place that George helped build for working-class families to have homes, Bailey Park, would have been a graveyard, symbolizing what would have happened to the working class and their values had George not been there to negotiate between their needs and Potter's greed. Without George, as evidenced by the changed, disaffected attitudes of the working-class people in Pottersville, the working class would have become the "discontented rabble" that Potter had defined them as being.

Thanks to Clarence, and despite his problems and continual self-sacrifices, George realizes what a "wonderful life" he has had, and Pottersville is turned back into Bedford Falls. George is happy to be alive and is even willing to go to prison if need be. That is not necessary, however, because the citizens of Bedford Falls once again demonstrate the organic nature of their community by bringing baskets, hats, bowls, jars and hands full of money to help George. George, as he said about his father earlier in the film, is richer than Potter, in value although not in material wealth.

George Bailey comes to the final realization that community, family and home are the core values of the American way of life. That realization is never made by Mary and the workers, however, because they never wanted to amass great wealth, see the world or truncate their roots in a specific locality to search for further material gain in the city. (It is important to point out that Mary is herself a worker. She works long hours making the Bailey house a home and caring for the Bailey children.) The values of the working class and of Mary in the film are the values in George Bailey that are in opposition to and in continual tension with the values of Potter, and both sets of values do battle within George himself.

To a postwar culture experiencing the structural reorganization of society facilitated by the war, *It's A Wonderful Life* functioned ideologically to mitigate the cultural anxieties of a capitalist society changing both structurally and socially. The film looks back to an idealistic pre-war society in which, it is assumed, republican values were extant and dominant, the governing ideology of society. A similar observation is made by Serafina Bathrick in her study of Vincente Minnelli's 1944 film, *Meet Me In St.Louis*. Bathrick points out that in the late stages of capitalism popular art forms often evoke stable visions of the past in order to ease capitalist cultures through times of change.[17] *It's A Wonderful Life*, like *Meet Me In St. Louis*, functions in this way by drawing on traditional values as an ideological means of dealing with the social and economic changes fostered by the consolidation of the corporate-capitalist state during and following

**George and Mary are reassured of the organic nature of their community as their earlier self-sacrifices are reciprocated by the other citizens of Bedford Falls. Photograph courtesy of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences.**

the war.[18] *Meet Me In St. Louis* is set in 1903-1904. *It's A Wonderful Life* is set in the mid-1940s, the time it was produced. But through the flashback scenes recounting George's life, we go back to 1919 and progress to George's predicament in the 1940s. The earlier years are a time when Americans such as Peter Bailey lived by traditional values rooted in the republican ideal. That past is evoked in the film to make an ideological statement about what society should be, a society in which liberalism is extant but tempered by the remnants of republicanism.

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In contrast to *It's A Wonderful Life, Johnny Guitar* (Republic Films) is a Nicholas Ray western. Compared to the former film, the number of contemporary Americans who have seen *Johnny Guitar* is relatively small. For this reason some readers may question my use of the film as a significant cultural artifact that has something important to tell us about postwar American culture. We need to remember, however, that *It's A Wonderful Life* is a Christmas classic shown annually on television to millions of Americans. *Johnny Guitar* has not been kept alive in the popular consciousness the way that Capra's film has because it is not

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a holiday classic, but it was popular with American film-goers in 1954, even though it was released at a time when there was a general slump in ticket sales, and even though critics disliked it.[19]

*Johnny Guitar* was released in early May and was usually in the top five in cities across the country through June. In late May, *Variety* pointed out, "*Johnny Guitar* is best bet of the new films around here this season in a week marked by continued doldrums at most mainstream houses."[20] Even during Memorial Day week, with competition from the newly released box office hit *Dial M For Murder, Variety* noted, "*Johnny* was still in fifth position overall."[21] Reviewers did not agree with fans, however. For example, the reviewer for *Time* wrote that the film "is one of those curious composite animals, like the tiglon, the hipplope and the peccadillo, that most people would rather talk about than see."[22] Other reviewers disliked the film for similar reasons: because women were cast in traditional male roles, because it was difficult to sympathize with the characters and because the film was full of love, hate and violence. (There were surely other things causing this last reviewer to dislike this western since it held no monopoly on love, hate and violence in the genre.)[23] That the film was not popular with professional *male* critics does not overshadow the fact that Americans across the country were flocking to see the film. On the contrary, it demonstrates that the film spoke to popular audiences in ways the professional critics did not understand. This, I believe, makes *Johnny Guitar* even that much more of a significant cultural artifact deserving analysis.

The film is about a woman saloon owner, Vienna (Joan Crawford), and her relationship to a town and to the men in her life, particularly Johnny Guitar (Sterling Hayden). But her relationship with Johnny develops within a social context. Vienna owns a saloon on the outskirts of a western town, which represents society in the film. She is new to the area and the location of her business outside of the town symbolizes her distanced relationship to society. She has connections to society—she has a bank account in town and she knows all of the people there—but she is not actually a part of it. This society is corrupt and controlled by a selfish and neurotic woman, Emma Small (Mercedes McCambridge), who cannot deal with Vienna owning her own business. She is also jealous of the attention men, particularly the Dancin' Kid (Scott Brady), show Vienna. Emma, as Potter in *It's A Wonderful Life,* wants everything for herself. Vienna is a shrewd businesswoman who struggles with Emma and with her own desires for power and wealth. She is introduced as a cold, self-interested individual, much like Emma, who purchased her land after learning from a surveyor that the railroad would be coming through the area and would nurture economic growth. Throughout the film, however, Vienna's greed is tempered as she discovers that wealth is empty unless it is shared.[24]

The gender role reversal that occurs in this film is one of the major reasons professional male critics disliked it in 1954, and their responses should be placed in their social and historical context. As World War II production demanded increased women's labor power, women entered the work force in large numbers,

and their experiences caused them to challenge more broadly the traditional assumption that women's place was in the home. After the war ended, however, and GIs were reintegrated into the work force, many women lost their jobs to men or had to give up their skilled jobs for unskilled jobs or clerical office positions. Of course, some women chose to return to the home.[25] After all, films such as *It's A Wonderful Life* depicted the home as their proper place. But women's wartime experiences increased the number of both single and married women in the work force, and this increase continued after the war, even though women lost jobs to returning GIs. Many women learned that the value of their labor need not be defined solely by their productivity in the home. Moreover, they represented an increasing threat to men in the work force, and employers did not value or reward their labor equally with that of men.[26]

In her studies of American families in the cold war era, Elaine Tyler May argues that professionals dealt with this threat by prescribing traditional women's roles in order to contain women within the traditional family structure. The influx of women into the workforce during and following the war caused physicians, psychiatrists, clergymen, sociologists, writers for women's magazines such as *The Ladies Home Journal* and other professionals, both male and female, to voice concerns that the moral fabric of society was ripping.[27] As May demonstrates, it was assumed that

> Stable families conforming to respectable behavior held the key to the future. In keeping with the American tradition of republican motherhood, it was up to women to achieve successful families: if they fulfilled their domestic roles as adapted to the atomic age, they would be able to rear children who would avoid juvenile delinquency, stay in school, and become future scientists and experts to defeat the Russians in the cold war."[28]

Many professional critics who reviewed *Johnny Guitar* in 1954 fit within May's field of experts who feared the female threat and prescribed traditional roles for women in films. In his review in *The New Yorker*, John McCarten called the film "the maddest Western you are likely to encounter this year. It has not only male but female gunfighters." Women are not professional gunfighters in the film, however. Emma and Vienna do shoot it out at the end, but that is a short scene in the film. That women in the film own property and are in positions of power over men were the real reasons this reviewer disliked the film, which is apparent in the way he concluded his review: "Back to *Kinder, Kuche, Kirche*" (children, kitchen, church).[29] The reviewer for *Time,* demonstrating his angst over sexual issues, wrote, "The menace is not a man but a woman . . . . What's more, she is not just the usual jealous woman but a real sexological square knot who fondles pistols suggestively and gets unladylike satisfaction from watching a house burn down."[30] The *Newsweek* reviewer, noting that Crawford "is still one of the slinkiest of the six-gun operatives," never actually reviewed the film and

could not get his mind off the actress. He ended with this observation: "Summing up: Joan Crawford shapes up well in her levis."[31]

The plot of the film develops around a stagecoach holdup. Emma's brother is killed in the holdup and she falsely accuses a group of men in the film, the Dancin' Kid and his men, of commiting the crime. The Kid and his men work and own a silver mine that cannot be reached without taking a secret trail through a stream and behind a waterfall. Emma uses the crime as an excuse to vent her wrath on the Kid and on Vienna. She associates the Kid and his men with the holdup and Vienna with the Kid, therefore condemning them all without any evidence. The Kid did not hold up the stage, but he and his men decide later to rob the bank. They figure they might as well since they are being blamed by society for being involved in a crime they did not commit; they are thus corrupted *by* society.

As in *It's A Wonderful Life,* there are tensions between the social groups in this film as well as tensions within groups and within particular group members. There is no room in Emma's corrupt society for those who hold to traditional values of private property, community and public virtue. These values only exist in people associated with the two groups that are outside of society.[32]

In addition to the tensions between social groups, we learn that tensions also exist within Vienna and between Johnny and Vienna. Vienna has sent for Johnny, an old acquaintance and a gunfighter, to protect her and her property from Emma and the townspeople. At one time in her life she wanted to settle down with Johnny, but he did not want to be tied down to a home. Standing in front of a model of the city she wants to erect, Vienna tells Johnny that five years earlier she wanted to build a future together but he needed his independence. The future society that Vienna wants to build could have had a place in it for Johnny, but he was unwilling to sacrifice his self-interest to be a part of it, something he now regrets. He asks her, "What do ya suppose'd happen if this man were to come back?" She replies, "When a fire burns itself out, all you have left is ashes." The tension is between his self-interest then and her self-interest now, between her past desire to have a relationship and his searching to see if that relationship is still a possibility. Thus the tension between groups, and between Emma and Vienna, also exists within groups, as is apparent in this scene with Johnny and Vienna. The only way for self-interest to be controlled is to share and moderate one's interests with the interests of others, something both Johnny and Vienna learn during the course of the film.

This tension between group members is evident throughout the film. For example, in one scene the Dancin' Kid and his men are at their silver mine debating where to go and what to do. The mine has been exhausted and they think Emma and the townspeople will be looking for them to blame them for the stagecoach holdup. The Kid wants to stay because he has feelings for Vienna. Bart (Ernest Borgnine) tells him he is a fool, that he should not waste his time on Vienna. The Kid asks if there is anything in life Bart likes and Bart says, "Me, I like me!" This same intra-group tension is also evident later in the film when the Kid wants to turn back and look for Turkey, who is hurt by an explosion and

falls behind the rest of the group when they are trying to escape. Bart tells the Kid they should not risk their own necks looking for Turkey. The Kid thinks of the group, but Bart thinks only of his own skin.

Unlike Bart's character, which remains the same throughout the film, Vienna's cold and bitter nature changes, and she realizes that the men who work for her depend on her and she on them. One scene illustrates that Vienna has come to think of her group as an organic community, much like the bank-run scene with George Bailey at the building and loan in *It's A Wonderful Life.* The posse is searching for Vienna because she was in the bank withdrawing her money when the Kid and his men robbed it. Because they did not take her money, Emma assumes that Vienna is also guilty. Vienna goes to her saloon and gives her three casino employees six months' pay and tells them to come back when the time has passed. She promises them a share of her business when they return, and she gives one of them extra money to take care of the cook, Tom (John Carradine). Unlike Emma, Vienna now understands that they depend on one another, and she is willing to let her employees have a share of her business. The future community she comes to envision will not be the extant, self-interested society that Emma controls. The intra-group tensions are thus developed within a social context, and the film can be read as a social struggle, an attempt to build a social group opposed to Emma's corrupt liberal society.

The contrast between Emma's values and those which Vienna comes to embrace is further apparent in a scene at Vienna's in which Emma and the posse arrive looking for Turkey. They find Vienna alone, sitting at the piano wearing a white gown, which is a stark contrast to their own black funeral clothes. The white gown symbolizes her new-found virtue, compassion and morality. Emma accuses Vienna of taking part in the bank robbery when Turkey rolls out from beneath a table. (Tom found him wounded and brought him there to hide.) They pull him up to a kneeling position and hold his arms outstreched as if they are crucifying him; there is blood covering his chest, neck and shirt. Emma tries to get him to say that Vienna was in on the bank robbery: "Just tell us she was one of you, Turkey, and you'll go free!" Turkey pleads to Vienna, "I don't want to die! What'll I do?" Vienna replies, "Save yourself." He then asks what they will do to her and Emma says, "The law will take its course." One of the men, McIvers (Ward Bond), tells Turkey he does not have to say anything, just nod. "Was Vienna one of ya?" he asks him. Then Emma screams, "Well, was she?!" Turkey gasps as if it were his last breath and nods his head forward to infer that she was.

In this scene, Turkey, to insure he will be dealt with less severely, is forced by Emma and her cohorts to say an innocent person took part in a crime. As in Arthur Miller's play The *Crucible* (1953), the scene is a parable on the House Committee on Un-American Activities hearings during the 1940s and 1950s, when, to protect themselves, people named others as being involved in subversive activities. Emma, with her short, dark hair and her neurotic personality, is in many ways a parody of Senator Joseph McCarthy. What is important about the scene, however, is the contrast between Vienna's values and those of the posse, of Emma

and even of Turkey. Emma and the posse want to hang an innocent person in the name of justice for their own warped satisfaction. Turkey saves himself (he thinks) by incriminating Vienna. Vienna, in contrast to her character early in the film, does not think only of herself.



**Emma and the posse in their dark funeral clothes symbolize the lack of virtue in Emma's corrupt society. Photograph courtesy of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences.**

At the end of the film, Johnny, Vienna and the Kid defeat Emma and her cohorts in a shootout at the Kid's hideout. In the final scene, Johnny and Vienna (the Kid is killed) emerge from behind the waterfall that hides the entrance to the Kid's place. They stand in the stream embracing, soaking wet from the water, as if cleansed through baptism of their past sins and now ready to begin a new life based on cooperative values.

*Johnny Guitar* is a low-budget film that received negative reviews, but its success at the box office suggests that audiences related to the tensions in the film more than the critics did. Critics often separate the text from the social situation from which the text is generated and thus miss the tensions within the text that are also in the society that produced it. The changing assumptions surrounding women's work and women's social roles, and the increased threat to small-business owners by the centralization of big business during and following the war, were surely reasons for the production and popular reception of *Johnny Guitar* in the 1950s. These were social realities people lived with in the 1950s, realities that were addressed in the film.

Much of the secondary literature on *Johnny Guitar,* however, like Carney's work on *It's A Wonderful Life,* focuses on the psychological tensions in the film. Peter Biskind and Michael Wilmington argue that *Johnny Guitar* is about personal, usually psycho-sexual, problems. In his auteur study of Nicholas Ray, Biskind downplays the socio-economic conflict between Vienna and Emma and her cohorts. To Biskind, Vienna "is punished for her independence from men by losing her casino (set afire by the posse), and must vanquish Emma, her evil, desexed other half so that she can accept the loving embrace of Johnny Guitar . . . ."[33] Biskind sees the essential conflict of the film as a psycho-sexual conflict within Vienna that is played out externally with Emma, whom he sees as Vienna's double. Wilmington reads Emma's character in a similar way. "Celibacy," he informs us, "has apparently driven her mad; she seizes on the murder as an excuse to banish and possibly lynch Vienna, whom she envies, and the Kid, for whom she has a wild, repressed love."[34]

My point is not that these psycho-sexual conflicts are absent in *Johnny Guitar,* or in other films of the 1950s, or in *It's A Wonderful Life,* for that matter. Biskind and Wilmington, as well as Carney, do much to uncover the psychological



**Johnny and Vienna watch her saloon burn. Vienna's white gown symbolizes her new-found virtue. Photograph courtesy of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences.**

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tensions in the films they study. My concern is that in such studies the social terrain becomes submerged beneath the psychological terrain, and that the social conflicts that foster psychological conflicts are not adequately addressed. I would agree with Biskind, for example, when he asserts that "Ray's films share with other films of the fifties a fondness for psychological and occassionally mythic categories . . . ," but I believe he goes too far when he concludes that these categories "replaced the social and political ones of the thirties and forties."[35] In the politically repressive environment of McCarthyism, filmmakers such as Ray did make less overtly political and subversive films than, say, King Vidor's *Our Daily Bread* (1934). But because they created films in a more censored and oppressive environment, they had to be more ingenious in devising ways to critique America's dominant institutions and values and propose possible alternatives to them.

Carney, Biskind and Wilmington suggest that the hegemony of America's socio-economic structure and institutions is so complete that there can be no possible opposition to it in these films. Consequently, the tensions must be psychological rather than sociological; conflicts and problems become individual rather than social, and social conflicts are merely internal conflicts externalized. Such a focus causes Biskind to acknowledge that Nicholas Ray was "a serious director concerned with social problems," but leads him to conclude that "to see [him] as fundamentally subversive to [America's] central institutions is the reverse of the truth."[36]

*Johnny Guitar* is a film in which Ray was struggling to do just that. For example, Wilmington points out that the title suggests the film is about Johnny Guitar when it is actually about Vienna.[37] Ray subverted the traditional structure of the western by casting women in traditional male roles, which is one of the reasons professional critics disliked the film. But I am more interested in Ray's attempt to construct in the film an oppositional social group with values antithetical to those of the dominant social group represented by Emma and the townspeople she dominates.

In *Johnny Guitar,* as in *It's A Wonderful Life,* there are three social groups and tensions between them. Emma owns the town and threatens the existence of Vienna's privately-owned business, which Emma eventually destroys by fire. She, as Potter, owns most of the town and wants everything for herself. That which she cannot have she must destroy, just as Potter wants to dissolve the building and loan. Thus, Emma is in the same social position as Potter: a capitalist who wants to consolidate all property in her own hands.

At the opposite end of the social spectrum is the Dancin' Kid's group. The Kid's men are workers; they work a small silver mine of their own. One could argue that since they work their own property they are not wage earners and therefore are not workers. However, consistent with the republican definition of private property, and like the Italian-American tavern owner Martini in *It's A Wonderful Life,* a worker can own his own means of production, his own business, and still be in the same relative social position as a wage-earning worker.

Moreover, the Dancin' Kid lives on the land farthest from town, farthest from Emma's domain, like Martini and those who share his social position live farthest from Potter in Bailey Park. It is also important to remember that it is only after Emma's corrupt society wrongly accuses the Kid and his men of a crime that they become discontented and actually rob the bank. And they do not take Vienna's money, only the money of their accusers. As the workers in *It's A Wonderful Life* only become Potter's "discontented rabble" when Bedford Falls becomes Pottersville, the Kid and his men only resort to crime due to the influence of Emma's self-interested corruption.

That the Kid and his men do not take Vienna's money when they rob the bank demonstrates that she holds a social position between the Kid and Emma. Her saloon is on the outskirts of town, between Emma's town and the Kid's gang's silver mine, just as George's house is between Potter and Bailey Park. Further, like George, Vienna helps the working class in their struggles with Emma and her cohorts and they help her. For example, she hides Turkey from Emma and the posse, and she tells Turkey to save himself at the probable cost of her own life. She also flees to the Kid's domain for protection when she is in trouble, just as Potter's "rabble" protect George from Potter's malicious act. Moreover, Vienna has the same tensions within her that George has within him. In the beginning of the film she is thinking about building a city and she avoids the romantic attentions of Johnny, just as George Bailey wants to build cities and bridges and avoids the romantic attentions of Mary. When Vienna does get involved with Johnny again, her clothes change from the black pants and shirts that the townspeople wear, to a red nightgown, to the white dress and finally to the more colorful clothes of the Kid's gang. In the end she actually wears the Kid's clothes, symbolizing her eventual solidarity with the gang and the social class they represent.

The social groups and the tensions between them in *Johnny Guitar* are representations of the groups and tensions within the society that produced the film. The threat to Vienna's private business by Emma's exploits represents the threat to small, private business by expanding monopolistic and multidivisional corporations in postwar American society. The value of small, private enterprise has become threatened by a changing social order that demands more centralized control of the means of production, distribution and exchange. The values that Vienna represents at the end of *Johnny Guitar* are not in harmony with the society in the film, which represents the social situation of the society that produced the film.

*It's A Wonderful Life* was produced in an earlier stage of the corporate-capitalist social order facilitated by the war, and a pre-war, pre-Depression past is evoked in the film to project a model of a stable society rooted in traditional values of small private property, public virtue, independent labor, community and family. Virtuous women are in the home and the traditional values of George Bailey's father are extant in society. In *Johnny Guitar* those values are no longer possible in society; they are in opposition to it. Those traditional values do not

disappear, however. They remain in ideological tension with their liberal opposites, although the liberal ideology has become so dominant that individuals holding traditional values cannot exist in society. Those holding traditional values in *Johnny Guitar* are alienated from the existing social order. The public virtue illustrated in *It's A Wonderful Life* is apparent only within a counter-cultural group in *Johnny Guitar*, and that group is best represented at the end of the film when Johnny, Vienna and the Dancin' Kid stand together to fight Emma and her group, who represent society. In Emma's society, there is no sacrificing of the self for the public good as there is in the society of George Bailey. Moreover, small private business and property are now destroyed by the dominant group in terms of wealth and power. Those who hold to traditional values become outlaws and victims of society's corruption.

In both of these popular films there is opposition to the materialism and individualism of American social and economic life. *It's A Wonderful Life* does not challenge that liberal hegemony but tries to reform it. For this reason, it would be more appropriate to associate Frank Capra with American progressivism than with the Romantic tradition Carney asserts he represents. Community and virtue, individualism and materialism exist together in Capra's society. Social harmony is maintained because virtuous middle-class citizens, represented by George Bailey, are willing to forsake their self-interests for the greater interests of the society in which they live. They mitigate the negative social consequences that result from the crass materialism and individualism represented by Potter. As long as middle-class citizens such as George do not fall to the temptations offered by Potter's crass materialism, then the potential discontent of the working class is checked. Potter's liberalism and George's republicanism can coexist in society, with the former reformed by the latter. This is demonstrated by George's friend, Sam Wainwright, who is in the same social class as Potter, but due to George's example Wainwright has a degree of social conscience. Republicanism is thus a force shaping and restraining liberalism in the film.

The idea of virtuous middle-class citizens forsaking their self-interests for the good of society is shattered in *Johnny Guitar*. Virtue is not even possible in the extant social order. It only exists within oppositional figures. Vienna imagines and wants to build a new society, and as her character develops she comes to see that the new society must be free of crass liberal self-interest and that common ownership facilitates loyalty, harmony and justice. Thus, republicanism serves an oppositional ideological function in the film. Since the extant social order is composed of corrupt individuals seeking their liberal self-interests, social harmony and justice cannot exist. Society cannot be reformed; it must be opposed. And there is a struggle in the film to develop a counter hegemonic social group.

*       *       *

These films demonstrate that the cultural hegemony of postwar liberalism is a precarious composite of both liberal and anti-liberal values. Theorists of the

concept of cultural hegemony and cultural historians who use the concept in their work call such a composite a historical *bloc*. Such a bloc, they inform us, is socially constructed: societies are composed of social groups with often oppositional interests; dominant groups make concessions to and use force against subordinant groups; subordinant groups often consent, due to those concessions and that force, to the rule of dominant groups, but they also contest that rule.[38]

How complete, how contested or uncontested the American liberal historical bloc is at any given time is the major point of disagreement between these scholars. This disagreement, I believe, is in large part a consequence of what they study. For example, John Diggins and Jackson Lears study the ideas of intellectuals and/or politicians. Their historical subjects either embrace or lament liberal social practices. Those who lament liberalism do not engage in social action against liberal social practices; they merely lament the social consequences of those practices.[39] George Lipsitz and Leon Fink, on the other hand, study individuals and social groups that participate in direct action. Their historical subjects both lament the inequities of liberal social practices and struggle to make their alternative social visions social realities.[40] The inaction of Lears' anti-modern intellectuals and the action of Lipsitz's and Fink's radicals are significant factors causing them to see hegemony differently. Consequently, Lears focuses on consent and force and emphasizes domination: "we need first to recognize that the concept of hegemony has little meaning unless paired with the notion of domination."[41] In contrast, Lipsitz sees "hegemony as something to be struggled *for*, rather than as something imposed *on* inert masses."[42]

These popular films demonstrate that the struggle for hegemony occurs on cultural as well as social terrain. Because films are produced for a popular audience, they often address the social structure with which people live and the real social struggles in which they are involved. The characters in popular films, such as the two studied here, as well as the people in audiences who identify with those characters, represent a variety of social and ideological positions. Those positions are constantly negotiated in social practice through consent, force and the struggle for position by counter hegemonic social groups that have alternative social visions.[43] Society and culture are not separate entities; consequently, the negotiations that take place over real issues in social practices also take place in cultural representations of those practices. How those issues are resolved in popular culture texts depends on both the social visions of auteurs such as Capra and Ray and on the stage of historical development in which the texts are produced. Despite an auteur's politics, popular audiences must be able to identify with the films or they will be box office failures.

Thus, *It's A Wonderful Life* was produced when the social and economic changes facilitated by the war were still in a nascent stage. The postwar liberal historical bloc is negotiated in the film, although it is not opposed. George Bailey and the common citizens of Bedford Falls do not want to get rid of Potter; they want to restrain the negative social consequences of his crass economic liberalism. Liberal social practices are depicted within a society of republican citizens,

and liberalism depends on republicanism for its legitimation.[44] A liberal gestalt does not replace a republican gestalt. On the contrary, liberal social practices are shaped by republican social practices and social harmony is the result.

Eight years later, when *Johnny Guitar* was produced, the social changes facilitated by the war were more entrenched. Thus society is depicted as entirely liberal, and small, independent enterprise cannot exist. Virtuous popular heroes are therefore distanced from society. They cannot even be associated with society because they risk being corrupted.[45] But republican values continue to exist. Characters holding those values oppose liberal society because there is no possibility for virtue within the extant liberal social order.

These films demonstrate that we should not think of liberal hegemony as a total cultural gestalt that must be transcended in order to find counter hegemonic alternatives. To discover counter hegemonic possibilities, we need not look to conservative anti-modern intellectuals who themselves look *outside* American culture to find alternative social values.[46] Those possibilities are *within* American culture and *within* modernity itself, the result of contemporary social struggles and historical memories of past struggles and possibilities.

# Notes

1.  John Patrick Diggins, *The Lost Soul of American Politics: Virtue, Self-Interest, and the Foundations of Liberalism* (New York, 1984); also see Diggins' essay, "Republicanism and Progressivism," *American Quarterly* 37 (Fall, 1985), 573-598; T. J. Jackson Lears, *No Place of Grace: Antimodernism and the Transformation of American Culture, 1880-1920* (New York, 1981), 270-297.
2.  Gordon Wood, *The Creation of the American Republic, 1776-1787* (New York, 1969), 46-124; Eric Foner, *Free Soil, Free Labor, Free Men: The Ideology of the Republican Party before the Civil War* (London, 1970), 1-23. Wood notes that "The sacrifice of individual interests to the greater good of the whole formed the essence of republicanism and comprehended for Americans the idealistic goal of their Revolution", 53. Likewise, in *Lost Soul,* Diggins informs us, "In republicanism true citizenship is founded upon the demands of 'virtue,' a political ideal whose realization required not only the people's direct participation in civic affairs but the subordination of their interests to the public good," 10.
3.  Diggins, "Republicanism and Progressivism," 596.
4.  Lears, *No Place of Grace. passim.*
5.  Other scholars have documented the continuing opposition to American liberalism among intellectuals and in grass roots political movements of the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and they have demonstrated that the tenets of republicanism are often the basis

of that opposition. On intellectuals see David W. Noble, *The End of American History: Democracy, Capitalism, and the Metaphor of Two Worlds in Anglo-American Historical Writing, 1880-1980* (Minneapolis, 1985). In *Free Spaces: The Sources of Democratic Change in America* (New York, 1986), Sara M. Evans and Harry C. Boyte discuss the influence of republican ideas on democratic movements in nineteenth- and twentieth-century America. Also see Leon Fink, *Workingmen's Democracy: The Knights of Labor and American Politics* (Urbana, 1983).

6. For an informative discussion of cultural hegemony and mass communication see Stuart Hall, "Culture, the Media and the Ideological Effect," in James Curran, *et al.*, eds., *Mass Communication and Society* (Beverly Hills, 1979), 315-348.

7. Daniel J. Czitrom, *Media and the American Mind: The American Mind from Morse to McLuhan* (Chapel Hill, 1982), 59. In his article, "On Certain Tendencies in American Film Criticism," *American Quarterly* 38 (Summer, 1986), 327-332, Robert Phillip Kolker points out that we need to understand how well a film "corresponds to what its audience generally perceives about itself and its social-political environment. We need to understand the ways an audience corresponds to the images of itself generated by the film." (328) I acknowledge that some art forms seem to transcend time and place by speaking to what might be termed basic attributes of the human condition. However, such texts are usually reinterpreted from a presentist perspective. My concern is with what popular art forms can tell us about the society from which they are generated.

8. Frank Capra, *The Name Above the Title: An Autobiography* (New York, 1971), 383

9. *Variety Film Reviews, 1943-1948,* 7 (New York, 1983), December 25, 1946.

10. *Time,* December 23, 1946, 54.

11. Capra, *Name,* 401.

12. *Ibid.,* 383-384

13. Frank Capra, director, *It's A Wonderful Life* (1946). All references to the text are to this film.

14. Raymond Carney, *American Vision: The Films of Frank Capra* (New York, 1986), 381.

15. *Ibid.,* 388.

16. For discussions of postwar wildcat strikes see Jeremy Brecher, *Strike!* (San Francisco, 1972), 221-231, and George Lipsitz, *Class and Culture in Cold War America: "A Rainbow at Midnight "* (South Hadley, Massachusetts, 1982), 14-86.

17. Serafina Bathick, "The Past As Future and the American Home in *Meet Me In St. Louis,"* *The Minnesota Review* 6 (Spring, 1976), 132-139.

18. Of course, the corporate-liberal state had been developing for some time; the war economy merely facilitated its rapid consolidation. For a discussion of the reorganization of the economy and the growth of the corporate-liberal state see the following works: Alfred D. Chandler Jr., *The Visible Hand: The Managerial Revolution in American Business* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1977), 476-483; Richard S. Kirkendall, *The United States, 1929-1945: Years of Crisis and Change* (New York, 1974), 205-217; George Lipsitz, *Class and Culture in Cold War America,* 5-8. In *The Triumph of Conservatism: A Reinterpretation of American History, 1900-1916* (New York, 1963), Gabriel Kolko discusses the increased regulation and management of the economy in the first two decades of the twentieth century.

19. Concerning the slump in ticket sales, *Variety* noted that there was an extended winter that year, which was one factor keeping many Americans at home. Another was that "Too many holdovers and extended runs plus an increase in [the] number of reissues are proving handicaps to any extensive improvement at the tickets this stanza." See *Variety,* May 12, 1954, 3. The film was often first or second in ticket sales in major metropolitan areas. See *Motion Picture Herald,* May 29, 1954, 30, and *Variety,* May 26, 1954, 8.

20. *Variety,* May 26, 1954, 8.

21. *Variety,* June 6, 1954, 2.

22. *Time,* June 14, 1954, 106-110.

23. *Variety Film Reviews, 1954-1958,* 9 (New York, 1983), May 5, 1954; *The New Yorker,* June 5, 1954, 63; *Newsweek,* June 14, 1954, 104.

24. Nicholas Ray, director, *Johnny Guitar* (1954). All references to the text are to this film.

25. Elaine Tyler May, *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era* (New York, 1988). May points out that many middle-class and upper middle-class women who gave up careers for full-time roles in the home said they preferred marriage and even viewed the change as a change in careers. See page 29, for example. The women characters in *Johnny Guitar* break the social norms of May's women. The production and popular reception of this film demonstrate the deep tensions in the culture over these social prescriptions. Working-class and lower middle-class women may not have, or perhaps due to their economic needs, could not have accepted these prescriptions so readily.

26. Lipsitz, *Class and Culture in Cold War America*, 232-238; Carl N. Degler, *At Odds: Women and the Family in America from the Revolution to the Present* (Oxford, 1980), 418-435.

27. May demonstrates that, among other things, experts presumed that "an essential ingredient to winning the cold war was presumably the rearing of strong and able offspring." Women would need to be contained in the traditional family structure for this to occur. See May's article,"Explosive Issues: Sex, Women, and the Bomb," in Lary May, ed, *Recasting America: Culture and Politics in the Age of Cold War* (Chicago, 1988), 154-170; for quotation see page 157.

28. May, "Explosive Issues," 163. In this essay and more thoroughly in *Homeward Bound*, May makes some interesting cultural connections between the idea of containment of the Soviets in American foreign policy and the idea of containment of women in traditional family roles in order to facilitate a moral front in the cold war at home. See pages 92-134 of *Homeward Bound*.

29. John McCarten, *The New Yorker,* June 5, 1954, 63.

30. *Time,* June 14, 1954, 106-110.

31. *Newsweek,* June 14, 1954, 104.

32. Will Wright, *Six Guns and Society: A Structural Analysis of the American Western* (Berkeley, 1975). Wright discusses how the structure of the western changes and how heroes increasingly cannot be directly associated with society. See pages 154-184.

33. Peter Biskind, "Rebel Without A Cause: Nicholas Ray in the Fifties," *Film Quarterly* 28 (Fall, 1974), 33.

34. Michael Wilmington, "Nicholas Ray's *Johnny Guitar,*" *Velvet Light Trap* 12 (Spring, 1974), 21.

35. Biskind, "Rebel Without a Cause," 32.

36. *Ibid.*

37. Wilmington, "Nicholas Ray's *Johnny Guitar,*" 22.

38. In *The Journal of American History,* 75 (June, 1988), see the following articles on the uses of cultural hegemony: Leon Fink, "The New Labor History and the Powers of Historical Pessimism: Consensus, Hegemony, and the Case of the Knights of Labor," 115-136; Jackson Lears, "Power, Culture, and Memory," 137-140; John P. Diggins, "The Misuses of Gramsci," 141-145; George Lipsitz, "The Struggle for Hegemony," 146-150. Also see Martin Jay's chapter on Antonio Gramsci, "The Two Holisms" of Antonio Gramsci," in *Marxism and Totality: The Adventure of a Concept from Lukas to Habermas* (Berkeley, 1984), 150-173; and T. J. Jackson Lears, "The Concept of Cultural Hegemony: Problems and Possibilities," *American Historical Review* 90 (June, 1985), 567-593. Two monographs in which the concept of hegemony is used in different ways are George Lipsitz, *A Life in the Struggle: Ivory Perry and the Culture of Opposition* (Philadelphia, 1988), and Lears, *No Place of Grace.*

39. Diggins, *The Lost Soul of American Politics;* Lears, *No Place of Grace.*

40. Lipsitz, *A Life in the Struggle;* Fink, *Workingmen's Democracy.*

41. Lears, "The Concept of Cultural Hegemony," 568.

42. Lipsitz, "The Struggle for Hegemony," 146.

43. Concerning the Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci's ideas on hegemony, Lipsitz notes that "Gramsci's careful distinction between a 'war of maneuver' whereby radicals fight to seize state power and a 'war of position' whereby they try to establish a prefigurative counter hegemony within the existing society, reveals another side to ostensibly 'reformist' efforts." See *A Life in the Struggle,* 232. I believe these films demonstrate that a "war of position" occurs within cultural representations of social struggles as well as within the social struggles themselves.

44. Similarly, Ronald Reagan often invoked images of working-class citizens and small independent businessmen in his speeches while surrounding himself with corporate figures; see, for example, Ronald Reagan, "Inaugural Address," *Vital Speeches of the Day* 47 (February 15, 1981), 259.

45. Wright discusses the changing social position of heroes in *Six Guns and Society,* chapters 6 and 7. The phenomenon of heroes being distanced from society continued in the 1970s and 1980s. Chuck Norris films and Sylvester Stallone's Rambo films are just a few examples of this more general phenomenon.

46. Lears, *No Place of Grace.*