

Jim Crow, Jett Rink, and James Dean: Reconstructing Ferber's *Giant* (1952-1956)

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In December 1954, America's best-selling historical novelist, Edna Ferber, wrote to director George Stevens emphasizing her continued interest in his production of her latest book, *Giant*. She believed that *Giant*'s value lay in its exposure of racial prejudice against Mexican Americans in Texas, and that its racial themes had become "more vital, more prevalent today in the United States than . . . when I began to write the novel."¹ Ferber hoped that one day Anglo oil millionaires like Bick Benedict and Jett Rink, the originators and perpetrators of these inequalities in the economic and social hierarchies of America's new West, would be "anachronisms like the dear old covered wagons and the California gold-rush boys."² Later in May 1955, when shooting first began on the film, Ferber wrote to Henry Ginsberg, producer and co-founder of the independent film company, Giant Productions, "I don't quite know why the motion picture presentation of *Giant* interests and fascinates me much more than the screen career of any of my other novels or plays. That goes for *Show Boat*, *So Big*, *Cimarron*, and many others. Perhaps it is because behind the characters and events in *Giant* there stands a definite meaning, a purpose."³

Although Ferber had considered writing a historical novel about Texas as early as 1939, she only started to research the topic seriously after the war. The wartime and postwar publishing boom on Texas, ranging from George Sessions Perry's admiring portrait, *Texas: A World in Itself* (1942), to Carey McWilliams's study of Mexican Americans, *North From Mexico* (1949), helped to change her



Figure 1: James Dean in blackface on the set of *Giant*, summer 1955. Warner Bros. Studios.

mind. Perry's admiration of Texans' wealth, success, and boundless financial frontiers was representative of a more general crass American materialism that sickened her.⁴ The new America was dominated by unabashed greed, garishness, and waste; as Ferber saw it, the nation had reverted to its Gilded Age-Robber Baron past, an era which Ferber had critiqued decades ago in her first two novels of the American frontier, *Cimarron* (1929) and *Come and Get It* (1935), and

the more recent *Saratoga Trunk* (1942). McWilliams's book helped her to link Texas greed with its history of exploitation of Mexican Americans. She wrote to McWilliams in early 1949 telling him of her plans, and he, familiar with her critical appraisals of western history and national myths, responded, "Needless to say I was delighted to receive your letter with its most kind and generous praise of my book. You have, of course, my permission to use the book for factual material and background. I shall look forward to reading your novel with the keenest anticipation."⁵ America's "most popular woman writer" had become, in her words, "An Angry Old Woman."⁶ *Giant* was the result, a chronicle of three generations of the cattle and oil-rich Benedicts viewed from the perspective of the family matriarch, Leslie Lynnton Benedict. As both an educated woman and an eastern-born outsider, Leslie functioned as Ferber's constant critical voice.

But Ferber's examination of the twin historical themes of American wealth and racism intersected in another character, Jett Rink, the poor-white ranch hand who ends up Texas's most oil-rich citizen. In George Stevens's 1956 film adaptation, Jett became the most magnetic of the three main protagonists, due in great part to James Dean's performance.⁷ In the years since *Giant*'s release, the legend of James Dean as one of America's pre-eminent cultural icons has eclipsed its complex portrait of Texas and Ferber's ironic construction of the persistence of the masculine frontier myth in the twentieth century. Ferber's reputation as one of America's most successful novelists, her critique of Texas racism and postwar masculinity, the critics' reaction to a woman's view of the West and its iconic heroes, George Stevens and Ferber's competing visions for the film, censorship battles, and the film's resonance with contemporaneous racial incidents have all been lost in Dean's epic shadow. But ironically, Jett Rink and Dean's magnetism are crucial in understanding Ferber and Stevens's confrontation with the darker side of America's frontier myths and *Giant*'s enduring racial legacy.

America's "Angry Old Woman" and the Unmaking of Texas

Giant would be Ferber's third major historical novel about the American West. Both *Cimarron* and *Come and Get It* were revisionist westerns that contrasted and connected the old-style nineteenth-century frontier to the twentieth. *Giant* would be set completely within post-First World War America, roughly 1925 to 1950, but this modern generation of Texans would still remain prisoners of their past. Ferber came across more than one article in her research that noted, "Today the allure of the past is almost an obsession in the minds of many Texans... Texans looking backwards see only what they want to see in the 'never, never land' of the early West."⁸ As Texan Vashti Hake complains to Leslie in the novel, "'Easterners always yapping about Bunker Hill and Valley Forge and places like that, you'd think the Alamo and San Jacinto were some little fracas happened in Europe or someplace.'"⁹ Vashti's historical comparison highlights not only Texans' belief that the Mexican War was a fight for freedom from foreign

oppression, but also that Texans still have to defend their historical and present interests against the assumption that they are foreign—still tinged with the taint of Mexico and Mexicans.

For Ferber, one of the greatest ironies about elite white Texans is that they will freely quote Crockett, Houston, and Bowie and mention the Alamo to justify their national importance, but they never mention that Texans' main complaint against Mexico before the formation of the republic was that the Mexican government had outlawed slavery in 1821.¹⁰ For white Texans, "freedom" was only ever for the few. Although Ferber's main attack on twentieth-century Texas is the white treatment of Mexican Americans, she invests Leslie's understanding of Texas history with their tradition of a slave culture and continuing Jim Crow legacy. After looking at the Mexican shanties, Leslie calls her husband Bick "Simon Legree" (of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*). When Bick tries to defend himself by criticizing the South, he argues, "'I noticed your nigger cabins in the dear old South weren't so sumptuous,'"¹¹ forgetting that Texas is part of both the South and West and therefore contains Jim Crow laws for Mexicans as well as African Americans. As historian Neil Foley has pointed out, "While longhorns, Stetson hats, and the romance of ranching have replaced cotton, mules, and overalls in the historical imagination of Anglo Texans today, the fact remains that most Anglo Texans were descended from transplanted Southerners who had fought hard to maintain the 'color line' in Texas and to extend its barriers to Mexicans."¹² In *Giant*, Ferber confronts the mythic legacy of the free frontier.

Ferber's revisionist westerns always had strong female protagonists, and Leslie Lynnton Benedict is no exception. Her thoughts and attitudes toward Texas structure the novel. But while Leslie locates the racial continuities in the hierarchies of the South and West, it is Jett Rink who has to translate things for her. He has to explain why Mrs. Obregon and her new son, Angel, have no doctor to care for them and why the other Mexican workers live in such poverty. Later on, when Bick's excuses for inequities have dampened her crusading outrage, it is Jett who has to remind Leslie of the racial and historical realities of Texas society and how the white elites acquired the land:

'Bought it—hell! Took it off a ignorant bunch of Mexicans didn't have the brains or guts to hang onto it. Lawyers come in and finagled around and lawsuits lasted a hundred years and by the time they got through the Americans had the land and the greasers was out on their ears . . . You asked me and I told you straight out. If you didn't want to know you got no call to ask me. You want everything prettified up, that's what's the matter with you.'¹³

As a landless, wage-earning, poor-white Texan, Jett is on the same economic level as Reata's Mexican-American vaqueros and servants and is looked down upon by wealthy landed whites. But though he shares their economic status, Jett

is arguably more anti-Mexican than Bick. In a state where “Not all whites... were equally white,” he has to work harder to assert his whiteness and inherent superiority to the Mexican Americans at Reata.¹⁴ Neil Foley has written about the Texas poor whites’ hybrid status in the racial and economic hierarchies of the state’s cotton culture, but the rules still apply at Reata’s cattle ranch during the 1920s. It was the same era that saw the publication of Lothrop Stoddard’s *The Rising Tide of Color Against White World-Wide Supremacy* (1920) and popular eugenics which described biologically inferior whites.¹⁵ Because the poor white shared economic and living conditions with Mexican Americans and African Americans, he was socially darkened, and a class and racial hybrid who undermined the socially constructed borders between black, white, and brown. Although by the end of the novel, Leslie is taken for a Mexican American at a diner,¹⁶ Ferber codes Jett as black, using him as a symbol of the rest of Texas’s racial prejudice. It is not merely his name which is another color for dark or black. When he strikes oil and runs in triumph to the Benedict house, Ferber writes,

his face was grotesque with smears of dark grease and his damp bacchanalian locks hung in tendrils over his forehead. . . . He came on, he opened the door of the screened veranda, he stood before the company in his dirt and grease, his eyes shining wildly. . . . The man stood, his legs wide apart as though braced against the world. The black calloused hands with the fingers curiously widespread as they hung, his teeth white in the grotesquely smeared face.¹⁷

Ferber’s language, emphasizing Jett’s degenerate, grotesque physicality and sexuality, is heavy with the ironies of traditional racial stereotyping of black masculinity. In emphasizing Jett’s visual as well as economic continuities with Mexican and African Americans via the greasy blackness of his skin, Ferber deconstructs the racial borders marking Texas society. The man who would attempt to preserve Jim Crow color lines in post-Second World War Texas (by having separate lavatories for Mexicans and Anglos and publicly calling Jordan Benedict III’s Mexican American wife Juana a “squaw”) was not pure white himself.

Texas critics were outraged by Ferber’s book, and while they did not list Jett’s black-Mexican-Anglo hybridity as one of her offenses, their abuse was close to a verbal lynching. Ferber literally became the deviant outsider, the woman infringing upon the masculine territory of the West, the New York despoiler of the pure Texas myth. In the San Angelo *Standard-Times*, Jack Allard wrote, “Many Texans . . . are calling for a burning at the stake of Miss Ferber. Instead of faggots, they would pitch copies of *Giant* on the fire.” He offered to hold the match.¹⁸ In Houston, columnist Carl Victor Little attacked her gender and the genre of women’s fiction, dismissing her research as, “steeped in backstairs gossip and what girl novelists call local color.”¹⁹ In yet another article, he said she should be lynched.²⁰ Lon Tinkle in Dallas maligned her as “berserk,” an

author who had “never written a really serious or significant work in her life,” and admonished her, “you aren’t writing *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*.”²¹

However, director George Stevens appreciated Ferber’s attack on Texas racism, and Warner Brothers knew that controversy was often good box-office in the 1950s. Stevens and his independent film company bought the rights in the summer of 1952, and then convinced Warner Brothers to put up the money for the production and distribution.²² Fred Guiol and Ivan Moffat, longtime associates of Stevens, were hired to adapt and write the screenplay with Stevens’s help. The director had already made extensive notes on his copy, highlighting the scenes of racial prejudice against Mexican Americans, including the near-ejection of a Latin American Ambassador from Jett’s hotel (later cut), Leslie’s comparisons between the Mexican shanty towns and those for African Americans in the South (never used by the screenwriters), Angel’s emerging *pachuco* identity (also cut), and Leslie’s inflammatory comment to Jett that the Mexican Americans at Reata were “more American than you [and her husband] are.”²³ But Stevens was also in love with the West and the western hero; his last film, *Shane* (1953), proved as much. His desire to condemn racism and enshrine the old-style toughness of the western hero would result in a deeply conflicted western.

Ferber may have suspected that Stevens would not adopt her book’s incisive critique. In 1951, MGM had remade *Show Boat* and excised much of her original attack on southern racism and anti-miscegenation laws.²⁴ So she kept an eye on production. When she sold the film rights in 1952, Ferber retained her usual copyright reversion and television rights, but also acquired a percentage in Giant Productions. She, Stevens, and producer Henry Ginsberg were the three heads of Giant Productions. It was almost unprecedented for a writer, even a historical novelist of Ferber’s national stature, to maintain this kind of powershare in a film production. As *Variety* noted, “The G-S-F setup will also embrace future filming of previous Ferber works, including remakes of some of her past film successes, rights to which have reverted [to her].”²⁵ But Ferber wanted more than executive privileges and percentages of profits. Preserving *Giant*’s critique of frontier racism was important, and she wanted to help construct the screenplay. “I want to work as an unsalaried writer,” she wrote Ginsberg.²⁶ All told, she spent eleven weeks in Hollywood working on the script, advising on technical issues, and meeting with cast and crew in Texas. Ferber was initially appalled at the way Moffat and Guiol handled the first script and wrote of Moffat, “He knows as much about Texas as I know about Iran. Less.” She continued caustically, “If I get out of this town without killing him it will be the greatest known triumph of restraint against honest impulse.”²⁷

Scripting Contemporary History

Ferber’s worries were only slightly exaggerated. The first treatment, dated March 24, 1954, roughly follows the outline of Ferber’s book.²⁸ Leslie’s early comments about Texas being stolen from Mexico were preserved and even

enhanced. In Stevens's annotated copy of the treatment, the director penciled additional dialog in the margin, "'After all, it's in the history books, isn't it?'"²⁹ Most crucially, though, Leslie's abortive attempts in the novel to improve the living and working conditions of the Mexican Americans attached to the Reata ranch economy were actually made realities in the script. It is Leslie who first works with "Dr. Guerra" on the Nopal settlements, not her son Jordy.³⁰ Whereas Ferber's Leslie was thwarted at every turn, Stevens invested her with more traditional frontier ingenuity and success. However, as a result, the few Mexican-American characters appear far more powerless and victimized than in Ferber's novel. While Ferber briefly discussed the rise of the League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC) and postwar Latin American activism and chronicled the friendship between Jordy and Angel Obregon, Stevens made the white Leslie the instigator of social change.³¹

Stevens also improved her relationship with Jett Rink, creating sympathy between the two characters which had not existed in Ferber's novel. In Stevens's annotated copy of the "Ferber script," dated in the summer of 1954, Stevens paid particular attention to Jett and Leslie's tour of the Reata slums. When Leslie first expresses her horror, he blames Bick: "'It's part of Reata, like all the rest of it. The ranch people live here.'" Then he talks about her "neighbors" the Obregons and Mrs. Obregon's illness. Stevens penciled in the margin, "More from Jett here as he shows her the slums. Leslie has been exclaiming that everything is beautiful, oh so beautiful. The plainest thing is beautiful and Jett is bored with this—He shows her the slums so that she can exclaim that this is beautiful too."³² Jett becomes Leslie's educator in Texas social hierarchies.

However, the writers edited Ferber's racial history of Texas and references to the state's entwined Mexican and African-American Jim Crow culture. Although the first treatment opens with a montage of Texas scenes and close-ups of Mexican-American and Anglo children, emphasizing the state's ethnic populations, the sequence features no African-American children or adults. Leslie's frequent comments to Jordan, in which she explicitly links white Texas elites' treatment of Mexican-American migrant workers to white southerners' Jim Crow laws, were never integrated into the script.³³ While Ferber was all too ready to see the connections between southern and western racism, the filmmakers may have balked at attacking the biggest social problem of the 1950s.

The Supreme Court announced their decision to end segregation in *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* in mid May 1954, and public debates over the issue continued throughout 1954 and 1955, when the process of implementation began.³⁴ Was it too hot a contemporary issue to discuss openly within an already controversial adaptation? Arguably, Stevens and his writers skilfully referenced some aspects of Jim Crow culture without visualizing the segregation of African Americans in the South. In the October 22, 1954 script, Moffat and Guiol, with Ferber's input, included a scene in which Leslie and the other Texas cattle baron wives discuss their husbands' fixing of the Mexican vote in local elections. Fidel Gomez, the Benedict henchman, has been forcing the Mexican Americans living

around Reata to vote according to Benedict interests. Shortly after Luz Benedict's funeral, Gomez is shown meeting with the men. Leslie does not understand the import of his conversation and the others must explain Texas election "laws" to her. Adarene tells her, "Gomez's vote is important," and Leslie responds innocently, "Anybody's vote is important." Vashti, characterized as the shyest and least intelligent of the women, explains the facts of Texas life to Leslie as though she were a child, "It's important that they vote right, honey. There's taxes going up to worry about and all. . . ." ³⁵

This scene would be totally reworked in the final script dated April 4, 1955 and in the film.³⁶ In the final script, Judge Whiteside tells Gomez, "Now you get with it, Gomez! Get your people out! I don't want anybody sitting on their honkers come election day." Gomez replies obsequiously, "Everything will be bueno, Senor. It will be the same—good. Adios—buenas noches, Senores." After he leaves, Leslie makes her famous attempt to enter the political discussion with her husbands' friends. The women do not comment on and explain the election bending. Instead, they show absolutely no interest in Gomez and even Leslie ignores him and fails to comprehend or question the situation.³⁷

Why was this scene made more oblique for the audience and for Leslie? The Texas women obviously appear more stupid and passive than their novelistic counterparts; the emphasis in the Hollywood adaptation is on male action and control, not on women's commentary and critique. But perhaps even more crucial for the filmmakers, scenes representing election tampering and forcing ethnic or racial groups to vote in a certain way were illustrating the tenets of the southern Jim Crow "laws." Showing Bick's complicity in this system demonstrated in a very obvious way that he was part of this racist system, a system which left the eastern outsider, Leslie, and much of the audience, dumbfounded. But ironically, the filmmakers tweaked the scene to avoid legal trouble from Texas families who were still embroiled in these corrupt policies. During the 1950s, the Klebergs of the King Ranch and Glenn McCarthy were probably the most notorious cattle and oil elites, and the possible connections obsessed the Warner Brothers legal department.

Warner Brothers may have allowed Stevens to direct and produce the film, but they were not prepared to sacrifice what they saw as their legal safety to the new age of independent company production. As Carl Milliken wrote to Henry Ginsberg in December 1954, "Edna Ferber's *Giant* is a specially worrisome property because it has been accepted, to a large extent, in the public mind as a true document not only of life in Texas but also specifically of the lives of the Kleberg family, which owns and operates the King Ranch, and of Glenn McCarthy, the much publicized Texas oil millionaire."³⁸ Milliken's paranoia wasn't entirely unfounded. *The Reader's Digest* article on the Klebergs in the May 1938 issue is a case in point. "Rumors persist that 'armed riders with Winchesters patrol the fences and that in the last two years four men crossing the fence to hunt have not returned.'" ³⁹ This story was eerily like Jett Rink's revelation about his father's mysterious death at the hands of the Benedict overlords. Obviously

this connection between the Benedicts and the Klebergs, which suggested that elite Texas families regularly “lynched” trespassers or squatters, could not go in the script, and therefore Jett, when asked, merely says that his folks “weren’t so foxy [as the Benedicts].”⁴⁰ But Milliken found Jett Rink’s connections with Glenn McCarthy especially troublesome: “We portray Rink as a thoroughly obnoxious character, one who is licentious, habitually drunk, and dedicated to the false principles of racial discrimination.”⁴¹ Stevens listened, but was more interested in *Giant*’s contemporary connections to Texas’s less affluent residents.

Racial and Gender Profiles

Despite Stevens’s preoccupation with Texas prejudice against Mexican Americans, he did not invest the Mexican-American characters with any active roles in the narrative. Angel Obregon was Ferber’s rebellious *pachuco*, an articulate young man aware of his Latin (not American) identity. But Stevens transformed him into a silent victim of World War II. In addition, his and Warner Brothers’ sympathies were not entirely with Leslie, the only one of the three “white” protagonists to combat Mexican-American prejudice. *Giant* may represent what Peter Biskind has called “the decay of patriarchy,” but Leslie’s egalitarian values do not win the West.⁴² In the Warner Brothers character profiles written in the spring of 1954, the filmmakers said that Leslie could be irritating. “There was a strong element of the dilettante in her constant harping upon the conditions of the Mexican servants. . . . There was a self-indulgent quality in her compassion.” And later: “Leslie romanticised truth, without necessarily understanding it.”⁴³ In these early profiles, Stevens’s writers undercut Leslie’s seriousness and commitment to change at Reata and dismissed her humanism as a pose. In contrast, they tried to justify Texas racism: “The trouble with anything of this sort on Leslie’s part was not so much that conditions in Texas were worse than in other places, but the Texans were exceptional in their unwillingness to admit that their State stood short of perfection.”⁴⁴

But the character profiles also ignore Leslie’s principles and purpose, which motivate her constant critical perspective—things which Ferber did value. Although they understood her early romanticization of the frontier and Texas, the filmmakers were less able to chart her disillusionment and psychological resistance to Texas.

This mood was probably intensified by the times: nationally, it was a time of romantic self-discovery, in which the poets were opening up the frontiers again where the pioneers and fortune seekers had just closed them. By many means she had been led into a romanticization of the West, promising a kind of freedom and richness, of uninhibited space and unconstrained manner. . . . She was soon to discover that Texas was as different from what she imagined.⁴⁵

The elements of Ferber's critique are here: the myth of the West and its twentieth-century reality, but in Stevens's film, Leslie is never able to articulate the contrast.

Instead, of all Ferber's characters, Stevens seemed most drawn to Jett Rink. In his original notes on the novel, the director quoted Jett's angry comment on the Benedicts: "Nobody's king in this country—no matter what they think." "Memorable line," he mused. "Should register on some people later on."⁴⁶ In both Ferber's novel and Stevens's adaptation, Jett introduces Leslie to the evils of the Benedict ranch system and their treatment of Mexican Americans. He instigates Leslie's desire for change in Texas. Stevens even toned down Jett's unrepentant racism, and made the character more central to the narrative. Although he occasionally bridles at Leslie's comments which link him and his lifestyle to that of the Mexican Americans ("You mean that bunch of wet-backs? Don't you get me mixed up with them. I'm just as much Texas as Bick Benedict is. I'm no wetback."⁴⁷), Stevens softens Jett's character while retaining many of Ferber's initial devices to link the lives of poor whites to Mexican Americans and even African Americans. In the process, Jett—rather than Leslie—becomes the dominant racial cross-over character in the film. Through Jett's combination of racism and hybridity, Stevens undermines the racial assumptions structuring Jim Crow prejudice in Texas.

The character profile on Jett touches carefully on these issues and makes him even more sympathetic by emphasizing his classic self-made man qualities:

At the lower depths of a great nation there sweeps an undertow of the human tide, a restless flux that is forever in motion, thrust forward and drawn backward by the pull of the economic and social seasons, and peopled by the marginal, the unskilled, the migratory and the anonymous. When such people work, they work hard to earn little and are at the mercy of fate. But when, in a rare moment, fortune takes a hand in the affairs of one of them, the man thus favored often seems equipped beyond all others to take advantage of it. Jett Rink was such a man . . . Jett had many reasons, as a young man, to be angry. First, he was a drifter in a world where he found himself one of the few under-privileged and yet non-Mexican employees of a young man of great wealth.⁴⁸

The profile emphasizes his marginality and his individuality, his closeness with Mexican Americans and other underprivileged groups in Texas, and his separateness. The profile returned to this issue, rewriting Jett's attitude towards Mexican Americans: "Jett did not dislike the Mexicans. He knew, more than most, that they were getting a raw deal. But his only interest in life was to get into the same position as those who were giving the Mexicans that same raw deal."⁴⁹

Stevens made Jett's hybridity even more explicit through the film medium. When Jett (James Dean) strikes it rich, the camera lingers on him as he becomes

increasingly black with oil—clothes, hands, and face. And when his truck zigzags over the immaculate lawn of the big house at Reata, it is as though an Okie or black southern sharecropper had strayed onto the white plantation. (fig. 2) A few minutes later, a blackened “Jett” faces the white-skinned, white-bloused Leslie on the front steps in an explosive two shot. (fig. 3) As he reaches out to touch her (a sexual action which will literally cover her in oil and his blackness, figuratively profaning her white racial purity), Bick strikes him. In this sequence, Stevens recontextualizes D.W. Griffith’s seminal film, *The Birth of a Nation* (1915), in which Gus, a mulatto or mixed-race African American, pursues the white hero’s younger sister.⁵⁰ Like the actor who played Gus, James Dean is painted black to overemphasize his transgressive, mixed status. But as both Michael Rogin and Richard Dyer have pointed out, Hollywood filmmakers’ eagerness to differentiate blacks and whites and to blacken mulatto characters with excessive make-up, lighting, and binary characterization has often undercut the social and



Figure 2: Jett Rink (Dean) returns to Reata. Warner Bros. Studios.

visual construction of racial categories.⁵¹ If “color” has to be painted on in order to represent racial difference, then what lies beneath is dangerously ambiguous and even indistinguishable. While Griffith’s racism is well documented, Stevens’s reworking of *The Birth of a Nation* on both a narrative and visual level is ironic. The script preserved Ferber’s original, highly-charged, racialized language—Uncle Bawley (Chill Wills), who has observed everything, later suggests that lynching Jett might have solved all of their problems. Leslie responds, ““Yes, that’s what you would have done in the old days. Thank heaven these days are different.””⁵² While Gus is lynched by the Ku Klux Klan, Jett escapes and even



Figure 3: *Birth of a Nation* revisited? Jett (Dean) confronts Leslie (Elizabeth Taylor) on the steps of Reata while Vashti (Jane Withers) looks on in horror. Warner Bros. Studios.

delivers the final blow to Bick. Although Jett's black "paint," or "grease" connects him to both African-American and Mexican-American (also known as "greasers") minorities in Texas, it also enables this dangerous racial hybrid to cross both class and racial barriers in Texas. Oil makes Jett the richest man in Texas.⁵³

The Gender of Authorship and Publicity Clashes

Shooting began in May 1955 and continued through mid October. The film, originally budgeted at a modest 1.5 million dollars, eventually ballooned to 3.2 million.⁵⁴ Although Ferber had occasionally suggested big names like Burt Lancaster for Bick, Audrey Hepburn or Grace Kelly for Leslie, and Robert Mitchum for Jett, Stevens had settled for the dark-haired Elizabeth Taylor, whose Latin-like beauty echoed Ferber's original racialized description of Leslie ("her eyes were large, dark, and warmly lustrous"⁵⁵), and two younger male stars, Rock Hudson (Bick) and James Dean (Jett). Giant Productions migrated to Marfa, Texas for principal on-location shooting.

As production continued and the studio publicity machine kicked into gear, Leslie was not the only woman upstaged by powerful men. Ferber was pushed more and more to the side as *Giant's* controversial author. The film was no longer a woman's western with an outsider's critical perspective. After all, George Stevens's last film had been the archetypal *Shane*, one of Hollywood's

most lyrical defenses of frontier masculinity. Stevens's deployment of Ferber's critique was in the end more palatable to Texas and national audiences. The film did not merely soften Ferber's muckraking criticism by eliminating many of the connections between African-American and Mexican-American Jim Crow laws. Leslie's character and her critical perspective on Texas racism and chauvinism are marginalized, and as Jane Hendler has argued, when Stevens humanized Bick at the end of the film by making him fight for Mexican Americans' right to eat at a "white" diner, the traditional patriarchy is saved and rehabilitated.⁵⁶ Although Leslie is shown achieving a certain amount of progress for Mexican Americans on Reata, the film never employs her critical historical voice as a voiceover. Instead, as one film critic wrote recently, *Giant* became "a luscious, colourful, exuberant kind of national epic . . . [that] looked enthusiastically to the future."⁵⁷ Independent filmmaker or not, Stevens was caught up in the Hollywood of the 1950s and its own kind of fascination with size and wealth. The scope of widescreen filmmaking and the lushness of WarnerColor were celebrated and the Texas elites emerged more or less unscathed. Stevens's first shot of Bick Benedict was telling—a closeup of his elegant heeled boots and branded gear—the icons of the cowboy. In the film's final shot, Bick has become the battered, but happy head of a multiracial family.

Another film released in 1956 and distributed by Warner Brothers, John Ford's *The Searchers*, also examines the racism motivating traditional frontier history. Set in nineteenth-century Texas, *The Searchers* focuses on Ethan Edwards's (John Wayne) quest for his niece Debbie, who was abducted by Comanches following the murder of her family. It becomes evident that Ethan's lengthy search is less a rescue than a planned racial execution, since he assumes—correctly as it turns out—that the captive Debbie has crossed sexual and racial boundaries in her gradual integration within the Comanche tribe. Many film scholars have pointed out that Ford's portrayal of Ethan's excessive and violent racism forces a reconsideration of racial mixing and segregation in western history and in contemporary American society.⁵⁸ Yet the differences between Ford's and Stevens's work are striking. *Giant*'s feminine literary antecedents and protagonist, racially ambiguous anti-hero, and portrayal of a successful mixed-race union contrast with Ford's white, masculine-driven narrative, which repeatedly marginalizes and victimizes women and Native Americans. However, Stevens's more positive outlook for racial integration, as Bick drives his new American family back to Reata in the final shots, ironically represented a public relations whitewashing of Ferber's harsher racial critique.

During production, the studio carefully released news blurbs emphasizing George Stevens and Warner Brothers's less inflammatory attitude toward Texas's overblown masculinity, crass wealth, and racism. Actress Jane Withers (Vashti Hake), herself a native Texan, reportedly "had only one condition . . . that the script not treat Texans as harshly as the Edna Ferber best-selling book about the nation's largest state."⁵⁹ Whether Stevens listened to Withers was open to question, but Warner Brothers certainly put pressure on the director to modify some of

Ferber's more pointed prose. As film critic Kate Cameron remarked upon seeing the film, "Although Stevens hasn't eliminated the sharp, bitter criticism of the people of Texas that was part of the book, he has blunted the point so that some of its propagandistic scenes do not strike the beholder as unfairly biased."⁶⁰

As far as most reviewers were concerned, this "whitewashing" benefited the film. Long uneasy about Ferber's controversial critique of the Texas oil elites, the press repackaged her novel as the ravings of an eastern virago. As one *Time* reviewer wrote, "Indeed, the best-selling 1952 novel by Edna Ferber, on which this picture is based, bellowed from the bookstalls that Texas in modern times is a microcosm of materialism, a noisome social compost of everything that is crass and sick and cruel in American life."⁶¹ Ferber's attack on the entrenched Jim Crow status quo for Mexican Americans living in Texas was seen as an extremist's polemic rather than a serious, well-supported argument about modern Texas history and American race relations. While critics increasingly dismissed Ferber as just a writer of potboilers, Stevens was hailed as a mature screen artist: "In the hand of a master moviemaker, *Giant* has been transformed from a flashy bestseller into a monumental piece of social realism."⁶²

In contrast, many critics accepted Stevens's scenes about racial prejudice and implied that he had enhanced Ferber's weak material. Was *Giant*'s view of Texas more palatable to the American public when projected by a man and one known for his spare, masculine westerns? Although female reviewers like Rose Pelswick praised Ferber's original work and actually claimed that the film, although good, was an expurgated version in which "the satire of the Ferber novel [is] almost entirely toned down,"⁶³ these views were a minority. Far more prevalent was the pronouncement of Philip K. Scheuer of the *Los Angeles Times*: "It is, I suspect, much more Stevens's movie than Edna Ferber's novel—the work of a distinctive and distinguished cinema stylist and creative artist."⁶⁴ The rhetoric of Texas reviewers like John Bustin of the *Austin American-Statesman* was even more explicit: "The Edna Ferber novel, *Giant*, told a harsh, often inaccurate and always bitter story about Texas and Texans during a trying period of change, and Texans were doubtless justified in finding it a vitriolic and frequently unfounded caricature of a small segment of their state," he complained. "In bringing Miss Ferber's story to the screen, though, Stevens has given it not only more accuracy and more point, but more real, life-sized human qualities than were even hinted at in the original novel."⁶⁵ According to this perspective, Ferber's historical fiction is inaccurate and therefore invalid. However, Stevens, using her material, is a competent man to tell the story of Texas. Alton Cook said something similar, "Stevens found a much more solid and compact drama than was given to the readers of the Edna Ferber novel on which the film is based. His conflict is keener and the issues are more clearly defined."⁶⁶ There is not anything specific that Cook uses to justify such criticism. Stevens is just a more acceptable source. But it seems that Ferber could never win. For Bustin, her "grasp of the issues" was too taut and unrelenting; for Cook, she was less focused on the social problem of prejudice than Stevens.

Later on, the publicity department nearly destroyed Ferber's partnership with Henry Ginsberg and Stevens. *Giant's* publicity team, with the consent of producer Ginsberg and possibly even Stevens, engaged in some front-page competition with the author. Although Ferber had astutely insisted in her contract that any film publicity carry her name with the film's title, the production company occasionally managed to undermine her authority as *Giant's* originator and one of the most respected historical novelists in America. In a letter to Ginsberg dated August 17, 1956, Ferber wrote that the *New York Evening Post* carried an article by Sidney Skolsky on August 16, claiming that "Edna Ferber, after seeing *Giant*, told George Stevens, 'Thanks—that's the story I wanted to write.'"67 Ferber was justifiably outraged by the publicity, since, as she reasoned, it could only have originated "in an organization devoted to the George Stevens publicity campaign in connection with *Giant*."⁶⁸ Not only had she not seen *Giant*, but "I will not stand for this sort of publicity which is beneficial to some one else while it breaks me down. I wrote the novel *Giant*. I wrote it as I wanted to write it."⁶⁹ But *Giant* now had more than one author.

Reception and Race

Relations may have been strained between Ferber and her film partners, but Hollywood critics saw the film as a major triumph for Warner Brothers and the film industry as a whole. Critics and audiences tended to focus on two major elements of the film: the film's history of racial discrimination in Texas and James Dean's magnificent performance as Jett Rink. But these two categories were kept separate in the public mind. While critics praised the film's exposure of Jim Crow Texas, audiences focused on James Dean's Jett, the gaudy symbol of the frontier hero.

Giant's historical seriousness was linked to its presentation of Texas racial issues. *Newsweek* joined the chorus of critics who praised the film's tackling of a serious social issue: "For a movie of its kind, *Giant* has an odd distinction; expensive productions like this usually stand clear of controversy; *Giant's* racial-segregation theme (involving Mexicans) will rile many a Texan and many another."⁷⁰ *Variety's* review praised Ferber for "an unflattering vivid portrayal" of Texas racism and also Stevens and the screenwriters, who "did not flinch [from] the discrimination angle."⁷¹ For *Variety*, *Giant* was "a powerful indictment of the Texas superiority complex. Not since Darryl F. Zanuck found the courage to make *Pinky* (1949) and *Gentleman's Agreement* (1947) has the screen spoken out with such a clear voice against group snobbery."⁷² Other critics connected it to different milestones in Hollywood's production history. In a review for *Motion Picture Daily*, James D. Ivers compared the film's enormous scope and historical perspective to *Gone With the Wind* (1939). Written by another key female American historical novelist, Margaret Mitchell, *Gone With the Wind*, though less concerned than *Giant* in righting racial wrongs, did focus on the unconventional

perspective of a woman, an outsider, a non-conformist, and, due to her Irishness, a racial crossover character.

Although Ivers did not point out the feminist continuities between the books and films, he did stress the historical content as a way, ironically, of drawing attention away from the narrow “feminine perspective.” Because *Giant* “covers a huge slice of that American phenomenon known as Texas from the early 20s until today,” it “plants this production firmly as a landmark in motion picture history.” One of Stevens’s more significant marks on the adaptation was allegedly in changing the novel’s attention from the personal perspective of Leslie to “the very much wider perspective made possible by the mobility of the camera.”⁷³ The *Hollywood Reporter* saw this widening of scope in terms of the film’s social realism, arguing that *Giant* faced Texas’s past and present racism and “in a very genuine way has the drumbeat of contemporary history.”⁷⁴

Preview audiences also responded to the film’s presentation of Jim Crow laws in Texas and their effects on Mexican Americans, but were slightly more ambivalent. Surviving comment cards give a fairly complete picture of how many southern California audiences (also familiar with racial clashes between “white” Okie and “Mexican-American” groups during the recent Depression) responded to the film.⁷⁵ Over a period of several months (May through September 1956), filmgoers in San Diego, El Cajon, Riverside, Long Beach, Encino, and Bakersfield had a chance to make suggestions. Over 80 percent of 300-plus viewers per screening gave the film top ratings. In San Diego at the Preferred Theatre screening on May 22, one of the 302 viewers wrote, “About the segregation problem—it is a good point brought out that people realise it is no good when it hits ‘at home.’”⁷⁶ An 18-30 male identified the “true theme of the picture—Mexicans disliked in Texas, altho [*sic*] Texas did belong to Mexico.” However, several men did not like the overemphasis on the segregation issues—also called “the racial stuff” and “the lecture on wetbacks.” Another viewer, identified only as a Texan, disliked “The emphasis on the anti-Mexican part.” Still another who lived in Texas at one point said that the real segregation issue in Texas was African-American discrimination.

At the Fox Theatre in Riverside, men generally disliked the racial issues while one female viewer actually came out in favor of their treatment. Two “over 45” Riverside men were especially adverse to the interracial marriage of Jordan Jr. and Juana, and they also identified Mexican Americans as “wetbacks.” Although previews in Encino and Long Beach in late September also had enormously positive responses, it was the discrimination issue that got people writing their comment cards. One over 31 year-old woman wrote that Stevens had concentrated on the Mexican-American question at the expense of Ferber’s other critiques of Texas: “Not enough ridicule of Texas as in the book—wetback problem became the dominant one,” she complained.⁷⁷

Curiously, one of the youngest viewers, a 12-17 year-old girl from San Diego, commented, “I don’t think this is a picture to be shown abroad.”⁷⁸ Warner Brothers executives may have taken this comment a bit too seriously, or have

had their own worries about the film's impact abroad. Soon afterward, studio executives decided to act over the heads of George Stevens's production team and edit the film version shown in Mexico and other Latin American countries. Although during the studio era, southern state film boards often demanded cuts in Hollywood's Civil War productions or contemporary southern dramas with black supporting characters, it was more rare for studios to cut footage unilaterally. It was particularly unusual for Warner Brothers to edit a film by an "auteur" like Stevens, who was known for his meticulous editing procedures and control of production. *The Hollywood Citizen-News* reported on August 27, 1957:

Mexico City newspapers are running angry front page stories protesting the censorship of *Giant*. The film (called *Gigante* south of the border) has had more than half an hour chopped out of it, including all references to anti-Mexican discrimination. The Edna Ferber novel enjoyed a good sale down there. Mexican critics seem agreed that there was no point to cutting the defamatory sections since a pro-Mexican moral wins out in the film. They know all about the American (uncensored) version from translated American periodicals in general circulation in Mexico.⁷⁹

Stevens wrote at once to his counsel, Morris Ernst, and asked what could be done. He believed that a certain executive at Warner Brothers, Benjamin Kalmenson, might have been responsible for the action. "We know that Kalmenson wanted to do this with the film for America, and also consulted with me at another time about cutting the film for England," he wrote. "I suppose this comes about due to the fact that they think they can get away with it because our interest has had no management since the First [of] May of this year."⁸⁰

Although Stevens sent this clipping to Ferber with a note asking for her thoughts, Ferber responded that she had known about the Mexican situation for months. "As I had read of this months ago, I naturally thought that you knew about the picture-cuts for Mexico," she responded. "I was appalled at the time. Also, I read that these cuts are to be made (or have been made) for all Spanish-speaking countries, including, of course, the South American Spanish-speaking countries whose audience potential is very large."⁸¹ Ferber had her own theories about why the studio had ordered the cuts behind Stevens's back.

When I read of this the first thought I had was Texas. This, I thought, was due to Texas pressure because of the Mexican-Texas labor situation. I don't know if you have seen Texas (Mexican labor) work camps. Down around the Brownsville border I visited a ranch which was paying 25 cents an hour for Mexican labor. Texas could bring a lot of pressure to bear on Warner for a cut in the Mexican showing. I don't

know what their interest would be in South America. Nothing, perhaps.⁸²

Frank Z. Clemente translated the September 1957 issue of the Mexican periodical *Ciné Universal* for the studios, and said that Mexicans were disappointed in *Giant* because the cutters had excised all the incidents showing white racial prejudice against Mexicans in order to avoid possible negative publicity from Mexico: “We understand that this is due to the merciless ‘cutting’ so as not to injure the sensibilities of the Mexicans.” The film was cut from 22 reels to 19 reels, losing 17 minutes of screen time. However, Warner Brothers’s clumsy attempt at public relations backfired: “But since *Giant* was amputated of all that ‘smelled’ like racial discrimination, the picture remains ‘cut-off,’ confusing, very long and without detail in that which refers to the Benedict family. It is a shame that this happened.”⁸³

Stevens initially seemed interested in legally pursuing the studio’s tampering with his work. However, correspondence with Morris Ernst on the subject faltered after late September 1957.⁸⁴ By that time, the director was already at work on another project, *The Diary of Anne Frank*, and his fame from making *Giant* was assured. Censorship issues may have seemed less important. But the issue was crucial enough for Warner executives to have interfered in the project. While Ferber’s suspicions of Machiavellian Texas oil interests seem valid considering the legal department’s outsized worries about lawsuits from the Klebergs and McCarthy, equally important were recent public incidents of Texas prejudice with international implications. Only two years before, Texas airport officials subjected the Indian Ambassador to their Jim Crow laws. The United States government had to apologize to the Indian government when Gaganvihari Lallubhai Mehta was forced to leave a dining room in Houston International Airport because, as the *New York Times* reported, “he was mistaken for a Negro.” This was an especially ill-timed incident for the Eisenhower government, since relations between India’s Prime Minister Nehru and the U.S. had been under strain due to the premier’s neutral stance toward communist governments in the East. As the *Times* reported, “It was feared that Communist and non-Communist critics of the United States would exploit the incident to aggravate relations with India and to discredit the United States throughout Asia.”⁸⁵ Would Juana’s expulsion from the hotel beauty parlor at the end of *Giant* have touched a raw nerve with some officials? Whatever the case, studio censors were not taking any chances and eradicated all scenes of racial discrimination in the film, including the modern-day incidents and the ones set from 1925 through the Second World War sequences.

The Legend of Jett Rink/James Dean

If the studio was anxious about the number of scenes depicting Mexican-American exploitation and discrimination, they could not get enough of James Dean. For the studios, Dean represented Hollywood exploitation at its best. As

a studio “contract” star, his salary on the picture only cost Warner Brothers a pittance—\$18,500 compared to Elizabeth Taylor’s mammoth \$177,430 and Rock Hudson’s \$101,667.⁸⁶ But towards the end of production, Dean’s *East of Eden* and *Rebel Without a Cause* were released to massive acclaim and he was a star. That September, before Stevens had begun postproduction and dubbing, Dean was killed in a car accident in California. Almost immediately, he was on his way to becoming one of Hollywood’s greatest legends. Ferber appreciated Dean long before his untimely death. She thought Dean was “magnificent” in his role as Jett Rink, conveying the modern Texas icon’s mystery, simmering menace, and unexpected humor. The two of them had met on Ferber’s trips to Los Angeles and Texas and, with Dean’s friend and co-star Mercedes McCambridge, spent a lot of time talking and laughing on the set. Curiously, it seems that Warner Brothers had been uncertain how to market Dean on the picture after his death: In a letter to friends, Ferber mused, “Poor Jimmy Dean! They are now trying to play him down in the publicity. He has grown into a kind of dreadful cult.”⁸⁷ Eventually, glowing reviews which spoke of his “legend” and acting genius made Warner Brothers reconsider their treatment of the dead star, and his image began to dominate publicity.⁸⁸ In 1957, Stevens’s production company publicists, Sidelinger and Company, prepared an “ad analysis” on the film and commented that the previous April, 8.75 million people had heard of *Giant*. “At the time, the great interest was attributed to the enthusiasm for the late James Dean and the furore which had been created by the Edna Ferber novel from which Mr. Stevens made the picture.”⁸⁹ Although Ferber’s name continued to be associated with the picture, it was largely through the legal enforcement of her contract, which specified that her name as author appear with any advertising for the film. But the studio saw the profit in promoting Dean’s contribution, and in re-release press books in 1963 and 1970, stories on Dean easily outnumber those on Stevens, Hudson, Taylor, and Ferber. Dean’s famous pose in the Benedict automobile, lounging in the seat, legs stretched out and casually crossed, battered hat pulled down over his eyes, became the key selling icon for the film.

Those same California preview audiences who had argued about the number and length of *Giant*’s anti-segregation scenes all agreed on one thing: that James Dean was the best element in the picture. But was it just Dean’s magnetic personality which made him the only thing worth looking at on the screen, or was it also Jett Rink? One of the film’s most memorable sequences involves Jett marking the boundaries of his new piece of land, a bequest from Luz Benedict (McCambridge). He strides up hills, accompanied only by the score, silhouetted against the horizon, black against the light. When he finally climbs up the windmill and dangles his booted legs over the side, Stevens conveys Jett’s dauntless individualism and ties to old pioneers. After all, he is the only character we see re-enacting the settlement and development of his land. He is the frontier hero—a man without a past, but with a future.

Jett’s working-class iconoclasm, his distaste for the Benedicts and other ruling elites in Texas, his understanding of anti-Mexican prejudice and his own

racism, his drive and determination, his poverty, and success, all added to his appeal to 1950s Americans. In the October 1956 edition of *Movie Secrets*, the editors did an extensive spread of James Dean images and devoted a chunk to his yet-unseen performance in *Giant*. It may have been over a year since his death, but the Dean legend was already powerful: “Again Jimmy Dean plays a rebel . . . As Jett Rink, Jimmy portrays a man with bitter hatreds towards his ‘betters’ always smouldering beneath a surface that manages to be arrogant even while being polite.”⁹⁰ The Horatio Alger tale has always been popular with Americans, and when the self-made man is rebellious, assertive, and slightly mysterious, he has even greater appeal. But in Ferber’s novel, Jett Rink is a violent man, abusing both women and ethnic minorities. Although as a poor, landless white man, Jett is marked as neither black, brown, nor white in Texas culture, and therefore understands racial otherness, though his racism is as rigid as Bick Benedict’s. Stevens may have covered him with black oil and re-enacted the southern racial clash between him and Leslie on the white veranda of Reata, but viewers showed little awareness of these visual ambiguities. In fact, many of the California viewers who focused on Jett as the picture’s highlight shared his racial outlook. Some, while claiming to abhor the Texas hypocrisy and double standards, then pointed out that they were not Mexicans and not black. As one viewer in El Cajon said of the film, there were “too many reference[s] to wetback[s]. May I add that I am not a Mexican—never met any I have cared anything about.”⁹¹ This was the audience Ferber and Stevens had to conquer.

But what is slightly disturbing about Dean’s enduring hold on the picture’s memory in popular culture is that he played the unredeemed racist and the great capitalist success. If Bick Benedict learns something about the history of Texas racism at the end of the film, Jett does not. And what of Leslie, Ferber’s original outsider-protagonist and vehicle for Ferber’s own discussions of race and gender hierarchies? Leslie’s perspective was curtailed in both the American and foreign versions of the film. Stevens and *Giant* productions saw from the beginning that a woman could not dominate and narrate a history of modern Texas; Ferber’s great expectations for *Giant* were never realized. In spite of the fact that Stevens bolstered Leslie’s racial activism and complicated Jett’s racial make-up, censorship dulled the novel’s racial and gender issues for both national and international releases. Ferber’s ego as a major American writer and popular historian was also bruised. As the filmmakers shifted focus to Jett and even Bick and away from Leslie as the protagonist, so studio publicity and reviews lionized Stevens for the racial crusade that Ferber had truly authored. As she wrote to her editor at Doubleday in August of 1957, “The thing eventually will turn out to be enormously profitable, I suppose, but it never will be worth the annoyance and irritation and time and precious energy it has cost me. I wish I could walk away from the whole thing right now and never hear of it again.”⁹²

Notes

I would like to thank the anonymous readers of *American Studies* and Patrick Major for their insightful comments and suggestions.

1. Edna Ferber to George Stevens, 7 December 1954, box 51, folder 614, George Stevens Collection, Academy of Motion Picture Arts & Sciences Library (hereafter AMPAS).
2. *Ibid.*
3. Ferber to Henry Ginsberg and George Stevens, 17 May 1955, box 51, folder 614, George Stevens Collection, AMPAS.
4. Pery, *Texas: A World in Itself* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1942) and McWilliams, *North From Mexico: The Spanish-Speaking People of the United States* [1949] (New York: Greenwood Press, 1968). See also Shelley Nickles, "More is Better: Mass Consumption in Postwar America," *American Quarterly* 54 (December 2002): 588.
5. Carey McWilliams to Edna Ferber, 9 Feb 1949, box 1, folder 4, Edna Ferber Papers, State Historical Society, Madison (hereafter Edna Ferber Papers). See also box 10, folder 2 for Ferber's copies of LULAC News.
6. Mary Rose Shaughnessy, *Women and Success in the Novels of Edna Ferber* (New York: Gordon Press, 1977), 283.
7. Jane Hendler, *Best-Sellers and Their Film Adaptations in Postwar America* (New York: Peter Lang, 2001), 119; Hollis Alpert, "It's Dean, Dean, Dean," *The Saturday Review*, 13 October 1956, 28-29. Over forty biographies of James Dean have been published between 1974 and 2006; there are no major studies of *Giant*.
8. Anon., "Frontier Myth and Texas Politics," *Texas Spectator*, Austin (24 May 1948), vol., 3, no. 33: 3-5, 15, p 3., box 10, folder 2, Edna Ferber Papers.
9. Edna Ferber, *Giant* (New York: Doubleday, 1952), 284.
10. See Gregg Cantrell and Elizabeth Turner, eds., *Lone Star Pasts: Memory and History in Texas* (College Station: Texas A & M University Press, 2007); Randolph B. Campbell, *An Empire for Slavery: The Peculiar Institution in Texas, 1821-1865* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1989).
11. *Giant*, 268-70, 259.
12. Neil Foley, *The White Scourge: Mexicans, Blacks, and Poor Whites in Texas Cotton Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997). For more on the instability of whiteness as an American social construct, see Matthew Frye Jacobson's *Whiteness of a Different Color: European Immigrants and the Alchemy of Race* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998) and David Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class* (London: Verso, 1999).
13. *Giant*, 215-16.
14. See David Montejano, *Anglos and Mexicans in the Making of Texas, 1836-1986* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1987).
15. Foley, 6. See also 163-82.
16. *Giant*, 439-440.
17. *Ibid.*, 364. Ferber's creation of a class/race hybrid was not unique in American literature. Margaret Mitchell's *Scarlet O'Hara* (1936) is possibly the best-known example of a white (but Irish) woman struggling against economic poor-white status following the Civil War. But while her familial ties to blacks like Pork, Mammy, and Dilcey are strengthened, Jett denies any ties (J.E. Smyth, "Classical Hollywood's Interracial History," in *Mixed-Race Hollywood*," edited by Mary Beltran and Camilla Fojas (New York: New York University Press, 2008).
18. "Ferber's Big Book on Texas Overdoes Even Zealot's Role," *San Angelo Standard-Times*, 28 September 1952.
19. Carl Victor Little, "Ferber's Big Bust: She Fills Texas Air with Private 4-Engine Jobs," *Houston Press*, 20 June 1952.
20. *Ibid.*, "By-the-way discusses Ferber's new book, *Midget*," 13 September 1952: "We have generously offered to furnish the rope if someone else furnishes the martinis."
21. Lon Tinkle, "Ferber goes both native and berserk: parody, not portrait, of Texas," *Dallas News*, 1952, part 7, p1 and 4.
22. Memo from Roy Obringer to Jack Warner, 21 Dec 1953 says that Stevens is to direct and produce and budget is 1.5 million, Jack Warner Collection, Warner Bros. Archive, University of Southern California [1 File].
23. George Stevens, annotated copy of Ferber's novel, box 35, folder 456, George Stevens Collection, AMPAS. See especially pages 55-6, 89-90, 218, 259, 355, 384, 411-15, which are heavily underlined and bracketed by the director.
24. Lauren Berlant, "Pax Americana: The Case of *Show Boat*," in Deirdre Lynch and William B. Warner, eds., *Cultural Institutions of the Novel*, 399-422 (Durham: Duke University Press, 1996).
25. *Variety*, 13 May 1953.

26. Ferber to Ginsberg and Stevens, 12 June 1954, box 51, folder 614, George Stevens Collection, AMPAS.
27. Ferber to Ken McCormick, 15 August 1954, box 9, folder 7, Edna Ferber Papers.
28. Treatment for screenplay, 366pp, no date through 24 March 1954, box 35, folder 461, George Stevens Collection, AMPAS. The one major deviation was the elimination of the modern sequence and flashback structure in favour of a more chronological format.
29. Treatment annotated by Stevens, 28, box 36, folder 462, George Stevens Collection, AMPAS.
30. Estimating Script, 22 October 1954, 94-5, 104, story file, Warner Bros. Archive, USC. This is 73-4 in final script.
31. *Giant*, 384-5, 424-5.
32. Stevens's copy of white script by Ferber, dated 28 June 1954-23 August 1954, 285pp.: 85, box 39, folder 472.
33. See *Giant*, 157, 209, 259, 268-270, 355.
34. James T. Patterson, *Brown v. Board of Education: A Civil Rights Milestone and Its Troubled Legacy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002); Richard Kluger, *Simple Justice: The History of Brown v. Board of Education and Black America's Struggle for Equality* (New York: Knopf, 1976).
35. Estimating Script, *Giant*, 22 October 1954: 81-5, Warner Bros. Archive, USC.
36. Final screenplay, 4 April 1955, with changes through 21 May 1955, 178pp., box 39, folder 482, George Stevens Collection, AMPAS.
37. *Ibid.*, 62-5.
38. Memo from Carl Milliken Jr. to Henry Ginsberg, 14 December 1954, 8pp. folder 622 (legal file), George Stevens Collection, AMPAS.
39. *Reader's Digest*, May 1938, 11. Article preserved in Stevens Papers, AMPAS, box 56, folder 699. The folder also contains an article on the Klebergs from *Colliers*, 18 December 1943.
40. For more on the lynching of Mexican Americans, see Laura Gomez, *Manifest Destinies: The Making of the Mexican American Race* (New York: New York University Press, 2007).
41. Memo from Carl Milliken Jr. to Henry Ginsberg, 14 December 1954, WB Archive, USC.
42. Peter Biskind, *Seeing Is Believing: How Hollywood Taught Us to Stop Worrying and Love the Fifties* (New York: Pluto Press, 1983): 285.
43. Bic Benedict profile, 4, and Leslie profile, 4, 30 June 1954, story file, Warner Bros. Archive, USC.
44. *Ibid.*
45. Leslie profile, 1.
46. Notes by Stevens on book, p. 1, folder 485, George Stevens Collection, AMPAS.
47. Final screenplay, 4 April 1955, 79, box 39, folder 482, George Stevens Collection, AMPAS.
48. Jett Rink Profile, 30 June 1954, story file, Warner Bros. Archive, USC.
49. *Ibid.*
50. See Sterling Brown, *The Negro in American Fiction* (Washington, D.C.: The Association of Negro Folk Education, 1937); Cassandra Jackson, *Barriers Between Us: Interracial Sex in Nineteenth-Century American Literature* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004); Linda Williams, *Playing the Race Card* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001); Donald Bogle, *Toms, Coons, Mulattoes, Mammies, and Bucks* [1973] (New York: Continuum, 2003); Thomas Cripps, *Slow Fade to Black* [1977] (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993).
51. Michael Rogin, "'The Sword Became a Flashing Vision': D.W. Griffith's *The Birth of a Nation*," in Robert Lang, ed., *The Birth of a Nation*, 250-93 (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1994); Richard Dyer, *White* (London: BFI, 1997).
52. Treatment for screenplay, 366pp, through 24 March 1954: 222, box 35, folder 461, George Stevens Collection, AMPAS.
53. See David Roediger, *Working Toward Whiteness: How America's Immigrants Became White* (New York: Basic Books, 2006).
54. Production budget, 19 May 1955: second revised production budget: May 19, 1955, Warner Bros. Archive, USC.
55. *Giant*, 66.
56. Hendler, *Best-Sellers*, 152. Hendler, however, ignores both book's and film's problematization of race via Jett.
57. My perspective differs from that of both Biskind and Marilyn Ann Moss (*Giant: George Stevens, A Life on Film*, Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2004, 223-224). The latter attributes the racial critique and strong female protagonist to Stevens, rather than Ferber. Moss's reading goes against the prevailing popular and critical readings of the film after its release. See also Moss, 203, 206.
58. See Brian Henderson, "The Searchers: An American Dilemma," in Arthur Ekstein and Peter Lehman, eds., *The Searchers: Essays and Reflections on John Ford's Classic Western*, 47-73 (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2004); Charles Ramirez Berg, "The Margin as Center: The Multicultural Dynamics of John Ford's Westerns," in Gaylyn Studlar and Matthew Bernstein, eds., *John Ford Made Westerns*, 75-101 (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001).

59. Clippings March-April 1955, Yuma, AZ *Sun and Sentinel*, 15 March 1955; Hollywood *Citizen-News*, 14 March 1955, box 54, folder 679, George Stevens Collection.
60. Kate Cameron, "Ferber's Giant a Giant Film," *New York Daily News*, 11 October 1956, box 56, folder 700, George Stevens Collection, AMPAS.
61. *Time Magazine*, 22 October 1956, 108, 110, 112.
62. *Ibid.*
63. Rose Pelswick, "Film Lives Up to Its Name in Everything," *New York Journal-American*, box 24, folder 2, box 56, folder 700, George Stevens Collection, AMPAS.
64. Philip K. Scheuer, "*Giant* Looms as Towering Saga of Texas Boom Years," *Los Angeles Times*, 7 October 1956.
65. John Bustin, "Show World," *Austin American-Statesman*, 9 November 1956.
66. Alton Cook, unmarked press clipping, box 56, folder 700, Stevens Papers.
67. Ferber to Henry Ginsburg, 17 August 1956, box 9, Ferber Papers.
68. Ferber to Ginsberg, 17 August 1956, box 9, Ferber Papers.
69. *Ibid.*
70. *Newsweek*, 10 October 1956, 112, 114.
71. *Variety*, 10 October 1956, box 56, folder 700, George Stevens Collection, AMPAS.
72. Review of *Giant*, directed by George Stevens, *Variety*, 10 October 1956.
73. Ivers, *Motion Picture Daily*, 10 October 1956, box 56, folder 700, George Stevens Collection, AMPAS.
74. *Hollywood Reporter*, 10 October 1956, box 56, folder 700, George Stevens Collection, AMPAS.
75. Folders 661-3, George Stevens Collection, AMPAS. See also James Gregory, *American Exodus* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989).
76. Folders 661-3, George Stevens Collection, AMPAS.
77. Folders 661-3, George Stevens Collection, AMPAS.
78. *Ibid.*
79. Hollywood *Citizen-News*, also in folder 610, 15, 17.
80. Note from Stevens to Morris Ernst, 18 September 1957, folder 610, George Stevens Collection, AMPAS.
81. Stevens to Ferber, 18 September 1957, folder 610, George Stevens Collection, AMPAS.
82. Note from Ferber to Stevens, 22 September 1957, folder 610, George Stevens Collection, AMPAS.
83. *Ciné Universal*, September 1957, translated by Frank Z. Clemente of West Hollywood, 15 November 1957, box 56, folder 700, George Stevens Collection. See also *Hollywood Citizen-News*, 27 August 1957.
84. The last letter on the subject in AMPAS was Ernst's to Stevens on 24 September, in which he asked whether Stevens had specific suggestions about legal action.
85. "Envoy is Victim of Segregation," *New York Times*, 24 August 1955. The story was also carried in the *New York Evening Post*, 23 August 1955. Ferber sent both articles to Stevens, folder 614, AMPAS.
86. Production budget, 19 May 1955, Warner Bros. Archives, USC.
87. Ferber to David and Eliza, 26 August 1956, box 1, folder 6, Edna Ferber Papers.
88. See Alpert; George Scullin, "James Dean: The Legend and the Facts," *Look* 16 (October 1956): 120-124; Daniel Yergin, "Young Dean's Legacy," *Newsweek* (22 October 1956): 112, 116.
89. Ad analysis on *Giant* by Sidelinger & Co., prepared for Warner Bros., 1 March 1957, 6pp, 2, box 57, folder 703, George Stevens Collection, AMPAS.
90. "James Dean: As You Will See Him," *Movie Secrets*, October 1956: 26-7.
91. Folders 661-3, George Stevens Collection, AMPAS.
92. Ferber to Ken McCormick, 23 August 1957, box 9, folder 11, Edna Ferber Papers.

