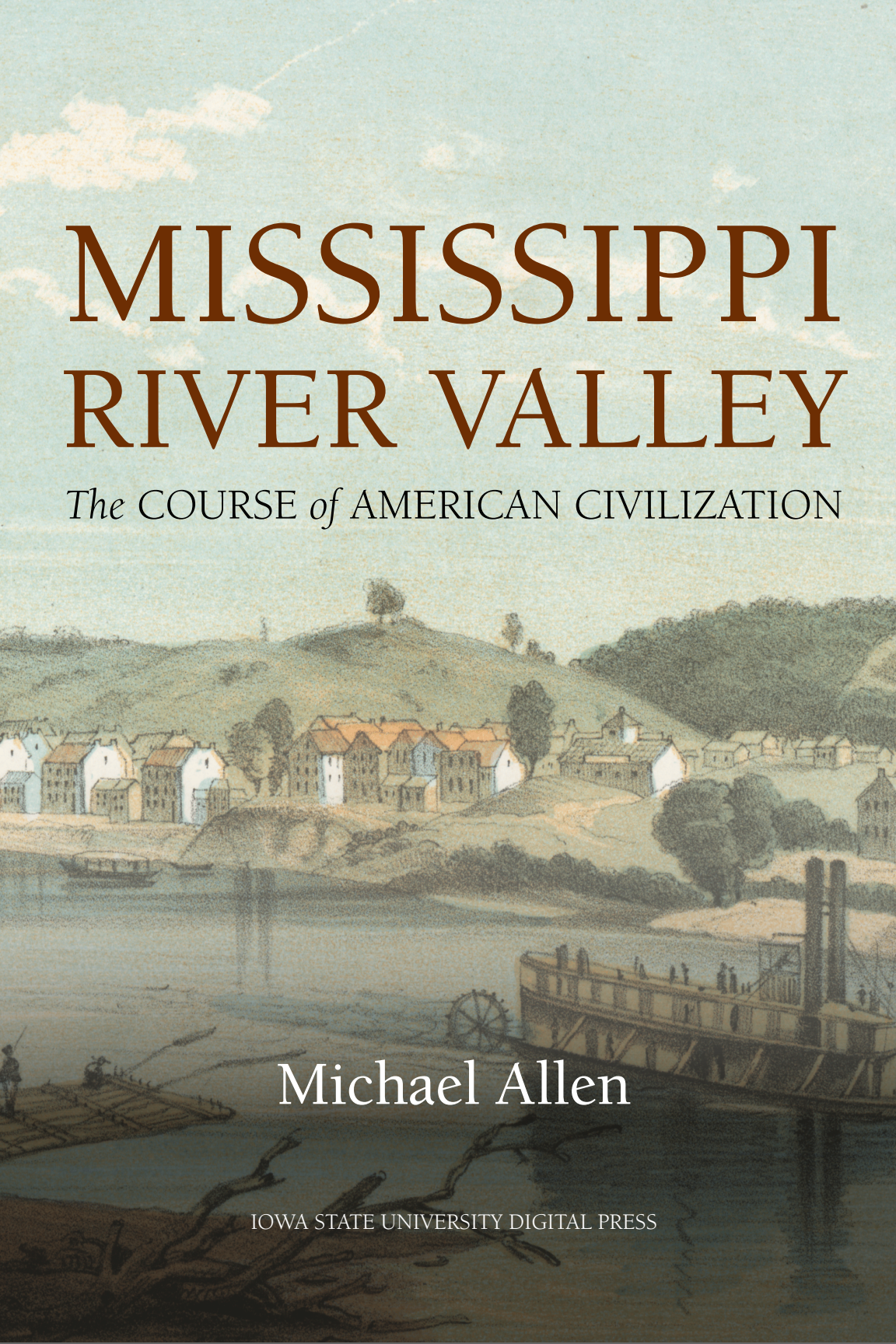
MISSISSIPPI RIVER VALLEY

The COURSE *of* AMERICAN CIVILIZATION



Michael Allen

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The Course of American Civilization

Michael Allen

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Iowa State University is located on the ancestral lands and territory of the Baxoje (bah-kho-dzhe), or Ioway Nation. The United States obtained the land from the Meskwaki and Sauk nations in the Treaty of 1842. We wish to recognize our obligations to this land and to the people who took care of it, as well as to the 17,000 Native people who live in Iowa today.

This book is dedicated to Jim, Davy, Caroline, and Judi.

Semper Fidelis

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

It took me a very long time to write this book, and many folks helped me along the way. If I fail to acknowledge all of them below, I beg their forgiveness.

My graduate school mentors Harry W. Fritz (University of Montana) and W. J. Rorabaugh (University of Washington) first taught me the historical craft, and department chairs B. F. Jones (Tennessee Technological University), Buzz Anderson (Deep Springs College), Mumtaz Fargo (Eastern Montana College), and Bill Richardson and Jim Brown (University of Washington, Tacoma) brought me up in the profession.

This work is based largely on sources coming to me by way of the University of Washington library system. I conducted research at the Captain William D. Bowell Sr. Library of the National Rivers Museum, Dubuque, Iowa; Herman T. Pott National Waterways Collection, St. Louis Mercantile Library, University of Missouri, St. Louis; Special Collections, Loyola University, New Orleans; Williams Research Center, Hogan Jazz Archive, Tulane University, New Orleans; and the Historic New Orleans Collection. My research was funded in part by grants from the University of Washington, Tacoma, and I thank the taxpayers of Washington State for subsidizing my work. Lachlan and Christin Mackay of the Joseph Smith Historic Site have been especially generous in granting me, for over fifteen years, free run of the library and a perfect writing environment alongside the upper Mississippi River in Old Nauvoo, Illinois. Terry Weninger, President of Yukon College, Whitehorse, Yukon Territory, hosted my one month on-campus stay as Visiting Scholar (to research a comparative analysis of the Yukon and Mississippi river valleys) in another wonderful setting.

Leroy Ashby, Ken Rose, Robert Walls, and George E. Webb read and made incisive comments on several chapters of the book manuscript. Other colleagues who read individual chapters are Stephen Ashby, Ellen Bayer, Mike Birdwell, Robert Gudmestad, Mike Honey, Lisa Mighetto, Joe Sharkey, Thomas Rhys Smith, and Larry Whiteaker. I hold them individually responsible for any errors in the book (only fooling)!

I have been publishing in the field of Ohio and Mississippi Valley history since the late 1970s, and some of that work, in edited and new forms, has found its way into the present volume and is footnoted in the text.

From 1991–2017, students in my North American Regions THIST 456 class at the University of Washington, Tacoma, played a role in shaping the organization and content of this book. My longtime colleague and friend Kim McKaig, editor at *Pacific Northwest Quarterly,* copyedited and formatted the manuscript in book form. I am very grateful to Harrison Inefuku and his colleagues at Iowa State University Digital Press for their work, and I am so pleased this book was produced in Ames, Iowa, in the upper Mississippi River Valley.

Finally, I thank my fellow towboatmen at Valley Towing Service in Memphis and National Marine Service in St. Louis. Over forty years ago, they taught me about the life and culture of the Mississippi, Illinois, Ouachita, Arkansas, and St. Croix river valleys, heading down into the mystery below.

Michael Allen
Ellensburg, Washington
January 1, 2022

INTRODUCTION

A small picture in the corner of a magazine masthead says a great deal about the historians who have researched and written about the United States of America over the past century. The picture is of a steamboat, and it is with this steamboat that my story begins.

Prior to 1964, the *Journal of American History* was named the *Mississippi Valley Historical Review* (*MVHR*) because today's Organization of American Historians (OAH) was originally named the Mississippi Valley Historical Association (MVHA).[1] The old *Mississippi Valley Historical Review* featured a steamboat on each issue's cover. When the Mississippi Valley Historical Association renamed itself the Organization of American Historians in 1964, society leaders left the steamboat image on both the cover and masthead of the renamed *Journal of American History* to remind a new generation of readers of the society's historic roots. By 1986, however, the steamboat was gone from the magazine cover, and the OAH had introduced a new logo (a waving OAH flag) on its stationery and newsletter. In today's *Journal of American History,* a small steamboat remains only in the corner of the *JAH* masthead.[2]

1. Michael Kammen, "The Mississippi Valley Historical Association, 1907–1952," in *The Organization of American Historians and the Writing and Teaching of American History,* ed. Richard S. Kirkendall (New York, 2011), 17–32. See also Jon Lauck, "The Prairie Historians and the Foundations of Midwestern History," *Annals of Iowa* 71 (Spring 2012), 138–45.
2. Richard Kirkendall (former executive secretary of OAH) to Michael Allen, Aug. 6, 2010, and Lewis Perry (former editor of *JAH*) to Michael Allen, Aug. 12, 2010, both in author's possession. Perry, who kept a stylized steamboat on the cover into the 1980s, states, "I don't believe there was much concern [about removing the steamboat] after members got used to the change from MVHA to OAH." Unlike Kammen, Kirkendall, and Perry, Jon Lauck documents a much more contentious transition from Mississippi Valley Historical

The decision to name a historical society and its official magazine after a geographic region—the Mississippi Valley—came naturally to members of the first generation of professional American historians. Many (not all) of them believed the Mississippi Valley to be the heartland or cultural hearth of the nation. While today there are Missouri Valley and Ohio Valley history conferences and a Southern Historical Association, in fact those groups' meetings feature papers across specializations and continents. The idea of a heartland is not as strong as it once was.[3]

Briefly defined, the Mississippi Valley is that region of North America bounded by the Appalachians to the east and the Rocky Mountains to the west. The Mississippi River is formed at Minnesota's Lake Itasca and descends south to the Gulf of Mexico. Along the way it is fed by the Ohio and Missouri, Minnesota, Illinois, Des Moines, Yazoo, Arkansas, Ouachita, White, Red, and several other rivers and their tributaries. As a distinct cultural place, the Mississippi Valley is typified by the deciduous forests, valleys, prairies, and floodplains extending west from the Appalachians to the 98th meridian, where the Great Plains commence.[4]

The belief that the Mississippi Valley was vitally important in American culture led the early scholars to write about it. Although no one today has authored a far-reaching scholarly synthesis of the history of the Mississippi River Valley, several nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century scholars and writers tried to do so. If one does a library subject search today for "Mississippi Valley," a handful of works by these writers will

Association to Organization of American Historians in *From Warm Center to Ragged Edge: The Erosion of Midwestern Literary and Historical Regionalism* (Iowa City, Iowa, 2017), 94–99. A masthead is an informational overview of a publication and everyone involved in its creation that appears in the opening pages of the publication. The masthead lists publisher, editors and staff, and contact information.

3. Thanks to Bob Walls for sharing his thoughts on this.
4. J. W. Foster, *The Mississippi Valley: Its Physical Geography, Including Sketches of the Topography, Botany, Climate, Geology, and Mineral Resources; and of the Progress of the Development in Population and Material Wealth* (Chicago, Ill., 1869), passim.

appear, all bearing publication dates from the mid-nineteenth to the early twentieth century.

The booster scholar Timothy Flint leads the list with his *Condensed Geography and History of the Western States, or The Mississippi Valley* (1828),[5] followed by John W. Monette's *History of the Discovery and Settlement of the Valley of the Mississippi: The Three Great European Powers, Spain, France, and Great Britain, and the Subsequent Occupation, Settlement, and Extension of Civil Government by the United States, until the Year 1846* (1848).[6] Henry Lewis's interdisciplinary *The Valley of the Mississippi* (1854) was originally published in German and is graced with reproductions of Lewis's own paintings of the valley, especially the upper course.[7] After the Civil War, J. W. Foster wrote a more focused scientific account, *The Mississippi Valley: Its Physical Geography, Including Sketches of the Topography, Botany, Climate, Geology, and Mineral Resources and of the Progress of the Development in Population and Material Wealth* (1869),[8] followed by C. B. Walker's tome, *The Mississippi Valley, and Prehistoric Events; Giving Account of the Original Formation and Early Condition of the Great Valley; of Its Vegetable and Animal Life; of Its First Inhabitants, the Mound Builders, Its Mineral Treasures and Agricultural Developments* (1880).[9]

Then, into the midst of these scholarly inquiries stepped Samuel Clemens, under the pen name Mark Twain. It is doubtful Twain ever intended *Life on the Mississippi* (1881) to be a definitive all-encompassing portrait of the Great Valley, yet it has been accepted as such for well over a century. An honest

5. Timothy Flint, *A Condensed Geography and History of the Western States, or The Mississippi Valley,* 2 vols. (1828; repr. Gainesville, Fla., 1970). See chapter 1, this work.
6. John W. Monette, *History of the Discovery and Settlement of the Valley of the Mississippi: The Three Great European Powers, Spain, France, and Great Britain, and the Subsequent Occupation, Settlement, and Extension of Civil Government by the United States, until the Year 1846* (New York, 1848).
7. Henry Lewis, *The Valley of the Mississippi Illustrated* (1854; repr. St. Paul, Minn., 1967).
8. Foster, *Mississippi Valley.*
9. C. B. Walker, *The Mississippi Valley, and Prehistoric Events; Giving Account of the Original Formation and Early Condition of the Great Valley; of Its Vegetable and Animal Life; of Its First Inhabitants, the Mound Builders, Its Mineral Treasures and Agricultural Developments* (Burlington, Iowa, 1880), passim.

appraisal of the book would conclude it is uneven—both brilliant and, occasionally, tedious.[10]

Mark Twain was a great recycler of material, and the heart of the book *Life on the Mississippi* is an edited version of "Old Times on the Mississippi," a series of lively articles he earlier published in the *Atlantic Monthly.*[11] Since the articles focused only on Twain's own 1850s steamboating days, the book needed a front and back, as it were. For the former, he churned out three short chapters covering 4,000 years of human history prior to the Steamboat Age; for the latter, he revisited the Mississippi River on a steamboat trip and wrote it up in his popular travelogue style. As we shall see below, *Life on the Mississippi* has its moments but often wanders afield.[12]

One author who followed would become just as famous and, occasionally, as outlandish as Mark Twain. Theodore Roosevelt was a gentleman scholar who also dabbled in cattle ranching, big game hunting, police force administration, military conquest, and politics. *The Winning of the West,* published in consecutive volumes from 1889 to 1896, was a paean to the Mississippi Valley. In a paper he read before the Wisconsin Historical Society, Roosevelt spoke of the upper tier of states of the "Valley of the Upper Mississippi" as "the heart of the country geographically … in population and in political and social importance." Roosevelt concluded, "I regard this section as the heart of true American sentiment."[13] James K. Hosmer of the Minnesota Historical Society followed Twain and Roosevelt in 1901 with a concise chronological overview, *A Short History of the Mississippi Valley*.[14]

10. Mark Twain, *Life on the Mississippi* (1881; repr., New York, 2001).
11. Mark Twain, "Old Times on the Mississippi," in *Great Short Works of Mark Twain*, ed. Justin Kaplan (New York, 1967), 1–78.
12. See Mark Twain, "The Raftsman Passage," in *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1883; repr. New York, 1977), 233–41. *Life on the Mississippi* is discussed in chapter 4, this work.
13. Theodore Roosevelt, *The Winning of the West,* 7 vols. (New York, 1889–96); Roosevelt quoted in Frederick Jackson Turner, "The Significance of the Mississippi Valley in American History," in *The Frontier in American History,* ed. Wilbur Jacobs (1920; repr. Tucson, Ariz., 1986), 178. It is telling that Roosevelt's praise is directed only at the *upper* half of the Great Valley—the Midwest—and he omits the South.
14. James K. Hosmer, *A Short History of the Mississippi Valley* (Boston, Mass., 1901).

It was at this time that a group of American historians from the Midwest formed the Mississippi Valley Historical Association. Both the political and intellectual history of this group bespeak a belief in American exceptionalism. Alienated by what some perceived as the East Coast elitism and neglect of the American Historical Association, midwestern scholars formed the rival Mississippi Valley Historical Association in 1907. While the nucleus of the MVHA was state historical society administrators, they soon welcomed professors and secondary school teachers.[15] Like many of the organization's founders, Professor Clarence Alvord of the University of Illinois believed the AHA "underemphasized" the history of the American heartland. The AHA opposed formation of the new society, starting a feud that lasted a decade but was ultimately resolved. In the meantime, Alvord became editor of the society's new journal, the *Mississippi Valley Historical Review,* founded in 1913. He referred to its readership as "the fraternity of western historians" and began to print a large replica of a steamboat on the cover.[16]

Frederick Jackson Turner ably outlined "The Significance of the Mississippi Valley in American History" in a 1908 keynote speech before the new organization. Turner's talk, subsequently published in the *Proceedings of the Mississippi Valley Historical Association, 1909–1910,* and as a chapter of his anthology *The Frontier in American History* (1920), is the smartest overview of the subject ever written. Turner had and has many critics,[17] and it is true that Turner produced only three books during his career, one of them a collection of essays. Folktales among historians telling how Turner wrote many of the latter essays on board railroad trains en route to meetings where he was to give the dinner address are unproven (though Mark Twain might have approved of this kind of recycling). Indeed, Turner had worked

15. John R. Wunder, "The Founding Years of the OAH," *OAH Newsletter* 34 (November 2006), 1, 6, 8.
16. Ibid.; Kammen, "The Mississippi Valley Historical Association, 1907–1952," 17–19. Kammen downplays the enmity between the AHA and MVHA.
17. Richard Hofstadter, "Turner and the Frontier Myth," *American Scholar* 18 (Autumn 1949), 433–43; Patricia Nelson Limerick, Clyde Milner III, and Charles Rankin, eds., *Trails: Towards A New Western History* (Lawrence, Kans., 1991).

as a typesetter and newspaperman prior to his academic career, and on occasion he worked like a journalist. This is not necessarily a bad thing. Despite his failings, Frederick Jackson Turner continues to demand our attention.[18]

Turner's essay "The Significance of the Mississippi Valley in American History" is directly related to his seminal 1893 essay, "The Significance of the Frontier in American History." In that piece, Turner had turned the dominant historiographic paradigm—germ theory—on its head by arguing American culture was not determined by European roots ("germs") but rather was a unique result of the frontier experience. The frontier took newly arrived colonists and "Americanized" them—forcing them to learn Indian skills to adapt to a hostile environment or die. The result was a new, exceptional American character working "for good and for evil." According to Turner, the new frontier American was innovative, courageous, strong, democratic and egalitarian, and nationalistic. As for the "evil" to which Turner also alluded, the frontier simultaneously produced a culture that was violent, wasteful, itinerant, insolvent, and anti-intellectual.[19]

Turner believed the frontier was a process not a place, and that the frontier replicated itself each time Euro-Americans advanced into Indian Territory. Most of the examples from "The Significance of the Frontier in American History" are taken from the Mississippi River Valley. Born and raised in Portage, on the Wisconsin River, Turner saw the Mississippi Valley as a crucial frontier in converting Europeans and easterners into Americans.[20]

Turner's published Mississippi Valley speech provides an

18. Turner, "Significance of the Mississippi Valley in American History," 177–204; Wilbur Jacobs, foreword to *The Frontier in American History,* passim. As a graduate student, I heard several variants of what might be labeled the "Turner used dinner speeches written aboard trains for his books" tale type.
19. Frederick Jackson Turner, "The Significance of the Frontier in American History," in *Frontiers of Western History: Origins, Evolution, and Future of Western History,* ed. Michael Allen and Mary L. Hanneman (1998; repr. Boston, Mass., 2007), 38–39, 56. Opposing views are Hofstadter, "Turner and the Frontier Myth," and Limerick et al., *Trails,* passim.
20. Turner, "The Significance of the Frontier in American History," passim.

outline for an interdisciplinary study of the Great Valley. He begins in a politic way, noting, "Already our eastern colleagues are aware" of the Mississippi Valley Historical Association's members' important work in researching "movement of population, diplomacy, politics, economic development, [and] social structure" of the trans-Appalachian West. Typical of his generation, he dismissed Mound Builders and Indians as "primitive" and "savage peoples," and one can search in vain for the female pronoun in the essay. Turner's main interest in African Americans is slavery's role as a catalyst for antebellum territorial debates, especially over the Louisiana Purchase. Yet, judged by the standards of the time, "The Significance of the Mississippi Valley in American History" is a progressive call for an interdisciplinary cultural history of this geographic region. "The Mississippi Valley," Turner concludes, "has furnished a new social order to America."[21]

During the twentieth century, journalists and creative nonfiction authors produced books about selected aspects of the Mississippi River Valley.[22] One of the most important accomplishments was the Rivers of America Series. With the support and encouragement of Frederick Jackson Turner, the novelist and poet Constance Lindsay Skinner first conceived and edited the Rivers of America Series in the 1930s. Skinner believed "the American nation came to birth upon the rivers" and had evolved in its myriad river valleys. During an astounding press run that spanned the years 1937 to 1974, Farrar and Rinehart and its corporate successors contracted authors to produce sixty titles, each devoted to an important American river. Skinner and her colleagues left the student of the Mississippi Valley a treasure trove.[23]

21. Turner, "Significance of the Mississippi Valley in American History," 177–80, 204. For examples of Turner's advanced, interdisciplinary thinking, see Frederick Jackson Turner, "The Significance of History," in *History, Frontier, and Section: Three Essays by Frederick Jackson Turner,* ed. Martin Ridge (Albuquerque, N.Mex., 1993), 46–47, 50, 56. See also Michael Allen, "The New Western History Stillborn," *Historian* 57 (Fall 1994), 201–208.
22. John T. Flanagan, "Middlewestern Regional Literature," in *Research Opportunities in American Cultural History,* ed. John Francis McDermott (Lexington, Ky., 1961), 124–39.
23. Constance Lindsay Skinner Induction File, National Rivers Hall of Fame, National Rivers

Meanwhile, academic writers pursued related work. Turner's thesis combined with creation of the Mississippi Valley Historical Association and the further professionalization of historians to foster hundreds of focused scholarly articles and books set in the Mississippi Valley. Nearly all of them sprang from doctoral dissertations about exploration, diplomacy, military, political, social, and cultural history within the Great Valley. These authors include Clarence Alvord, Milo Quaife, Arthur Preston Whitaker, Thomas Perkins Abernethy, Archer Hulbert, and Leland D. Baldwin (to name a very few), who trained a subsequent generation that included John D. Barnhart, R. Carlyle Buley, Ray Allen Billington, Merle Curti, Thomas D. Clark, Vernon Carstensen, and, later, Martin Ridge, Malcolm J. Rohrbough, and others.[24]

In the 1970s, following the name change of the Mississippi Valley Historical Association, new social historians brought a different methodology and ideology to the study of the Mississippi Valley. Uninterested in cultural geography and exceptionalism, they produced scores of works focused on race, class, gender, and environment in the Mississippi River Valley. Here, the names Daniel Usner, Richard White, John Mack Faragher, William Cronon, Stephen Aaron, Tom Buchanan, and John Seelye come to mind.[25]

Surveying this vast body of literature, one is struck by the fact that, of the hundreds of monographs about the Mississippi Valley, all but a dozen avoid synthesis and instead focus on specific topics within Mississippi Valley history. And of those dozen books that take a sweeping view, nearly all were written in the middle and late nineteenth century.[26]

Museum, Dubuque, Iowa; Joel L. Samuels, "Chronological Bibliography of *Rivers of America Series,*" William J. Peterson Collection, Charles C. Meyers Library, University of Dubuque, Dubuque, Iowa. While a few credentialed academics authored works in the series (e.g., Thomas D. Clark, *The Kentucky* [1942]), the editors purposely chose journalists (e.g., Hodding Carter, *The Lower Mississippi* [1942]), novelists (e.g., Richard Bissell, *The Monongahela* [1952]), and poets (e.g., Edgar Lee Masters, *The Sangamon* [1942]).

24. Lauck, "Prairie Historians," 137–73; Kammen, "Mississippi Valley Historical Association, 1907–1952," passim.
25. George E. Webb, "Western History: A Historiographical Introduction and Analysis," in Allen and Hanneman, *Frontiers of Western History,* 15–21.

With this historiographical context in mind, and in the second decade of a new century, and amid the work of a new generation of American historians, it is time to return to the idea of the Mississippi Valley as a cultural hearth and a major force in the creation of American civilization. Fortunately, I am not alone in recognizing this need. Robert D. Kaplan spotlights the crucial role of the Mississippi Valley to America in *Earning the Rockies: How Geography Shapes America's Role in the World* (2017). Jon Lauck's books *The Lost Region: Toward a Revival of Midwestern History* (2013) and *From Warm Center to Ragged Edge: The Erosion of Midwestern Literary and Historical Regionalism, 1920–1965* (2017) have combined with the work of others to revive the scholarly study of the upper half of the Great Valley. The Midwestern History Association formed in 2014, and dozens of historians have answered Lauck's call in conference panels, dedicated conferences, scholarly journals, and *Finding a New Midwestern History,* edited by Jon Lauck, Gleaves Whitney, and Joe Hogan (2018). This book is my contribution to that effort.[27]

In planning how to write about the Mississippi Valley, I have heeded the pitfalls inherent in trying to do it all (like Flint, Hosmer, and Walker) or focusing on isolated topics (like the new social historians). I am drawn to authors who paint a broad picture through use of carefully selected and representative vignettes ("histories"). Henry Lewis did this, and I believe this is what Mark Twain might have accomplished in *Life on the Mississippi.* In *Father Mississippi* (1927), Lyle Saxon uses the selected vignette methodology, and in *Look Down That Winding River: An Informal Portrait of the Mississippi* (1973), Ben Lucien Burman, an author who devoted his career to writing about

26. Exceptions are Marquis Childs's pithy polemic, *Mighty Mississippi* (New York, 1982), and Paul Schneider's eco-history, *Ole Man River: The Mississippi River in North American History* (New York, 2014).

27. Robert D. Kaplan, *Earning the Rockies: How Geography Shapes America's Role in the World* (New York, 2017); Jon Lauck, *The Lost Region: Toward a Revival of Midwestern History* (Iowa City, Iowa, 2013); Lauck, *From Warm Center to Ragged Edge: The Erosion of Midwestern Literary and Historical Regionalism, 1920–1965* (Iowa City, Iowa, 2017); Lauck, "Why the Midwest Matters," *Midwest Quarterly* 54, no. 2 (Winter 2013), 165–85; Lauk, Gleaves Whitney, and Joe Hogan, eds., *Finding a New Midwestern History* (Lincoln, Nebr., 2018). See www.midwesternhistory.com.

Mississippi Valley folk, paints a similarly evocative portrait of river life.[28]

My own hero is Daniel Boorstin, a distinguished University of Chicago professor and Librarian of Congress, who used selected histories to portray American civilization in his Pulitzer Prize–winning trilogy, *The Americans.* Although *The Americans* is not a Mississippi Valley work (though it lingers in the Great Valley in portions of volume 2), Boorstin uses an interdisciplinary case study method to artistic ends, painting a word picture of the history of American culture. No one can ever hope to replicate Boorstin's work, but he inspires the effort. In a related vein, I have been strongly influenced by two historians whose work offers methods for writing geographically based historical narrative. Walter Prescott Webb's *Great Plains* (1931) and Fernand Braudel's *Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II* (1972) successfully explore American and European history through the lens of cultural geography.[29]

In this book, I have combined forty-eight histories of the Mississippi Valley. It is an interdisciplinary work with chapters that proceed more or less chronologically and are organized around areas of study—nature and the environment, history, economics, folklore, popular culture, literature and the arts, movies, and music. Within the chapters are topics ranging from the natural world, to Mound Builders and Indians, to Frances Wright and General U. S. Grant, to postbellum Redeemers and Black Republican congressmen, to Kate Chopin, to Thomas Hart Benton, to Harry Truman, to blues, gospel, and country musicians. There will no doubt be questions and disagreements about the particular individuals and topics I have chosen to

28. Lyle Saxon, *Father Mississippi* (New York, 1927); Ben Lucien Burman, *Look Down That Winding River: An Informal Portrait of the Mississippi* (New York, 1973).

29. Daniel Boorstin, *The Americans: The Colonial Experience* (New York, 1958), *The Americans: The National Experience* (New York, 1965), and *The Americans: The Democratic Experience* (New York, 1973); Walter Prescott Webb, *The Great Plains* (Boston, 1931); Fernand Braudel, *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II* (New York, 1972). Frederick Jackson Turner wrote, "What the Mediterranean Sea was to the Greeks … [the] Great West has been to the eastern United States." Quoted in Jacobs, foreword to *Frontier in American History,* xii.

portray. I tried to find interesting stories reflective of larger themes and trends within each chapter's area of study. There are other stories I might have told, and stories that other writers would have chosen. Some might eschew biography, but I was drawn to the stories of individuals in the Mississippi Valley.

A few times I have wandered outside the Mississippi Valley—a little east of the Appalachian crest and west of the 98th meridian—to tell stories linked to the valley's history and culture. The Rocky Mountain trappers might seem a world apart from the Great Valley, but they descend from Appalachian mountain men, and Saint Louis was their mecca. Jews in Atlanta, Georgia, share a history and culture with their brethren in New Orleans, Natchez, and Nashville. Mount Airy, North Carolina, the inspiration for *The Andy Griffith Show*'s Mayberry, lies slightly east of the Appalachians, but the show's folkways and values strongly resonate farther west. The same connections apply to the North Carolinian Junior Johnson and the Alabamian Kenny Stabler—heroes of NASCAR (stock car) racing and Southeastern Conference college football. The movie *Smokey and the Bandit* ends in Georgia only after Burt Reynolds, Sally Field, Jerry Reed, and Jackie Gleason have raced from Texarkana across the lower Mississippi Valley to get there. Mississippi Valley food and drink customs have worked their way east (and west) as well.

The book ends in the 1960s and '70s, but there is no exact end date. The last chapter tells the story of Bob Dylan's recording sessions in Nashville, Tennessee, Muscle Shoals, Alabama, and New Orleans, Louisiana. I also examine the birth of rock-and-roll music, the civil rights movement, the demise of the segregationist wing of the Democratic Party, and Ronald Reagan's path from Dixon, Illinois, to the presidency. But the further I moved into a world I have experienced during my own lifetime, the warier I became about my ability to write about it. The late Murray Morgan, a beloved local historian of Tacoma, Washington (where I teach), often joked that he ended his *Puget's Sound: A Narrative of Tacoma and the Southern Sound* (1979) in the year 1916 because that was when he was born. Actually Murray Morgan's method is a pretty good one, and, while I lack his will

power, I have tried to avoid the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. I leave it to other writers to explore the impact of Louisiana's Cancer Alley, the environmental movement, the emergent Sun Belt and new Republican South, New Orleans hip-hop music, and many, many other important modern Mississippi Valley topics.

While I have done archival research and use traditionally published and online firsthand sources, I rely heavily on secondary sources. For the latter, I have consulted recent scholarship, but have concluded that in many (not all) instances the older histories remain the best works available. In chapters about the arts (literature, movies, music, paintings, etc.) and popular culture, I rely much more heavily on the actual works than the analyses by contemporary art and literary critics. Although I do analyze movies, songs, and books, I am most interested in telling the stories of the artists who created them and retelling the stories those artists told in their work.

I wrote the basic outline for this book when I was a young man. In 1974, I presented it as a prospectus for a master's thesis to Harry Fritz at the University of Montana, and he just smiled good-naturedly and set me to the task of researching the Federalists and the West. A few years later, at the University of Washington, Seattle, Bill Rorabaugh also smiled, informed me I was proposing the kind of book someone writes when they are around 60 years old, and set me to work on a social history of flatboatmen. Well, fellows, forty years later, here it is.

In concluding, I would like to turn to the field of biology. In studying the Mississippi Valley, it is necessary to begin by studying the natural world, the plants and animals that populate its ecosystem. I believe this because of the way I came to study the place. I was a stranger, one who had grown up in the semiarid foothills (the Columbia Plateau) of eastern Washington State. I was twenty-four years old when I entered the Mississippi Valley for the first time in my life. One summer day in 1975, I hitchhiked south from Minneapolis–Saint Paul and then east on I-40. Crossing Iowa heading for Davenport and the Quad Cities, I was struck by the mysterious land in which I found myself. I

was moved by the landscape, lush vegetation, and overwhelming humidity. For an eastern Washington boy, the first sight of fireflies at dusk on the Mississippi was unforgettable.

About thirty years prior, Jack Kerouac had viewed the Mississippi River for the first time at the Quad Cities. In *On the Road,* Kerouac writes,

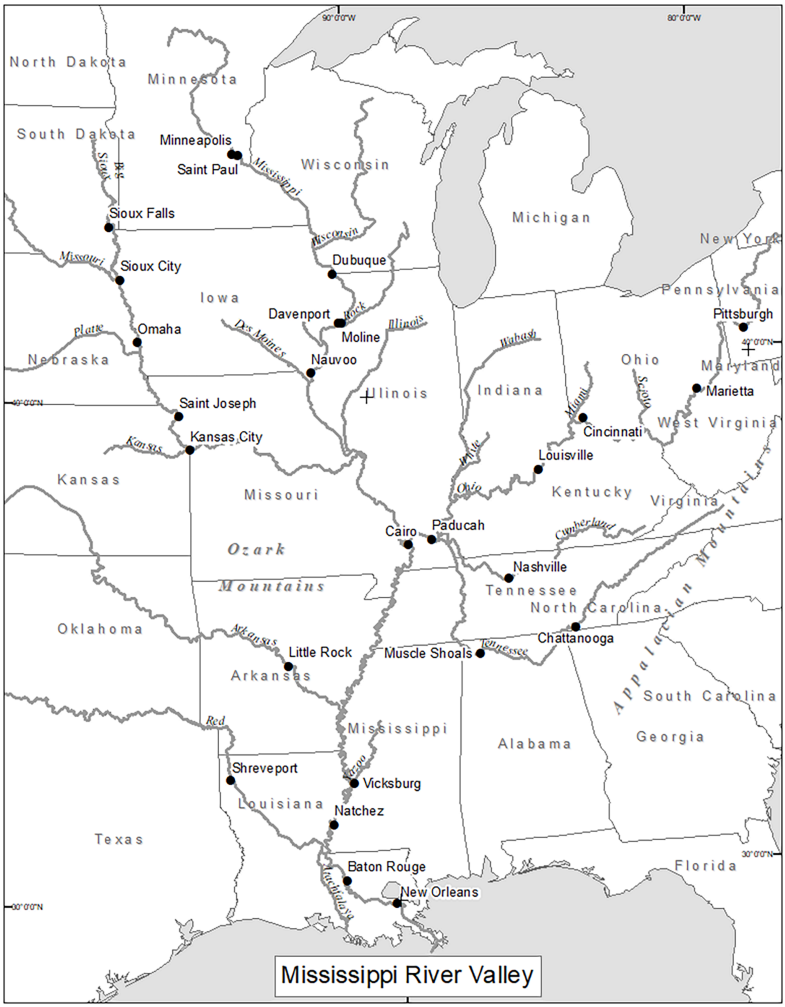
> I took over the wheel and … drove clear through the rest of Illinois to Davenport, Iowa, via Rock Island. And here for the first time in my life I saw my beloved Mississippi, dry in the summer haze, low water, with its big rank smell that smells like the raw body of America itself because it washes it up.[30]

More than one hundred and seventy years ago, two religious prophets spoke of their Mississippi Valley homeland. The first was Tenskwatawa, the Shawnee prophet and brother of Tecumseh. He experienced religious trances and visions. He called for a return to the ways of the Ohio Valley wilderness during his fight to save his beloved homeland from the Euro-American advance.[31] One of those Euro-Americans, the Latter-day Saints prophet Joseph Smith, Jr., traveled west from upper New York state and Ohio, to Independence, Missouri, and Nauvoo, Illinois. In the 1830s and 1840s, Smith told his followers that the vast and fertile Mississippi Valley was the new Zion, a land to which Jesus Christ would one day return.[32]

These men evocatively described the spiritual forces of the land and culture of the Mississippi River Valley. Yet their words are no more powerful than those of the unlikely hero of a novel set before the Civil War, an illiterate boy who grew up in a Missouri village a few hundred miles north of Saint Louis. Sailing south on the great river on a log raft, helping his friend, a slave named Jim, escape to freedom, lying on his back, gazing up at the stars, swimming and fishing, Huckleberry Finn was also awed by the Mississippi River's power and beauty. In words

30. Jack Kerouac, *On the Road* (1955; repr. New York, 1958), 14.
31. R. David Edmunds, *The Shawnee Prophet* (Lincoln, Nebr., 1983). See chapter 1, this work.
32. Richard L. Bushman, *Joseph Smith, Rough Stone Rolling: A Cultural History of Mormonism's Founder* (New York, 2005), 161–65, 221–22. See chapter 1, this work.

that are strong because they are spare, Huck recalled that drifting down the "big river" made him feel "kind of solemn." The Mississippi was—and is—"awful still and grand."[33]



Mississippi River Valley map, by Tom Carlson.

33. Twain, *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, 11, 55, 96.

PROLOG: LOOK DOWN THAT WINDING RIVER

> In *my universe* of America, the deer runs free, and the Hunter [is] free forever… America will always be my land. I never close my eyes without travelling thousands of miles along our noble streams; and traversing our noble forests. The voice of the thrush and the rumbling noise of the Alligator are still equally agreeable to my sense of recollection.
>
> John James Audubon (1827)[1]

Between 1808 and 1843, the ornithologist and artist John James Audubon traversed the farthest reaches of the Mississippi River Valley, from the headwaters of the Ohio River, to the headwaters of the Missouri, to the Mississippi's mouth draining into the Gulf of Mexico.[2] Although Audubon sought to publish and sell illustrated books of North American birds and mammals, money-making was not the sole motive for his odyssey. His aims were varied and reflected a strong passion for traveling, seeking adventures, hunting, studying birds and mammals, and depicting them in narrative prose and art.

John James Audubon was born in 1785 in Santo Domingo (Haiti), the illegitimate son of John Audubon, a French naval captain and merchant, and his French chambermaid, an

1. John James Audubon to Lucy Bakewell Audubon, Nov. 25, 1827, quoted in Daniel Justin Herman, *Hunting and the American Imagination* (Washington, D.C., 2001), 164. The prolog's title is borrowed from Ben Lucien Burman's *Look Down That Winding River: An Informal Portrait of the Mississippi* (New York, 1973).
2. Thomas Ruys Smith, *River of Dreams: Imagining the Mississippi before Mark Twain* (Baton Rouge, La., 2007), 112–14; Ella M. Foshay, *John James Audubon* (New York, 1997).

"extraordinarily beautiful Woman" named Jeanne Rabine. Jeanne died six months after John James was born; in 1791, he, his father, and his sister were driven from Santo Domingo by a slave rebellion. Captain Audubon, a wealthy man his son remembered as "quick, industrious, and Soberly inclined," resettled the family in the French town of Nantes. There, he instilled in young John James his own love of nature, especially bird-watching. But the chaos of Revolutionary France and rise of Napoleon worried Captain Audubon. Fear of military conscription, John James remembered, "determined my Father on sending me to *America* [to] Live on the *Mill Grove* Farm," Captain Audubon's estate near Philadelphia. In 1803, John James Audubon arrived in America and began what would become a rapid and total acculturation to the values, ambitions, patriotism, and optimism of the young frontier republic.[3]

John James Audubon married Lucy Bakewell in 1808, and the two immediately headed southwest aboard an Ohio River keelboat, seeking their fortune in the trans-Appalachian West. Over the next decade Audubon managed to lose large sums of money in the general store business and other ventures in Louisville and Henderson, Kentucky, and Shawneetown, Illinois. Although one traveler insisted that "science and literature had not found one friend" in Louisville, Audubon continued to study and sketch birds, a hobby begun in Pennsylvania. Soon after the Panic of 1819 briefly landed Audubon in jail for debt, he left his young family behind and sailed aboard a southbound flatboat. "Ever since [I was a] Boy," he wrote, "I had an astonishing desire to see much of the world & particularly to Acquire a true knowledge of the Birds of North America."[4]

From 1820 to 1821, Audubon traversed the lower Mississippi River Valley, writing an elaborate journal, observing and recording natural and sociological phenomena, and bird-

3. John James Audubon, *Mississippi River Journal, Writings and Drawings* (1826; repr. New York, 1999), 28–30.

4. Ibid., 31–32; Lawrence Hott, dir., "John James Audubon: Drawn from Nature," *American Masters* (Oley, Pa., 2007), DVD. See Public Broadcasting System, https://www.pbs.org/wnet/americanmasters/john-james-audubon-drawn-from-nature/106/, accessed Oct. 28, 2017.

watching. Settling in New Orleans with his reunited family, from 1821 to 1826 he created and attempted to market a portfolio of beautiful and detailed drawings of the birds he studied. His media were mixed; he drew in paint, chalk, lead, and graphite. Each bird appeared in a scene that reflected the surrounding environment and often involved some action, like hunting prey. Observers remarked on the "personalities" of birds reflected in Audubon's drawings. Failing to find a publisher in America, in 1824 the thirty-nine-year-old artist sailed to Europe.[5]

During his remarkable three-year tour of England, Scotland, and France, Audubon created a minor sensation. He quickly learned, and took advantage, of Europeans' romantic fascination with the American frontier and folk heroes like Daniel Boone, Davy Crockett, Andrew Jackson, and the half-horse, half-alligator Mississippi rivermen. In an 1826 self-portrait, Audubon sketched himself wearing a fur cap, long leather hunting shirt and high-topped moccasin footwear ("leatherstockings"), with a belted tomahawk and hunting rifle in hand. Like Boone, he wore his hair shoulder-length and combed it through with bear grease. Audubon certainly held legitimate claim to such a mystique; he was a skilled hunter (he used bird carcasses as painting models) and had sailed the length of the Ohio and lower Mississippi aboard flatboats and keelboats. But Audubon also had a penchant for the dramatic, and he knew how to tell a good story.[6]

John James Audubon's artistic talent and life story combined with his ability to market the frontier myth to gain him a publisher for the hugely successful *Birds of America* (1828–38). This was followed by his *Ornithological Biography* (1831–39), and *The Vivaporous Quadrupeds of North America* (1845-48), establishing Audubon as a premier American zoologist, artist, hunter, and frontier folk hero.

Audubon's blending of science, art, and folklore reflects the key inspirations of his life and career. Although he is arguably the Mississippi Valley's greatest naturalist, he was not alone in his desire to portray the Great Valley's environment. Scores of

5. Hott, "John James Audubon"; Foshay, *John James Audubon,* 69–70.
6. Foshay, *John James Audubon,* 70, 85; Herman, *Hunting and the American Imagination,* 163–67.

his colleagues (and adversaries) also roamed the early trans-Appalachian frontier and sailed the Ohio, Missouri, and upper and lower Mississippi Rivers and their tributaries. Together they recorded and preserved oral, written, and drawn images of the topography, flora, fauna, and climate. Their images provide, as it were, a bird's-eye view of the Mississippi Valley.

In its widest definable extent, the Mississippi Valley is that region of North America bounded by the Appalachians to the east and the Rocky Mountains to the west. As a specific geographic culture, however, the Mississippi Valley is that region typified by the deciduous forests, valleys, prairies, and floodplains extending west from the Appalachians to the 98th meridian, where America's semiarid Great Plains commence. The Mississippi River itself is born at Lake Itasca, in north-central Minnesota, and is fed by the Ohio and the Missouri. The Minnesota, Illinois, Des Moines, Yazoo, Arkansas, Ouachita, White, Red, and other rivers, and all of their tributaries, also feed the Father of Waters.[7]

Because of its vastness, we can best view the Mississippi Valley in increments, studying Audubon's and other travelers' descriptions of the Ohio Valley, the upper Mississippi, the Missouri River Valley, and, finally, the lower Mississippi to the Gulf of Mexico.

In the Mississippi Valley's northeastern corner, the Ohio River is created by the Monongahela and Allegheny Rivers, and joined by the Scioto, Kentucky, Miami, Tennessee, Wabash, Cumberland, and Tennessee, among others. The Ohio River flows southwesterly 1,100 miles, from the Appalachians towards its confluence with the Mississippi. The Ohio River Valley (like the Missouri River Valley) is a major geographic component of the Mississippi River Valley.[8]

Early nineteenth-century naturalists saw marked changes as

7. J. W. Foster, *The Mississippi Valley: Its Physical Geography, Including Sketches of the Topography, Botany, Climate, Geology, and Mineral Resources; and of the Progress of the Development in Population and Material Wealth* (Chicago, Ill., 1869), passim. See also Christopher Morris, *The Big Muddy: An Environmental History of the Mississippi and Its Peoples from DeSoto to Katrina* (New York, 2012).
8. Foster, *Mississippi Valley,* 42–43.

they sailed down the Ohio—changes in topography, climate, plants, and animals. The river's beginnings are in the heavily forested foothills of the Appalachian Mountains, where Audubon described trees "hung with long and flowing festoons of different species of vines." Other travelers found this upper Ohio forest immense and dark, "like a sea of woods … as far as the eye can reach." The banks of the Ohio were covered with maples, oaks, hickory, and huge sycamores. One old sycamore's diameter was recorded at nineteen and a half feet (settlers reportedly used huge hollowed trees as grain bins and even shelters). Travelers were struck by the fragrant smells of locust, honeysuckle, herbs, and flowers. Winthrop Sargent, the first governor of Mississippi Territory, wrote of "shrubberies diffusing every species of perfume," the "fragrance of the woods," and "aromatically scented valleys."[9]

Naturalists and other travelers noted that the deep forest was devoid of underbrush and the forest floor bare of vegetation. The cause was the Indian practice of burning brush each year to make farming mulch, or to assist in clearing hunting and warfare grounds. Another result was that during the fall the upper Ohio was curtained by a shroud of smoke, a kind of pre-industrial air pollution. Audubon remembered "the Blood Red Raising Sun—and the Constant *Smokey* atmosphere," which had been ascribed to "Indians firing the Prairies of the West." Andrew Ellicott (a naturalist who also happened to be the American envoy to Spanish Natchez) described these "clouds of smoke," as did Audubon's ornithologist rival (and an amateur poet) Alexander Wilson:

> Red through smoky air the wading sun
> Sunk into fog ere half the day was done;
> The air was mild, the roads embrown'd and dry,
> Soft, meek-eyed Indian summer ruled the sky.[10]

9. Audubon quoted in Nancy Plain, *This Strange Wilderness: The Life and Art of John James Audubon* (Lincoln, Nebr., 2015), 32. Subsequent quotations in Ray Swick, "The Smoky Time: Ohio Frontier Valley," *History Today* 27 (April 1977), 235–37.
10. Audubon, *Mississippi River Journal,* 9; Ellicott and Wilson quoted in Swick, "Smoky Time," 238–39.

The Ohio Valley was home to myriad animal species and an abundant fishery. "Now and then a large catfish arose to the surface of the water," Audubon wrote. "Other fishes we heard uttering beneath our [boat] a rumbling voice" were "white perch." John May, a Boston entrepreneur and adventurer, complained the fish underneath his flatboat were so numerous and noisy they "frequently keep me awake half the night." Audubon also noted (and hunted) "foxes, Lynxes… Many Dears," and he "saw a Bear on a Sand Barr, had a great run after it—to no purpose." He wrote about "the Wolf," praising that animal's "strength, agility, and cunning."[11]

Of course, John James Audubon's main interest was birds, and he described numerous Ohio River species. In one twenty-four-hour period during October 1820, he noted, "Many Ducks, Several *Northern Divers* or Loons—some Cormorants, Many Crows … Pa[r]tridges … Ravens—Many Winter Hawks—some Red breasted Thrushes or Robins … 2 Pheasants … a Young Blackburnian Warbler—a Young Carolina Cucko[o]" and a "Bar[r]ed Owl." He especially admired turkeys, "one of the most interesting of the birds indigenous to the United States of America," and placed them first in his *Ornithological Biography.* He praised their "Great size and beauty."[12]

As the Ohio meanders southward, the hills and mountains subside and the river descends into prairies and flooded lowlands. Zadok Cramer, author of an early nineteenth-century travelers' guide called *The Navigator,* wrote that near the "Great Falls of the Ohio" (Louisville), "the low lands commence. The hills … now entirely disappear." The French scientist Constance F. Volney also described these swampy lowlands, bordered by "deep woods." Here, the river widens and increases its velocity as it prepares to enter the Mississippi. At the juncture of these two great rivers, on November, 17, 1820, Audubon wrote, "I took the

11. Audubon, *Mississippi River Journal,* 10–11, 17; Audubon, *Ornithological Biography,* 543; John May, *The Western Journals of John May, Ohio Company Agent and Business Adventurer,* ed. Dwight L. Smith (Cincinnati, Ohio, 1961), 63.
12. Audubon, *Mississippi River Journal,* 6-7; Audubon, *Ornithological Biography,* 195, 210–11.

Skiff and Went to the Mouth of the Ohio, and round the point up the Mississippi … I bid my Farewell to the Ohio at 2 o'clock."[13]

From its Lake Itasca source, the upper Mississippi River Valley differs in some respects from the Great Valley around and below Saint Louis, where the Mississippi is joined by the Missouri, Illinois, and Ohio Rivers. The upper Mississippi Valley still bears dramatic remnants of its glacial beginnings. During the great Ice Age, from approximately 75,000 to 12,000 BC, huge glaciers, 5,000 to 10,000 feet thick, covered North America. When the earth began to warm, around 12,000 BC, the glaciers slowly melted. Mastodons and mammoths roamed the plains abutting the receding glacial ice. Paleolithic hunters, the first humans in North America, inhabited these harsh plains.[14]

The melting glaciers formed lakes. Lake Agassiz, the largest of these, created and fed an enormous river that flowed south, carving out the Minnesota and upper Mississippi River Valleys; the Mississippi flows from Itasca into this valley at Saint Anthony's Falls. Joined by other glacial lakes and their rivers, the Mississippi River for 3,000 years carved the upper valley that is today lined by bluffs from two hundred to six hundred feet high. In fact, the original bluffs were twice that high; fully one-half of the original valley floor is now filled with rich silt left by the river's torrent.[15]

Flowing southward alongside towering bluffs, the upper Mississippi is narrower (only a few hundred yards wide in places), with a slower current than the lower Ohio, Missouri, and lower Mississippi. The channel held major navigation obstructions at the upper and lower rapids near modern-day Rock Island. Bluffs, forests, prairies, and marshes lined the river's banks. Winter weather reaches subzero temperatures, and the waters freeze over for weeks and months on end. Spring and

13. Zadok Cramer, *The Ohio and Mississippi Navigator* (Pittsburgh, Pa., 1802), 37; C. F. Volney, *A View of the Soil and the Climate of the United States*, trans. Charles Brockden Brown (1804; repr. New York, 1968), 31–32; Audubon, *Mississippi River Journal,* 21.
14. Ray Allen Billington, *Westward Expansion: A History of the American Frontier* (1949; repr. New York, 1957), 292–93; C. B. Walker, *The Mississippi Valley, and Prehistoric Events ...* (Burlington, Iowa, 1880), 27–54. See chapter 1, this work.
15. Walker, *Mississippi Valley,* 27–40; Foster, *Mississippi Valley,* 335–36.

autumn are relatively mild, but summers in the upper valley are hot and humid, with the heavy, late afternoon thundershowers that characterize the Mississippi Valley in general.[16]

John James Audubon sailed the upper Mississippi by both keelboat and steamboat. Although Audubon did not use the modern ornithological term "flyway," he knew the Mississippi Valley was a major migratory route for geese and other birds. He wrote, "The Canada Goose makes its first appearance in the western country, as well as along our Atlantic coast, from the middle of September to that of October, arriving in flocks composed of a few families." He continued,

> The flight of this species of Goose is firm, rather rapid and capable of being protracted to great extent… In rising from the water or from ground, they usually run a few feet with outspread wings; but when suddenly surprised and in full plumage, a single spring on their broad webbed feet is sufficient to enable them to get on wing.[17]

Audubon also studied and drew the "White-headed Eagle," a bird he observed along the upper Mississippi and throughout the Great Valley. He was awed by their huge, powerful wings, and strong, unequaled flight, and he praised their daring and "cool courage." While "descending the upper Mississippi" he commented on eagles' "audacity" in hunting. Waxing romantic, Audubon called this "noble bird … the remembrance of a great people living in a state of peaceful freedom":

> [P]ermit me to place you on the Mississippi, on which you may be floating gently along… The Eagle is seen perched, in an erect attitude, on the highest summit of the tallest tree by the margin of the broad stream. His glistening but stern eye looks over the vast expanse… Now is the moment to witness the display of the Eagle's powers.[18]

16. Foster, *Mississippi Valley,* 335–36; Audubon, *Ornithological Biography,* 547–50.
17. Audubon, *Ornithological Biography,* 369, 373–74.
18. Ibid., 238.

The Missouri River is born in the northern Rocky Mountains, where the Madison, Gallatin, and Jefferson Rivers (named for President Jefferson and his secretaries of state and treasury by the scouts Meriwether Lewis and William Clark) join together at Three Forks. From there, the Missouri flows southeast 2,540 miles through prairies to the humid climes of the Mississippi Valley heartland. Major rivers feeding the Missouri are the Milk, Yellowstone, Osage, Vermillion, Big and Little Sioux, and Platte, and these rivers and others are fed (and muddied) by many tributary streams. The Missouri's current is extremely swift (up to five miles per hour) and its lower portion is more difficult to navigate than even the lower Mississippi.[19]

Naturalists divide the Great Plains ecosystem into tall-grass and short-grass prairies (using the terms "plain" and "prairie" interchangeably). The short-grass prairies extend, approximately, from the foothills of the Rocky Mountains to the 98th meridian and constitute the semi-arid Plains. Audubon "cross[ed] … the wide Prairies" and steamed along the upper Missouri in researching *The Vivaporous Quadrupeds of North America.* His drawings and word-pictures portrayed the archetypal Plains creatures—grizzly bear, elk, antelope, beaver, wolf, coyote ("prairie wolves" to Audubon), fox, gopher and prairie dog, and, of course, American bison, the buffalo.[20] During Audubon's 1840s trip, the latter still flourished amid the abundant native grasses of the upper river valley and surrounding plains.

There is no exact place on the map where the short-grass prairie ends and tall grass begins, but the ecosystem undergoes marked change in and around the 98th meridian; by this point the elevation has fallen from 5,000 to 1,500 feet. It is here that one senses the beginnings of the Mississippi Valley's classic features—the rich, green, humid landscape that typifies America's heartland.[21]

19. William H. Goetzmann, *Exploration and Empire: The Explorer and the Scientist in the Winning of the American West* (New York, 1966), 5–10; Billington, *Westward Expansion,* 405–409.
20. Audubon, *Missouri River Journals,* 524, 553–749; George Page, dir., *Nature: The Land of the Eagle* (Alexandria, Va., 1991), VHS.

One of the most obvious signs that one has entered the Mississippi Valley is the appearance of fireflies. They are visible in small numbers in the eastern regions of the Dakotas, Nebraska, Kansas, Oklahoma, and Arkansas; they dramatically increase as one nears the Mississippi River. Of two thousand species of fireflies worldwide, three genera—*Photinus, Photuris,* and *Pyractomena*—light the skies of the Mississippi Valley with flashing green, yellow, and orange lights. Their "fire"—produced by a chemical reaction in the abdomen—helps them identify and choose mates.[22]

Missouri River travelers described mosquitoes (today we know the most common sub-species as *Aedes* and *Culex).* Some said mosquitoes were bigger and more plentiful on the upper Missouri, but they flourished throughout the valley. Young mosquitoes hatch from ten-day-old eggs laid at the edge of floodplains, and they can fly in intervals over a range of up to fifteen miles. Countless travelers complained of "myriads of mosquitoes and other insects"; Audubon recurrently describes "Musquitoes" as "quite troublesome." The Kentucky River flatboatman John G. Stuart claimed the Mississippi River mosquitoes were "almost twice as large as those in Kentucky." Also annoying were swarms of mayflies—also known as "fishflies," "sandbarflies," "shadflies," and, by the mid-nineteenth century, "Mormonflies."[23]

The meeting of the Missouri and the Mississippi forms an important geographic juncture. A few miles upriver from the Missouri's mouth, the Illinois also joins the Father of Waters.

The combining of these three rivers noticeably changes the width, depth, color, and current of the Mississippi River. The

21. Page, *Nature.*
22. Jessica Gorman, "Phenomena and Curiosities: Your Branch or Mine?" *Smithsonian* 36 (June 2005), 39–40. Fireflies mark only the western entry into the Mississippi Valley; they are common east of the Appalachians.
23. Audubon, *Mississippi River Journal,* 53; John G. Stuart, "A Journal: Remarks or Observations in a Voyage Down the Kentucky, Ohio, Mississippi Rivers, etc.," *Register of the Kentucky Historical Society* 50 (January, 1952), 19; Pamela Eyden, "Mayflies: Ancient Flash Mobs Seize the Day," *Big River Magazine* (July–August 2013), 62–63. The last term is apparently an insulting reference to the growing number of Mormons in the Mississippi Valley during the nineteenth century.

change is so significant that it marks the beginning of what river folk call the "lower Mississippi." As one sails southward, the high bluffs that characterize the upper river slowly (though never completely) decrease. With decreasing elevation, the banks abutting the river feature more floodplains, marshes, and willow rushes. The Mississippi continues to gather momentum as it rolls towards its juncture with the Ohio.

John James Audubon, like most river travelers and naturalists before and after him, took particular care in recording his entry from the Ohio into the waters of the lower Mississippi River. Here, "the Traveller enters a New World" that "awakes him to troubles and Difficulties unknown on the Ohio":

> The meeting of the Two Streams reminds me a Little of the Gentle Youth who Comes in the World, Spotless he presents himself, he is gradually drawn in to Thousands of Difficulties that Makes him wish to keep Apart, but at Last he is over done Mixed and Lost in the Vortex.[24]

For approximately nine hundred miles, from the confluence to New Orleans, the lower Mississippi River features sweeping floodplains, swampy lowlands, and a rich delta, interrupted only by a few significant rises at Chickasaw Bluff (Memphis), Walnut Hills (Vicksburg), the Natchez Bluff, and Baton Rouge. Near New Orleans, the valley literally becomes subtropical, as marshes become bayous and the river winds towards the Caribbean and Gulf of Mexico.[25]

Along the way, the river is rendered even more powerful by entry of the Yazoo, White, Red, Ouachita, and Arkansas tributaries. According to Zadok Cramer, the lower Mississippi was in places a mile wide and thirty to fifty feet deep. Naturalists and other river travelers were awed by the swift-moving (three to five miles per hour) and "remarkably crooked" river. They described scenes of "terrific grandeur" caused when "a mass of

24. Audubon, *Mississippi River Journal*, 20–21.
25. Michael Allen, "The Lower Mississippi in 1803: The Traveler's View," *Missouri Historical Review* 77 (April 1983), 253–71.

yellow muddy water" destroyed entire riverbanks and forests as it swept southward.[26]

The water was silty from the tons of rich, fine-grain sediment it carried. Although much of this sediment found its way to lower Louisiana and the Gulf of Mexico,[27] some was left along the way. From one hundred miles north of the Chickasaw Bluff to below Natchez, this thick deltaic sediment began to form what we know today as the Mississippi Delta of Tennessee, Arkansas, and Mississippi.

Climate changed too. Audubon described the high winds that swept the valley, impeding navigation. Above the Walnut Hills, winters could be as cold as the Ohio, upper Mississippi, and lower Missouri River Valleys. Freezing rain and sleet were common; the river did not freeze over, but sheets of ice could and did appear. Snow was recurrent above Chickasaw Bluff, and sometimes fell to the south. But with entry into the subtropics, winter weather markedly improved. Landing in Natchez in December of 1820, Audubon wrote, "The Naturalist will immediately remark [on] the General Mildness of the temperature" and the availability of fruits and vegetables not seen northward until "April and sometimes in May." Approaching New Orleans, the valley's heat and humidity were stifling. Here, thunderstorms became tropical storms, and on occasion, hurricanes rolled in from the Gulf of Mexico, wreaking havoc.[28]

Plants and trees grew even more prodigiously than in the upper Mississippi Valley. In the early 1800s, the French traveler M. Perrin du Lac described the Mississippi's shoreline between the confluence with the Ohio and the mouth of the Arkansas as an unbroken, wild, and immense forest. Some of the trees were coniferous (cedar and pine), but deciduous hickory, walnut, poplar, and oak were most abundant. To the south, Louisiana's

26. Zadok Cramer, *The Navigator* (1814; repr. Ann Arbor, Mich., 1966), 149; Andrew Ellicott, *The Journal of Andrew Ellicott* (1803; repr. Chicago, Ill., 1962), 119; Volney, *View of the Soil,* 342.

27. James M. Coleman, *Deltas: Process of Deposition and Models for Exploration* (Champaign, Ill., 1976), 25–26.

28. Ellicott, *Journal,* 26–27; Stuart, "Journal," 20; Audubon, *Mississippi River Journal,* 23, 60.

cypress-forested bayous were home to "almost impenetrable" canebrakes. Audubon wrote, "The Woods here have a new and very romantic Appearance—the Plant Called Pamitta [palmetto] raises promiscuously through them [and Spanish] moss on every tree darkens the undergrowth." This verdant wilderness formed a habitat for "hundreds of Beautifully Plumed inhabitants."[29]

"The *Intrepid Hawks* are extremely plenty along the Banks of the Mississippi," Audubon observed. He also saw and studied the "Turkey Buzzard … Sand Hill Cranes—Malards—Crows … Winter Wrens—Meadow Larks—Partridges, Red Winged Starlings—and Vast Numbers of Swamp Sparrows in the High Mississippi grass, Parokeets—Golden Crowned Wrens … Carolina Wrens and Cardinals." In the butcher stands of New Orleans's Market Square, Audubon found "much and great variety of game," including teals, widgeons, "Snow Geese," bluebirds, and a "Barred Owl."[30]

The bayou country was full of reptiles. Water moccasins thrived, and in 1820 Audubon drew an image of a rattlesnake measuring "5 7/12 feet Weighed 6 ¼ lb had 10 rattles." Exploring the swampland around New Orleans, he observed that "several toads were hop[p]ing about … [and] on turning a Dead Tree over, we found several Lizards, who moved with great Vigour—." Throughout his Mississippi Valley wanderings, Audubon sighted turtles—"green" and "snapping" (he was primarily interested in their status as a food source for large predator birds). Frogs abounded, ranging in size from small cricket and green frogs to huge bullfrogs. Across the valley's marshy lowlands, bullfrogs (*Rana catesbeiana)* measured eight inches in length, often weighing about a pound and enjoying an average lifespan of eight years. Aggressive predators, bullfrogs dined on insects, smaller frogs and toads, and even turtles, mice, and ducklings.[31]

Larger beasts of prey made the lower Mississippi Valley their home. On a single outing, Audubon sighted a "Cougar, called

29. M. Perrin du Lac, *Travels through the Two Louisianas* ... (London, 1807), 285–88; Stuart, "Journal," 19; Audubon, *Mississippi River Journal,* 67.
30. Audubon, *Mississippi River Journal,* 49, 51, 55, 73–74.
31. Ibid., 123, 68.

here a *Painter* [Panther]" and noted, "Bears and Wolfs are plenty." Like many naturalists, he was most fascinated by alligators. Local swamp hunters told him gators "could be seen every few day[s] … they are killed here for the Skin… They move slow on the ground—but swiftly in the Water." One hunter told Audubon he owed the gators "a Grudge for killing an excellent hunting Dog."[32]

Despite being surrounded by a diverse ecosystem with exotic flora and fauna he had never before witnessed, John James Audubon remained fascinated by the lowly catfish. Common throughout the entire extent of the Mississippi River Valley, catfish somehow possessed a mystique rivaling the bald eagle and alligator. References to catfish pepper the journals of naturalists and other travel writers. And hunters like Audubon ranked catfish among their prized quarry:

> I was taken off Suddenly a few Minutes ago to take a Cat Fish of[f] our line, I had some trouble for a few Moments but having drowned him put my Left Hand in his Geels and hauled it in the skiff—it weighed 64 ½ lb and Looked fat—Killed It by stabbing it about the center of its head… I would be Inclined that, from *shape, Size, Color* & habits so different to those of the Cat Fish Caught in the River Ohio the present One is a different *Species*.[33]

The tropical world of the Caribbean beckoned. The environmental transition had, of course, also caused a transition of human culture; ethnicity, language, food, architecture, and folk culture all began to reflect diverse Caribbean influences. While Saint Louis, Natchez, and New Orleans certainly shared similarities, their differences reflected the changing ecosystem. Sailing south, all travelers were struck by this steamy new world of bayous, palm trees, and alligators.[34]

In its final hundred miles, the Mississippi meanders through the vast swamplands of southern Louisiana to the Gulf of Mexico. Du Lac described this land as unfit for agriculture because it was inundated by the river. In fact, the river met, and

32. Ibid., 55.
33. Ibid., 38–39.
34. Allen, "Lower Mississippi in 1803," 270–71.

was simultaneously inundated by, the salt waters of the Gulf. Cramer described this land, "chiefly covered with reeds, having little or no timber," as a veritable "morass, almost impassable for man or beast." Nearing the ocean, the Mississippi ceases to be a single identifiable river. It branches into riverine "passes," each flowing along a different course into the Gulf of Mexico.[35]

On the Gulf Coast in 1837, John James Audubon wrote, "My Spirits are not above par." His melancholy, however, was an aberration, a temporary setback. Always ready for another adventure, and anxious to study and depict the natural world of North America, Audubon remained hopeful. "Tomorrow," he wrote, "I expect to be cured, by a dance over the Waters of the Mexican Gulph—and then all will be right again."[36]

35. du Lac, *Travels through the Two Louisianas,* 101; Cramer, *Navigator,* 336–37.
36. John James Audubon to John Bachman, Feb. 24, 1837, in *Letters of John James Audubon, 1826–1840,* ed. Howard Corning, 2 vols. (1930; repr. Boston, Mass., 1939), 2:839–40.

Chapter 1

THE ANTEBELLUM VALLEY

> To the south and west, stretch the vast waters of the Mississippi… There is something unspeakably sublime in the vast extent of earthly domain that here opens to the mind's eye; and truly sublime is the contemplation, when we consider the life and energy with which it is fast teeming. An industrious and enlightened people, laying in the wilderness the foundations of commonwealth after commonwealth, based on justice and the immutable rights of man! What heart so cold as to contemplate this unmoved!
>
> Fanny Wright, *Views of Society and Manners in America* (1821)[1]

At 1,112 pages, the Reverend Timothy Flint's *Condensed Geography and History of the Western States, or the Mississippi Valley* (1828) hardly seems "condensed," and one wonders how many pages Flint might have judged adequate for an unabridged edition. Published in two volumes, Flint's magnum opus mirrored the interdisciplinary scope and methods of "gentlemen scholars" and early national American men of letters. Beginning with the geology, geography, and biology of the natural world, Flint shifts to Indians and early European exploration, and then gives a thorough recounting of the history of the early American republic's expansion into the Mississippi Valley. By page 447, near the end of volume 1 of the *Condensed Geography and History,* Flint has arrived at Andrew Jackson's victory over the British at

1. Frances Wright, *Views of Society and Manners in America* (1821; repr. Cambridge, Mass., 1963), 135.

the Battle of New Orleans, fought only thirteen years prior. The remainder of volume 1, and all of volume 2, contains chapters devoted to each of the ten new Mississippi Valley states, plus Arkansas Territory, organized around the same all-encompassing interdisciplinary categories. It is "indisputable," Flint writes in the preface, "that a compendious Geography and History … of a country, already containing four millions of inhabitants, was needed… Whether this book in any measure supplies the desideratum," Flint leaves to the judgment of "the western people [who] are both warm hearted and in the main just. They will not deny him the merit of industry and good intentions, if nothing more."[2]

The Reverend Timothy Flint (1780–1840) was one of a breed of New England Yankees drawn to the trans-Appalachian West during the decades following the American Revolution. Born into a large North Reading, Massachusetts, farming family, Flint was a sickly child who suffered ill health throughout his life. He decided on a career in the church, graduated from Harvard in 1800, and traveled west, preaching the gospel throughout the Mississippi Valley from 1815 to 1825. Though Flint and his congregants soon concluded he made a poor minister, the knowledge he gained from his travels enabled him to write a popular memoir, *Recollections of the Last Ten Years* (1826). The next decade saw Flint, based in both Cincinnati, Ohio, and Alexandria, Louisiana, pursue a successful writing career, producing essays, novels, and histories on frontier topics at a remarkable pace. Amid all of these projects, he somehow found time to write and publish *A Condensed History and Geography of the Western States, or The Mississippi Valley,* and its sequel, *The History and Geography of the Mississippi Valley* (1832).[3]

Considering his poor health, Timothy Flint put in an extraordinary amount of time and effort at research and writing.

2. Timothy Flint, *A Condensed Geography and History of the Western States, or the Mississippi Valley*, 2 vols. (Cincinnati, Ohio, 1828), 1:15.

3. James K. Folsom, *Timothy Flint* (New York, 1965), 7–9, 17–47; John Ervin Kirkpatrick, *Timothy Flint: Pioneer, Missionary, Author, Editor, 1780–1840* (Cleveland, Ohio, 1911), 15–34, passim; Thomas Ruys Smith, *River of Dreams: Imagining the Mississippi before Mark Twain* (Baton Rouge, La., 2007), 60–61.

He noted that he "put his hand to the plough" for the *Condensed Geography and History* by examining nearly all available primary and secondary accounts and conducting research in Cincinnati, Saint Louis, and New Orleans. Flint was one of the first American scholars to systematically mine data from United States Census records. Despite arduous formal research, Flint said much of what he knew about the Mississippi Valley came from "devot[ing] the best portion of twelve years to exploring the western country[,] … travers[ing] the great valley, in all its chief directions." "On foot and alone," Flint had wandered and sailed "the Mississippi and its tributary waters." He was particularly struck by "the physical aspect of the country, its amenity, beauty, fertility, and resources… The features of nature have received from their Divine Author the impress of his own immutability."[4]

Although "Man, his works, his ambitions, his hopes and fears are transitory" compared to God's nature, Timothy Flint devoted most of his *Condensed Geography and History* to the story of man in the Great Valley. His itinerant ministry had "brought him in contact with all classes of [the valley's] people, and all its aspects of society," and made him one of America's first social and economic historians. Modern students of Ohio and Mississippi rivermen have turned to Flint to document the lives of these inarticulate, early American frontiersmen and their role in the nation's economic growth. "Every principal farmer, along the great water courses, builds, and sends to New Orleans the produce of his farm in a flat boat," Flint wrote, and thus "a great proportion of the males of the West … have experienced that expansion of mind, which can not fail to be produced by traversing long distances of country, and viewing different forms of nature and society," from Pittsburgh, to the Missouri, to New Orleans. Flint was a product of his time and place, and his writings reflect early national prejudices. He describes Indians as primitives whose extirpation is foreordained, and, although many Yankees opposed slavery, Flint seems to accept, but not applaud, the South's peculiar institution.[5]

4. Flint, *Condensed Geography and History*, 1:10, 14.
5. Ibid., 10, 14, 213; Michael Allen, *Western Rivermen, 1763–1861: Ohio and Mississippi Boatmen*

Between 1826 and 1833, Timothy Flint produced one dozen book-length works of fiction and nonfiction. These include *Francis Berrian* (1826), *A Condensed Geography and History of the Western States, or The Mississippi Valley, The History and Geography of the Mississippi Valley* (1828), *George Mason, the Young Backwoodsman* (1829), *The Lost Child* (1830), *The Shoshonee Valley* (1830), *The Personal Narrative of James O. Pattie* (1831), *The Art of Being Happy* (1832), *Indian Wars of the West* (1833), *Lectures upon Natural History* (1833), and Flint's most influential book, *Biographical Memoir of Daniel Boone* (1833). Flint also founded and edited the *Western Monthly,* a Cincinnati literary magazine (1827–30), where he wrote one of the first stories about the legendary Ohio and Mississippi keelboatman Mike Fink. Although Flint's hard work brought him much success, it also contributed to his increasingly ill health. Exhausted and ailing, he returned to the East Coast, serving a brief stint as editor of New York City's *Knickerbocker* magazine (1833). Timothy Flint died August 16, 1840, in Salem, Massachusetts, and is interred at Harmony Grove Cemetery, where a monument stands today.[6]

The pages of *A Condensed Geography and History of the Western States, or The Mississippi Valley,* address many of the significant historical issues of the Mississippi Valley prior to the American Civil War. Timothy Flint discusses ancient Mound Builders and their Indian descendants; Spanish, French, and British explorers; Daniel Boone; the role of Christianity; the Louisiana Purchase; Lewis and Clark; the Burr Conspiracy; Tippecanoe; Andrew Jackson at Horseshoe Bend and New Orleans; and much more. Although he does not touch on all of the topics a modern American might list, Flint lays the groundwork for a broad interdisciplinary examination of America's heartland. Indeed, the Reverend Timothy Flint's *Condensed Geography and History* furnishes the modern scholar a roadmap to study the antebellum history of the western states of the Mississippi Valley.

and the Myth of the Alligator Horse (Baton Rouge, La., 1990), 170; Flint, *Condensed Geography and History*, 1:342–43, 505–507.

6. Folsom, *Timothy Flint*, 14, 4–47, 170.

BEGINNINGS

Around 12,000 BC, the great Ice Age came to an end in North America. As the earth began to warm, the gigantic glaciers slowly melted, and plant and animal life gradually evolved. Huge mastodons (ancestors of today's elephants), mammoths, bison, giant sloths, bears, and cats roamed the lush plains abutting the receding glacial ice. Herds of these prehistoric animals were drawn to the Big Bone Lick, a major Ohio Valley salt deposit located downstream from the mouth of the Kentucky River. Because the lick was in swampy lowland, its quicksand-like mud occasionally entrapped salt-hungry animals. Many unfortunate bison and mastodons died at the lick, and their remains were evident 14,000 years later.[7]

The first European to note seeing these huge prehistoric bones was the French army major Charles LeMoyne in 1739. In 1755, the Shawnee captors of the pioneer emigrant Mary Ingalls showed her the site, and the British Indian agent and scientist George Croghan studied the remains in the late 1760s. Though he never visited the Big Bone Lick, President Thomas Jefferson sent William Clark to gather specimens there in 1807; Jefferson later wrote a scholarly paper about fossil mastodons and other post–Ice Age mammals. Meanwhile, the lick became a regular stop for hundreds of flatboatmen descending the Ohio. "Remarkable large bones have been found," reported the 1802 *Ohio and Mississippi Navigator,* "which must have belonged to some monstrous animal whose race is now tho't to be entirely extinct."[8]

Human beings also inhabited the region, though archeologists still debate the origins of human life in North America, and Indians have their own creation stories. Most social scientists

7. C. B. Walker, *The Mississippi Valley, and Prehistoric Events ...* (Burlington, Iowa, 1880), 27–54; Stanley Hedeen, *Big Bone Lick: The Cradle of American Paleontology* (Lexington, Ky., 2008); Ray Allen Billington, *Westward Expansion: A History of the American Frontier*, 3d ed. (New York, 1957), 292–93. For glaciation, see prolog, this work.
8. Paul Semonin, *American Monster: How the Nation's First Prehistoric Creature Became a Symbol of National Identity* (New York, 2000); Zadok Cramer, *The Ohio and Mississippi Navigator* (Pittsburgh, Pa., 1802), 35. Thanks to Matthew Hulton.

believe humans crossed from Asia to North America roughly 12,000 to 14,000 years ago. The arrival of hunter-gatherers thus paralleled the receding glaciers. Paleolithic (Stone Age) hunters earned a living spearing bison, bear, wildcats, and other animals below the Late Wisconsin Ice Sheet in what we now call the Mississippi River Valley. Over the course of 10,000 years, these folk slowly made the transition from hunting and gathering to agriculture. Some of those early farmers were the ancestors of modern Indian people and are commonly known as Mound Builders.[9]

Americans have always been fascinated with Mound Builders, from the time of Thomas Jefferson's studies to the present. Mound building civilizations in North America naturally invite comparisons to concurrent pyramid builders among Mexican, Central, and South American cultural groups, such as the Aztecs, Inca, and Mayans. A perusal of archeological analyses of North American Mound Builders reveals wildly varying start and end dates of particular groups. For example, the eminent archeologist Brian Fagan dates the Hopewell group from 400 BC to AD 200, while the *Encyclopedia Britannica* dates them 200 BC to AD 500. Generally speaking, the Hopewellian and Mississippian eras span approximately 2,000 years, from 400 BC to AD 1400.[10] The exact chronology is not so important for our purposes until it approaches the beginnings of the southeastern Indian (Creek, Cherokee, Choctaw, Chickasaw, and Seminole) civilizations and European exploration of the Mississippi River Valley.

The Hopewell dwelt in the upper Mississippi Valley's eastern sector, in modern-day Ohio, Wisconsin, Indiana, Illinois, western Pennsylvania, and New York. Their influence and cultural ways spread even further. The Hopewell raised maize (Indian corn), gathered nuts and berries, and hunted and fished. They created strong kinship networks and worked in metals (copper and silver) and clay. Although the Adena and other

9. Brian M. Fagan, *The Great Journey: The Peopling of Ancient America* (London, Eng., 1987), 195–96, 241–42. See also Fagan, *Ancient North America: The Archeology of a Continent*, rev. ed. (London, Eng., 1995).
10. Fagan, *Great Journey*, 242–48.

groups constructed earthen burial mounds, the Hopewell took the process to a much larger scale, using hundreds and perhaps thousands of workers who hauled dirt in baskets strapped to their backs. They were the first North Americans to construct elaborate earthen mounds for use in defense, religious and burial rituals, and more. One of the striking aspects of Hopewell effigy mounds is that they were not pyramidal. The effigy mounds took a number of shapes that, viewed today from an airplane, are clearly identifiable as huge snakes, birds, and other figures. This is noteworthy for many reasons, not the least of which is that the Hopewell had no access to higher viewing elevations than the mounds and the surrounding forest. They could not have possibly shaped these elaborate effigy mounds by sight.[11]

During the millennium following the birth of Christ, the Mississippian civilization slowly evolved, supplanting and expanding that of the Hopewell. Mississippians flourished from approximately AD 800 until the eve of European contact, residing in the lower Mississippi Valley while ranging north to the upper Mississippi and Ohio Valleys and as far east as the Carolinas and northern Florida. Archeologists group their multiple chiefdoms as Placquemine, Caddoan, South Appalachian, Middle, Fort Ancient, and Oneota Mississippian peoples. Although there was great diversity in Mississippian culture, important characteristics apply generally and help us to understand their sophisticated civilization.[12]

Mississippians made their living farming, hunting, fishing, and gathering. They were hoe farmers, raising maize, beans, squash, gourds, and tobacco in the rich soil of the Mississippi Valley lowlands. Corn was the centerpiece of their agricultural sustenance and a prime trading commodity. They celebrated corn—and the sun that made it grow—in religious rituals, prayers, and dances. Corn was eaten boiled by the ear, baked,

11. Ibid., 243; Jeffrey J. Jordan, "Aboriginal Cultures and Landscapes," in *A Geography of Ohio*, ed. Leonard Peacefull (Kent, Ohio, 1996), 71. The name Hopewell was drawn from an Ohio farm family on whose land the first scientific excavations took place.
12. Brian Fagan, *Ancient North America*, 427–37. Many thanks to Randal Williams, who wrote his senior paper on Mississippian culture at Tennessee Technological University, Cookeville, in 1988.

and ground into meal; corn stalk roots were brewed for tea; and the husks filled mattresses and pillows. Mississippians also gathered hickory nuts and wild berries, and hunted bear, deer, raccoons, squirrels, turkey, ducks, geese, and other waterfowl. They were expert fishermen, harvesting the nutrient-rich catfish and bottom feeders of the Mississippi and its tributaries; probably half their calories came from fish and waterfowl.[13]

The Mississippians' primary social and political organization was the chiefdom. Chiefs were hereditary rulers who lived atop their village's highest mound. Advised by kin and councilors, chiefs coordinated their communities' agricultural production and distribution, religious ceremonies, and trade; they adjudicated villagers' disputes and crimes; and they conducted relations with neighboring chiefdoms. The chiefs were war leaders whose fierce troops used bows and arrows, spears, axes, and maces to violently settle disputes over land or to avenge wrongs perpetrated by neighbors. Mississippian warriors are known to have scalped and tortured their enemies and burned villages to the ground. In some excavated graves, one-third of the bodies bear the marks of violent death. Chiefs formed military alliances and built elaborate palisades (walls built from logs) to protect their villages from attack. Warfare increased as resources grew scarce in the new millennium.[14]

The fact that scholars and laypersons alike still call these Mississippian people Mound Builders reflects the significance of the huge earthen works around which their civilization revolved. Today, there are several places one can view and ascend the mounds, but the most awe-inspiring group lies in Cahokia, a few miles east of Saint Louis, across the Mississippi River in Illinois. Cahokia, the greatest of all the Mississippian communities, existed from approximately AD 700 to 1400, peaking during the years 1050–1200. In Cahokia, some one hundred and twenty mounds of varying size sat on a six-square-mile river lowland

13. Fagan, *Ancient North America*, 432–34. Thanks to Kristeen M. Barker.
14. Timothy R. Pauketat, *Ancient Cahokia and the Mississippians* (Cambridge, Eng., 2004), 157–59; George R. Milner, *The Moundbuilders: Ancient Peoples of Eastern North America* (London, Eng., 2004), 124, 166–67.

boasting an estimated ten to fifteen thousand people. A large circle of upright logs—named Woodhenge by archeologists—was used to track the seasonal path of the sun and thus determine calendar dates, solstices, and equinoxes. The city's centerpiece was Monks Mound (named in the modern era after 1700s Catholic missionaries), standing 100 feet high with a 955-foot-by-775-foot base, equal to the base size of Egypt's Great Pyramid of Giza. In contrast, Emerald Mound, one of the best-preserved mounds on the lower Mississippi (near Natchez) is smaller, yet still impressive at 35 feet in height with a base of 83 feet by 50 feet.[15]

The mounds were the result of monumental and back-breaking labor. Workers carried earth from nearby diggings in basket loads weighing fifty to sixty pounds. The chief's home sat atop a village's highest mound, and governing councils met there; the town plaza, or courtyard, lay at the base of the mound. Cahokia's forty-acre Grand Plaza served as the community's market, ceremonial, and social center. Mounds served as sites for religious ceremonies, including funerals and human sacrifice rituals, complete with decapitations and sacrificial offerings.[16] Mississippians might have built mounds so that they could enjoy viewing the grand Mississippi River while remaining safe from its powerful forces. Mound tops no doubt provided excellent refuge from the Mississippi Valley's frequent floods and served as observation posts for leaders to oversee villagers below and those farming adjacent fields. Mounds were probably used as lookouts to spy on marauding enemies, and if those enemies managed to breech a village's palisade, mounds provided excellent positions for a defensive stand.

We can glimpse the society and lifestyle of ordinary

15. Pauketat, *Ancient Cahokia and the Mississippians*, 67–9, 71, 77–79, 87, passim; Ian W. Brown, "Plaquemine Culture in the Natchez Bluffs Region of Mississippi," in *Plaquemine Archeology*, ed. Mark A. Rees and Patrick C. Livingood (Tuscaloosa, Ala., 2007), 149–52; William R. Iseminger, *Cahokia Mounds: America's First City* (Collinsville, Ill., 2010), 16–19. For Arkansas River Valley mounds, see Jay Miller, *Ancestral Mounds: Vitality and Volatility of Native America* (Lincoln, Nebr., 2015).
16. Pauketat, *Ancient Cahokia and the Mississippians*, 75–81, 94–95; Milner, *Moundbuilders*, 124–25, 132–36; Iseminger, Cahokia Mounds, 6, 9, 13.

Mississippians using evidence from archeological digs and examining the folkways of their early modern Indian descendants. Villagers lived in rectangular or circular huts with mud-plastered walls and heavily thatched roofs to keep out rain and snow. They made their clothing from animal skins and woven grasses fashioned into breechcloths, leggings, shirts, skirts, and moccasins; in summer, they shed clothing, and in winter, they added fur mantles and stoles. Mississippians wore bead bracelets and necklaces and earbobs made from shells, bone, copper, and pottery. They adorned their bodies with tattoos. Adults spent their leisure with their children and extended kin. For pleasure, they feasted on bear steaks and venison, and smoked tobacco; they might have drunk a stimulant made from pounded holly leaves. Mississippians gambled at shell and dice games, and on the plaza they played lacrosse and used wooden sticks and polished stones to play a game resembling field hockey. Mississippians were excellent potters, and their cooking utensils and tableware were stout and attractive. They fashioned artistic copper and pottery statues and masks engraved with bird, serpent, bear, hand, skull, bones, and weeping eye images.[17] The skull, bones, and weeping eye motifs reflect a natural concern over death.

Following the course of all great civilizations, the Mississippians slowly rose and then declined. Decline began gradually around 1200, and by 1400 the Cahokia site was abandoned. Indeed, the name Cahokia is not Mississippian, for they had no written language to preserve the community's name. Cahokia is the name of a band of the Illiniwek (Illinois) Indian tribe that French explorers and priests found encamped at the foot of Monks Mound. Other Mississippians endured longer than the Cahokians, but met their same fate. European diseases such as smallpox and measles, against which Indians had no immunity, are no doubt one reason for the decline. Yet, in Cahokia and elsewhere, the decline had begun well before the Europeans' arrival. According to the archeologist George R.

17. Pauketat, *Ancient Cahokia and the Mississippians*, 83–84; Fagan, *Ancient North America*, 446–50; Milner, *Moundbuilders*, 111–13, 140–42.

Milner, the Spanish explorer Hernando De Soto and his men "found a tangled and uninhabited wilderness" where the Savannah River Mississippians had once flourished. "Once impressive river valley societies had all but disappeared" before the Spaniards' arrival. Why? Crop blight is a major culprit, and tree ring analysis indicates a series of droughts. The blight destroyed corn crops, and drought made a rebound impossible, resulting in famine. Then, too, fierce warfare between chiefdoms caused populations to decline. All of this hastened the Mississippians' demise, but it did not leave the Mississippi Valley without Indigenous human occupants.[18]

Woodland Indian descendants of the Mississippians carried on their ways on a smaller and less complex scale. Because the Mississippians were geographically isolated from one another and had no written language, many traditions were lost as elders died. Yet descendant Indian tribes—the Natchez, Coosa, Creek, Cherokee, Choctaw, Chickasaw, Seminole, and others—practiced and adapted remnant traditions through the early modern era before Indian removal. They continued hoe-farming, and Creeks and others practiced a green corn harvest ceremony that was a less elaborate version of the Mississippian ritual. Choctaws also retained core cultural elements and spiritual beliefs, following what they called "the straight bright path." The elaborate villages of the Mississippians were succeeded by humbler and more transient communities that were no longer surrounded by huge bean, squash, and corn fields. No town like Cahokia ever rose again, and no more earthen mounds were built after 17th-century Natchez Indians discontinued the practice. Meanwhile, the Mississippians' Indian descendants faced the European explorers and missionaries who began to arrive in the mid-1500s.[19]

When recounting the story of early European exploration of

18. Milner, *Moundbuilders*, 166–68.
19. Fagan, *Ancient North America*, 450–52, 482–84; Pauketat, *Ancient Cahokia and the Mississippians*, 144. See also James Taylor Carson, *Searching for the Bright Path: The Mississippi Choctaws from Prehistory to Removal* (Lincoln, Nebr., 1999), and Charles Hudson, *The Southeastern Indians* (Knoxville, Tenn., 1976).

the Mississippi River Valley, Mark Twain's pithy description in *Life on the Mississippi* paints as negative a picture as any of today's post-colonial storytellers. Twain adds healthy doses of his own humor, sarcasm, irony, and sacrilege to the familiar tales of Hernando de Soto, Jacques Marquette, Louis Jolliet, and René-Robert Cavelier, the Sieur de La Salle.[20] In chapter 2 of *Life on the Mississippi,* Twain quickly covers the Spaniard de Soto's 1542 sighting of the Mississippi River, saving most of his ammunition for the Frenchmen who followed. His transition is a reference to the fact that in "that day, all explorers traveled with an outfit of priests," and, although food and other supplies often ran low, "they always had the furniture and other requisites for the mass." In 1673, when Jolliet and Marquette sailed the Mississippi to the mouth of the Arkansas and were threatened by a "tribe of war-whooping savages," the devout explorers "appealed to the Virgin for help; so in place of a fight there was a feast, and plenty of pleasant palaver and folderol." La Salle's 1681 expedition was even more "religious": "La Salle set up a cross with the arms of France on it, and took possession of the whole country for the king—the cool fashion of the time—while the priest piously consecrated the robbery with a hymn." La Salle then "drew from these simple children of the forest acknowledgments of fealty to Louis the Putrid [France's King Louis XIV], over the water. Nobody smiled at these colossal ironies."[21]

The devastating impact on Indian peoples that accompanied the arrival of Christopher Columbus, de Soto, Jolliet, Marquette, La Salle, and subsequent European traders and settlers is an important and well-researched subject that makes for sobering reading.[22] The advent of modernity inevitably meant the demise

20. Mark Twain, *Life on the Mississippi* (1883; repr. New York, 1961), 3–11, passim
21. Ibid., 7–9.
22. Robbie Ethridge, *From Chicaza to Chickasaw: The European Invasion and the Transformation of the Mississippian World, 1540–1715* (Charlotte, N.C., 2010); Ethridge and Sheri M. Shuck-Hall, eds., *Mapping the Mississippian Shatter Zone: The Colonial Indian Slave Trade and Regional Instability in the American South* (Lincoln, Nebr., 2009); Daniel H. Usner, *Indians, Settlers, and Slaves in a Frontier Exchange Economy: The Lower Mississippi Valley before 1783* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1992); Richard White, *The Middle Ground: Indians, Empires, and Republics in the Great Lakes Region, 1650–1815* (New York, 1991). See also Andrew Lipman, "No More Middle Grounds?" *Reviews in American History* 44 (March 2016), 24–30.

of hunting and gathering and agricultural Indian people. But this tragic process was not genocide, which is by definition premeditated. There are isolated instances of genocide in the history of Euro-American and Indian conflicts, and they are exceptions. While some have overestimated the number of pre-Columbian Indians, the mortality rate for the existing population was most certainly high. And the results of diseases were horrific, even if Europeans did not conspire to spread those diseases to the Indians.[23]

Mississippi Valley exploration is part of the larger history of the Age of Discovery and European expansion into the New World. Beginning with Columbus in 1492, Spain spearheaded the drive to the west. The French followed the Spaniards' penetration of North American frontiers, and they in turn were followed by Great Britain and her North American subjects. The old saying that Spanish explorers were motivated by "gold, God, and glory" is an accurate way to describe European colonialism if one adds scientific curiosity to the mix and stresses the fact that the four motives were unequal. Economic gain was no doubt a dominant motive, yet religious devotion, the quest for knowledge, and a desire for military/strategic advantage (as well as adventure and "glory") figured importantly in the Spanish, French, and British exploration and settlement of the Mississippi Valley during the fifteenth, sixteenth, and seventeenth centuries.[24]

Hernando de Soto (c.1496–1542), Spain's intrepid adventurer in Florida and the trans-Appalachian West, was a devout

23. John D. Daniels, "The Indian Population of North American in 1492," *William and Mary Quarterly* 49 (April 1999), 298–320, reviews competing estimates. See also Robert Royal, *Columbus on Trial, 1492 v. 1992* (Herndon, Va., 1992), and C. Adrienne Mayor, "The Nessus Shirt in the New World: Smallpox Blankets in History and Legend," *Journal of American Folklore* 108 (1995), 54–77. Worst-case examples of Indian population overestimates and accusations of genocide are Howard Zinn, *A People's History of the United States* (New York, 1980), and Francis Jennings, *The Invasion of America: Indians, Colonialism, and the Cant of Conquest* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1975).

24. Louis B. Wright, *Gold, Glory, and the Gospel: The Adventurous Lives and Times of the Renaissance Explorers* (New York, 1970), ix–xvi, 352; Charles Gibson, *Spain in America* (New York, 1966). For alternate views, see Jennings, *Invasion of America*, and Jacob F. Lee, *Masters of the Middle Waters: Indian Nations and Colonial Ambitions along the Mississippi* (Cambridge, Mass. 2019).

nobleman in search of gold and silver. As a Spanish cavalry captain in Peru, de Soto had in 1536 taken a small fortune in Incan gold back to Seville, but he hungered for more. There was a legend that, in the eighth century, seven Spanish bishops migrated to the New World and founded the fabulously wealthy Seven Cities of Cibola; of course, there was also a story about a Fountain of Youth. Although de Soto did not believe these stories, his success in looting Peru no doubt fired his ambitions. Appointed governor of Cuba by King Carlos (Charles) V, he set sail for North America in 1539. With approximately one thousand troops and a platoon of priests, he landed in Tampa Bay and explored and conquered northern Florida, encamping near modern-day Pensacola. He wrote back to Cuba that local natives told him of "gold, silver, and many pearls. May it please God that this may be so. For of what these Indians say I believe nothing but what I see, and must well see; although they know … that if they lie to me that it will cost them their lives."[25]

Hernando de Soto then turned his eyes northward. Throughout 1540–41, he and his army explored and charted 350,000 square miles of the Old Southwest—modern Florida, South Carolina, Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi, and Arkansas. He first headed due north and then turned southwest, approaching the Mississippi River south of the Chickasaw Bluffs in northwestern Mississippi. His secretary Rodrigo Ranjel wrote, "They saw the great river. Saturday May 21 [1541], the force … began to build four barges to cross over to the other side. Many of the conquerors said this river was larger than the Danube." De Soto's priests won few converts and the "conquerors" took a beating from fierce Indians. Wounded in battle, de Soto first tried to press on across Arkansas toward New Spain (Mexico), but Indian fighters turned his dwindling army back; the Spaniards spent the miserable winter of 1641–42 encamped near the juncture of the Arkansas and Mississippi Rivers. Overtaken

25. Edward Gaylord Bourne, ed., *Narratives and Career of Hernando de Soto ... the Diary of Rodrigo Ranjel, His Private Secretary ...,* 2 vols. (New York, 1904), 2:162; Robert V. Hine and John Mack Faragher, *The American West: A New Interpretive History* (New Haven, Conn., 2000), 29–31.

with fever, de Soto sickened and died in either May or June of 1542. His men buried him, but Indians soon disinterred the body, placed it in a hollow log, and sank it in the Mississippi. Meanwhile, the remnants of de Soto's failed army sailed to the Mississippi's mouth, at last finding refuge along the northwestern coast of the Gulf of Mexico. Of the one thousand men de Soto had led into Florida in 1539, only three hundred lived to tell the tale.[26]

While the Spaniards had come from the south in the 1500s, French exploration of the Mississippi Valley emanated in the mid-1600s from Quebec City, the capital of French Canada. Under the leadership of Samuel de Champlain, the French had spent much of the first half of the seventeenth century founding and stabilizing their Canadian empire, preaching Catholicism, maneuvering against their British enemies on the lower Atlantic seaboard, and trading in furs with the natives. King Louis XIV, the Sun King, saw expansive colonialism as requisite to the growing glory of France, and he appointed the shrewd and energetic Jean Talon governor of New France in 1665. Talon aimed to expand the fur trade southward, thwarting British expansion while continuing to search for an elusive all-water route to Asian ports. In 1673, he dispatched Father Jacques Marquette and Louis Jolliet to explore the Mississippi River.[27]

Marquette and Jolliet—a priest and a cartographer/hydrographer turned frontier fur trader—mirror France's intertwined religious, scientific, and economic motivations in exploring the Mississippi Valley. Marquette was trained by Jesuits in his native France before requesting to minister to Huron Indians on Lake Superior. Talon was as impressed by Marquette's skills as a woodsman as his piety; Jolliet was also an adept woodsman who had traversed the Canadian wilds since his Quebec childhood. The two led a small band across Wisconsin,

26. Bourne, *Narratives and Career of Hernando de Soto,* 2:137; Hine and Faragher, *American West,* 30–31.

27. Hine and Faragher, *American West,* 44–47; W. J. Eccles, *The Canadian Frontier, 1534–1760,* rev. ed. (Albuquerque, N.Mex., 1983), 103–107; Reuben Gold Thwaites, *France in America, 1497–1763* (New York, 1905), 3–22 34–48; Ray Allen Billington, *Westward Expansion: A History of the American Frontier,* 4th ed. (New York, 1974), 110–14.

trekking to the Wisconsin River and sailing its treacherous rapids to the Mississippi. When Marquette and Jolliet launched their canoes on the Mississippi on June 17, 1673, they became the first Europeans to explore its upper reaches.[28]

"Turning southward, they paddled down the stream through a solitude unrelieved by the faintest trace of man," wrote the nineteenth-century historian Frances Parkman. "At length the buffalo appeared, grazing in herds on the great prairies which then bordered the river." Near the eastern Iowa shore they met and parleyed with local Indians, then sailed past the mouths of the Missouri and Ohio Rivers. "Soon they began to see the marshy shores buried in a dense growth of cane, with its tall straight stems and feathery light-green foliage. The sun glowed through the hazy air with a languid stifling heat, and by day and night mosquitos in myriads left them no peace." Arriving at the mouth of the Arkansas River, very near the place where de Soto had died more than a century earlier, they once again met and queried the local Indians (the "war-whooping savages" of Twain's account). At last accepting the fact that the Gulf of Mexico, not the Pacific Ocean, lay at the Mississippi's mouth, Marquette and Jolliet decided to travel no farther. They slowly worked their back way upstream, this time ascending the Illinois River to Lake Michigan, ending a 2,500-mile adventure near modern-day Chicago.[29]

While Marquette returned to his ministry, Jolliet proceeded to Quebec City in 1674 to make a full report. Although Jolliet had lost his maps and notebooks in a canoe accident, his verbal account greatly impressed Talon's replacement, Governor General Louis de Buade, Comte de Frontenac et de Palluau, generally known as Frontenac. The disappointment over the Mississippi not being a route to the Pacific was immediately replaced by the realization that an all-water connection between the Great Lakes and the Caribbean was a wonderful consolation prize. Frontenac and other leaders reasoned they could link New

28. Thwaites, *France in America,* 56–57.
29. Francis Parkman, *The Discovery of the Great West: LaSalle,* ed. William R. Taylor (1869; repr. New York, 1956), 45–46, 50, 51–60; Eccles, *Canadian Frontier,* 107.

France to the Gulf of Mexico through a chain of forts along the Mississippi. They would trade with Indians for furs to ship to European markets via Quebec and a new port city to be built on the river's lower reaches. Moreover, their forts would bar British colonists from moving west. To begin the job of charting this grand plan—a plan that would lead to the founding of New Orleans and France's Louisiana Territory—Frontenac turned to his protégé, a shrewd Indian trader named René-Robert Cavelier, Sieur de La Salle.[30]

René-Robert Cavelier, usually known as Robert de La Salle, was born in France in 1643 and as a teenager trained to be a Jesuit priest. Rejecting the rigors of the order, he embarked on an adventurous course that in 1666 led him to the Canadian fur-trading frontier, ranging as far west and south as Lake Ontario and the Great Falls of the Ohio. Although La Salle was by all accounts a cold and difficult man, he nevertheless inspired loyalty among his lieutenants, most notably Henry de Tonti and Father Louis Hennepin. With government backing, they moved in 1679 to begin the Mississippi Valley trading network, constructing forts at the mouth of the Saint Joseph River (Lake Michigan) and the upper Illinois River. Indian warfare and other setbacks stalled their plan, but in 1681 they descended the Illinois and Mississippi Rivers. La Salle wrote a friend in France that within the year he anticipated "the end of this business, which I hope will turn out well: for I have M. de Tonty, who is full of zeal, thirty Frenchmen, all good men … and more than a hundred Indians."[31]

On March 13, 1682, La Salle's troop arrived at the mouth of the Arkansas River and met with a band of Arkansas Indians, the scene Mark Twain sarcastically described in *Life on the Mississippi.* One of La Salle's men later remembered "the civility and kindness we received from these barbarians," who were "gay, civil, and free-hearted." After a convivial exchange, La Salle

30. Eccles, *Canadian Frontier,* 105–107; Hine and Faragher, *American West,* 47–48; Thwaites, *France in America,* 57.

31. Walker, *Mississippi Valley,* 179–80; Parkman, *Discovery of the Great West,* 4–8, 216 (qtn.). La Salle's troop was composed of 23, not 30, Frenchmen.

proclaimed France's formal possession of the Louisiana Territory, and then sailed south to do so once again. Near the Gulf of Mexico, where the Mississippi branches into three outlets, La Salle, Tonti, and a third lieutenant sailed separate parties to the river mouths and reunited on the gulf. Assembling his men in military formation, on April 9, 1682, René-Robert Cavelier, Sieur de La Salle, took formal possession of the Mississippi Valley "in the name of the most high, mighty, invincible, and victorious Prince, Louis the Great, by the grace of God King of France." A musket volley and shouts of "Vive le Roi!" followed the proclamation, as La Salle and his men sang, "The banners of Heaven's King advance, the mystery of the Cross shines forth." Mark Twain's description of this "theft" is balanced by Parkman's summary of the occasion:

> On that day, the realm of France received on parchment a stupendous accession. The fertile plains of Texas; the vast basin of the Mississippi, from its frozen northern springs to the sultry borders of the Gulf; from the woody ridges of the Alleghanies to the bare peaks of the Rocky Mountains—a region of savannahs and forests, suncracked deserts, and grassy prairies, watered by a thousand rivers, ranged by a thousand warlike tribes, passed beneath the scepter of the Sultan of Versailles; and all by virtue of a feeble human voice, inaudible at half a mile.[32]

Returning north, La Salle worked feverishly to continue to build his fur-trading empire. Convinced the founding of a city near the river's mouth was a first priority, he sailed by way of the Atlantic for the gulf in 1684 with four hundred men. When they missed the Mississippi's mouth and became lost and stranded on the southeast Texas coast, some of his own men murdered him. New Orleans, the city La Salle envisioned, was not founded until 1718.[33]

Meanwhile, the English found themselves barred from access

32. Quotations from Parkman, *Discovery of the Great West,* 220, 225–27. Only a small portion of what became known as Texas was included in Louisiana. See also Twain, *Life on the Mississippi,* 9; Billington, *Westward Expansion,* 114–15.
33. Parkman, *Discovery of the Great West,* 220, 225–27.

to the Mississippi River Valley. Spain and France had explored, proselytized, and capitalized the trans-Appalachian West so early and so thoroughly that England could make no headway there until the mid-eighteenth century. Slowly building their colonial outposts on North America's Atlantic seaboard, the British battled France in four colonial wars, regional conflicts that were part of a global power struggle. These wars began in the early 1700s and finally ended with British victory in 1763.[34]

The short-lived peace following Britain's 1763 victory over France ushered in the trans-Appalachian expeditions of Daniel Boone. Boone was born in 1734 to a humble Quaker family in Pennsylvania's Schuylkill Valley. He spent his youth following the game trails, moving farther down the Great Valley between the eastern Appalachian and Blue Ridge Mountains, and settling in the remote Yadkin Valley of North Carolina in 1751. Boone supported his wife and seven children as a farmer and professional hunter who also scouted for land companies. He had adapted the Indian practice of the long hunt—departing on lone or small-group hunting expeditions in the fall (after harvesting his crops), hunting and trapping deer, bear, fox, and beaver all winter (when the animals' fur was thickest), and returning in the spring to market his catch and plant new crops. Boone's youngest son, Nathan, recalled stories of his father's hunting expeditions. The men "would wear moccasins of deer skins, stuffed well with deer's hair to answer the place of stockings," and deerskin "leggings" and "hunting shirt[s]." Nathan stated that although Boone thoroughly hunted and explored the eastern ridges and even trekked over the Appalachians into Watauga (northeastern Tennessee) before 1769, "he would never consider he had discovered the real West, which was Kentucky. The real West was the land beyond the Cumberland … mountain chain."[35]

Daniel Boone was an early explorer of the Cumberland Gap—the famed mountain pass connecting the old colonies of

34. Hine and Faragher, *American West,* 80–87; John Mack Faragher, *Daniel Boone: The Life and Legend of an American Pioneer* (New York, 1992), 35–37.
35. Faragher, *Daniel Boone,* 9-67; Nathan Boone, *My Father, Daniel Boone: The Draper Interviews with Nathan Boone,* ed. Neal O. Hammen (Lexington, Ky., 1999), 15, 36–37.

Virginia and North Carolina (including what is now northeastern Tennessee) with Kentucky. Yet he was not the first white person to follow that route. In 1750, Dr. Thomas Walker and his party trekked the gap into Kentucky in a land speculation venture, following a well-worn Indian trail dubbed the Warrior's Path to the north. The Ohio River trader John Finley first saw the Bluegrass Country—the rich lowlands of east-central Kentucky—when he was captured and taken there by Shawnee Indians in 1752. Finley learned the Bluegrass was accessible from the east via the gap. Tales began to spread about wondrous hunting grounds with huge herds of deer and buffalo, and wild turkeys so thick their weight broke strong tree branches on which they roosted. But the French and Indian War intervened, temporarily halting exploration.[36]

Daniel Boone met John Finley during his military service in the French and Indian War; shortly afterward, Boone's brother-in-law John Stewart traversed the gap on a hunting expedition with Benjamin Cutbird. Both men told him stories of the bounty of Kanta-ke, the Iroquois term for meadow; the Euro-Americans called this lush country the Kane-tok and, ultimately, the Kentucky Bluegrass. Boone's first attempt to cross the gap (1767–68) led him too far north. So he teamed with Finley and three fellow backwoodsmen in a 1769 expedition funded by Judge Richard Henderson, a North Carolina land speculator. The five men (Boone's brother, Squire, joined the party later) departed in May, and Boone did not return home until the spring of 1771. They successfully trekked the Warrior's Path, crossing the Cumberland Gap into Kentucky, where their adventures ranged from sublime to disastrous. The early Kentucky chronicler John Filson quoted Boone's memory of his first view of the Bluegrass:

> From the top of an eminence, we saw with pleasure the beautiful level of Kentucke. We found everywhere an abundance of wild beasts of every sort, through this vast forest. The buffalo were more frequent than I have seen cattle in the settlements, browsing on

36. Billington, *Westward Expansion,* 162–63.

> the leaves of the cane, or cropping the herbage on those extensive plains.

For two years, Daniel thoroughly explored the new land as far north as the Ohio River. Then, as Boone headed home in 1771 with a small fortune in furs, Shawnee Indians robbed him and Squire of everything, including their horses. Daniel Boone did walk home to the Yadkin Valley with one priceless treasure, however. In his head was more knowledge of the Kentucky Bluegrass country than possessed by any other white man.[37]

During the next four years, Daniel Boone continued his explorations, blazing the Wilderness Road and founding the Bluegrass settlement of Boonesborough in 1775. There, he fought as a patriot in the American Revolution. Over the next two and a half decades his interest in hunting was joined and temporarily superseded by his land dealings and political career as a sheriff and territorial legislator. Meanwhile, he became a character of legendary stature during his own lifetime. Oral tales of Daniel circulated and found their way into print. In these stories, Boone was portrayed alone in the wilderness, hunting bear and buffalo, outrunning and outgunning Shawnee Indians, and always moving westward in advance of civilization; Boone supposedly believed the sight of chimney smoke meant his neighbors were too close and he had to move on. This tale type of the brave, wandering frontiersman ultimately formed the creative basis for James Fenimore Cooper's *Last of the Mohicans* (1826), the first modern western novel. In these stories, the tension between Boone's love of the wilderness and his desire to exploit and civilize it made for compelling art, because it accurately reflected Boone's own history.[38]

In 1799, bankrupted by land speculation ventures and lawsuits, sixty-five-year-old Daniel Boone led his family across the Mississippi River to Spanish Saint Louis. A local youth

37. Faragher, *Daniel Boone*, 68, 76–87 (Filson qtn., 79). See also *Theodore Roosevelt, The Winning of the West*, 6 vols. (1889; repr. New York, 1906), 1:172–209.
38. Billington, *Westward Expansion,* 170–71; Faragher, *Daniel Boone,* 213–74; Allen, *Western Rivermen,* 25, 217, 220.

remembered Boone entering the city with "saddle bags, rifle on his shoulder, leather hunting shirt, and a couple of hunting knives in his belt, accompanied by three or four hunting dogs." Awed Spanish and French officials received him with pomp and honored a warrant Boone held for land above Saint Charles; they even appointed him justice of the peace and militia commandant. Continuing his westward trek in advance of Euro-American civilization, Boone and his family settled on the lower Missouri River, where, within four years, they once again found themselves living in the United States of America. Boone's Missouri tenure lasted twenty fruitful years. On the morning of September 28, 1820, eighty-five-year-old Daniel Boone told family and friends, "I am going, my time has come," and the old explorer's life expired.[39]

Even as late as Daniel Boone's 1799 crossing, the exploration of the Mississippi River was not yet complete. The great river's headwaters still remained unknown to white men. From the sixteenth century onward, French, Spanish, British, and American adventurers had searched for the Mississippi's headwaters, and several men, most notably Father Louis Hennepin, erroneously claimed to have found them. Upon assuming the presidency in 1801, Thomas Jefferson ordered continued exploration of the "principal waters of the Mississippi and Missouri," most notably by Meriwether Lewis and William Clark beginning in 1803. Their fellow U.S. army captain Zebulon Pike ascended the Mississippi River in 1805, but turned back at Leech Lake in north-central Minnesota, unaware he was only forty-five miles away from the much-sought headwaters. The final achievement remained out of reach for nearly thirty years, until the expedition of Henry Rowe Schoolcraft.[40]

The New Yorker Henry Rowe Schoolcraft (1793–1864) was a geologist and proto-ethnologist who traversed the Mississippi Valley during the early decades of the nineteenth century.

39. Faragher, *Daniel Boone,* 279–319 (qtns., 279, 318–19).
40. Henry Rowe Schoolcraft, *Narrative Journal of Travels through the Northwestern Regions of the United States Extending from Detroit through the Great Chain of Lakes to the Sources of the Mississippi River in the Year 1820,* ed. Mentor L. Williams (East Lansing, Mich., 1953), 1–2.

Schoolcraft accompanied army expeditions to Missouri and Arkansas in 1817–18, and then explored Lake Superior and the upper Mississippi in 1820. Appointed a federal Indian agent, he married an Ojibwa-Scottish woman, Bamewawagezhikaquay (Jane Johnston) Schoolcraft, in 1822 and, with her assistance, subsequently studied and published extensively about the culture of Great Lakes Indian people. In 1832, Schoolcraft set out to solve the Mississippi headwaters puzzle once and for all. On July 13, 1832, two hundred and ninety years after Hernando de Soto's 1542 sighting of the Mississippi, Henry Rowe Schoolcraft wrote in his journal:

> We followed our [Indian] guide down the sides of the last elevation, with the expectation of momentarily reaching the goal of our journey. What had been long sought, at last appeared suddenly. On turning out of a thicket, into a small weedy opening, the cheering sight of a transparent body of water burst upon our view. It was Itasca Lake—the source of the Mississippi.[41]

REVOLUTION

Leaders of the American Revolution turned their eyes westward from the outset of the American war for independence. Certainly, early frontier historians like Theodore Roosevelt exaggerated the role of the Revolution's western theater. The war was mostly fought and won in the northern and southern theaters of the original English colonies, not west of the Appalachian Mountains. Yet modern Americans cannot understand the Revolution in its totality without also turning their eyes to the Mississippi Valley. The British, recent victors in the French and Indian War, had developed a complex web of relationships with the defeated French and their Indian and Spanish allies in the West. To keep American colonists from stirring up a beehive, King George III's Parliament forbade them

41. Henry Rowe Schoolcraft, *Schoolcraft's Expedition to Lake Itasca: The Discovery of the Source of the Mississippi,* ed. Philip P. Mason (East Lansing, Mich., 1958), xix, 146–47.

from settling west of the Appalachians in the infamous Proclamation of 1763.[42]

While General George Washington's Continental Army and state militias concentrated on fighting British forces in New York, New Jersey, Virginia, and the Carolinas, the situation in the trans-Appalachian West demanded some show of force. Tory (Loyalist) militiamen combined their forces with Britain's Indian allies to pose a serious threat to the Revolution; if the British held sway west of the mountains at war's end, it would greatly complicate strong American desires to push out the Indians and annex this new country as part of any peace treaty. With few exceptions, Whig (Patriot) militiamen and their French and Spanish (and some Indian) allies, not professional Continental troops, fought the western battles. And while the Whigs' record was mixed, they scored enough success to bolster American diplomats' efforts at war's end. This can be seen in the 1777–81 campaigns of Daniel Boone, George Rogers Clark, Bernardo de Galvez, and Tennessee militiamen at the Battle of King's Mountain.[43]

As the war began, central and western Kentucky Whigs retreated to strong fortifications at Saint Asaph's, Harrodsburg, and Boonesborough to fight off Tories and their Delaware and Shawnee Indian allies. In 1777, which Kentuckians called the Bloody Year, there was recurrent fighting; the Shawnee chief Black Kettle and his men surrounded Boonesborough but failed to overrun its defenders. The next year, however, they succeeded in capturing Captain Daniel Boone and thirty-some frontiersmen on a salt-gathering expedition. The Shawnee moved their prisoners north of the Ohio and, as was the custom with select prisoners of war, Boone was adopted as Shawnee Chief Black Kettle's son. In late spring of 1778, Boone learned the Indians were planning to once again assault his home. "I began to meditate an escape," he later recounted to John Filson, and "on the sixteenth [of June], I departed in the most secret manner." He later told his youngest son, Nathan, that after riding

42. Billington, *Westward Expansion*, 175, 144–45, 156.
43. Ibid., 175–76; Faragher, *Daniel Boone*, 141–42.

some distance on horseback, he "went on foot as rapidly as he could" and "crossed the Ohio … a little above Maysville." After a remarkable four-day 160-mile wilderness trek, Boone reached Boonesborough on June 20, 1778, informed the settlers of the impending attack, and successfully led them in defense of the fort.[44]

Interestingly, Boone never forsook his Shawnee foster parents and maintained close relations after the war. When he removed to Missouri in 1799, Boone often visited Shawnee brethren on the lower Missouri River. In response to popular tales of his fierce exploits fighting Indians, Boone once responded, "I never killed but three… I am very sorry to say that I ever killed any, for they were kinder to me than the whites."[45]

Patriot stands like Boonesborough were complemented by the offensive campaigns of the fiery Kentucky militia lieutenant colonel George Rogers Clark, the older brother of Meriwether Lewis's 1803 co-captain William Clark. Commissioned by the Virginia legislature, Clark led one hundred seventy-five volunteers across the Ohio River into the western Illinois wilderness in June of 1778, just as Boone was escaping his Shawnee captors. On July 4, Clark launched a surprise attack on the small British garrison at Fort Kaskaskia, on the Mississippi River, and forced its surrender. When Clark informed neighboring Frenchmen that King Louis XVI had recently allied with the American Revolutionaries, they rallied to the cause, convincing British troops at Fort Vincennes, on the Wabash, to surrender to a French priest without firing a shot. But in December, the British captain Henry Hamilton marched a five-hundred-man army to the site and recaptured Vincennes. Clark then led his force across the wintry Illinois prairie, retaking Vincennes in a surprise attack on February 24, 1779. But Clark's subsequent plan to take Fort Detroit fizzled; meanwhile, other western patriot militia battles produced mixed results.[46]

44. Faragher, *Daniel Boone,* 154–200 (qtns., 172, 174); Boone, *My Father, Daniel Boone*, 53–73 (qtn., 61).
45. Faragher, *Daniel Boone,* 39, 300. Because of his adoption, Boone was falsely accused, but quickly acquitted, of treason.

To the Patriots' aid came General Bernardo de Galvez, governor of Spanish Louisiana. Prior to losing the French and Indian War, the French had ceded Louisiana Territory to their Spanish allies in consolation for Spain's loss of Gibraltar. No friend of democratic republicanism, King Carlos (Charles) III of Spain was nevertheless as eager as Louis XVI to avenge their recent defeat by Britain. When Spain formally allied with the United States in 1779, the leader of their North American force was Don Bernardo de Galvez. Born in 1746 to a military family, Galvez was a veteran of the Seven Years War (the European component of the French and Indian War) and had bravely fought Apache Indians in northern Mexico. He was just twenty-nine years old when appointed governor of Louisiana in 1776. From his New Orleans base, General Galvez was now in a good position to assist the Whig cause.[47]

Galvez began his work prior to the formal 1779 treaty alliance in collaboration with the American adventurers Oliver Wolcott, James Willing, and others. In February of 1777, Galvez sent keelboats north on the Mississippi loaded with what he officially described as "various effects … for sale there." In fact, the "various effects" shipped to Pittsburgh were gifts, and included $70,000 worth of medicine, uniforms, gunpowder, and arms. Galvez supplied George Rogers Clark and other Patriot militiamen, and he provided Spanish gold and silver to advance the Revolutionary cause. After the August 1779 alliance, Galvez assembled a polyglot army to make war on British outposts in West Florida—that disputed territory encompassing the Florida panhandle west to Natchez and Baton Rouge. Galvez reinforced his Spanish troops with French, German, Mestizo, American Indian, and Afro-Cuban soldiers.[48]

By September 1779, General Galvez and his men had defeated British defenders at four lower Mississippi River forts, including

46. Billington, *Westward Expansion,* 181–83.
47. John Caughey, *Bernardo de Galvez in Louisiana, 1776–1783* (Berkeley, Calif., 1934), 61–69; Bernardo de Gálvez, National Park Service, https://www.nps.gov/foma/learn/historyculture/galvez.htm, accessed Oct. 30, 2011.
48. Caughey, *Bernardo de Galvez in Louisiana,* 85–134.

Baton Rouge and Natchez, capturing five hundred fifty enemy soldiers and two navy ships. When he attacked Fort Mobile (on the Gulf Coast) in the spring of 1780, Galvez's fleet ran aground. Undaunted, he ferried his stranded soldiers and sailors ashore and captured the fort before British reinforcements from Pensacola arrived. Galvez later wrote of "the valor and courage of our troops," who "desire nothing more than to continue proving to his majesty the resolution they have of sacrificing themselves in his service." One year later, Galvez moved west along the gulf to attack Fort Pensacola. Circumventing his own timid admiral, Jose Calbo de Irazabel, Galvez sailed four troop ships into Pensacola Harbor through fierce British fire, standing on the bow with sword raised to a fifteen-gun salute. The Battle of Pensacola raged on until May 1781, five months before General Cornwallis's final British capitulation to George Washington at Yorktown, Virginia.[49]

To reward Galvez for his valor, King Carlos made Bernard de Galvez a count and added West Florida to the Louisiana colony he governed; later, Galveston, Texas, was named in his honor. While Galvez's campaign seems merely a fascinating sidelight in the military history of the American Revolution, it had extremely important consequences. Galvez shipped much-needed supplies and money to western Whig guerillas, and his military campaigns distracted and crippled overextended British forces. In consequence, Spain controlled all Mississippi River navigation from Natchez (at approximately 31 degrees latitude) southward, and had added British West Florida to its empire. Of course, Spain's flirtation with American independence would soon end. Almost immediately after the war ended in 1783, Americans replaced Britons as Spain's chief foes in the lower Mississippi Valley.[50]

As Bernardo de Galvez waged his attack on Britain's Mississippi and Gulf Coast ports, a final chapter in the story of the American Revolution began to unfold. Although the Battle

49. Ibid., 149–214 (qtn., 184–85).
50. Arthur Preston Whitaker, *The Spanish American Frontier, 1783–1795* (1927; repr. Lincoln, Nebr., 1969), 1–14.

of King's Mountain was fought in the eastern foothills of the Appalachians, near modern-day Charlotte, North Carolina, the Patriot troops who fought there were primarily mountaineers from Watauga in northeastern Tennessee, which was then still part of North Carolina. This small battle fits into the larger context of Great Britain's final defeat in the Revolution. Thwarted in New England, New York, and New Jersey, General George Cornwallis turned southward. After the British captured Charleston, South Carolina, their plan was to sweep north through the Carolinas to Virginia, where Cornwallis would meet and defeat Washington's Continentals in a final decisive battle to win the war.[51]

Yet Cornwallis was thwarted from the outset by Patriot militiamen using guerilla tactics—ambush, night attack, hit-and-run, etc.—to halt his progress. To protect the left (Appalachian) flank of his advance, Cornwallis dispatched a Scottish Highlander, Major Patrick Ferguson, and approximately one thousand Tory militiamen. Angered by attacks emanating from the west, Ferguson had sent a written warning to Patriot mountaineers: "If they [do] not desist from their opposition to British arms, [I will] march [my] army over the mountains, hang their leaders, and lay their country waste with fire and sword." The immediate result, of course, was that the mountain men chose to ride east to find Ferguson. The Tennessee colonels William Cleveland, Isaac Shelby, Arthur Campbell, and John Sevier assembled approximately fifteen hundred militiamen at Sycamore Shoals, in the northeastern corner of Tennessee, September 25, 1780. After crossing the crest of the Appalachians, they found Ferguson in a strong defensive position atop King's Mountain on October 7, 1780.[52]

Historians debate the role of the militia and guerilla tactics in America's victory over Great Britain,[53] and King's Mountain

51. Don Higginbotham, *The War of American Independence: Military Attitudes, Policies, and Practice,* rev. ed. (Boston, 1983), 363, passim; Billington, *Westward Expansion,* 188–89.
52. Higginbotham, *War of American Independence*, 363–64.
53. Daniel Boorstin, "A Nation of Minutemen," in *The Americans: The Colonial Experience* (New York, 1964), 343–72; Higginbotham, *War of American Independence,* 57–80.

provides a good test case. King's Mountain was a true guerilla action: both armies were exclusively composed of American-born militiamen. But on October 7, the Patriots threw in a formal military tactic to seal the Tories' fate. King's Mountain, like most eastern mountains, is relatively small, a few hundred feet high, and covered in heavy brush amid deciduous forest. The Americans advanced stealthily, using camouflage to cover their movements. When Ferguson's force boldly charged the middle of the Patriot line, the Patriots surprised him. Feigning a retreat, the soldiers at the center of their line turned and rushed a few hundred yards to the rear, but then turned again to stand and fight. Major Ferguson's force had rushed into the vacuum only to find that, to their rear, the mountaineers had turned their flanks inward and now surrounded the Tories completely. Wounded, Ferguson was reportedly dragged to death by his own horse, one foot caught in his stirrup. When the smoke cleared, two hundred twenty-five Tories lay dead; one hundred sixty-three were wounded, and seven hundred fifteen taken prisoner of war. The mountaineers had twenty-eight killed and sixty-two wounded. Most important, King's Mountain combined with other setbacks to completely thwart Cornwallis's southern offensive. And Whig militiamen deserve some (not all) credit for the beleaguered state of Cornwallis's army when it arrived to face Washington at Yorktown one year later.[54]

Immediately following King's Mountain, Colonels Sevier and Campbell returned home to help defeat Britain's Cherokee allies. Trans-Appalachian westerners welcomed peace and news of Britain's 1781 defeat at Yorktown. And they were overjoyed to learn the terms of the 1783 Treaty of Paris, officially ending the Revolutionary War. Negotiating without their French and Spanish allies, the newly independent Americans gained remarkable concessions and impressive new boundaries. A northern border divided the United States from British Canada at the Great Lakes, while the southern border with Spain ran across the 31st parallel. The western border was the Mississippi

54. Higginbotham, *War of American Independence*, 364; Billington, *Westward Expansion,* 189.

River itself, from the Great Lakes south to the 31st parallel. The new United States of America had annexed nearly all the eastern half of the Mississippi River Valley.[55]

THE POLITICS OF EXPANSION

Revolutionary Americans' expansion west across the Appalachian Mountains figured importantly in much more than military and diplomatic developments. The views of the Patriots Thomas Jefferson and Timothy Pickering mirror vastly different attitudes toward the pioneer folk settling the trans-Appalachian West. An ardent agrarian, Jefferson wrote in 1781, "Those who labor in the earth are the chosen people of God if ever he had a chosen people, whose breasts he has made the peculiar deposit for genuine virtue." However, Jefferson's Federalist foe Pickering wrote in 1785, "The emigrants to the frontier lands … are the least worthy subjects in the United States. They are little less savage than the Indians." During the Revolutionary era, both Jefferson and Pickering advocated expansion of the American republic over the Appalachians into the Mississippi River Valley, but they did so from these widely disparate points of view. Their disagreement mirrors a larger debate and shows the significance of the Mississippi Valley in the early national era.[56]

In *The Radicalism of the American Revolution,* Gordon S. Wood sees westward expansion as contributing to the breakdown of aristocratic traditions and the growth of American exceptionalism in a democratic republic. Combined with a rapidly increasing population, westward expansion "was the most basic and liberating force working on American society during the last half of the eighteenth century."[57]

By Revolution's end, the task of governing the new lands west of the Appalachians fell to the Continental Congress, now called

55. Ibid., 189, 194; Whitaker, *Spanish-American Frontier,* 9–11.
56. Thomas Jefferson, *Notes on the State of Virginia,* ed. William Peden (1783; repr. New York, 1954), 164–65; Timothy Pickering to Rufus King, June 4, 1785, in *The Life and Correspondence of Rufus King,* ed. Charles King, 6 vols. (New York, 1894), 1:106–107. Jefferson obviously was writing of white farmers, not slaves.
57. Gordon S. Wood, *The Radicalism of the American Revolution* (New York, 1991), 133–34.

the Confederation Congress because it operated as the sole branch of government under America's first constitution, the Articles of Confederation. The Mississippi Valley was in fact a stumbling block in officially ratifying the Articles of Confederation, because some small states like Maryland had refused to do so until speculators and "landed" state governments in New York, Connecticut, Virginia, the Carolinas, and Georgia surrendered their western land claims to the new federal government. When most of them did so in the early 1780s, America's National Domain was born, and the states officially adopted the articles.[58]

Some still incorrectly teach that the Confederation Congress was a weak body that accomplished little, a mere footnote on the way to the federal Congress under the U.S. Constitution. In fact, the Confederation Congress's record is superior to that of any other revolutionary legislature in history. Its accomplishments include helping to defeat one of the greatest military powers on earth, negotiating the beneficial Treaty of Paris, and creating the first American western policy, setting the course for land sales, territorial government, Indian policy, and foreign diplomacy.[59] Following the peace treaty, congressional committees set to work drafting laws to govern the West. Congressmen were spurred on by the promise of land sale revenues from the thousands of pioneers pouring over the mountains into the Ohio Valley. But differences of opinion over western policy soon combined with other issues and led to formation of political factions. In the 1780s, Patriot Whigs divided into camps that would in the 1790s become America's first two political parties, the Federalists and the Jeffersonian Republicans.[60]

58. Merrill Jensen, "Creation of the National Domain, 1781–1784," *Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 26 (December 1939), 323–342; Jensen, "The Creation of the Old Northwest," *Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 23 (June 1936), 27–46; Richard B. Morris, *The Forging of the Union, 1781–1789* (New York, 1987), 223–27.
59. Herbert James Henderson, *Party Politics and the Continental Congress* (New York, 1975), 1–2, 5–6; Michael Allen, *The Confederation Congress and the Creation of the American Trans-Appalachian Settlement Policy, 1783–1787* (Lewiston, N.Y., 2006), 1–3.
60. Allen, *Confederation Congress.* For trans-Appalachian emigrants, see chapter 2, this work. Jeffersonian Republicans were not connected to modern Republicans; the Jeffersonians became the Democratic Party under Andrew Jackson.

With some exceptions, these factions were regional, with southerners and westerners opposing easterners ("easterner" was the early national term for northeasterners, including New Englanders). Because regional political foes often practiced different occupations, southern and western planters and farmers opposed eastern businessmen. And, again with notable exceptions, there were differing regional ideologies. While all good Revolutionary Whigs opposed centralized governmental authority, many influential easterners were nationalists who sought a more viable central state by strengthening the Articles of Confederation at the expense of the states' powers. Many of them were former Continental Army officers. Their opponents were mostly rural western and southern radicals like Jefferson who favored states' rights over national power. For our purposes, the terms "eastern nationalists," "southerners," and "westerners" will suffice so long as readers remember there are important exceptions (for example, George Washington and John Marshall were both southern nationalists). Eastern nationalists went on to advocate the new federal Constitution in 1787 and form the Federalist Party, while southerners and westerners, for the most part, were antifederalists who became Jeffersonian Republicans.[61]

As suggested by the above quotations from Thomas Jefferson and Timothy Pickering—"the chosen people of God" versus "the least worthy subjects … little less savage than the Indians"—members of Congress disagreed sharply over proposed laws for governing the western territories. In 1783–84, Congressman Jefferson and his allies William Grayson, Hugh Williamson, David Howell, and others held the upper hand. They passed a territorial government ordinance—the Ordinance of 1784—paving the way for sixteen new states in the trans-

61. Henderson, *Party Politics and the Continental Congress*, 5–6; Merrill Jensen, *The New Nation: A History of the United States during the Confederation Era, 1781–89* (New York, 1950), xiii–xiv, 425; Jackson Turner Main, *The Antifederalists: Critics of the Constitution* (New York, 1961), vii, xii. Rhode Islanders and rural northerners in western Pennsylvania and upstate New York sided with the radical Jeffersonians. Differing interpretations of 1780s factions are in Richard B. Morris, *Forging of the Union,* and Jack Rakove, *The Beginnings of National Politics: An Interpretive History of the Continental Congress* (New York, 1979).

Appalachian West via liberal provisions for voting, formation of territorial governments, and joining the union as equal members. This democratic plan for governing the white settlers of the new American empire was unprecedented in the history of colonialism (not even the Romans were so generous in granting citizenship in their empire). Although Jefferson and his allies failed in their attempt to grant free land to the westerners, the radicals held what one historian has called "optimistic expectations of western innocence and regeneration." Yet they also saw political and economic advantages in expansion. Southern agrarians foresaw westerners continuing America's agricultural expansion and becoming political allies in thwarting eastern plans for industry and centralized government.[62]

Easterners, however, had some plans of their own. Thomas Jefferson's departure to become the American ambassador to France coincided with the rise of eastern nationalists in the Confederation Congress. Timothy Pickering, John Jay, Rufus King, Nathan Dane, Gouverneur Morris, and others looked to the West as a means of consolidating national power through the army, Indian policy, and diplomacy with Britain and Spain. Unlike Jeffersonians, eastern nationalists distrusted the "lawless Banditti" of the West and rightly feared new western states would decrease their own political and economic clout while spreading slavery into the territories. Their solution was a sort of reluctant expansionism, one in which the central government would garner revenues from land sales while overseeing a slow, well-organized advance westward. A Massachusetts congressman wrote:

> It has been a question, with the Eastern Delegates especially, whether peopling these new regions with emigrants from the old States, may not, in one point of view, be a disadvantage to them. But it has been found, that these new lands are very inviting to settlers, and that, if not regularly disposed of and governed by the

62. Henderson, *Party Politics in the Continental Congress,* 369, 409 (qtn.); Allen, *Confederation Congress,* 32–40, 75–76. Jefferson's bills are in Julian P. Boyd, ed., *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson* (Princeton, N.J., 1953), 6:603–15, and John C. Fitzpatrick, ed., *Journals of the Continental Congress* (Washington, D.C., 1934), 7:563–64 and 26:275–79.

> Union, they will in a very few years be seised and settled in an irregular manner, and perhaps at no less expence to the Inhabitants of the Old states. Considering these circumstances, the advantage of regular settlements, of lessening the public debt and military expences on the frontier, and of keeping, by such settlements, that Country more effectually connected with the Union, Congress have been induced to adopt measures to establish Government, etc. there.[63]

The easterners went to work, led by Rufus King and Nathan Dane of Massachusetts and John Jay of New York. After granting western lands to Continental Army officers in lieu of pensions, they passed the Land Act of 1785 creating a New England township grid (640-acre sections in 36-section-square townships) and offering land at $1.00 per acre. But because the minimum purchase was a township, only capitalized entrepreneurs (most of them easterners) could apply. Nationalists envisioned a controlled westward expansion onto speculator-owned lands, supervised by the government and avoiding Indian warfare, a plan that would be foiled by frontier squatters time and again. The Indian Ordinance of 1786 aimed to settle disputes by acknowledging Indian right of soil and requiring contractual (treaty) purchase of land. The ordinance reflects both the New Englanders' humanitarianism and their shrewd strategy of maintaining an Indian buffer to slow the westward advance, shaky propositions that Jeffersonian (and, later, Jacksonian) frontiersmen would continually thwart. But on paper the eastern plan appeared a sensible way to expand west while producing land sales revenue for the new government.[64]

Debate over the 1786 Jay-Gardoqui Treaty (not the more famous Jay's Treaty of 1794) provides a case study in the political costs of easterners' reluctant expansionism. As noted, France had ceded the Louisiana Territory to her Spanish allies prior to their

63. Allen, *Confederation Congress,* 4–6 (qtn., 6); Henderson, *Party Politics in the Continental Congress,* 369, 377, 409.

64. Fitzpatrick, *Journals of the Continental Congress,* 28:251–57, 31:49–53; Allen, *Confederation Congress,* 77–83; Michael Allen, "Justice for the Indians: The Federalist Quest," *Essex Institute Historical Collections* 122 (April 1986), 124–41.

1763 defeat in the French and Indian War, and, although Spain would eventually return Louisiana to France, the Spaniards held sway on the Mississippi south of Natchez from 1762 to 1803. When America's westward surge recommenced in 1783, Spain reacted by closing the Mississippi River south of the 32nd parallel to all American commerce on July 22, 1784. Angry southerners and westerners demanded the river be reopened, so the Confederation Congress's foreign affairs committee sent the diplomat John Jay to Spain to parley with Don Diego de Gardoqui. In fairness to Jay, Congress sent him to bargain from a very weak position. America had no treaty right to navigate along Spain's Mississippi shores, and no strong army or navy to force a claim. After a seeming impasse, Gardoqui made Jay a proposal that was, from a diplomatic perspective, generous. He offered the United States a military alliance with Spain and a trade treaty favorable to the northeastern states. In return, all Jay had to do was agree to forego American navigation of the Mississippi River for twenty-five years. John Jay signed the treaty and sent it to Congress in hopes of securing the constitutionally required nine (out of thirteen) state votes.[65]

One historian suggested that the reaction to the treaty was akin to throwing a bomb down the congressional aisle. A fierce debate ensued, baring the factional divide and sharp differences between easterners and the South/West alliance. Jay spoke on the matter, expressing regret but arguing this was a good bargain considering America's weaknesses. A North Carolina congressman wrote home, "The subject was … agitated with warmth which might reasonably have been expected." Southerners believed "use of the Mississippi is given by nature to our western country, and no power on earth can take it away from them." James Madison characterized Jay's efforts as "short-sighted" and "dishonorable." The proposed treaty, southerners

65. Whitaker, *Spanish-American Frontier,* 63–68, 70–71; *Journals of the Continental Congress,* 29:658; John Jay to President of Congress, April 11, 1787, in *Correspondence and Public Papers of John Jay,* ed. Henry P. Johnston (New York, 1890), 3:241, 243. See also Michael Allen, "The Mississippi River Debate, 1785–1787," *Tennessee Historical Quarterly* 36 (Winter 1977), 453–55.

declared, would ensure "Eastern states are to receive the benefits … and the Southern states are to pay the purchase by giving up the Miss[issippi]." In the end, the treaty failed to muster the required nine votes. All states above the Mason-Dixon line (the southern border of Pennsylvania) voted aye, while all those south voted nay.[66]

In supporting John Jay's doomed treaty, eastern nationalists acted on complex and, at times, selfish motives. Although Rufus King wrote a friend that it "would be impolitic" to speak frankly because their true views about the West could not "with safety be *now* admitted" openly, easterners left sufficient evidence to form a picture. King doubted the "loyalty" of western squatters and "banditti," and feared their "pursuits and interests … will be so opposite [ours], that an entire separation must eventually ensue." If westerners did remain in the Confederation, the new states would ally with the South and diminish easterners' power (easterners "have a majority and will endeavor to keep it," William Grayson had warned). Then too, there was economics. One easterner wrote that westward expansion "must in consequences depopulate and ruin the Old states," draining away laborers and thus raising wages. If westerners could be "cut off for a time from any connections except with the Old States, across the mountains," the resultant stability "would be highly beneficial to them both, and bring considerable trade."[67]

John Jay's views reflect all these political and economic

66. Edmund Cody Burnett, *The Continental Congress* (New York, 1941), 654–55; Timothy Bloodworth to North Carolina Assembly, Dec. [?], 1786, in *Letters of the Members of the Continental Congress,* ed. Edmund Cody Burnett (Washington, D.C., 1936), 8:521; Jensen, *New Nation,* 172; Morris, *Forging of the Union,* 240–41. The vote was seven to five, with Rhode Island absent. Madison was a southern nationalist. See also James H. Mast, "Hugh Henry Brackenridge and the Mississippi Question, 1786–87," *Western Pennsylvania Historical Magazine* 54 (October 1971), 378, 380–81.

67. Rufus King to Jonathan Jackson, Sept. 3, 1786, *Letters of the Members of the Continental Congress*, 8:458; King to Elbridge Gerry, June 4, 1786, in *Life and Correspondence of Rufus King,* ed. Charles R. King (New York, 1984), 1:175; Henderson, *Party Politics in the Continental Congress,* 408–409; Whitaker, *Spanish-American Frontier,* 74–75; Jensen, *New Nation,* 9, 171. See also Richard Henry Lee to George Washington, n.d., in *The Letters of Richard Henry Lee,* ed. James Curtis Ballagh (New York, 1914), 2:426–27, and James Madison to Thomas Jefferson, March 19, 1787, in *The Writings of James Madison,* ed. Gaillard Hunt (New York, 1901), 2:328.

motives combined with the desire to avoid an Indian war. They also reflect complete ignorance of conditions in the Ohio and Mississippi Valleys. Although Jay had traveled widely across the northeastern United States and in Europe, he had never been south or west of Philadelphia. He predicted the West "will one day give us trouble" and expressed doubts "whether after two or three generations [westerners] will be fit to govern themselves." In a candid letter to his fellow diplomat Thomas Jefferson, Jay asked,

> Would it not be wiser gradually to extend our settlements as want of room should make it necessary, than to pitch our tents through the wilderness in a great variety of places, far distant from each other, and from the advantages of education, civilization, law, and government which compact settlements and neighborhoods afford? Shall we not fill the wilderness with white savages?—and will they not become more formidable to us than the tawny ones which now inhabit it?

It is interesting that John Jay was trying to persuade Jefferson, whose view of the West was so diametrically opposed to his own. Then, too, there is real class prejudice in the last quoted sentence of Jay's letter. Easterners like Jay looked down on the "squatters, insolvent emigrants and demagogues" and "white savages" who populated the trans-Appalachian West. "Border" folk "looked rude in their manners and dress" and gave "an unfavorable opinion of the country." "Under pressure of poverty, the [jail], and the consciousness of public contempt," wrote the Connecticut jurist and poet Timothy Dwight, they "leave their native places, and betake themselves to the wilderness." Writing about western Pennsylvania's backwoodsmen, Dr. Benjamin Rush of Philadelphia observed,

> The first settler in the woods is generally a man who has outlived his credit or fortune in the cultivated parts of the state… As he lives in the neighborhood of the Indians, he soon acquires a strong tincture of their manners. His exertions, while they continue, are violent, but they are succeeded by long intervals of rest. His pleasures consist chiefly in fishing and hunting… Above all he

> revolts against the operations of the laws. He cannot bear to surrender up a single natural right for all the benefits of government.[68]

The Jay-Gardoqui Treaty defeat was the only setback in the advance of eastern nationalist western policy. Northeasterners immediately began work replacing Thomas Jefferson's territorial government Ordinance of 1784 with their own Northwest Ordinance of 1787 (to be followed by the Southwest Ordinance of 1789). This all paralleled a crucial nationalist surge that resulted in the 1787 Philadelphia Convention drafting the federal Constitution to replace the Articles of Confederation. Thus, as the Federalist founders drafted the Constitution in Philadelphia, their nationalist allies in the Confederation Congress in New York City worked on a new law for the western territory. Nathan Dane chaired a reconstituted territorial government committee dominated by easterners.[69]

Progressive historians used to lambaste easterners for emasculating Jefferson's territorial system, but in retrospect the Dane committee's changes were moderate albeit less democratic. The Northwest Ordinance of 1787 legislated for the territory north of the Ohio, east of the Mississippi, and south of Canada; the Southwest Ordinance would do the same for the U.S. territory south of the Ohio. The Dane committee reduced Jefferson's number of new states from sixteen to nine, and it slowed the process of statehood by raising the population requirement to 60,000. Congress also checked direct territorial democracy, as territorial governors would now be federal appointees and so too would judges. Yet Congress also provided territorial residents with their own legislature, a bill of rights,

68. John Jay to Thomas Jefferson, April 24, 1787, in *Correspondence and Public Papers of John Jay,* 3:245; David Ramsay to Thomas Jefferson, [?] 1787, in *Papers of Thomas Jefferson,* 10:441; Francis S. Philbrick, *The Rise of the West, 1754–1830* (New York, 1965), 319; Philbrick, *Laws of the Illinois Territory, 1809–1818* (Springfield, Ill., 1950), 25:cccxxxiii–iv; Marshall Smelser, *The Democratic Republic, 1801–1815* (New York, 1968), 76.

69. Allen, *Confederation Congress,* 111–122. See also Peter S. Onuf, *Statehood and Union: A History of the Northwest Ordinance* (Bloomington, Ind., 1987); Robert F. Berkhofer, "The Republican Origins of the American Territorial System," in *The West of the American People,* ed. Allan G. Bogue (Itaksa, Ill., 1970), 152–61.

and a nonvoting congressional representative. And again, American colonialism was benign compared to that of Spain and France. While Indians certainly bore the full brunt of American colonial power, white settlers from the old states kept their American citizenship and looked forward to joining the Union in new states with equal representation and all the rights of the original thirteen. There was no precedent in the history of world civilization for an empire like this one.[70]

In sum, from 1784 to 1787 the Confederation Congress crafted laws for the West that continue to affect our nation. Flying over the United States today in an airplane, one is struck by the checkerboard pattern of the land below—the long right-angled roads and square fenced fields that constitute our modern townships and land sections first introduced by the 1785 Congress. And when today's Indian tribes take the government to court for abrogation of treaties, they do so under the right of soil and contractual treaty provisions of the Ordinance of 1786. All of the western states through Alaska and Hawaii have joined the Union under terms tied directly to the Ordinance of 1784 and the Northwest Ordinance of 1787. And when we listen to news stories about the governor of Puerto Rico, territorial legislators on Saipan, or American Samoa's congressional representative, we are seeing the legacy of the Confederation Congress's trans-Appalachian settlement policy.

An equally important result of the territorial ordinances manifested itself throughout antebellum debates over slavery in the territories. Although a slaveholder, Jefferson had unsuccessfully tried to add a clause to the Ordinance of 1784 banning slavery in all new states to arise in the trans-Appalachian West. His fellow southerners thwarted the effort, but eastern nationalists successfully renewed it in 1787. The Northwest Ordinance outlawed slavery in all the states to be created above the Ohio River (Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Michigan

70. *Journals of the Continental Congress,* 31:699–703, 32:281, 343; Allen, *Confederation Congress,* 122–129; Berkhofer,"Origins of the United States Territorial System," 261. See also Morris, *Forging of the Union,* 229–31, and R. Douglas Hurt, *The Ohio Frontier: Crucible of the Old Northwest* (Bloomington, Ind., 1996), 272–73.

and Wisconsin), while the Southwest Ordinance (1789) allowed slavery south of the river (Kentucky, Tennessee, Mississippi, and Alabama). Meanwhile, the Constitutional Convention, meeting concurrently in Philadelphia during the summer of 1787 and at loggerheads over the slavery question, soon produced a document that says remarkably little about how new states will join the Union and absolutely nothing about the status of slavery in the territories before statehood. Historians have correctly assumed this is not a coincidence. Obviously, the Constitutional Convention ended the standoff between anti-slavery easterners and pro-slavery southerners by persuading Congress to pass a statute, the Northwest Ordinance. The long-term problem, of course, is that statutes are not fundamental (constitutional) law and can be repealed or changed by a majority vote of congressmen. When Congress overturned the Missouri Compromise of 1821 with the Kansas-Nebraska Act of 1854, the nation learned the downside of the Compromise of 1787. On the other hand, without the Northwest Ordinance there might never have been a federal Constitution in the first place.[71]

Meanwhile, the ushering in of a new federal government in 1789 marked a new stage in the politics of expansion over the mountains and into the Mississippi Valley. Eastern nationalists became Federalists, a party led by Washington, Jay, King, Pickering, Alexander Hamilton, and John Adams, and based in the commercial Northeast with some southern membership. Under Washington and Adams, Federalists would dominate the federal government until 1800. Most southerners and antifederalist opponents of the Constitution formed the Jeffersonian Republican Party, led by its namesake, the former nationalist James Madison, John Randolph, Nathaniel Macon, and Albert Gallatin. The Republicans attracted rural western Pennsylvanian and upstate New York farmers into an agrarian

71. Staughton Lynd, "The Compromise of 1787," *Political Science Quarterly* 81 (June 1966), 225–50; Henderson, *Party Politics in the Continental Congress,* 413–18. The Ohio slavery debate story is told from settlers' viewpoints in David McCullough's masterful work *The Pioneers: The Heroic Story of the Pioneers Who Brought the American Ideal West* (New York, 2019), 11, 13, 29–30, 144–46, 201.

party of slaveholders and frontier farmers who stood against the more urban and commercial Federalists. They also enlisted New York City's Aaron Burr and cultivated radical French (and Irish) immigrants.[72]

As always, the parties battled over the Mississippi Valley. When Secretary of Treasury Hamilton needed revenue, he called on Congress to tax western Pennsylvania whisky distillers at 25 percent, and the Whisky Rebellion (1794) began. When Kentucky and Tennessee applied to join the Union in 1791 and 1796, Republicans voted aye but Federalists balked unless a new northern state (e.g., Vermont) could balance the Senate. When reckless Jeffersonian frontiersmen started Indian wars, the Federalists went to war, but grumbled about the expense and bloodshed. And when it came time to pass a new land law in 1795, Federalists raised the price to $2.00 an acre over Republican protest. In retrospect, we can see that all of this was political suicide. A rapidly growing nation was not going to vote for a political party that resisted westward expansion. In 1796, Tennessee's three electoral votes brought Thomas Jefferson within a hair's breadth of defeating John Adams for the presidency (Tennesseans also elected a young Jeffersonian named Andrew Jackson as their first congressman). Four years later, Jefferson was elected and Adams went home to Massachusetts. Soon, the price of land dropped, Ohio entered the Union, and Jefferson sent negotiators to France to talk to Napoleon about purchasing the port of New Orleans. They returned with a treaty popularly called the Louisiana Purchase.[73]

If approved, the 1803 Louisiana Purchase would bring huge consequences, doubling the size of the American nation and marking the course for nearly a century of westward expansion. The land Napoleon offered to cede to Thomas Jefferson for $16,000,000 (about $233,000,000 in today's dollars) was the entire western half of the Mississippi Valley, all of the territory

72. The best overview remains Morton Borden, *Parties and Politics in the Early Republic, 1789–1815* (Arlington Heights, Ill., 1967).

73. Michael Allen, "The Federalists and the West, 1783–1803," *Western Pennsylvania Historical Magazine* 61 (October 1978), 315–32.

contained within the river systems originating in the Rocky Mountains and flowing east to the great river. Following the 1783 British surrender of their (and their Indian allies') claims to the trans-Appalachian West, the Mississippi Valley would constitute a contiguous national ecosystem, the setting for the republic's exuberant and tumultuous growth throughout the course of the nineteenth century. Jefferson could see this great potential, and before the Senate approved the treaty he had secretly dispatched the U.S. Army officers Meriwether Lewis and William Clark and a Corps of Discovery to explore the new territory.[74]

Strident Federalist opposition to the 1803 Louisiana Purchase mirrors the decline of their party, yet it also offers a fascinating glimmer of how their beliefs in nationalism, union, and a viable central state might eventually survive and triumph under another political banner. When Jefferson first presented his breathtaking purchase of the Louisiana Territory to Congress, Connecticut's *Hartford Courant* sounded the arch-Federalist battle cry:

> Fifteen million dollars for bogs, mountains, and Indians! Fifteen million dollars for uninhabited wasteland and refuge for criminals! And for what purposes? To enhance the power of Virginia's politicians. To pour millions into the coffers of Napoleon on the eve of war with England.

Congress's dwindling Federalist cadre objected to the huge cost and raised constitutional questions about adding foreign territory through treaty and unilaterally granting U.S. citizenship to French and Spanish nationals. While the purchase passed easily, twenty of the twenty-five House opponents were Federalists, and all five Senate nays came from Federalists. Jefferson succeeded in adding to the Union what one Federalist termed a "Gallo-Hispano-Indian ominum gatherum of savages and adventurers." Delaware's Fisher Ames lamented, "Now by

74. Arthur Preston Whitaker, *The Mississippi Question, 1795–1803: A Study of Trade, Politics, and Diplomacy* (1934; repr. Gloucester, Mass., 1962); Stephen E. Ambrose, *Undaunted Courage: Meriwether Lewis, Thomas Jefferson, and the Opening of the American West* (New York, 1996).

adding an unmeasured world beyond that river [Mississippi] we rush like a comet into infinite space. In our wild career we may jostle some other world out of its orbit, but we shall, in every event, quench the light of our own."[75]

The silver lining for eastern nationalists in this seeming debacle is that Alexander Hamilton, Rufus King, and John Marshall all supported the Louisiana Purchase, and so too did the junior Senator from Massachusetts, John Quincy Adams, son of the defeated president. John Quincy Adams could see on which side his bread was buttered, and he soon declared himself to be a "national Republican" and (temporarily) joined the party of his father's enemies. The irony of this whole story is that the Federalists' heirs, the Whigs and Lincoln (not Jeffersonian) Republicans, all attracted many votes from the West and especially the Old Northwest. David Crockett, Henry Clay, William Henry Harrison, and Abraham Lincoln all rose to power when nationalists learned how to harness western democracy to eastern capitalism. As the nineteenth century progressed, nationalists would learn how to pass around the liquor jug and the barbequed beef and pork, besting the Jacksonian Democrats and becoming a party of the people.[76]

Much happened during those years between Fisher Ames and Davy Crockett, "Old Tippecanoe" (Harrison), "Harry of the West" (Clay), and "Honest Abe" Lincoln. The industrial revolution shifted New England's economy from ocean commerce to manufacturing, and the East became democratized. Transplanted easterners settled the Old Northwest and fanned out across the Mississippi River to Iowa and Minnesota. Steamboats, the Erie Canal, and railroads linked East and West, and many westerners

75. U.S. Congress, Senate, *Debates and Proceedings in the Congress of the United States* (*Annals of Congress*), 8th Congress, 1st sess. (1803), 73; ibid., House, 488–89; James Eugene Smith, *One Hundred Years of Hartford's Courant* (New York, 1949), 82; Fisher Ames to Christopher Gore, Oct. 3, 1803, in *The Life and Works of Fisher Ames,* ed. Seth Ames (Boston, Mass., 1854), 323–24. An excellent narrative summary is in Marshall Smelser, *The Democratic Republic, 1801–1815* (New York, 1968), 97–101.

76. David Hackett Fischer, *The Revolution of American Conservatism: The Federalist Party in the Era of Jeffersonian Democracy* (New York, 1965), passim; Homer C. Hockett, "Federalism and the West," *Essays in American History Dedicated to Fredrick Jackson Turner* (New York, 1910), 134–35.

furnished raw materials and growing markets for the East while southern Democrats groaned in dismay. The Confederation era's South-West alliance was replaced by an East-West alliance (excepting Missouri, Arkansas, and Texas) that lasted through most of the nineteenth century. Free market capitalism, democracy, and a belief in free labor and "free soil" linked two regions that eastern nationalists once thought incompatible. When, in 1861-65, Lincoln waged war on the Old South, Ulysses S. Grant of Illinois and William Tecumseh Sherman of Ohio led tens of thousands of upper Mississippi Valley soldiers in support of their Yankee brethren.[77]

WHO WAS DAVID CROCKETT?

Of the many stories told about Colonel David Crockett, most concerned his exploits as a hunter, frontier farmer, soldier, and Congressman. But Davy Crockett was also a river man, and the brevity of his boating career provides the punch line for the following story drawn from his autobiography, *A Narrative of the Life of David Crockett, by Himself* (1834).

Around 1826, after a hunting season in which he claimed to have killed "one hundred and five bears," Crockett decided to take a river trip to New Orleans. Captaining two flatboats loaded with "thirty thousand staves" (lumber), he sailed down the Obion River and into the Mississippi, but things soon got rough. Davy discovered his "pilot was as ignorant of the business as myself" and, unable to land the boats, he decided to "go on and run all night." Then disaster struck: "We went broadside full tilt against the head of an island where a large raft of drift timber had lodged," and soon "water was pouring thro' in a current" and the boats were "sucked under" the timber drift.[78]

Trapped in his cabin below, Crockett looked death in the face and called out for help. As the cabin filled with rushing river water, several men in his boat crew yanked him through a small

77. Hockett, "Federalism and the West," 134–35.
78. David Crockett, *A Narrative of the Life of David Crockett, by Himself* (1834; repr. Lincoln, Nebr., 1987), 195–97.

porthole; he escaped, "literally skinned like a rabbit." Their boats and cargo lost, the crew members spent the night shivering from the cold, but happy to have "made such a marvelous escape." He concludes:

> This was the last of my boats, and of my boating; for it went so badly with me, along at the first, that I hadn't much mind to try it any more. I now returned home again, and as the next August was the Congressional election, I began to turn my attention a little to that matter.[79]

Unlike some Davy Crockett stories, the above tale probably has more elements of truth than fancy in it. Crockett did make an unsuccessful flatboat trip, losing his boats at Devil's Elbow, a treacherous spot on the Mississippi near Memphis. But a few elements of the story are probably concocted for literary effect. It is unlikely Crockett killed one hundred and five bears in less than a year; that would require killing one bear and hauling it out of the woods every two or three days. And perhaps the dramatic rescue scene was embellished a bit? And it is perhaps too neat a coincidence that Davy could transition perfectly out of flatboating and into his first election to Congress. That sequence certainly worked out nicely for literary effect and the beginning of the next chapter of the *Narrative of the Life of David Crockett, by Himself.*

Then too, this part of the book was probably not even written by Crockett. The handwriting of the manuscript Crockett delivered to his publisher was that of his colleague, the Whig congressman Thomas Clinton of Kentucky. Crockett claimed authorship but acknowledged Clinton helped "correct it as I write it." Clinton received half of the royalties from the phenomenally successful *Narrative.*

As the above suggests, sorting out the truth about David Crockett is a bit of a chore. Who was David Crockett? The answer depends upon whether one is asking about Colonel *David* or *Davy* Crockett, or the fellow who has jumped back and forth

79. Ibid., 199–200.

between those two identities throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.[80]

We must begin by tracing the factual history of the life of David, not Davy, Crockett. David was the name of the frontiersman-turned-politician who came of age in the Tennessee wilderness. Colonel David Crockett and his family seldom used the name Davy; that name was used by 1830s literary artists who built the myth of Davy Crockett out of the life story of David Crockett. But it was no accident that storytellers and artists were drawn to this historical David Crockett, for his history reflects classic American themes of democracy, manifest destiny, partisan politics, provincialism, frontier traits, and nostalgia for a vanishing frontier past.

"My father's name was John Crockett, and he was of Irish descent," Crockett begins the *Narrative.* Crockett meant northern Irish, or Scots-Irish descent; his people were poor Pennsylvania farmers who migrated from Revolutionary-era Carolina over the Appalachians to what would soon become Tennessee. There, John Crockett fought alongside the mountaineer militiamen who routed the British at the 1780 Battle of King's Mountain. Six years later John's wife Rebecca gave birth to David in Greene County, east of Knoxville.[81]

Life was hard in the Tennessee mountains. With a large family to support, Crockett's parents ran a tavern and scratched out a living from the soil. David grew up wild, truant from school and employers, and running away from home at age thirteen. He finally returned home in 1802, a hardened hunter, trapper, and farmer. Two brief courtships followed, the second resulting in an 1806 marriage to Polly Finely. The newlyweds roamed the Tennessee-Alabama country, farming the first of eight Crockett homesteads and bringing two sons into the world. But "I was better at increasing my family than my fortune," David later

80. Paul Hutton, introduction to Crockett, *Narrative of the Life of David Crockett,* vi–vii; Michael Allen, "Who Was David Crockett?" in *Tennessee: State of the Nation,* ed. Larry H. Whiteaker and W. Calvin Dickinson (Mason, Ohio, 2006), 51–57.

81. Crockett, *Narrative of the Life of David Crockett*, 14–16; Michael Lofaro, ed., *Davy Crockett: The Man, the Legend, the Legacy* (Knoxville, Tenn., 1985), xviii.

wrote, and the family struggled. Soon the Creek Indian War pulled David Crockett away from his family and sent him down the road to fame in the War of 1812.[82]

By the time of his Indian war service, Crockett had already acquired a reputation as a skilled hunter and scout. Southern militiamen fought the Creek Indians, British allies and staunch foes of America's surge westward. When the Creeks attacked Fort Mims in 1813 and killed more than five hundred soldiers, women, and children, Crockett joined the Tennessee state militia general Andrew Jackson in a counteroffensive. At this time, Jackson was an up-and-coming Tennessee judge, soldier, and politician; his and Crockett's careers would cross again as both allies and rivals. Crockett saw combat and was promoted to sergeant, but he soon soured on military life and returned home after his ninety-day enlistment was up. He re-enlisted the next year, but missed the crucial battles of Horseshoe Bend and New Orleans. "This closed my career as a warrior, and I am glad of it," he wrote, "for I like my life now a heap better than I did then." In fact, he would serve twice again, once as a peacetime Tennessee militia colonel and, finally, as an 1836 volunteer at the famed siege of the Alamo.[83]

Polly died unexpectedly in 1815, and Crockett quickly courted and married Elizabeth Patton, a young widow. They shared five children from former marriages and brought four of their own into the world. They also shared Elizabeth's "snug little farm," but not for long. Crockett, who never seemed content to stay in the same place for long, packed them all up in 1816 and moved to Shoal Creek, in Lawrence County, Tennessee. It was there that his reputation as a hunter, soldier, patriot, and family man propelled him into a political career.[84]

Although he had little formal education, and no legal education whatsoever, David Crockett was appointed magistrate and then justice of the peace. "I had never read a page in a law book in all my life," Crockett remembered, so he mapped out a common-

82. Hutton, introduction, viii–ix; Crockett, *Narrative of the Life of David Crockett,* 68.
83. Lofaro, *Davy Crockett*, xviii–xix; Hutton, introduction, xii.
84. Crockett, *Narrative of the Life of David Crockett,* 125–33.

sense course to perform his duties. Whenever a crime occurred, "I and my constable ordered our warrant [orally], and then he would take the man, and bring him before me in trial." But when the state legislature insisted that "warrants must in writing and signed; and that I must keep a book, and write my proceedings in it … [t]his was a hard business for me, for I could just barely write my own name." In time, Crockett improved his literacy, handwriting, and legal knowledge. "I gave my decisions on the principle of common justice and honesty between man and man."[85]

In 1818, Lawrence County voters elected David Crockett colonel in the 57th Tennessee State Militia Regiment. Then, in 1821 and 1823, they sent him to the state legislature in Nashville. Crockett supplemented his meager government salary by continuing to farm and hunt; it was during this time that he embarked on his disastrous flatboating venture. Whether or not there was a direct relationship between his failed flatboat trip and his congressional campaign, both events did occur in 1826–27.[86]

Colonel David Crockett's 1827 congressional victory began a meteoric and short-lived (nine-year) national political career. He campaigned in typical frontier style, opening his rallies with a barbeque, giving a speech, and ending with a dance. In between he treated the crowd to drinks, "a little of the *creature* to put my friends in a good humor." Crockett was a clever speaker known for his humor. One of his recurrent tricks was to repeat verbatim his opponent's stump speech before he could deliver it himself, leaving his opponent speechless, as it were.[87]

From 1827 to 1835, Crockett won his congressional seat three times, lost it twice, all the while receiving praise and vilification and the status of a potential Whig Party presidential candidate. He began in Congress as a Jacksonian Democrat, an opponent of then-sitting President John Quincy Adams.[88] As noted, Jackson's

85. Ibid., 133–35.
86. Ibid., 137–45, 195–200.
87. Hutton, introduction, xiii; Crockett, *Narrative of the Life of David Crockett,* 201–20.
88. Allen, "Who Was David Crockett?" 53–54; Lofaro, *Davy Crockett,* xx.

and Crockett's careers paralleled at times, and the two shared a remarkable similarity as legendary Tennesseans whose exploits were celebrated in oral tradition. True, Crockett was younger than Jackson and lacked the résumé of the Hero of New Orleans, but he would ultimately gain equal historic and folkloric stature. Perhaps Jackson recognized that his ally could soon become a rival, for the two soon parted ways.

Crockett remembered he had followed Jackson's "principles as he laid them down, and as *'I understood them,'* before Jackson's election as president." By 1831, the issues of Indian removal, tariffs, internal improvements, and the Bank of the United States had driven Crockett into the rival Whig camp.[89] It was Jackson's 1830 plan for Indian removal—extirpating Chickasaw, Cherokee, Choctaw, Creek, and Seminole people from Tennessee, Alabama, Georgia, Florida, and the Carolinas to a "permanent Indian frontier" in Oklahoma Territory—that first angered Crockett. He had left the Creek Indian War in part because he saw some justice in their opposition to Indian-haters like Jackson. Crockett's congressional district lay adjacent to Chickasaw land, and, like Sam Houston, Crockett had many Indian friends.[90]

In his most famous speech before Congress, David Crockett defended the "native people of this country as a sovereign people" and attacked the Democrats who wanted to take their land and ship them west. Should Congress "turn a deaf ear to [the Indians'] cries, misery must be their fate." If Indian removal was not "oppression with a vengeance, [he] did not know what was." Acknowledging a vote against removal might hurt his political fortunes, Crockett concluded that if he were to "exchange [my] conscience for mere party views" he hoped his "Maker would no longer suffer him to exist." Indeed, although he "should like to

89. Richard Boyd Hauck, "The Man in the Buckskin Hunting Shirt: Fact and Fiction in the Crockett Story," in Lofaro, *Davy Crockett,* 10–11.

90. David Crockett, "From Speech before Congress (May 19, 1830)," in *The Removal of the Cherokee Nation: Manifest Destiny or National Dishonor,* ed. Louis Filler and Allen Guttmann (Huntington, N.Y., 1977), 39–41.

please" his constituents, he ultimately "had a settlement to make at the bar of God."[91]

With his folk hero status, speaking skills, and down-home, principled demeanor, Congressman David Crockett initially seemed a godsend to the Whig Party. Ideological descendants of the Federalists, Whigs espoused a solid program of economic nationalism, but they suffered the unfair reputation of being "elitists" when compared to their Democrat opponents. "Old Hickory"—as Jackson was affectionately called—and his followers were very successful in marketing Democrats as the "Party of the Common Man." The Whigs had not yet cultivated candidates like "Old Tippecanoe" (William Henry Harrison) and "Honest Abe" Lincoln, but Crockett would play a major role leading them in that direction. Thus Whig stalwarts like Henry Clay, Daniel Webster, and former president John Quincy Adams welcomed Crockett as their own "common man," a symbol that they too represented homespun values, frontier courage, equality, and the aspirations of the democratic majority.[92]

Ultimately, Crockett's feisty independence alienated some of his Whig allies, just as it had Democrats. In 1831, he lost his congressional seat. He won it back in 1833, but in 1835 he lost it again.[93] Disgusted with Washington, D.C., and party politics in general, Crockett supposedly told the voters to "go to hell" because he "would go to Texas."

Whether or not David Crockett ever uttered such a clever (and artistic) story transition is irrelevant. What history tells is that moving to Texas in 1836 was really not a bad idea for an unemployed politician looking for new opportunities. Texas, still part of Mexico, was home to thousands of rebellious Americans, many of them Crockett's former cronies from Tennessee. They were poised to declare themselves independent from Mexico. Crockett no doubt reckoned Texas the perfect place to rebuild his financial fortunes and perhaps become a territorial governor,

91. Crockett, "From Speech before Congress," 39, 40, 41.
92. Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., *The Age of Jackson* (New York, 1945), 278–79. Schlesinger inaccurately terms Crockett a "conservative."
93. This and the next three paragraphs are based on Hutton, introduction, xxvi–xxxvii.

or congressional representative, or maybe even the president of a Texan republic.

Colonel David Crockett rode into Texas just as the Texas Revolution of 1836 broke out. Entering San Antonio in February of 1836, he declared to Jim Bowie, William Travis, and their small Texan militia, "I have come to aid you all that I can in your noble cause." Tragically, he never lived to see, or benefit from, the Texas republic he fought to create. On March 6, 1836, David Crockett fought alongside one hundred eighty-eight Texans defending the Alamo against an attack by General Santa Anna's Mexican army of fifteen hundred. The Texans fought to the last man, and we know Crockett was one of the very last standing. As Mexicans stormed and seized the Alamo, Crockett finally surrendered to the victors.

Much of what we know about subsequent events comes from the diary of a Mexican lieutenant, Jose Enrique de la Pena. Characteristically, Crockett used his verbal skills to try to talk his way out of the situation; he described himself to his captors as a mere tourist who had mistakenly wandered into a combat zone and taken up arms in self-defense. Unimpressed, Santa Anna ordered execution of Crockett and his few remaining compatriots. But there was no firing squad. Crockett died, unarmed, as angry Mexican soldiers repeatedly thrust their swords into his body. "Though tortured before they were killed," wrote Lieutenant Pena, "these unfortunates died without complaining and without humiliating themselves before their torturers."[94]

Thus ended the historic life of Colonel David Crockett, and began the folkloric and popular culture life of Davy Crockett, an American icon. Indeed, the confusion between David and Davy had begun only a few years before Crockett's death at the Alamo. In 1833, Washington, D.C., theatergoers thronged to see James Kirk Paulding's *Lion of the West.* Much of the reason for the play's enthusiastic reception was the audience's identification

94. Ibid., xli, xliii; Paul Andrew Hutton, "How Did Davy Really Die?" *True West Magazine,* Feb. 13, 2011, https://truewestmagazine.com/how-did-davy-really-die-2/, accessed June 25, 2017.

of the leading character as the Tennessee congressman David Crockett. Although the play's hero, played by the famed actor James Hackett, was called Nimrod Wildfire, Americans instantly recognized Wildfire as a dramatized version of Crockett. Attired in buckskin breeches, moccasins, and a raccoon-skin cap, his trusty Kentucky long rifle was always at his side. Wildfire was a skilled hunter, ferocious Indian fighter, and slick talker. "Mister, I can whip my weight in wildcats!" Wildfire snorted. "My father can whip the best man in old Kaintuck, and I can whip my father!"[95]

On the opening night of the Washington, D.C., performance of *The Lion of the West,* the theater audience was treated to a view of *two* Colonel Crocketts at one time. The real David Crockett, in town for what would be his last congressional session, decided to attend and see his mythic alter ego on stage. When Hackett—as Nimrod Wildfire—took the stage, he paused for a moment and looked up into the balcony where Congressman Crockett was seated. Hackett then doffed his coonskin hat and, with sweeping bow, paid respects to the man upon whom his character was based. Simultaneously, David Crockett arose and tipped his formal dress hat to Hackett. For one crystal moment, two Colonel Crocketts—one imaginary and one real—stood and saluted one another. The audience cheered wildly, whistling, shouting, and stamping its feet. Then, just as suddenly as the scene had begun, Congressman Crockett took his seat and *The Lion of the West* began.[96]

Who was David Crockett? He was a Tennessee frontiersman—a husband, father, farmer, scout, hunter, soldier, river man, judge, state legislator, and United States Congressman who died fighting for Texas independence at the Alamo in 1836. David Crockett was an American, and through his story we can view very important themes in early national American history: the settlement of the Mississippi Valley, the rise of democracy

95. James Kirke Paulding, *The Lion of the West,* ed. James N. Tidwell (1831; repr. Stanford, Calif., 1954), 54; Lorman Ratner, *James Kirke Paulding: The Last Republican* (Westport, Conn., 1992), 63–64.

96. James N. Tidwell, introduction to Paulding, *Lion of the West,* 7–8.

and party politics in the Age of the Common Man, and, finally, American westward expansion and manifest destiny.

THREE PROPHETS AND A FORCE TO CONTEND WITH

On June 16, 1806, a seeming miracle occurred among Shawnee Indians in the village of Greenville, in central Ohio. William Henry Harrison, governor of the Indiana Territory, was engaged in a campaign to conquer the Shawnee and curb the power and reputation of Tenskwatawa, a religious prophet who had risen up among them and challenged American dominance. Earlier, in the spring of 1806, in an attempt to cast doubt on Tenskwatawa's authenticity, Harrison questioned the prophet's direct connection with divine authority. He challenged the Shawnee to show "he is really a prophet" through a miraculous act.[97]

What happened in mid-June astounded Harrison and galvanized Ohio Valley Indians around Tenskwatawa, the Shawnee Prophet. Tenskwatawa had called his followers together, promising them he would use his powers to produce what the Shawnee call Mukutaaweethee Keesohta, a "black sun." On the morning of June 16, with Greenville filled with worshippers, Tenskwatawa retired to his lodge for prayer and contemplation. Then, at approximately noon, the multitude watched in amazement as the sun slowly disappeared and the daylight lessened to a murky grey twilight. At a moment timed for dramatic impact, Tenskwatawa emerged from his lodge and announced, "Did I not speak the truth! See, the sun is dark!" Then, promising his people he would restore the sun to its former brightness, Tenskwatawa stood by as what was actually a solar eclipse receded. The sun once again appeared, but the lives of Indians in the Ohio and Mississippi Valleys were changed forever.[98]

Prophets serve as interpreters of God's word to their followers. Many of the world's great religions have recognized

97. R. David Edmunds, *The Shawnee Prophet* (Lincoln, Nebr., 1983), 47. Some versions of this story have Harrison directly challenging Tenskwatawa to "cause the sun to stand still." Ibid.
98. Ibid., 48–49.

prophets—holy men who have been touched by God and have communicated with Him.[99] The Hebrews were led by Abraham, Moses, Isaac, Aaron, Jacob, and other Old Testament prophets; Muslims acknowledged the same prophets and followed their own prophet, Mohammed. Jesus, the Messiah, instructed his Twelve Apostles to interpret and spread God's word to the masses. Since the first millennium, Catholics have granted sainthood to scores of men and women who have been touched by the Lord and interpreted and relayed His word; Joan of Arc, for example, was called to duty by a vision from God. While Confucians and Buddhists do not recognize prophets in the Western sense of the term, Confucius was, and is, held in awe for his wise teachings; today's Dalai Lama commands the same kind of veneration, as does the Catholic Pope. For four millennia, prophets have arisen among all of the world's people with varying effect and success.

The history of religion in the Mississippi Valley should certainly be told alongside the stories of the Mound Builders, early explorers, Revolutionary war soldiers, early national government leaders, and frontier folk heroes. America's trans-Appalachian frontier proved to be fertile ground for both Indian and Christian prophecies. The Shawnee Indian Tenskwatawa figures prominently alongside the followers of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in telling the story of Mississippi Valley religion.

While on the surface there appear to be great differences between Tenskwatawa, Joseph Smith, Jr., prophet of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, and his son Joseph Smith III, prophet of the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, there are also interesting and important similarities. All three men rose to prominence during the decades of religious ferment called the Second Great Awakening. All three were charismatic believers in providential manifestations of God's (or the Master of Life's) will; they all believed in moral law as a

99. J. M. Calès, "Prophecy, Prophet, and Prophetess," *The Catholic Encyclopedia* (New York, 1911), reprinted in *New Advent*, https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/12477a.htm, accessed Nov. 3, 2017.

counter to sin and evil; and they believed in resurrection and eternal life, heresy, heaven and hell, and tradition (as opposed to modernity). All three devoted their lives to proselytization of God the Master's word to convert the masses and welcome them to the fold with holy ordinances and rituals.

The Shawnee Indian prophet was born a triplet in 1775 in western Ohio. Originally given the name Lalawethika ("The Noisemaker"), he matured during the difficult years of the American Revolution and expansion of the newly independent American republic onto Shawnee lands in the Ohio Valley. Allies of the French during the French and Indian War, the Shawnee naturally gravitated towards victorious Great Britain afterwards. As the American Revolution approached, they shrewdly saw the British as a lesser evil than the expansionist Revolutionaries, and fought alongside them. Following Britain's defeat, and British betrayal in treaty negotiations, the Shawnee continued to resist American expansion in a series of Ohio Valley Indian wars. Though forced again to surrender land at the Treaty of Greenville (1795), their resolve strengthened. They continued what they saw as their only hope of survival, remaining staunch British allies into the new century and the impending War of 1812.[100]

Thus Lalawethika grew up in a tumultuous age for the Shawnee, during which they made their last stand and sustained an inevitable defeat to American expansionists. It was also a time when whites were swept up in a major Protestant religious revival, the Second Great Awakening, that spilled over into the Indian villages. Lalawethika's mother, Methoataske ("Turtle Laying Its Eggs") was of Creek descent. His father, Puckeshinwa, a leading war chief of the Kispokotha band of the Shawnee, lost his life at the Battle of Point Pleasant shortly before Lalawethika was born. He had several siblings, including a brother

100. Francis Paul Prucha, *The Great White Father: The United States Government and the America Indian* (Lincoln, Nebr., 1984), 76–78; R. Douglas Hurt, *The Ohio Frontier: Crucible of the Old Northwest, 1720–1830* (Bloomington, Ind., 1996), 40, 76, 141–42, 315, 317. See also Timothy D. Willig, *Restoring the Chain of Friendship: British Policy and the Indians of the Great Lakes, 1783–1815* (Lincoln, Nebr., 2008).

Kumskaukau (the other surviving triplet), and Tecumseh, seven years his elder. Shortly after Lalawethika's 1775 birth, however, Methoataske deserted him and his siblings. She apparently traveled west to escape both grief over her husband's demise and the dangers of Revolutionary warfare. The family never saw her again.[101]

Lalawethika's childhood was difficult. Parented by older siblings and family friends, he was ignored as they lavished attention on his charismatic older brother Tecumseh. As Tecumseh matured, it became apparent he was to inherit the venerated war chief status of their deceased father. This made Lalawethika jealous, yet he and Tecumseh maintained a strong, if tense, connection. Always an unruly child, he turned into a braggart. Once, when playing carelessly with an iron-tipped arrow, he poked himself and lost the sight in his right eye. As his problems and insecurities mounted, Lalawethika developed a strong taste for alcohol.[102]

Although he was not a brave warrior like Tecumseh, Lalawethika did go to war in 1794 and fought alongside Tecumseh at the Battle of Fallen Timbers. After the Shawnee defeat by the American general "Mad Anthony" Wayne, Tecumseh refused to attend the subsequent Treaty of Greenville council, but Lalawethika was there. When Tecumseh moved their band farther west into the White River country of Indiana, Lalawethika followed. He took a wife and fathered children, but his poor eyesight and deficient hunting skills kept his family on the margin; facing adversity, he always turned to alcohol.[103]

However, things began to change when Lalawethika found a mentor. Penagashea, a respected and aged prophet and medicine man, befriended the troubled young man and shared some of his knowledge of religion and medicine with him. As Lalawethika studied and began to practice medicine, some tribe members began to change their bad opinions of him. When Penagashea died in 1804, Lalawethika was seen as a possible heir, but the ill

101. Edmunds, *Shawnee Prophet*, 28–29.
102. Ibid., 30–31.
103. Ibid., 32.

will he had built during the first three decades of his life left a residue. The ultimate turning point came in the wake of a vision Lalawethika experienced in April of 1805. It was a personal religious awakening that would send reverberations throughout the Indian villages of the trans-Appalachian West.[104]

One day Lalawethika suffered a seizure, collapsed, and reportedly lost all signs of life; his family and tribesmen believed he was dead. Then, in the midst of the funeral planning he suddenly awakened and spoke to his stunned brethren. During his sleep, Lalawethika explained, he had a vision. The Master of Life showed him paradise, a "rich fertile country, abounding in game, fish, pleasant hunting grounds and fine corn fields," where Shawnee could "plant, … hunt, [or] play at their usual games." But only pious and virtuous Indians could enter paradise; the Master of Life sent those who had sinned to a fiery torture. Lalawethika's first vision was followed by others. He learned the Master of Life saw a decline in morals among the Shawnee and commanded them to return to traditional, non-European ways. The Master forbade alcohol, polygamy, adultery, disrespect of elders, false prophets, and violence against fellow Shawnee. White Americans were the "children of an Evil Spirit," and the Shawnee must cleanse themselves of white technology, clothing, and food. Although the Master of Life commanded Indians to live at peace with one another, war against the white man was a holy cause in which the Master would protect his people from harm.[105]

Following his vision, Lalawethika took the name Tenskwatawa, the "Open Door"; to whites, he became known as the Shawnee Prophet. He abstained from alcohol and began to proselytize and win converts among the Shawnee, Kickapoo, Delaware, Miami, Wyandot, Fox, and other Mississippi Valley tribes. Converts partook in an elaborate ritual that included gently drawing threaded beans through their fingers. R. David Edmunds notes the similarity of Tenskwatawa's ritual use of beads and that of Catholic priests and the holy rosary. Edmunds

104. Ibid.
105. Hurt, *Ohio Frontier,* 317; Edmunds, *Shawnee Prophet,* 34–39, 110–11.

sees this as an exception to Tenskwatawa's Indianness, and otherwise ascribes his beliefs to Native traditions.[106]

Yet there are connections in the story of Tenskwatawa to Judeo-Christian prophecy, and other world religions as well. Priests and Protestant missionaries and preachers traversed the Ohio Valley, and it seems likely Tenskwatawa was influenced by both Catholicism and Old and New Testament elements of the Second Great Awakening teachings. Tenskwatawa's religion arguably incorporated an incipient monotheism (via the Master of Life), strict rules regarding moral behavior, and a concept of sin and evil, including heresy and veering from traditional lifestyle. The prophet's religion featured holy ordinances and rituals, proselytization and conversion, and a belief in creating a holy community on earth (Zion in Hebrew theology), as well as heaven. And of course there was a belief in providence—God's demonstration of his power through miraculous earthly events. Woven throughout was a striving for eternal life, on earth in a holy community and then in paradise (heaven). All of this was interpreted and taught by Tenskwatawa, a prophet who had himself been resurrected from death and called to preach the gospel.

Throughout the years leading up to the War of 1812, the Shawnee Prophet's power and influence spread across the Mississippi Valley as far south as the Cherokee and Creek villages. The story of his miraculous darkening of the sun awed the multitude (though Harrison and others soon reasoned that a party of American scientists had told Tenskwatawa about the imminent solar eclipse). He became his brother Tecumseh's spiritual partner in much the same way as the Book of Mormon depicts a joint warrior king/spiritual king leadership of ancient Nephites. Together, the two embarked on a quest to create a grand Indian confederacy, allied to save their way of life from white invasion and conquest. Based in Prophetstown, a Zion (or Mecca) established near the juncture of Indiana's Tippecanoe Creek with the Wabash River, Tenskwatawa and Tecumseh

106. Edmunds, *Shawnee Prophet,* 40.

enjoyed remarkable success. Hundreds of followers made the pilgrimage to Prophetstown to see the Shawnee Prophet and carry his teachings back to their far-flung villages.[107]

Yet there was no stopping the white adherents of industrial revolution, modernity, democratic republicanism, and Christianity. Tenskwatawa's prayers to the Master to protect Indians from white bullets went unanswered. He managed to keep his own life in 1811, avoiding combat when William Henry Harrison's army attacked Prophetstown and won victory in the Battle of Tippecanoe. Tecumseh was also absent from Tippecanoe (he had traveled south to recruit more members for their confederacy). But after the War of 1812 officially commenced, Tecumseh lost his life fighting bravely alongside the British at the Battle of the Thames, October 5, 1813. The U.S. Army prevailed, and because he had promised the Shawnee warriors protection and victory, the Shawnee Prophet's power and prestige began a slow decline.[108]

Tenskwatawa's ebb mirrored the demise of most Indians between the Appalachians and Mississippi River. One year after the Shawnee met defeat at the Thames, Andrew Jackson routed Alabama's Creek Indians in the Battle of Horseshoe Bend. And only three years following Jackson's spectacular 1815 victory over British troops in the Battle of New Orleans, he defeated North Florida Indians in the First Seminole War. Although there would be a bloody Second Seminole War (circa 1833–42) and Black Hawk's War (1832) on the upper Mississippi, the fate of Indian people was sealed, and the idea of Indian removal gained momentum. Throughout the 1820s and 1830s, defeated trans-Appalachian Indians were relocated, usually forcibly, to reservations in Indian Territory, west of the Mississippi River. Only a few bands of Seminole and eastern Cherokee managed to avoid federal troops by hiding out in, respectively, the Florida Everglades and Appalachian Mountains. When Chief Justice

107. Billington, *Westward Expansion,* 264–65; Edmunds, *Shawnee Prophet,* 48–49, 72. The theory that Euro-American scientists informed Tenskatskawa of the impending eclipse is in Edmunds, *Shawnee Prophet,* 48–49.

108. Prucha, *Great White Father,* 77–78; Billington, *Westward Expansion,* 264–67, 272–73.

John Marshall and the Supreme Court issued a ruling in favor of the Cherokee in *Worcester v. Georgia* (1832), the president of the United States was the old Indian fighter and Democrat Party hero Andrew Jackson. Jackson ignored the ruling and continued plans for executing the Indian Removal Act of 1830.[109]

Following the War of 1812, the Shawnee Prophet retreated to Canada, where the British offered protection and sustenance. He soon tired of exile and began to negotiate with Lewis Cass, Michigan's territorial governor. Cass persuaded Tenskwatawa of the wisdom of relocating the Shawnee to the west, and Cass hoped to parlay whatever support Tenskwatawa still retained among his people to achieve that end. The relocation process was a long one, stretching from 1824 to 1828, as the Shawnee crossed the upper Midwest and into Missouri. At last, Tenskwatawa's party arrived on the designated Shawnee Indian Reservation in eastern Kansas on May 14, 1828. Over the next eight years, his following deteriorated to only family members; their small encampment was a sad sequel to his Prophetstown Zion and its multitudes. A high point for Tenskwatawa came in 1832 when the acclaimed western artist George Catlin asked to paint his portrait. Later commenting on his famous subject, Catlin wrote that Tenskwatawa was "shrewd and influential, perhaps one of the most remarkable men who [had] flourished on these frontiers for some time past." But Catlin also noted that the aged prophet had begun a physical decline and appeared "silent and melancholy."[110]

After sitting for Catlin, Tenskwatawa disappears from contemporary accounts of tribes and leaders in the Indian Territory. He lived out the final years of his life in obscurity, no longer a prominent personage among the Shawnee. Tenskwatawa died in November 1836, near modern-day Kansas City, Kansas; no one today knows where his remains lie.[111] Less

109. Prucha, *Great White Father,* 79–80, 87, 232–33, 253–57, 179–213; "Memorial of the Cherokee Nation," July 17, 1830, in *The Removal of the Cherokee Nation,* ed. Louis Filler and Allen Guttman (Huntington, N.Y., 1962), 42–48; *Worcester v. Georgia* (1832), in *Documents of American Constitutional and Legal History,* ed. Melvin I. Urofsky, 2 vols. (Philadelphia, Pa., 1989), 1:255–61.

110. Edmunds, *Shawnee Prophet,* 165-87 (qtns., 186–87).

than two years after the death of the Shawnee Prophet, and less than a hundred miles away, the Mormon prophet Joseph Smith, Jr. (1805–1844), led his band of Latter-day Saints to found their own Zion in northwest Missouri.

The Mormon prophet Joseph Smith, Jr., was born December 23, 1805, in Sharon, Vermont, the fifth of eleven children. His parents, Joseph Senior and Lucy Mack Smith, were humble farmers who moved their family to western New York State in the winter of 1816–17, seeking new opportunities. The Smiths crossed the mountains, arriving near Palmyra, New York, during the beginnings of the Second Great Awakening, a major religious revival that would ultimately sweep over all of the United States. Joseph Smith, Jr., came of age in New York State's Burned-Over District, a stretch of territory roughly paralleling the Erie Canal construction route that was known for religious fervor and political and social radicalism, including millennialism, Christian socialism, temperance, abolitionism, feminism, dietary experimentation and vegetarianism, and sexual and marital experimentation, including plural marriage and celibacy.[112]

The Smith family's religious faith sprang from the ground of Yankee Puritanism and was nurtured in the fires of the early New England phase of the Second Great Awakening. Joseph Senior and Lucy Mack Smith were religious seekers who had adopted, but were unsatisfied by, the teachings of the backcountry Methodist and Presbyterian churches. The Smiths retained the strong Calvinist belief in providence—God's clear demonstration of His will through actions and events on earth. Their son Joseph Junior inherited both their providential beliefs and their yearning for the true church. In 1820, at age fifteen, Joseph left his family's crowded cabin and wandered into a nearby grove of trees to pray. It was there he experienced what Latter-day Saints later called "the First Vision."[113]

111. Ibid., 187.

112. The classic works are Alice Felt Tyler, *Freedom's Ferment: Phases in America's Social History* (1944; repr. New York, 1962), 86–107, passim; Whitney R. Cross, *The Burned-over District of New York: The Social and Intellectual History of Enthusiastic Religion in Western New York, 1800–1850* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1950), 138–49, passim. See also Ronald G. Walters, *American Reformers, 1815–1860,* rev. ed. (New York, 1997).

In three accounts written in the 1830s, Joseph Smith, Jr., recalled what happened to him that miraculous day in the woods. He had gone there with a troubled heart, anxiously searching for meaning in his life. Joseph recalled that, while on his knees praying aloud, "a pillar of light" came "down from above and rested upon me." "I saw the Lord and he spake unto me saying Joseph my son thy sins are forgiven thee." Then another person appeared in the light, and the Lord said, "This is my beloved Son, Hear him." Joseph learned that "the world lieth in sin" because all the modern churches preached false doctrine. "All their Creeds were an abomination in [H]is sight" and there needed to be a restoration of the beliefs and practices of the ancient Church of Christ.[114]

Joseph recalled that he returned home "filled with love and for many days I could rejoice with great Joy and the Lord was with me." Convinced he was cleansed of sin, Joseph nevertheless puzzled over God's pronouncement that no existing church could sustain his faith, and he continued to pray for guidance. Late in the evening of September 21, 1823 as the Smith family slept, an angel named Moroni appeared before Joseph, clothed in a "robe of exquisite whiteness." "His whole person was glorious beyond description, and his countenance truly like lightning." Moroni directed Joseph to a nearby hill where he unburied a "book written upon gold plates, giving an account of the former inhabitants of this continent and the source from whence they sprang." Seven years later, Smith had translated and published 5,000 copies of the Book of Mormon. The scripture told the story of how an ancient tribe of Israel had come to the New World before the birth of Christ. Their descendants—Nephites and Lammanites—had witnessed a miraculous New World reappearance of Jesus Christ after his crucifixion and had become Christians. But then they fell into decline, burying the

113. Scott H. Faulring, ed., *An American Prophet's Record: The Diaries and Journals of Joseph Smith* (Salt Lake City, Utah, 1989), xxiii, 3–5; Richard Lyman Bushman, *Joseph Smith, Rough Stone Rolling: A Cultural Biography of Mormonism's Founder* (New York, 2005), 8–35.

114. Ibid., 35–40; Joseph Smith, Jr., *Personal Writings of Joseph Smith,* ed. Dean C. Jessee, rev. ed. (Salt Lake City, Utah, 2002), 10–12, 230–31, 242.

golden plates on which they had written the only record of their story.[115]

Upon the 1830 publication of the Book of Mormon, Joseph Smith, Jr., and a small band of followers founded the Church of Christ, which Smith led as first elder, "seer, prophet, translator, and apostle of Jesus Christ." In 1838, they adopted a new name, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, proclaiming to have restored Christ's one true church. In keeping with their restoration beliefs, the Saints were governed by a prophet president (Smith) who was advised by a three-man first presidency, a quorum of twelve apostles ("the Twelve"), an assemblage of "the Seventy," and an all-male priesthood of laymen elders. In the heat of the Second Great Awakening, the Saints enjoyed great success, but they also aroused suspicions and accusations of heresy for their unorthodox beliefs. During the 1830s, Joseph led them from western New York, to Kirtland, Ohio, and to northwestern Missouri. Run out of Missouri by mobs and a gubernatorial extermination order, they fled to southwestern Illinois, where, in 1839, Joseph proclaimed Nauvoo, Illinois, on the banks of the Mississippi River, to be the Saints' New Zion.[116]

The Latter-day Saints' enemies pointed (and still do today) to alleged heresies—the belief that Hebrews inhabited the New World before Christ, certain temple rituals, baptism of the dead, the interpretation of the holy trinity, and, of course, the practice of plural marriage.[117] Yet, despite their uniqueness, Latter-day Saints fit within the parameters of the Christian movement. They were monotheists who believed Jesus Christ was the son of God, the Messiah; they believed Christ was crucified and martyred to atone for human sin, and that he was resurrected to return in a second coming (millennialism). They believed that in becoming Christians they were forgiven their sins and promised

115. Bushman, *Rough Stone Rolling,* 41–45, 57–83, 110–12; Smith, *Personal Writings of Joseph Smith,* 12–14.

116. Faulring, *American Prophet's Record*, xxiv–xxix; Glen M. Leonard, *Nauvoo: A Place of Peace, a People of Promise* (Salt Lake City, Utah, 2002), 3–40; Robert Bruce Flanders, *Nauvoo: Kingdom on the Mississippi* (Champagne-Urbana, Ill., 1965), 1–22.

117. Bushman, *Rough Stone Rolling,* 88–94.

eternal life. And they believed it their duty to proselytize and convert non-Mormons (whom they called "Gentiles" in Hebrew fashion) and to seek a Zion, a worldly kingdom where they might reside, aspiring to peaceful and moral lives as they awaited Christ's return.

When Joseph Smith arrived in Nauvoo in 1839, he and Emma Hale Smith (1804–79) had been married for twelve years. Like the Smiths, Emma's parents, Isaac and Elizabeth Lewis Hale, came from old New England Puritan stock; their family trees extended back to Massachusetts, Connecticut, and Vermont. In 1790, Isaac Hale had removed the family from Pennsylvania's Susquehanna Valley to western New York State, where Emma was born on July 10, 1804. She grew into a tall, quiet, dark-haired girl who was a fine singer and independent thinker. She met Joseph in 1826, when he and his father briefly boarded at the Hale household. Joseph soon told his mother that Emma "would be my choice in preference to any other woman I have ever seen," and Emma was equally smitten by handsome, six-foot, brown-haired Joseph. But her father balked, for he believed Joseph was a dreamer and "treasure hunter" (the Smiths were known to have dug for buried treasure). "Preferring to marry him to any other man I knew," Emma later wrote, she and Joseph "eloped to marry" on January 18, 1827, and Emma was baptized into the Church of Christ in 1830. She would bear nine children and adopt two, but six of the eleven died in infancy. She trekked alongside her husband and established homes for their family in New York, Ohio, and Missouri before the Smiths arrived in Nauvoo in 1839.[118]

Though Nauvoo was a sparsely populated wetland when the Latter-day Saints arrived, by 1844 it had reached a population second only to Chicago, with 12,000 residents in brick and framed timber houses and log cabins. Missouri and Ohio followers were joined by several thousand British converts who arrived on steamboats via New Orleans. "The rapid increase of

118. Linda King Newell and Valeen Tippetts Avery, *Mormon Enigma: Emma Hale Smith* (Champagne-Urbana, Ill., 1994), 1–79; Bushman, *Rough Stone Rolling,* 52–54. Treasure-hunting is discussed in Bushman, 48–52.

our city is almost incredible," wrote one Saint. "Every day is seen, phoenix-like, the ponderous fronts of new and extensive buildings starting into existence, peering themselves above the roofs of the more humble ones that surround them, and where lots [in a short time] smile under the products of cultivation to be crowned with residences." Joseph set the Saints to work at many projects, the most important of which was building a huge temple atop a nearby bluff overlooking Nauvoo and the Mississippi River.[119]

While residing in Nauvoo, Joseph Smith, Jr., and the Latter-day Saints became Mississippi river men. Nauvoo's construction projects created a huge demand for logs and lumber, so in 1841–42 the church dispatched a company of Saints northward to log and mill timber at a pinery on Winnebago Indian land abutting Wisconsin's Black River. Joseph recalled,

> A company was formed last fall to go up to the pine country to purchase mills, and prepare and saw lumber for the Temple and the Nauvoo House, and the reports from them are very favorable: another company has started, this last week, to take their place and to relieve those that are already there: on their return they are to bring a very large raft of lumber, for the use of the above-named houses.

On October 13, 1842, Joseph reported, "The brethren arrived from Wisconsin with a raft of about 90,000 feet of boards and 24,000 cubic feet of timber for the Temple and Nauvoo House." This raft, "covering an acre," consisted of timber, lumber, and shingles. Although the enterprise was $3,000 in debt, it provided much needed wood and sparked a desire to try again. While some men remained in Nauvoo "to drive the work at home," a new logging crew departed to harvest and plane an 1843 crop.[120]

Steamboats had navigated western rivers for more than

119. Flanders, *Nauvoo,* 1–56 (qtn., 156).

120. Dennis Rowley, "Nauvoo: River Town," *BYU Studies* 18, no. 2 (1978), 1–16; Dennis Rowley, "The Mormon Experience in the Wisconsin Pineries, 1841–45," *BYU Studies* 32, no. 1 (1991), 1–25; Joseph Smith, Jr., *History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day* Saints (1839–44; repr. Salt Lake City, Utah, 1956), 4:608–609, 5:169–70; Flanders, *Nauvoo,* 183–84.

twenty-five years prior to the founding of Nauvoo, and some three hundred sixty-five steamboats worked the upper Mississippi River. Nauvoo became a significant steamboat landing, visited on average by five steamers each day. Most new British converts arrived via steamboats and if, upon arrival, a would-be Saint was not already baptized, the Mississippi River provided a convenient and sacred font; Joseph and the elders baptized as many as one hundred in a single service. Always the entrepreneur, the Latter-day Saint prophet began steamboating in 1840, when he purchased a steamer (on credit) from the federal government through the agency of a young Army Corps of Engineers lieutenant, Robert E. Lee. Smith rechristened the boat *Nauvoo* and used it for both Latter-day Saint transport and the upper river commercial trade. But he defaulted on the boat payments, and on July 11, 1841, the U.S. government won judgment against Smith for $5,184.31 in the U.S. District Court for Illinois. Joseph Smith then turned to Captain Dan Jones, co-owner of the *Maid of Iowa.* In April of 1843 (three months after he was baptized in the Mississippi River), Captain Jones piloted a boatload of English converts upriver to Nauvoo. Joseph negotiated with Jones and his associate Levi Moffat for the *Maid of Iowa:* "After much conversation and deliberation," Smith wrote, "I agreed to buy out Jones, by giving him property in the city worth $1,321, and assuming the debts [for the *Maid of Iowa*]." The steamer immediately went to work ferrying passengers between Nauvoo and Montrose.[121]

While the Latter-day Saints had, by 1844, built Nauvoo into a prosperous settlement, they had also moved into theological, political, and military realms that greatly angered their non-Mormon neighbors. With approximately five thousand Saints eligible to vote, Joseph became involved in Illinois politics, attracted the support of Judge Stephen Douglas, and announced

121. Ronald D. Dennis, "Captain Dan Jones and the Welch Indians," *Dialogue* 18, no. 4 (1985), 112; Donald L. Enders, "The Steamboat *Maid of Iowa:* Mormon Mistress of the Mississippi," *BYU Studies* 19 (Fall 1979), 321–35, passim; Flanders, *Nauvoo,* 160–61. Another aspect of Illinois Mormon boating is seen in Vickie Cleverly Speek, "Forgotten Waterway: The Illinois and Michigan Canal and Its Connection to Early Mormon History, *John Whitmer Historical Association Journal* 31 (Fall/Winter 2011), 103–16.

his candidacy for the U.S. presidency. In addition to stating unpopular antislavery views, Smith's campaign literature listed him as "Lieutenant General Joseph Smith," denoting his rank in the two-thousand-man Nauvoo Legion, nominally an army of the Illinois state militia. His rising political and military power appeared even more threatening to nonbelievers because of a series of new revelations, as Smith proclaimed the doctrine of baptism of the dead and instituted an elaborate set of temple rites known only to the Saints. The fire that lit this powder keg was the Latter-day Saint renewal of the ancient Hebrew practice of polygamy. Opposition within his own ranks combined with outside fears and hatred, and in June of 1844, Joseph and his brother Hyrum were charged with treason, arrested, and detained in the nearby Carthage, Illinois, jail. On June 27, 1844, a mob broke into the jail and murdered Joseph Smith, Jr., and his brother. The Latter-day Saint prophet was now a martyr.[122]

Following Joseph's death, Nauvoo was beset by chaos. It would be two years before the main body of Saints made their famed exodus across the frozen Mississippi en route to Utah, and in the meantime they desperately needed a leader. Unfortunately, Joseph Smith, Jr., had left conflicting instructions as to the choice of a successor. On the one hand, he had anointed his oldest son, Joseph III, as his heir apparent, and there is much evidence supporting this. On another occasion, however, he had stated that Emma would give birth to a son named David who would succeed him. And indeed, Emma was pregnant when Joseph was murdered and soon gave birth to a son she named David Hyrum Smith. Finally, as Joseph had departed for the Carthage jail, he passed his authority to the twelve apostles, who rightly believed they would play a role in choosing a successor. Because Joseph III was not yet twelve years old at the time of his father's murder, and David was yet unborn, there was considerable confusion. The Twelve met and deliberated at length. They considered either designating an interim leader until Joseph III came of age, or taking the dramatic step of designating a new prophet.

122. Bushman, *Rough Stone Rolling,* 4–5, 423–27, 437–46, 448–52, 514–17, 546–50.

Several names came to light. At one time or another, the elders Sidney Rigdon, Lyman Wight, James J. Strang, William Smith, William Marks, Charles Thompson, Alpheus Cutler, James Colin Brewster, and of course Brigham Young were seen as candidates to become the new Mormon prophet. But the Twelve had not yet reckoned with one of the most powerful characters in this drama: Emma Hale Smith.[123]

During the years 1844–46, as he slowly emerged as the new leader of the Latter-day Saints, Brigham Young met with Emma Smith on several occasions. Well aware of the Saints' love and respect for the Smith family, Brigham needed Emma, Joseph III, and the rest of their family to accompany him as he led the Saints west to the Great Basin of Utah. According to some reports, he assured Emma that Joseph III "is too young to lead his people now, but when he arrives at a mature age he shall have his place. No one shall rob him of it." But Emma would have none of it, and in retrospect we can see her motives were tied to her hatred of polygamy and Young's role as the aspiring leader of a polygamist church. Joseph had tried and failed to convince Emma of the righteousness of plural marriage, and after his death she did not intend to raise her children in the company of polygamists. This combined with Emma's other disagreements with Young (mostly over the division of church and personal property and debt litigation) to create an irreparable breech. During the winter of 1846, parties of Latter-day Saints began to cross the frozen Mississippi River and gather on the Iowa shore. In the spring, Brigham Young led the advance party of Saints across Iowa and the Great Plains. Yet Emma Smith and her five children remained in Nauvoo. Years later, Brigham Young bitterly complained, "Emma … is a wicked, wicked, wicked woman and always was."[124]

Emma Hale Smith played a varied and important role in the growth of both the original and Reorganized Latter-day Saint

123. Roger D. Launius, *Joseph Smith III: Pragmatic Prophet* (Urbana, Ill., 1995), 15–16, 32–35; D. Michael Quinn, *The Mormon Hierarchy: Origins of Power* (Salt Lake City, Utah, 1994), 226–33.

124. Newell and Avery, *Mormon Enigma,* 203, 260 (Young qtn., 281); Launius, *Joseph Smith III,* 34–41; Bushman, *Rough Stone Rolling,* 490–99. The exodus is described in Flanders, *Nauvoo,* 337–40.

churches. Although she was not an aggressive, outspoken woman, Emma's bearing, loyalty, and good sense had made her a de facto counselor to the prophet and their son Joseph III. In 1835, the Twelve appointed Emma to choose the music for what became *A Collection of Sacred Hymns, for the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, Selected by Emma Smith* (Kirtland, 1835). And in 1842, Emma helped to found the Female Relief Society, a church group that to this day performs important social work among the Saints. By all accounts, Joseph's polygamy drove a wedge between the two. Emma was so opposed that Joseph gave up trying to win her over and never revealed to her the complete extent of his polygamy; she knew that he was a polygamist but did not know all of the women to whom he was married. This struggle helps explain why, after Joseph's death, Emma raised her five children in the false belief that their father had *never* practiced polygamy and that it was Brigham Young who first revealed and practiced plural marriage. "No such thing as polygamy, or spiritual wifery, was taught, publicly or privately, before my husband's death," she told sons Joseph III and Alexander in 1879. Joseph "had no other wife but me."[125]

This falsehood notwithstanding, Emma rebounded from the murder of her husband and did an admirable job raising her five children in Nauvoo during the mid-nineteenth century. In 1847, Emma married Lewis Bidamon, a prosperous merchant and militia major who had business dealings with the Saints but was not himself a believer. Bidamon had failings (he fathered a child out of wedlock that Emma raised), but the Smith children all respected him and were grateful their mother had found a new husband and partner. Mr. and Mrs. Bidamon attained upper-middle-class status and comforts through merchandising, farming, and the hotel business. Meanwhile Joseph III grew to manhood in the village by the Mississippi River. Unsure of his calling in life, he worked for his stepfather and tried his hand at farming. He briefly studied law and, though he never became a practicing lawyer, was elected Nauvoo's justice of the peace.

125. Newell and Avery, *Mormon Enigma,* 57–8, 106–107, 300–302 (qtn., 301); Launius, *Joseph Smith III,* 190–94.

In 1856, he married Emmeline Griswold over her parents' strenuous religious objections and continued to seek his calling.[126]

Emma Smith Bidamon and her children were not the only Latter-day Saints who chose not to migrate to Utah. An estimated ten thousand Saints, most (not all) of them antipolygamists, remained in the Midwest, divided into separate bands. Some were trekkers who had grown weary on the Mormon Trail and dropped out to settle in Iowa and eastern Nebraska. Sidney Rigdon, William Smith, William Marks, Charles Thompson, Alpheus Cutler, and James Colin Brewster all aspired to leadership roles among remnant believers, and Lyman Wight eventually took a band of Saints south to Mexico. James J. Strang, a charismatic and egotistical polygamist, led thousands of Latter-day Saints to a colony on Lake Michigan's Beaver Island, where he was murdered by a follower in 1856. Joseph Junior's unstable brother William B. Smith had joined Strang, but then seceded to gather his own movement. When William's band splintered in 1850, two moderate and respected antipolygamists, Jason W. Briggs and Zenos Gurley, formed congregations that continued to search for a prophet. Based in northern Illinois and southern Wisconsin, Briggs's and Gurley's sizeable groups were well-connected to smaller bands of Saints. In 1851, Briggs said God spoke to him and declared, "The successor of Joseph Smith is Joseph Smith, the son of Joseph Smith the Prophet. It is his right by lineage, saith the Lord, your God."[127]

When he was not studying law or courting Emmeline Griswold, Joseph III was studying the Bible and the Book of Mormon. In this he had Emma's indirect support. "I have always avoided talking to my children about having anything to do in the church," Emma told visitors in the late 1850s, "for I have suffered so much I have dreaded to have them take any part

126. Launius, *Joseph Smith III,* 56–58, 69–70.

127. Dean May, "A Demographic Portrait of the Mormons, 1830–1980," in *The New Mormon History: Revisionist Essays on the Past,* ed. D. Michael Quinn (Salt Lake City, Utah, 1992), 122–24; Launius, *Joseph Smith III,* 77–87, 292 (qtn., 87).

in it." Then she added, "But I have always believed that if God wanted them to do anything in the church, the One who called their father would make it known to them." God had first made Himself known to Joseph III in the early 1850s. In study and prayer, Joseph concluded that Mormonism was indeed the one true religion, but that during the Nauvoo period the church had strayed from its theological foundation. Polygamy, he later wrote, was "abomination in the sight of God," and Joseph III was highly skeptical of the elaborate temple rites, including baptism of the dead, introduced in the Nauvoo church. One day in 1853, pondering the many schisms of Mormonism and what possible role he might play in the Restoration, Joseph III experienced a religious vision in which he faced a choice between service in the secular or spiritual spheres—business and the professions or serving the Holy Spirit. He was praying for guidance when "the room suddenly expanded and passed away," and,

> I saw stretched out before me towns, cities, busy marts, court houses, courts, and assemblies of men, all busy and all marked by those characteristics that are found in the world, where men win place and renown. This stayed before my vision til I had noted clearly that the choice of preferment was offered to him that would enter in, but who did so must go into the busy whirl and be submerged by its din, bustle and confusion. In the subtle transition of a dream I was gazing over a wide expanse of country in a prairie land; no mountains were to be seen, but as far as the eye could reach, hill and dale, hamlet and village, farm and farm house, pleasant cot and homelike place, everywhere betokening thrift, and the pursuit of happy peace were open to view. I remarked to him standing by me, but whose presence I had not before noticed, "This must be the country of a happy people." To this he replied, "Which would you prefer, life, success, and renown among the busy scenes you first saw; or a place among these people, without honor or renown? Think of it well, for the choice will be offered to you sooner or later, and you must be prepared to decide. Your decision once made you cannot recall it, and must abide by the result."[128]

128. Newell and Avery, *Mormon Enigma,* 269, 271; Launius, *Pragmatic Prophet,* 66–67 (vision qtn.), 117 (polygamy qtn.).

Joseph Smith III was destined to follow a path similar to his father, one with interesting similarities to that of the Shawnee Prophet, Tenskwatawa. Like both men, Joseph III believed in providence and had experienced a visionary religious call to serve as a prophet of the Lord, the Master of Life. God called him to lead a church with holy ordinances and rituals, a church that would seek converts through proselytization. Like his father and Tenskwatawa, Joseph III would caution his followers against abuse of alcohol; like Tenskwatawa, but unlike Joseph Junior and Brigham Young, Joseph III opposed polygamy. In questioning priestly temple rites, Joseph III was calling for a restoration of founding principles. All three prophets called for a return to the piousness of an untainted past and aimed to build a holy community—a new Zion—on earth. Indeed, Joseph III's vision of "a wide expanse of country in a prairie land … hill and dale, hamlet and village, farm and farm house, pleasant cot and homelike place," resembles Tenskwatawa's "rich fertile country, abounding in game, fish, pleasant hunting grounds and fine corn fields" where Shawnee could "plant, … hunt, [or] play at their usual games."

In 1859, pushed to despair by family reverses and the loss of a baby daughter, Joseph Smith III kneeled down in prayer, and his prayers were answered. He later wrote a letter to William Marks, who had joined Gurley and Briggs in what they now called the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints. The letter began: "I am going to take my father's place at the head of the Mormon Church." On March 20, 1860, Marks and others visited Joseph III in Nauvoo, where Marks reportedly told Joseph, "We have had enough of man-made prophets and we don't want any more of the sort. If God has called you we want to know it." Smith carefully explained his call to the elders and they left satisfied they had found their new leader.[129]

On April 4, 1860, Joseph Smith III and Emma Smith Bidamon crossed the Mississippi River. Their journey, though momentous, was not as grand as the 1846 exodus of Saints from

129. Newell and Avery, *Mormon Enigma,* 270–71; Launius, *Pragmatic Prophet,* 108–11.

Nauvoo. Boarding a leaky rowboat, the two headed towards Montrose, Iowa, with two friends helping Joseph row. The wind blew, waves washed water into the boat, and Joseph reportedly used his shoe to bail out the water. At Montrose, they boarded the Illinois Central Railroad, which crossed the Mississippi at Davenport and took them back into Illinois. They arrived in Amboy, a small town in north-central Illinois, late that evening. The Reorganized Church was meeting in Amboy, and Joseph and Emma had come to join them. Upon entering the room Joseph later recalled, "I became fully aware of the fact that the same Influence and Power that had been at work with me, had determined my course of action, and had finally led me into their midst, had also been manifesting itself to many of these faithful, loyal, and devoted old-time Saints." Standing to address the group the next day, Joseph III said simply, "I have come here, not to be dictated by any man or set of men. I have come here in obedience to a power not my own, and I shall be dictated by the power that sent me."[130]

NASHOBA

Mormonism was an important part of utopian communalism, a movement that swept across the United States of America during the decades before the Civil War. Although the noun "utopia" comes from the Englishman Sir Thomas More's 1516 fictionalized account of an ideal community, America was the land where utopians actually launched a number of these experiments. From the time of its founding, America was viewed by settlers as a place where they might build a radical new society—a City on a Hill as Puritans called it—amid the woodlands of the New World.[131] As utopianism grew, many of its adherents looked west to the Mississippi Valley, which they viewed as an unspoiled wilderness where they could plant their communities.[132]

Alice Felt Tyler's 1944 classic *Freedom's Ferment* began the

130. Launius, *Pragmatic Prophet,* 115–17.
131. Walters, *American Reformers,* 39–40.

focused academic study of American communalists—autonomous local groups who formed to achieve a more perfect society by sharing goods and forbidding private property ownership. Tyler and subsequent scholars divided communalists into two main categories: religious folk (like the Mormons) and those of a secular stripe. While the religious groups fared better than the nonbelievers, no communalists except the Mormons ever gained widespread popular support for their movements. Yet all of them left a fascinating history in settlements like Ephrata, Mount Lebanon, Harmony, Fruitlands, Brook Farm, Oneida, and many more. During the decades preceding the Civil War, communitarian experiments dotted North America from New England to the banks of the Wabash and Mississippi Rivers. What they shared in common was a belief in human perfectibility in a new age of peace and harmony they all believed was close at hand.[133]

The secular communalist dreams of Frances "Fanny" Wright (1795–1852) make up a fascinating story set in the early Mississippi Valley. Wright and her younger sister Camilla were born on the coast of Scotland in the late eighteenth century to affluent parents who flirted with radical political beliefs. James Wright, Jr., their merchant father, had subsidized the printing of an edition of *Rights of Man,* Thomas Paine's paean to the French Revolution, and young Fanny was captivated by stories of the American Revolutionaries and the Enlightenment ideals expressed by Thomas Jefferson in the Declaration of Independence. Orphaned as young children and raised by wealthy London relatives, Fanny and Camilla matured into idealists, but with an important distinction: Because they had inherited their parents' fortune, the two sisters could literally invest in changing the world. Thomas Paine had earlier written in *Common Sense,* "Every spot of the Old World is overrun with

132. Arthur Bestor, *Backwoods Utopias: The Sectarian Origins and the Owenite Phase of Communitarian Socialism, in America, 1663–1829,* 2d ed. (Philadelphia, Pa., 1970), 34–35.

133. Tyler, *Freedom's Ferment,* 196–211. Walters surveys and notes similarities between religious and secular communes, in *American Reformers,* 41–75. For perfectionism and millennialism see Walters, *American Reformers*, 39. See also Bestor, *Backwoods Utopias,* 1–59.

oppression. Freedom hath been hunted round the world," and thus only in America could there be "an asylum for mankind." In 1818, Fanny and Camilla Wright set sail for the United States.[134]

After an extended tour of America, Frances Wright wrote, "It is said that every man has his forte, and so, perhaps, has every nation. That of the American is clearly good sense: this sterling quality is the coin of the country." Fanny Wright's love of the new nation eventually led her to become a naturalized American citizen. As she left the Atlantic seaboard and traveled west, the tall, lively young woman seems to have embraced agrarianism and the myth of the West, convinced that the trans-Appalachian frontier could become a utopia within the larger American utopia. She observed:

> The western states seem destined to be the paradise of America. The beauty of their climate is probably unrivalled, unless it be by some of the elevated plains of the southern continent. The influence of the mild breezes from the Mexican gulf, which blow with the steadiness of a trade wind up the great valley of the Mississippi, is felt even to the southern shore of Lake Erie.

Of course, Wright did not like everything she saw. Slavery, human greed, and the inequality of the sexes drew her ire. Yet she viewed the Mississippi Valley as a place where she could begin to reform these evils. Returning briefly to Europe, Wright began to hatch a plan, aided by her and Camilla's family fortune and an impressive group of allies.[135]

Fanny Wright's 1821 publication *Views of Society and Manners in America* gained her notoriety and a lifelong friendship with the iconic French hero of the American Revolution, the Marquis de Lafayette. She accompanied Lafayette on his triumphal 1824–25 American tour and in the process met Thomas Jefferson, with

134. Celia Morris, *Fanny Wright: Rebel in America* (1984; repr. Urbana, Ill., 1992), 4–24; Tyler, *Freedom's Ferment,* 206; Thomas Paine, *Common Sense,* in *A Patriot's History Reader: Essential Documents for Every American,* ed. Larry Schweikart, Dave Dougherty, and Michael Allen (New York, 2011), 20. Camilla Wright was named after her mother. The sisters' older brother, Richard, died in a military skirmish with the French in 1809.

135. Wright, *Views of Manners and Society in America,* 65, 234.

whom she shared her antislavery views. She also drew the attention of President James Monroe and, out west, the Senator Henry Clay of Kentucky and General Andrew Jackson, whom Lafayette had recommended she consult about purchasing lands in western Tennessee. Like so many of his contemporaries, Jackson was charmed by the vivacious Scotswoman, and he pointed her to two thousand wild acres astride the Wolf River, near what would soon become the town of Memphis, Tennessee. Frances and Camilla bought the land in 1825 and launched a settlement called Nashoba, after the Chickasaw word for "wolf."[136]

Fanny Wright opposed inequality of race, class, and gender as manifested in nineteenth-century slavery, capitalism, and what we today call misogyny and sexism. In Nashoba, she aimed to establish a small model society that would eradicate all these evils. Her plan, developed with the help of the antislavery radical George Flower, was bold. She would use her own fortune and solicit donations to purchase about thirty slaves from their masters and move them to Nashoba. There they would work alongside a small cadre of enlightened white settlers (including herself and her sister) in a community that forbade individual property ownership and encouraged experimentation in marriage. The slaves would be educated and their wages applied towards purchasing their own freedom. Once freed, Wright aimed to recolonize them in the Black republic of Haiti. Nashoba would be a model experiment for what Wright and others envisioned would become a network of farms enabling Americans to gradually end the evil institution of slavery.[137]

To modern readers, elements of Fanny Wright's plan may seem conservative. Though she was a rich woman, Fanny did not intend to buy slaves and grant them freedom. They would remain enslaved until they reimbursed their purchase price and

136. Morris, *Fanny Wright,* 108–10; Tyler, *Freedom's Ferment,* 207–208. Although the Wrights' time in Nashoba parallels that of David Crockett, who represented west Tennessee in Congress, there is no record that they ever met.

137. Tyler, *Freedom's Ferment,* 208; Morris, *Fanny Wright,* 104–106. There are differing counts of the exact number of slaves Fanny brought to Nashoba, ranging from fifteen to thirty-one.

the cost of their education through labor at Nashoba. The capitalist desire for profit—something Wright abhorred—lay at the basis of all of her plans. She would give slaveholders a profit incentive to sell and slaves the incentive of working for their freedom. Moreover, when Blacks were educated and freed, they would be deported via a colonization scheme popular among some white Americans who opposed slavery but doubted Blacks and whites could ever live together as free citizens of the same nation. Although Wright did not actually support colonization, allies convinced her it would make her plan palatable to less enlightened souls. And despite all her compromises, Fanny Wright's proposals were extremely radical by antebellum standards. The vast majority of white folks who heard of Wright's Nashoba plan were no doubt shocked by its audacity. They were probably also struck by its infeasibility.[138]

The correspondence of the Wright sisters and their friends dating from Nashoba's 1826 founding through its 1829 demise shows an arc of great enthusiasm quickly descending into profound disillusionment.[139] "I write you dear Love from our log cabins around wh[ich] the axes are ringing & all is stirring," Fanny wrote to her friend Julia Garnett from Nashoba in 1826:

> All are cheerful & contented & a fiddle wh[ich] we procured immediately for one of the men who knows how to turn some merry tunes strikes up regularly every evening… Our woods at this moment are in full beauty of spring tender verdure and fine pasture… I am—busy—busy… Our people here continue cheerful & happy & grown in industry.

Yet Fanny's English friend Frances Trollope soon assessed the futility of the venture, writing from Nashoba in 1828, "One glance sufficed to convince me that every idea I had formed of the place was as far as possible from the truth. Desolation was

138. Morris, *Fanny Wright*, 104–105. For the colonization movement, see Eric Burin, *Slavery and the Peculiar Solution: A History of the American Colonization Society* (Gainesville, Fla., 2002).

139. Cecilia Helena Payne-Gaposchkin, ed., "The Nashoba Plan for Removing the Evil of Slavery: Letters of Frances and Camilla Wright, 1820–1829," *Harvard Library Bulletin* 23 (October 1975), 429–61.

the only feeling—the only word that presented itself; but it was not spoken." Trollope, who had come to live and assist Fanny in her utopian experiment, quickly boarded a steamboat bound for Cincinnati.[140]

Illness fostered by western Tennessee's climate and swampy environment was an early sign of Nashoba's demise. "Since writing to you last my loved friends my time has been most painfully engrossed in attending our dear Fanny during a severe attack of fever," Camilla wrote home in October of 1826, describing the symptoms of malaria. Though Fanny soon reported, "I am alive and travelling fast into health," she departed Nashoba to convalesce (and raise more money) in Europe, beginning a pattern of absentee stewardship of the commune.[141] Conflicts over money and work assignments soon arose among the utopians, and Fanny noted they were forced to change their socialist groundings, "leaving cooperation in the strict sense of the word to the next generation & demanding of our associates to bring a small income in money" for "food & kitchen services." The fact that Nashoba's total 1827 farm revenues (from cotton, corn, and fodder) amounted to less than $300 led Wright to comment dryly, "Cooperation has nigh killed us all." Fanny was on track to lose half her total assets on Nashoba, and things were getting worse. An 1827 article in a Baltimore antislavery magazine reported that the white colonist James Richardson was cohabiting with the mulatto daughter of Nashoba's school principal, and that he had on several occasions publicly "tied up and flogged" some of Nashoba's slaves.[142]

"There was a time … when I should have said come—share a sisters home at Nashoba," Camilla sadly wrote Harriet Garnett in late 1828, "but that once pleasing vision is ended." In 1828, Fanny

140. Fanny Wright to Mme. Julia Garnett, March 11 and June 20, 1826, in ibid., 434–37; Frances Trollope, *Domestic Manners of the Americans,* ed. John Lauritz Larson (1832; repr. St. James, N.Y., 1993), 15–17.

141. Camilla Wright to Mr. le Baron Hyde de Neuville, Oct. 29, 1826, in Payne-Gaposchkin, "Letters of Frances and Camilla Wright," 437–38. Fanny added a postscript: "I drink wine by the quart & bark wh[ich] since the fever was quelled have been my elixir vitae."

142. Frances Wright to Harriet Garnett, March 20, 1828, in Payne-Gaposchkin, "Letters of Frances and Camilla Wright," 447; Morris, *Fanny Wright,* 141–45, 165.

and Camilla left Nashoba to the care of an overseer, a rapidly dwindling number of white colonists, and their slaves. Although the sisters accepted ultimate responsibility for the Nashoba property and the slaves left behind, they now sought refuge in New Harmony, Indiana, where the Welshman Robert Owen, a fellow radical, had recently begun his own communalist experiment along the Wabash River. Owen was an early inspiration for Fanny's utopianism, and she had told Camilla, "The principles advocated by Owen are to change the face of the world as surely as the sun shines in the heavens." Owen's ideology "reconciled me with life, & gave me hopes for the human race as high as my former despair had been deep."[143]

Having accrued a fortune in the Scottish cotton textile trade, Robert Owen dedicated his life to the eradication of poverty through socialism. Owen's avowed enemy was individualism (he called it the "individual system") and its selfish economic, religious, and marital practices. "[The] individual system," Owen wrote, was "directly opposed to universal charity, benevolence, and kindness." Owen denied the existence of individual will; he believed that, in a controlled environment, humans could be shaped and reformed by utopian planners like himself. Although he had already created a model factory village in Scotland, Owen, like Fanny Wright, saw the Mississippi Valley as a seedbed for this radical, secular, perfectionist transformation. In 1824, he purchased Harmony, the Wabash River site of a successful religious utopia founded by the German fundamentalist George Rapp. Rapp sold the entire Harmony town site and infrastructure to Owen and led his own followers eastward. Owen envisioned New Harmony as a "halfway house," where residents could reform their ways, give up individualism, and learn to live cooperatively.[144]

Fanny and Camilla soon discovered that Owen's New

143. Camilla Wright to Harriet Garnett, Nov. 20, 1828, in Payne-Gaposchkin, "Letters of Frances and Camilla Wright," 453–56; Fanny quoted by Camilla in Camilla Wright to Julia Garnett, Dec. 8, 1826, ibid., 440. See also Camilla Wright to Julia Garnett, April 26, 1828, ibid., 452.

144. Robert Owen, "A Manifesto against Individualism" (1825), in *Antebellum American Culture,* ed. David Brion Davis (Lexington, Mass., 1979), 445–47; Walters, *American Reformers,* 64–67.

Harmony utopia was in even worse shape than Nashoba, if only because its populace and ambitions were so much greater. Founded in 1825 with a huge capital investment, Owen's experiment boasted a population of nine hundred individuals, many of whom turned out to be rugged individualists indeed. Robert Dale Owen, one of the founder's sons, later described New Harmony's utopians as "a heterogeneous collection of radicals, enthusiastic devotees to principle, honest latitudinarians, and lazy theorists, with a sprinkling of unprincipled sharpers thrown in."[145]

New Harmony began well enough. European intellectuals and teachers in the group established a good school, and they published an influential newspaper, the *New Harmony Gazette.* There were plays, concerts, and dances (and no sanctioned church services). But the collective was lacking in artisanal skills, and New Harmony's pottery, cotton, and woolen mills floundered (the colonists did produce some lumber and flour). Then, too, critics arose both outside and inside the community. Outsiders were scandalized by Owen's atheism and anticapitalist views, while his own recruits quickly grew dissatisfied. Some of the Owenites left New Harmony to found more than a dozen small, short-lived Mississippi Valley utopias. Meanwhile, New Harmony generated a band of whiners and shirkers as the "disease of laziness" led to "grumbling, carping, and murmuring." Much later in his life, Owen's son Robert Dale Owen astutely noted that the United States was a very poor place to try and do away with individual property rights through communalism. In America, wages were high and land was cheap, squashing "any feeling of the necessity for cooperative action."[146]

Like Fanny Wright, Robert Owen was an absentee utopian, interested in big ideas but unwilling to deal with the daily details necessary to carry them to fruition. After purchasing New

145. Walters, *American Reformers,* 64–67; Robert Dale Owen quoted in Tyler, *Freedom's Ferment,* 200. See also Bestor, *Backwoods Utopias*, 60–93. Latitudinarians were tolerant of diverse religious views.

146. Walters, *American Reformers*, 66–67; Tyler, *Freedom's Ferment,* 200–204 (qtns., 203). Tyler paraphrases Robert Dale Owen, in Tyler, *Freedom's Ferment,* 206. See also Bestor, *Backwoods Utopias,* 160–201.

Harmony in 1824, he returned to England, visiting New Harmony in January 1826. He sailed back to England the same year, leaving his sons in charge of the venture. Owen traveled to the Wabash River community again in 1827 to find the dwindling, disheartened populace described above. He immediately declared New Harmony a failed experiment, liquidating and privatizing the settlement and offering generous terms and loans to the remaining residents. The financial outcome was Owen's loss of 80 percent of his personal fortune. Although Owen returned to England to pursue other radical endeavors, all of his sons remained and became American citizens and stalwart Indianans.[147]

Fanny Wright had not lingered in New Harmony. She stayed just long enough to deliver the first public address ever made by a woman on American soil, then departed on a tour with Robert Dale Owen to preach their secular gospel and try to raise more money. Fortuitously, New Harmony's downfall had provided the solution for Fanny Wright's own failed idealism. The *New Harmony Gazette* was in financial trouble, and Wright came to the rescue. Camilla noted that Fanny decided to underwrite the *Gazette* so it "sh[ould] not fall to the ground & immediately affixed her name to it as Editor conjointly with R.D. [Owen]." One of Fanny's contractual terms, however, was that she could publish the paper in any location she chose. She immediately moved the *Gazette* from the backwoods of the Mississippi Valley to New York City, where she "devoted herself exclusively to the superintendence of the *Gazette,*" which she renamed the *Free Enquirer.* Fanny Wright had apparently decided that the best way to advocate against individualism was as an individual journalist and public speaker.[148]

On the lecture circuit and in the pages of the *Free Enquirer,* Wright helped lay some of the intellectual foundations of the modern American labor, feminist, and socialist movements. She condemned the commercial class and its treatment of northern

147. Bestor, *Backwoods Utopias,* 187–201; Tyler, *Freedom's Ferment,* 204.
148. Camilla Wright to Harriet Garnett, Nov. 20, 1828, in Payne-Gaposchkin, "Letters of Frances and Camilla Wright," 453–55.

factory workers, and assisted in forming a Working Man's Party to advance workers' political clout. She advocated free universal public education through a system of publicly financed, secular boarding schools. Her feminist writings espoused the view that men and women possessed different natures and that men were naturally more pecuniary, violent, and individualistic than women. Government and economics could be reformed only by allowing female access to those spheres of activity. This would require woman's suffrage, integration of the professions, redistribution of wealth, and a cultural revolution in marital and sexual relations. Fanny agreed with Camilla that marriage was "one of the most subtle inventions of priestcraft" for stifling female happiness. Wright stated that in a just world, no woman would be forced to "forfeit her individual rights or independent existence, and no man assert over her any rights or power whatsoever, beyond what he may exercise over her free and voluntary affections." This meant not only more open marriages, but also consensual sexual relations before and outside of marriage. Fanny believed sexuality was "the strongest and … noblest of the human passions," and the basis of "the best joys of our existence," and "the best source of human happiness."[149]

Most Americans found Fanny Wright's views dangerous and scandalous, and her public speeches drew protestors angry over what they called "Fanny Wrightism." It is worth reemphasizing that, before Wright, no American woman had ever made a public speech. Camilla wrote of the incendiary nature of Fanny's speeches but claimed "even her most violent opposers expressed their admiration and wonder at her transcendent talents as a public speaker & almost admitted her eloquence to be irresistible." In lecture tours that began in the Ohio Valley towns of Cincinnati, Louisville, and Vincennes and ultimately took her back east, "her manner, her voice, her appearance alike called forth repeated bursts of applause from her audience & her heretical doctrines on religion and morals were received with

149. Quotations in Morris, *Fanny Wright,* 2, 146, 156. Wright's labor activism is discussed in Walters, *American Reformers,* 189–90. See also Frances Wright, *Course of Popular Lectures with Three Addresses of Various Public Occasions …* (1834; repr. New York, 1972).

feelings of deepest interest & curiosity," Camilla believed. In all of her speeches, Fanny Wright presented her radical ideas as being consummately American—a natural fulfillment of the American Revolution's promise of liberty and equality.[150]

Despite having spent much of the 1820s critiquing the tradition of marriage, Fanny followed Camilla in marriage in 1831 when she wed William Guillayme D'Arusmont, a French physician she met at New Harmony. The couple had one child, Frances Sylva D'Arusmont, and they lived in France for a brief period before returning to the United States in 1835. Although Fanny would continue her trans-Atlantic lifestyle, Cincinnati, Ohio, became an anchor for her until the end of her life. She continued to advocate reform as an individual citizen, but never with the passion that she exuded in the 1820s. Wright was active in the northern wing of the Democratic Party and wrote one last book, published in 1836. After she and D'Arusmont divorced, Fanny spent much of her time in legal wrangling over their cojoined estates. She died in Cincinnati December 13, 1852, of complications from a fall down an icy staircase. Her headstone in Cincinnati's Spring Grove Cemetery reads, "I have wedded the cause of human improvement, staked on it my fortune, my reputation and my life." Estranged from Frances Sylva, Fanny nevertheless left her a sizable estate that included her Tennessee Nashoba holdings.[151]

Although it might seem that the utopians Fanny Wright and Robert Owen shared little in common with Joseph Smith, Jr., and the Nauvoo Mormons, there were similarities as well as differences. All three advocated communal ownership of property, although the Mormons allowed for family property rights within their strict tithing and social welfare system. All three advocated radical experimentation with the institution of

150. Camilla Wright to Harriet Garnett, Nov. 20, 1828, in Payne-Gaposchkin, "Letters of Frances and Camilla Wright, 1820–1829," 454–55.

151. Editor's note, Payne-Gaposchkin, "Letters of Frances and Camilla Wright," 460–61; Paul Baker, introduction to Wright, *Views of Society and Manners in America,* xxi–xxii. For Camilla's decision to marry, see Camilla Wright Whitbey to Harriet Garnett, April 26, 1828, in Payne-Gaposchkin, "Letters of Frances and Camilla Wright," 451. Soon after losing her only child, Camilla died in 1830.

marriage. Unlike Owen and Wright, Smith did not oppose marriage outright, but the Mormons' plural marriage doctrine took the tradition much further out of the mainstream than Owen's and Wright's failed experiments. In her tolerance of premarital and extramarital sex, Fanny practiced what would become a modern social norm. Perhaps most significant, Owen's and Wright's secular ideologies actually overlapped with the religiosity they so despised. As Walters and others have shown, both secular and religious communalists espoused perfectionism—the belief that human beings could cleanse themselves of flaws, or sins. And both groups believed that a new age had arrived, an age secularists termed "enlightened" and the devout believed was the beginning of a "kingdom of peace on earth." As the decades of the nineteenth century advanced, these millennial beliefs would become hugely consequential. And, as we shall see, perfectionism and millennialism became powerful forces when intertwined with the growing debate over slavery.[152]

What happened to the Nashoba slaves, the voiceless human actors in Fanny Wright's failed utopian dreams? Wright worked hard to achieve a just outcome. In November of 1829, two years prior to Fanny's marriage and Camilla's death, Camilla wrote about Fanny's plans. She said Fanny had concluded that because the Nashoba slaves were "a constant source of anxiety & pecuniary loss," she had decided to "free … herself from all further responsibility regarding them, by … conveying them to Hayti [Haiti]," a Black republic in the Caribbean. Camilla's husband, Richesson Whitbey, soon accompanied thirty-one Nashoba Blacks "by steamboat to N. Orleans," where Fanny held the legal paperwork to free them. Fanny and her soon-to-be husband William Guillayme D'Arusmont departed New Orleans with the manumitted Blacks on January 19, 1830, and landed at Port au Prince about a month later. The Haitian president Jean Pierre Boyer and his governmental aides, who had been apprised of Wright's mission by the Marquis de Lafayette, gave them a

152. Walters, *American Reformers,* 39. See Edward Royle, *Robert Owen and the Commencement of the Millennium: A Study of the Harmony Community at Queenwood Farm, Hampshire, 1839–1845* (Manchester, Eng., 1998).

warm welcome. Boyer granted all the former Nashoba slaves good land and a generous stipend with which to begin again in Haiti.[153] There is no record of their lives or the lives of their descendants thereafter. In the United States, meanwhile, a storm was brewing over slavery. This was a storm Fanny Wright had, in small but important ways, helped to create.

153. Camilla Wright to Madame Pertz, Nov. 1, 1829, in Payne-Gaposchkin, "Letters of Frances and Camilla Wright," 459.

Chapter 2

THE FOLK AND THEIR WAYS

> What's the use of improvement? Who ever found wild buffalo or a brave Indian in a city? … Where's the fun, the frolicking, the fighting? Gone! Gone!
>
> Mike Fink, King of the River[1]

In chapter 19 of *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn,* Mark Twain introduces two outrageous scoundrels, the Duke and the King, pathological liars who claim to be European aristocrats. The Duke of Bilgewater and "the late Dauphin" (the latter, the rightful heir to "King Looey") are two of Twain's greatest literary creations; these swindlers lead Huck and Jim on a series of comical yet dangerous misadventures. Mark Twain loved to lampoon Europeans and European aristocracy, as in chapter 4 of *Life on the Mississippi,* where he introduces an ignorant, "soiled and seedy" steamboat engineer who also makes ridiculous claims of descent from European royalty. "He was the son of an English nobleman—either an earl or an alderman, he could not remember which, but believed was both."[2]

The characters and story lines of Twain's steamboat engineer, the Duke, and the King are based on American oral folk traditions. Throughout the antebellum years, Americans told tales of European aristocrats who somehow found themselves in

1. Thomas Bangs Thorpe, "The Disgraced Scalp-Lock; or Incidents on Western Waters," *Spirit of the Times,* July 16, 1842, 230.
2. Mark Twain, *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn,* (1884; repr. New York, 1977), 98–102; Mark Twain, *Life on the Mississippi* (1883; repr. New York, 2001), 31–32.

America. Like many folktales, the stories reflect historic context. A revolutionary people who had just shed themselves of a monarchy liked to poke fun at aristocratic traditions and hapless aristocrats wandering America like ducks out of water, as it were.

Another such tale features a democratic boat captain named Thomas Carter. Carter supposedly commanded the keelboat carrying Louis Phillipe (the dispossessed French Bourbon monarch, also descended from "King Looey") and his brothers as they traveled through the Mississippi Valley in the early nineteenth century. Although Phillipe and his brothers actually did travel in America, the Carter tale is probably concocted; it is certainly exaggerated. According to the story, the keelboat regularly grounded on shoals (sandbars), whereupon Captain Carter would call down to Louis and his entourage: "You Kings down there! Show yourselves, and help us three-spots pull off this bar!" Immediately obeying the boatman's orders, the French royal family ascended the stairs, jumped into the river, and set to work. Upon completion of the difficult task, they returned to their quarters, wet and muddy, and resumed their lives as noblemen in a frontier republic.[3]

CRACKER CULTURE

Folklore—nonverbal, partly verbal, and verbal traditions—tells us a good deal about the history of the Mississippi Valley's common men and women. Workways, material culture, food, celebrations, dances and music, vernacular language and sayings, superstitions, practical jokes, and other folkways hold much historical information. After spending considerable time researching literate elites, historians are now turning to the study of the American folk.[4]

3. Leland D. Baldwin, *The Keelboat Age on Western Waters* (Pittsburgh, Pa., 1941), 72.
4. Lawrence Levine, "How to Interpret Folklore Historically," in *Handbook of American Folklore,* ed. Richard M. Dorson (Bloomington, Ind., 1983), 338–40; Jan Harold Brunvand, *The Study of American Folklore* (New York, 1986), 1–36; Ronna Lee Wilder Sharpe, "Lore for the Folk: Benjamin A. Botkin and the Development of Folklore Scholarship in America," in *America's Folklorist: B. A. Botkin and American Culture,* ed. Lawrence Rodgers and Jerrold Hirsch (Norman, Okla., 2010), 35–55; Simon Bronner, *Folk Nation: Folklore and the Creation of*

A good deal of Mississippi Valley folk culture is cracker culture. "Cracker" is an early vernacular term describing common American folk of Celtic descent. While there were several important ethnic groups in the trans-Appalachian West, crackers were extremely influential. Crackers were reputedly good talkers, and gained a reputation in America for storytelling and joking—making "cracks," or wisecracks.[5]

The first crackers were Scots Presbyterians who emigrated to Colonial America from Ulster, in northern Ireland, where they had grown weary of violent relations with their Irish Catholic cousins. These Protestant Ulster crackers were called Scots Irish. Other crackers migrated to America from the Scottish Highlands, and portions of Wales, Cornwall, and northern England. They avoided the Anglo Yankee settlements of New England, the middle states, and the South's tidal lowlands; crackers initially settled in western Pennsylvania and the eastern Appalachian highlands. By the late eighteenth century, they were crossing the Appalachians, in search of free land and opportunities in Tennessee, Kentucky, and the southern portions of Ohio Territory. By the first third of the nineteenth century, crackers had joined other ethnic groups settling west Georgia, Alabama, Indiana, Illinois, Missouri, and Louisiana—the heart of the Mississippi Valley.[6]

It would be a mistake to describe cracker culture as simply a European germ that replicated itself on the early American frontier. While crackers certainly brought many of their Old World ways to America, they were forced to adapt to survive new frontier conditions. Moreover, an important part of this process was their adaptation of, and influence upon, the traits of other American ethnic folk groups. To the south in Louisiana, there were strong French and Spanish influences, while German and Scandinavian immigrant folk held sway to the north in

American Tradition (Wilmington, Del., 2002); Richard M. Dorson, *America in Legend: Folklore from the Colonial Period to the Present* (New York, 1973), xiii–xiv.

5. For epigrams defining crackers, see front matter, Grady McWhiney, *Cracker Culture: Celtics Ways of the Old South* (Tuscaloosa, Ala., 1988), n.p.
6. Ibid., xi–xliii, 1–22. See also David Hackett Fischer, *Albion's Seed: Four British Folkways in America* (New York, 1989).

Minnesota, Wisconsin, northwest Illinois, and Iowa. But the three most important non-Celtic groups were Indians and Anglo and African Americans. Mississippi Valley cracker culture is thus based in Celtic folkways, but with other Old and New World influences melded into the gumbo.[7]

Grady McWhiney, preeminent scholar of Celtic Americans, closely examined their agricultural and herding lifestyle, leisure pursuits, foodways, morality, and intellect. He characterizes them as precapitalist, anti-intellectual, and violent folk who were "hospitable, generous, frank, courteous, spontaneous, lazy, lawless, militaristic, wasteful, and reckless." These characteristics overlap some (not all) of those Frederick Jackson Turner ascribes to American frontier settlers; they also reflect "Indianization" delineated by Turner (and, later, James Axtell), and aspects of Thomas Sowell's analysis of Black American folkways. This emergent folk culture stands in stark contrast to that of taciturn, pious, and industrious Yankees.[8]

Following the American Revolution, tens of thousands of frontiersmen and women crossed the Appalachians into the Mississippi Valley in what was known as the Great Migration. They followed three principal routes. Initial parties crossed the mountains through the Cumberland Gap, then trekked Boone's Wilderness Road into Kentucky's Bluegrass region. A second more circuitous route (used, for example, by the Scots Irishman Andrew Jackson to settle Nashborough in 1790) was to cross the Carolina Appalachians, sail down the Tennessee River to the Ohio, then move upstream along the Cumberland. Following

7. McWhiney, *Cracker Culture,* xi–xliii, 1–22; Michael Allen, review of *Cracker Culture,* in *Journal of the Early Republic* 8 (Autumn 1988), 338–39; Frederick Jackson Turner, "The Significance of the Frontier in American History," in *Frontiers of Western History: Origins, Evolution, and Future of Western History,* ed. Michael Allen and Mary L. Hanneman, 2d ed. (Boston, Mass., 2007), 37–56; Frank L. Owsley, *Plain Folk of the Old South* (1949; repr. Baton Rouge, La., 1982). A differing analysis based on frontier causation is Terry Jordan and Matti Kaups, *The American Backwoods Frontier: An Ethnic and Ecological Interpretation* (Baltimore, Md., 1989).

8. McWhiney, *Cracker Culture,* 268–69, passim; Turner, "Significance of the Frontier," 56; James Axtell, "The Indian Impact on English Colonial Culture," in *The European and the Indian: Essays in the Ethnohistory of Colonial North America* (New York, 1981), 272–315; Thomas Sowell, *Black Rednecks and White Liberals* (New York, 2006).

defeat of upper Ohio Valley Indians in the Battle of Fallen Timbers (1794), tens of thousands of pioneers sailed flatboats southwest on a third route down the Ohio River. Landing in river ports like Maysville and Hendersonville, Kentucky, they immediately fanned out over the countryside. The traveler Morris Birbeck later wrote:

> Old America seemed to be breaking up, and moving westward. We are seldom out of sight … of family groups, behind and before us… Add to these the numerous stages, loaded to the utmost, and the innumerable travelers on horseback, on foot, and in light wagons, and you have before you a scene of bustle and business extending over three miles, which is truly wonderful.[9]

Arriving in the Ohio and Mississippi Valleys, pioneers were forced to adapt to the new, challenging environment. At first, this meant utilizing American Indian workways, food, and material culture. Settlers learned Indian words, incorporating names like raccoon, hickory, mosquito, pone, pecan, moose, and skunk (and literally hundreds of Indian place names) into an emergent American English dialect. They sometimes dressed in deerskin breeches, hunting shirts, and animal skins, donning moccasins to more stealthily hunt in the forests of the trans-Appalachian West. They incorporated Indian foods—corn, beans, squash, and bear and venison jerky—into their diet. They learned to fashion dugout canoes from logs; in winter they traveled via snowshoes.[10]

Like Anglo colonials before them, westerners learned to fight Indian style. "The colonist … builds the log cabin of the Cherokee and Iroquois and runs an Indian palisade around him," Turner wrote. "He shouts the war cry and takes the scalp in orthodox Indian fashion." Beginning with Daniel Boone and George Rogers Clark, Mississippi Valley militiamen learned to defend themselves and expand their territory by blending European warfare techniques with Indian guerilla tactics—fighting in all

9. Michael Allen, *The Confederation Congress and the First American Trans-Appalachian Settlement Policy, 1783–1787* (Lewiston, N.Y., 2006), 16–18 (qtn., 19).
10. Turner, "Significance of the Frontier," 38.

seasons and in camouflage, attacking civilians, marching single file, and employing hit-and-run ambushes and surprise attacks. To those with Celtic ancestry, fierce warfare techniques came naturally.[11]

After achieving relative safety, these pioneer folk set about the work of farming. Using axes to hew out a small clearing, they built a cabin with the timber, perhaps hosting a cabin-raising party to help with the work. Clearing five acres for crops proved more difficult; the Indian practice of girdling large trees with sapling tourniquets helped pioneers fell scores of deciduous trees to clear the way for planting. The typical backwoods farmer planted one acre of wheat and vegetables and four acres of corn; crop rotation and fertilization were rare. Adept herdsmen, crackers turned their hogs, cattle, and sheep into the forest to graze on the public domain. Hogs—"wind splitters" in folk parlance—were the dominant source of protein. Crackers were known to herd hundreds of pigs at a time.[12]

Thus the cracker entrée of choice was pork, with portions of venison, bear, raccoon, squirrel, and catfish thrown in for variety. On the side, frontiersmen and women ate lots of corn—roasted, boiled, and fried. They soaked it and made hominy, and they ground it into meal for cornbread, pancakes (johnnycakes), pone bread, hush puppies, or cornmeal mush. Much corn was distilled into whisky, the Mississippi Valley's most common beverage; a sign of progress was acquisition of milk cows. Apples were served year-round, imported from upstream, or picked from orchards that matured in less than a generation. Hearty (and heavy) vegetables—potatoes, squash, and beans—were common; lighter greens (including poke "salet") were harvested in summer, then boiled for hours with pork fatback, or served fried in bacon grease ("dressing"). This fatty, unbalanced diet caused some sickness, and travelers often commented on the "pale" and

11. Ibid.; Daniel Boorstin, *The Americans: The Colonial Experience* (New York, 1964), 351; Grady McWhiney and Perry Jamieson, *Attack and Die! Civil War Military Tactics and the Southern Heritage* (Tuscaloosa, Ala., 1984).
12. Malcolm J. Rohrbough, *The Trans-Appalachian Frontier: People, Societies, Institutions, 1775–1850* (1978; repr. Belmont, Calif., 1990), 22–28; McWhiney, *Cracker Culture,* 52–55.

"bluish-white complexions." Yet, these pioneer folk nevertheless grew stronger, and most of them prospered on this simple diet. In a very important sense, Mississippi River Valley civilization was built on pork and corn.[13]

Thomas Lincoln, Abraham's father, an Illinoisan by way of southern Indiana and Kentucky, described his family's hardscrabble frontier lifestyle, saying, "We lived the same as the Indians 'ceptin' we took an interest in politics and religion." (Today, we note that the Indians also took an interest in politics and religion, though there were huge differences.) Mississippi Valley religion differed from that practiced by European Americans east of the Appalachians, which in turn differed from that of Europeans. As Americans moved westward, mainstream Protestant congregations of Congregationalists and Anglicans gave way to Presbyterians, Methodists, Baptists, and a number of schisms thereof. No Baptist minister was required to have formal education to preach; a man need only be "called" to the pulpit. This democratic practice quickly spread to other Protestant denominations, and democratic lay churches arose and fired the Second Great Awakening. Circuit riders rode up to a hundred miles ministering to scores of frontier congregants. The folk became heady with old-time religion.[14]

Mississippi Valley theology was simple, revolving around beliefs in predestination, salvation, and millennialism. Believers worshiped in an increasingly enthusiastic style. Like the early Puritans, the faithful knew that God predestined each person to salvation or damnation at birth (one schism's members called themselves Two-seed-in-the-Spirit Baptists). If one were "chosen," he or she learned this through a religious conversion experience, a joyous and wondrous occasion. Moreover,

13. McWhiney, *Cracker Culture,* 80–83, 87–89; W. J. Rorabaugh, *The Alcoholic Republic: An American Tradition* (New York, 1979), 126–28; George Dangerfield, *The Era of Good Feelings* (New York, 1952), 111–12. Thanks to Larry Whiteaker. See also James E. McWilliams, *A Revolution in Eating: How the Quest for Food Shaped America* (New York, 2005).
14. Dangerfield, *Era of Good Feelings,* 112–16; Alice Felt Tyler, *Freedom's Ferment: Phases of American Social History from the Colonial Period to the Outbreak of the Civil War* (1944; repr. New York, 1962), 35–45; William G. McLoughlin, *Modern Revivalism: Charles G. Finney to Billy Graham* (New York, 1959).

Protestant millennialists believed increasing religious fervor was a response to an impending Kingdom of Heaven on Earth, preparing the way for the return of Jesus Christ. Millenarians, including many frontier revivalists, believed Christ's return was imminent.[15]

Although few common settlers owned slaves, proximity to slave quarters made for even more remarkable religious adaptations. African American slaves had early on embraced Protestant Christianity, drawn to Old Testament stories of the Jews' flight from Egyptian slavery and the millennial promise that "There's a Better Day A'Comin.'" Like cracker frontiersmen, African Americans changed European religion's germ into a hybrid. They added enthusiastic African verbal folkways to religious services, turning up the heat on European call-and-response liturgy. They did the same in song, introducing syncopated rhythms to the performance of once staid European and Euro-American church music.[16]

All of these themes and influences melded together and ignited camp meetings, the ultimate manifestation of Second Great Awakening religious enthusiasm. From 1815 to 1860, enthusiastic Christians throughout the United States gathered together in large outdoor meetings. Mississippi Valley folk brought camping gear and food, and stayed for as long as a week. These gatherings provided a social, as well as spiritual, outlet for isolated westerners; courtships and marriages often resulted. At the largest gatherings, church services were held around the clock, with a team of preachers speaking in turn to the crowds. Their exhortations were, by all accounts, entertaining and evocative. The crowds responded with singing, shouting, dancing, and other expressions of religious zeal. James Finley, a revivalist who was converted at a huge (twenty thousand congregants) Cane Ridge, Kentucky, meeting, remembered,

> The noise was like the roar of Niagara. The vast sea of human

15. Ronald G. Walters, *American Reformers, 1815–1860* (New York, 1978), 21–27.
16. John Blassingame, *The Slave Community: Plantation Life in the Antebellum South* (New York, 1972), 59–76.

> beings seemed to be agitated as if by a storm. I counted seven ministers all preaching at once, some on stumps, others in wagons… Some of the people were singing, others praying, some crying for mercy in the most piteous accents, while others were shouting most vociferously… At one time I saw at least five hundred swept down [brought to their knees or prone] in a moment, as if a battery of a thousand guns had opened upon them, and then immediately followed shrieks and shouts that rent the very heavens.[17]

While the religious enthusiasm appeared overwrought and disturbed some observers, the general impression was favorable. Indeed, despite the crackers' overall penchant for emotion, anti-intellectualism, waste, lawlessness, and violence, outsiders were often complimentary when describing these rough frontier folk. McWhiney's description of cracker culture as hospitable, generous, frank, and courteous is supported by ample firsthand evidence. Ignorant backwoodsmen were often lauded as "uniformly kind and obliging," always ready to provide strangers a meal and a bed at no cost. Many noted the recurrent "sirs" and "ma'ams" with which crackers courteously peppered their sentences. When Mississippi Valley folk passed the collection plate around church, they were reportedly always "more ready to give" than their Yankee brethren.[18]

The opposite poles and contradictions of Mississippi Valley folk culture certainly confirm Frederick Jackson Turner's description of American character as "dominant individualism working for good and for evil." Today, it has become fashionable to describe frontiersmen of the trans-Appalachian Great Migration as brutal conquerors, exterminators who killed and extirpated Indian people so they could exploit the land. Indeed, the term "cracker" today reflects many violent, crude redneck stereotypes. Yet, upon examining the historic folk life of these early Mississippi Valley men and women, one must draw a more favorable portrait. To be sure, they had many rough, offensive characteristics. Yet the breadth and difficulty of their pursuits, their accomplishments, and the legacy they hand down to

17. Tyler, *Freedom's Ferment,* 35–42 (qtn., 37).
18. McWhiney, *Cracker Culture,* 95, 163, 190, 262, passim.

contemporary American culture (indigenous American music forms are only one example) render them worthy of some respect, even admiration. Perhaps George Dangerfield best described the character of those folk who made the Great Migration to the Mississippi Valley, when he wrote,

> The flow of human beings beyond the Alleghenies at one end to the prairies and the Gulf at the other was a great and wonderful influence upon American life… It was perhaps the last time in all history when mankind discovered that one of its deepest needs—the need to own—could be satisfied by the simple process of walking towards it. Harsh as the journey was, and cruel as the wilderness could be, this movement could not help but be a hopeful one.[19]

RIVER LORE

Like people from all occupational groups, early Mississippi Valley nonsteam rivermen (flatboatmen, keelboatmen, and raftsmen[20]) are characterized by unique nonverbal, partly verbal, and verbal lore. In studying nineteenth-century rivermen's folklore, we must use written sources because, of course, there were no tape recorders or video cameras to record their traditions. And in examining the printed word, we must be wary of accounts and tales concocted or embellished by professional writers. The key to identifying riverboat folklore is evidence of recurrent lore types and motifs, oral transmission, common usage, and, often, anonymous authorship. Published travel accounts, usually written by educated Americans and Europeans, sometimes contain folkways transcribed by their authors. And American writers and journalists such as Mark Twain, Thomas Bangs Thorpe, Augustus Baldwin Longstreet, James Hall, Hardin E. Taliaferro, and John Henton Carter were all personally familiar with folkways that they used as sources for their

19. Turner, "Significance of the Frontier in American History," 56; Dangerfield, *Era of Good Feelings,* 120.
20. Flatboating, keelboating, and rafting are discussed in chapter 3, this work.

published stories. Then, too, much folklore is found in existing writings of actual rivermen.[21]

Boatmen were tricksters and practical jokers. They often howled and called out to one another in passing, swearing back and forth. A Wabash River flatboatman remembered exchanges between rivermen in which "either tries his wit against the other & make very witty and laughable replies & … questions." Boatmen were superstitious folk who regularly practiced rituals to ensure good luck and safe voyages. Flatboatmen urinated over the stern or side of their boats, never over the bow, which was bad luck. Boatmen considered women and preachers on board to be bad luck, and thought the same of any white animals (horses, dogs, or cats). Rats were welcome so long as they did not desert the boat suddenly in great numbers, and boatmen believed horseshoes brought good luck. On the upper Cumberland River, some flatboatmen thought a man's twentieth boat voyage bad luck. According to a descendant, the Cumberland riverman John Willis made nineteen trips to New Orleans, "but he never would do the twentieth trip. He claimed that nobody ever got back from the twentieth trip."[22]

Lumber and log raftsmen observed many of the same rituals and added a few of their own. A rising river at the beginning of a trip meant good luck. So too did bad weather or a rainstorm: "Bad beginning, a good trip," Allegheny River raftsmen used to say. Birds alighting and remaining onboard a raft were a good

21. Brunvand, *American Folklore,* 16–36; Richard M. Dorson, *American Folklore and the Historian* (Chicago, Ill., 1971), 3–14, 25, 119, 121, 186–203; John T. Flanagan, "Folklore in the Stories of James Hall," *Midwest Folklore* 5 (Fall 1955), 159–68; John T. Flanagan, *James Hall, Literary Pioneer of the Ohio Valley* (Minneapolis, Minn., 1941). For folklore methodology, see also Sharpe, "Benjamin A. Botkin," 35–55, and Gene Bluestein, *Poplore: Folk and Pop in American Culture* (Amherst, Mass., 1994), 12–27.

22. Michael Allen, *Western Rivermen, 1763–1861: Ohio and Mississippi Boatmen and the Myth of the Alligator Horse* (Baton Rouge, La., 1990), 190–91; Thomas Bolling Robertson, "Journal of a Tour down the Ohio and Mississippi," 1807, typescript, Thomas Bolling Roberston Papers, Walter Pritchard Collection, Special Collections and Archives, Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, n.p.; "The Beauties of Flatboating," *Atalantian Journal* 2, no. 19 (Sept. 1, 1845), copy in Indiana Historical Society, Indianapolis; Charles Henry Ambler, *A History of Transportation in the Ohio Valley* (Glendale, Calif., 1931), 343. Quotation from William Lynwood Montell, *Don't Go up Kettle Creek: Verbal Legacy of the Upper Cumberland* (Knoxville, Tenn., 1983), 132.

sign, and so too was a squeaky or "talking" raft. Raftsmen frowned on a falling river, but a corpse aboard reportedly did not cause much consternation. However, in *Life on the Mississippi,* Mark Twain tells a story of a raftsman named Dick Albright whose raft is followed and haunted by a barrel containing the corpse of his murdered baby.[23]

A favorite river custom was tricking new crewmen (today's "greenhorns"). Adapted from widespread use "on the bank" (ashore), flatboatmen harassed new men in varied ways. In Marietta, Ohio, Captain Miles Stacy's hands ordered new men "to work scouring or greasing the anchor," while they watched with glee. Ordered to "coon the Steering oar," green deckhands found themselves crawling all the way out a twenty-foot oar and then back again, risking a cold swim if they failed. Seasoned rivermen forced greenhorns to treat the crew to rounds of whiskey, and on the upper Mississippi near Grand Tower Rock, this was part of an elaborate ritual. There, according to Captain Meriwether Lewis, boatmen conducted a ceremony similar to that of deep-sea sailors crossing "the tropics o[r] Equanoxial line." Lewis reported that new men who did not treat the crew to drinks were "ducked" in the Mississippi River by senior boatmen.[24]

Rivermen were renowned talkers and storytellers—wisecrackers in the cracker tradition. We have some idea of the sound of their voices through printed sources. Like other European germs, the King's English was radically transformed in the Mississippi Valley. As noted above, frontiersmen incorporated Indian nouns into their vocabulary, and the Mississippi Valley's French and Spanish folk naturally lent new

23. Maud D. Brooks, "Rafting on the Allegheny," *New York Folklore Quarterly* 1, no. 4 (1945), 226; Mark Twain, *Life on the Mississippi* (1883; repr. New York, 1961), 18–23.

24. Allen, *Western Rivermen,* 49, 190; Miles A. Stacy, "Flatboating down Old Man River, 1849–1869: Reminiscences of Captain Miles A. Stacy as Related to his Daughter Adelaide Frost Stacy, February, 1913," typescript, Ohio Historical Society, Campus Martius Museum, Marietta, Ohio, 7; T. C. Collins, *The Adventures of T. C. Collins—Boatman, Twenty-four Years on the Western Waters, 1849–1873,* ed. Herbert L. Roush, Sr. (Baltimore, Md., 1985), 113; Meriwether Lewis, "The Journals of Captain Meriwether Lewis and Sergeant John Ordway Kept on the Expedition of Western Exploration, 1803–1806," *Wisconsin Historical Society Collections* 22 (1916), 65, 59.

words to the evolving vernacular language. African-American words and intonations found their way into common speech. Linguists define early Ohio and Mississippi Valley speech as the Midland Accent—the flat-voweled, uneducated drawl that still resonates throughout the American Midwest. Although the Midland Accent has variants—sharp, twangy A's southward and a more lilting cadence peppered with accented "ou" vowels northward—this is the drawl non-Americans immediately identify as our national speech.[25]

Boatmen incorporated colorful expressions into their vocabulary. An out-of-work boatman was a "wharf rat," frozen lines were "cat's claws," peddling produce by boat was "ratting," a lightened flatboat was "sparsed," and a riverman's possessions were his "traps." Rivermen called treacherous stretches of the lower Mississippi by names like "Devil's Bake Oven," "Devil's Punch Bowl," and "Devil's Race Ground." Fearing a collision on the lower Mississippi, a merchant navigator in one of Thomas Bangs Thorpe's stories yelled to his flatboat's pilot, "If that ar fellow at the sweep don't bear on harder and keep us off that tree, I am a busted up pork merchant." An unreliable man would "never do to tie to," and a snag in the river was a "Mississippi produce buyer." Distressed at the swarms of mosquitoes surrounding his flatboat on the lower Mississippi in 1845, an Indiana boatman threatened to tear down the flat's chimney and throw the bricks overboard so the mosquitoes wouldn't have anything "too convenient for them to sharpen their bills on"![26]

Though some river stories were concocted by professional writers, many printed tales contain folkloric elements that can

25. Robert McCrum, Robert McNeil, and William Cran, dirs., *The Story of English,* episode 7: "Pioneers! O Pioneers!" (Chicago, Ill.,1986), VHS; Ravin I. McDavid, "The Dialects of American English," in *The Structure of American English,* ed. Winthrop Nelson Francis (New York, 1958), 480–53; McDavid, "A Note on Dialect in Literature," in Francis, *Structure of American English,* 540–43; Allen, *Western Rivermen,* 103–104.

26. Allen, *Western Rivermen,* 104; F. Cuming, *Sketches of a Tour to the Western Country through the States of Ohio and Kentucky, Early Western Travels, 1748–1846,* ed. Reuben Gold Thwaites (Cleveland, Ohio, 1904), 283, 289; Everett Dick, *The Dixie Frontier* (New York, 1948), 21; Collins, *The Adventures of T. C. Collins,* 227, 238–39, 240–41, 243; Thomas Bangs Thorpe, *The Hive of the Bee Hunter, a Repository of Sketches* (New York, 1854) (qtn., 130); "The Beauties of Flatboating," *Atalantian Journal* 2, no. 17 (Aug. 18, 1845).

be traced to boatmen themselves. Tales provide clues to the rivermen's characters, how they perceived themselves and joked amongst one another, and, in many cases, how they were perceived by landsmen and portrayed in the popular media.

The Indiana flatboatman Samuel Chew Madden told a tale of an old riverman, Uncle Mark Grimes, who was fooled by his own echo. Grimes was "a regular Harum Scarum and splutter[er] from away back," who on a very still night during his first flatboat trip to New Orleans "commenced some of his loud spluttering talk and the echo came back and he thought it was somebody on the shore a mocking him." Grimes "became enraged and bawled out that he was a Tennessean and a Jacksonian, and that he would fight in blood to his knees and if he was out there he would mop up the earth with him." The moral of the story, Madden concluded, was that if Uncle Mark "had kept his mouth shut" the other fellow would have kept his mouth shut too.[27]

Two tales reflect popular perceptions of clever, democratic boatmen. The Ohioan James Hall, an early folktale collector, related a story about a group of boatmen who explored an abandoned village, where they discovered an old whipping post used for punishment in colonial times. The rivermen were so disgusted they pulled the post up from the ground and threw it into the river, declaring, "Them that wanted to be whipped mought go after it." A Kentucky riverman, a "first rate 'Mississippi snag,'" showed his disdain for European pomp and aristocracy immediately upon arrival in New Orleans. When a "powdered French dandy" rode past him on horseback, the riverman sarcastically bowed low, doffing and sweeping his hat to the ground in feigned respect. The Frenchman's startled horse promptly threw its rider into a large mud puddle, whereupon the wet, muddied aristocrat arose and returned the salute, adding, "You are a little too d—nd polite, Saire"![28]

27. Samuel Chew Madden, "Notebook," typescript, Sesqui Manuscripts, Indiana Historical Society, Indianapolis, 3.
28. Allen, *Western Rivermen,* 15; James Hall, *Letters from the West* ... (1828; repr. Gainesville, Fla., 1967), 89–90; Arthur K. Moore, *The Frontier Mind* (New York, 1963), (New Orleans qtn., 117); Flanagan, *James Hall, Literary Pioneer of the Ohio Valley* (Minneapolis, 1941), passim.

Miles Stacy retold several tales in his flatboating reminiscences. One is a racist tale that appears to be concocted. Tying his boat up on a dark Ohio River night, Stacy supposedly sent one of his hands, Press Hill, ashore to secure a line. Tying onto "an old tree stub," Press called out to Stacy and his hands to "haul aboard," but was surprised to find that the stump was in fact "a big nigger" who complained, "What yo' all doin' heah." In another tale, Stacy recounted a night near the Coal Creek Bend eddy (whirlpool) when some of his crew noted the similarity of the scenery along the riverbanks they were passing. Chiding his crew, "So, you're going back home, are you boys?" Stacy pointed out that they had steered right into the eddy and had been going around in circles all night.[29]

Stacy's second story about the eddy contains migratory motifs—elements that appear in other tales. The story appeared in published versions (by Thorpe and Twain) that Stacy probably read or heard and then "borrowed" to liven up his own memoir.[30] The tale might well have oral folk origins, which is certainly the case for another of Stacy's borrowings, the beef story.[31]

The beef story is a migratory tale that appeared throughout the trans-Appalachian West in different versions at different times. What follows is a retelling of four different versions, the first being a relatively modern (early twentieth-century) upper Cumberland River rafting story. Whether or not the event occurred in the fantastic way told here, it is significant because upper Cumberland locals repeatedly told the story, and it is a meaningful representation of how they viewed rivermen as trickster folk heroes.

Several very hungry upper Cumberland raftsmen are floating their logs downstream, and they are looking for some dinner. They spy a herd of cattle and decide to shoot a calf; they haul the dead calf back to the raft to cook him up for dinner. Although the farmer they have robbed hears their rifle shot and soon appears, the raftsmen have prepared a trick. They have disguised the calf

29. Stacy, "Flatboating down Old Man River," 14.
30. See Baldwin, *Keelboat Age on Western Waters,* 74–75.
31. Stacy, "Flatboating down Old Man River," 8.

with "rubber boots on its hind legs and a rain slicker over the rest of it." When the farmer advances to investigate, a raftsman tells him not to come aboard, for his brother has "just died of the smallpox… There he lays now." As the raftsman begins to sob in grief, the farmer runs away, "not wanting any contact with the contaminated body."[32]

Another version of this trickster story appeared as a printed 1840s tale about Mike Fink, the king of the Ohio River keelboatmen. The Fink variant features several sheep instead of one steer, and tricksters who rub "scotch snuff" (granulated tobacco) up all the sheep's noses to cause wheezing and thus feign an incurable animal plague they soberly call the Black Murrain. In this story, the farmer begs Mike to toss the diseased sheep into the Ohio River; Mike does so, only to pick them from a downstream eddy a few minutes later. Meanwhile the farmer has given Mike and his crew gold coins and "peach brandy" as a reward for staving off the plague of Black Murrain![33]

Yet another version was recurrent among antebellum African American slaves. This time the slave's "Massa" (Master) discovers a dead hog in the pen and demands the slaves confess to killing him. A trickster slave gravely informs Massa the hog has died of the "deadly Malitis" and that all the plantation's pigs would have been lost had it not been for the slaves' alertness. Massa then rewards all the slaves for their trouble, allowing them to eat what he believes to be disease-tainted meat. "And what was the 'deadly Malitis,'" the trickster later asks? "Why the deadly Malitis is what happens every time you take a hammer and whack a pig on the forehead; right then the deadly Malitis sets in!"[34]

"Jim Girty's Beef Story," published in the *Spirit of the Times,* tells about a trickster boatman named Jim Girty whose crew shoots and steals fat beef steers and conceals them aboard to enhance

32. Montell, *Don't Go up Kettle Creek,* 110n88.
33. Ben Casseday, *The History of Louisville* (Louisville, Ky., 1852), 73–75; Thomas D. Clark, *Rampaging Frontier: Manners and Humors of Pioneer Days in the South and the Middle West* (Indianapolis, Ind., 1939), 95–97; Allen, *Western Rivermen,* 10–11.
34. Lawrence W. Levine, *Black Culture and Black Consciousness: Afro American Folk Thought from Slavery to Freedom* (New York, 1977), 126–27; American Social History Productions, *Doing as They Can* (Wyckoff, N.J., 1987), VHS.

their boat's larder. Confronted by an angry farmer and his gun-wielding friends, Jim invites them onboard to search his flatboat, but informs them gravely that "we buried two [men] yesterday, with smallpox, and them four are very sick—very sick indeed, gentlemen, and I must beg of you not to disturb them." Needless to say, the farmer and his friends instantly march off the boat "without speaking a word," and Jim Girty and his crew soon sit down to a steak dinner.[35]

A final published version appears dramatically altered, yet nevertheless utilizes the basic tale type of a trickster using the fear of disease to outwit more powerful adversaries. In this story there is no sick animal. A young boy is floating down the Mississippi on a raft, helping his Black slave friend escape to the North. When slave hunters advance aboard their own boat, the boy rows a small canoe away from the raft and to the slave hunters' boat; the slave conceals himself in the river, clinging to the raft. The hunters demand to search the boy's raft. He assents and begs them to come help his father, who is lying aboard very sick. Yet the boy does not reveal the exact nature of the sickness. The slave hunters conclude the boy's father has "the smallpox," and the boy tearfully confesses that is true and begs them again for help. The terrified slave hunters immediately flee after giving the boy some gold coins to help him in his troubles. Saved from the slave hunters, the boy and his Black friend continue their Mississippi River quest for freedom.

The names of the slave and the trickster boy are, of course, Jim and Huckleberry Finn.[36]

ENTER THE ALLIGATOR HORSE

Whenever Mississippi Valley folk gathered aboard flatboats, on their front porches, around campfires and cabin fireplaces, or in general stores, they told tales of a hero they called the Alligator Horse. The term "Alligator Horse" and its related modifier "half horse, half alligator" are still used with variants in American

35. Clark, *Rampaging Frontier,* 95–97.
36. Twain, *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn,* 74–76.

vernacular (folk) speech. Like much folklore, authorship is anonymous. The term begins to appear in printed travel accounts as early as 1810, and by the Jacksonian era its use is ubiquitous.[37]

Alligator Horse tales are good examples of the fact that all folk cultures, not just Indian and African, utilize animal imagery in their traditions. The Alligator Horse was a cracker folk hero; he could be a trapper, hunter, Indian fighter and scout, militiaman, or riverman. He was a rough, tough frontiersman who could prevail on water and on land. He was a lawless trickster, crack shot with a rifle, fierce wrestler and fist fighter, a hard drinker and gambler, a promiscuous lover, and yet, somehow, a romantic symbol of America's westward expansion.[38]

From a humble beginning in oral tradition, the Alligator Horse was catapulted to fame, beginning with a song and a play performed during the Age of Jackson. "The Hunters of Kentucky" was a Samuel Woodworth tune celebrating the January 8, 1815, victory of General Andrew Jackson and his army, which included militiamen, at the Battle of New Orleans. When the actor Noah M. Ludlow, attired in a buckskin hunting shirt and leggings ("leatherstockings"), sang the song for a New Orleans theater audience in 1822, the response was overwhelming: "At that instant, came a shout and an Indian yell from [riverboatmen in] the pit, and a tremendous applause from other portions of the house, the whole lasting nearly a minute," Ludlow remembered.[39] "Ye gentlemen and ladies fair / Who grace this famous city / Just listen if you've time to spare / While I rehearse a ditty," the song

37. Christian Schultz, *Travels on an Inland Voyage ... in the Years 1807 and 1808,* 2 vols. (1810; repr. Ridgewood, N.J., 1968), 1:145–46; Robertson, "Journal of a Tour down the Ohio and the Mississippi."

38. Michael Allen, "'Sired by a Hurricane': Mike Fink, Western Boatmen, and the Myth of the Alligator Horse," *Arizona and the West* 27 (Autumn 1985), 237–52; Allen, *Western Rivermen,* 6–8, fn2–6; Thomas Ruys Smith, *River of Dreams: Imagining the Mississippi before Mark Twain* (Baton Rouge, La., 2007), 63–78. The classic works are James H. Justus, *Fetching the Old Southwest: Humorous Writing from Longstreet to Twain* (Columbia, Mo., 2004), 441–56; Bernard DeVoto, *Mark Twain's America* (Boston, Mass., 1967), 91–93, 240–68; Constance Rourke, *American Humor: A Study of the National Character* (New York, 1959), 48, 66, passim; and Walter Blair and Franklin J. Meine, eds., *Half Horse, Half Alligator: The Growth of the Mike Fink Legend* (Chicago, Ill., 1956), passim.

39. John William Ward, *Andrew Jackson, Symbol for an Age* (New York, 1968), 13–15, 217–18.

begins. "And for the opportunity / Conceive yourselves quite lucky / For 'tis not often that you see / A hunter from Kentucky / O Kentucky, the hunters of Kentucky!"

The song celebrates Jackson's spectacular success; with nearly two thousand Britons killed or wounded and the loss of only nineteen Americans, the Battle of New Orleans ranks as one of the greatest American victories of all time. But the song ignores or distorts much of the historic record. In fact, the battle was fought mistakenly, two weeks after the signing of a treaty ending the War of 1812. Moreover, the sharpshooting militiamen were not all from Kentucky (Jackson certainly was not!), and regular army troops and Creole artillerymen played equally important roles in the triumph.

But Americans then, as now, were ready and willing to ignore inconvenient details surrounding a heroic military victory. The song struck a responsive chord in a nation that had recently romanticized the minutemen of the American Revolution. Thus the children of revolutionaries cheered the verse, "And if a daring foe annoys / Whate'er his strength and forces / We'll show him that Kentucky boys / Are alligator horses / O Kentucky, the hunters of Kentucky!" A stanza describing the Americans' strategic positioning contains a second, and final, reference to the Alligator Horse: "Behind [a bank] stood our little force / None wished it to be greater / For ev'ry man was half a horse / And half an alligator."[40]

The Alligator Horse hero of folklore and popular culture was a raucous, comic, violent fellow, the nineteenth-century version of today's cracker, redneck, or good ol' boy. Like all authentic folk heroes, his antics were based on a core of historic truth and are directly descended from the kinds of tales, practical jokes, and superstitions related above, embellished and modified over time. As 1830s magazine, almanac, and newspaper writers caught wind of the tales, the Alligator Horse's exploits found their way into print and even onto theater stages across the land. A new genre of folk-based literature was born, featuring half-horse,

40. Ward, *Andrew Jackson,* 217–18.

half-alligator frontier heroes. That writing is known as the Southwestern School of American literature—emanating from small print shops across the Old Southwestern states of the Ohio and Mississippi Valleys.[41]

Alongside Jackson, the most famous Alligator Horse was Davy Crockett, the folkloric alter ego of Tennessee's historic colonel and congressman *David* Crockett.[42] In "The Lion of the West," James Kirke Paulding's wildly popular 1831 melodrama based on Davy's legend,[43] the hero is portrayed as a fast-talking, hard-drinking, practical-joking, hard-fighting, straight-shooting, egalitarian American frontiersman. Many stories spotlight Davy's hunting prowess, but some storytellers borrowed motifs from European tales of Robin Hood and William Tell. They told of Davy outshooting a skilled adversary by splitting his opponent's spent bullet in the target (Robin Hood split his adversary's arrow in half). Another shooting tale features Davy's folkloric (not historic) nemesis Mike Fink, the "Last of the Boatmen." Mike shoots a comb out of his wife's hair (not an apple, like William Tell), and challenges Davy to equal the feat. Davy declines because, unlike Mike, he is too much a gentleman to endanger Mrs. Fink.[44]

Yet in most stories, Davy appears as a pretty rough customer. He drinks heavily, going on partying sprees and imbibing huge quantities of "lickur," "flem cutter," and "anti-fogmatic." He often speaks aggressive, racist words, bragging of "swallowing niggers and Injuns whole," so long as someone first "buttered their ears back." He despised "greasers" (Mexicans) as well, traveling all the way to Texas to teach them some respect. Indeed, the folkloric Davy Crockett vented his violence against any man or beast who

41. DeVoto, *Mark Twain's America*, 91–93, 240–68; Blair and Meine, *Half Horse, Half Alligator,* passim.
42. See chapter 1, this work.
43. James Kirke Paulding, *The Lion of the West,* ed. James N. Tidwell (1831; repr. Stanford, Calif., 1954); Lorman Ratner, *James Kirke Paulding: The Last Republican* (Westport, Conn., 1992), 63–64.
44. *The Crockett Almanac, 1840,* in *The Tall Tales of Davy Crockett: The Second Nashville Series of Crockett Almanacs, 1839–1841,* ed. Michael Lofaro (Knoxville, Tenn., 1987), 11; Michael Allen, "Who Was David Crockett?" in *Tennessee: State of the Nation,* ed. Larry H. Whiteaker and Calvin Dickinson (Mason, Ohio, 2006), 54–55.

got in his way, beginning his fights with an elaborate boast, proclaiming, "You infernal heathen … I'll have you understand that I'm a snorter by birth and eddycation, and … I'll give you a taste of my breed. I'll begin with the snapping turtle, and after I've chawed you up with that I'll rub you down with a spice of alligator."[45]

Several spurious 1830s "autobiographies," written without Crockett's permission, claimed to tell the *Life and Adventures of Colonel David Crockett* or *Colonel Crockett's Tour of the Northern States* (Crockett ultimately hired a co-author and published his own *Narrative of the Life of David Crockett)*. Here the democratic political anecdote emerged as standard fare, with the Whig Congressman Crockett appearing as an equality-loving political candidate in the Age of Democracy. Davy's firm belief in the rights of the common white man is evident in campaign stories in which he uses down-home sense and tactics (with a little trickery thrown in) to win election. One tale has Davy buying drinks for a crowd of voters (a true story to that point), but paying for repeated rounds using the *same* coonskin, retrieved by Crockett from a hole in the bar wall immediately after making each payment to the bartender. In a more ribald tale, a farmer's daughter variant, Davy tricks an important constituent into believing his opponent—his real-life rival, the Democrat Adam Huntsman—tried to seduce his daughter. Upon discovering Huntsman's seeming lecherousness, the farmer proclaims, "You can't fool me," renounces his support of Huntsman, and urges his friends and neighbors to vote for the upright Davy Crockett; Davy wins the election.[46]

There are scores of tales of Davy Crockett's hunting feats, but one in particular merits close attention. The story is deceptively simple: Davy claims he could "grin a coon [raccoon]" out of a tree to avoid ruining the critter's pelt with gunshot. "Well, I discovered a long time ago that a 'coon couldn't stand my grin," he relates earnestly. "I could bring one down tumbling from the

45. *Crockett Almanac, 1840,* 11; *The Crockett Almanac, 1839,* in Lofaro, *Tall Tales of Davy Crocket,* 22–23.
46. Allen, "Who Was David Crockett?" 55.

highest tree. I never wasted powder and lead when I wanted one of the creatures."[47] Aficionados have heard and told this story so many times that few ever think about its absurdity. How could a grin *kill* an animal? Surely it was not a friendly or warm grin. Indeed, it must have been a *ferocious* grin—a grin so horrible that it could strike an animal dead! This simple story is not so simple; it ranks among the most effective uses of irony in early American oral and written tradition.

While Congressman David Crockett's real-life opponents were the Jacksonian Democrats, his most famous folkloric rival was Big Mike Fink, a character we met briefly in the preceding stories about tricksters stealing livestock. Crockett probably never met Fink, but the two are paired in numerous oral traditions and folk-based newspaper and magazine stories. Like Crockett and Jackson, the historic Mike Fink was a trans-Appalachian frontiersman; as a professional keelboatman, he plied the Ohio, Mississippi, and Missouri Rivers between 1790 and 1823. In the employ of the Rocky Mountain Fur Company, Mike Fink died a violent death at the mouth of the Yellowstone River. During and after his life, stories of Fink's feats spread rapidly among the folk of the Mississippi Valley and found their way into print. Mike Fink's humble life and lack of a professional or political résumé make his rise in oral tradition and literature even more unusual than that of Crockett and Jackson. Mike Fink was evidently such an extraordinary individual that tens of thousands of frontier folk talked about him, and their talk made him a popular culture hero ranking alongside a congressman and the president of the United States.[48]

The Mike Fink stories are double-edged: some are light-hearted and comical, while others are laced with violence, alcoholism, racism, and sexism. And, like Crockett's lore, many Fink tales somehow combine all of the above with a romantic and nostalgic view of a vanishing frontier way of life.[49]

47. Paul Hutton, introduction to *A Narrative of the Life of David Crockett by Himself,* by David Crockett (1834; repr. Lincoln, Nebr., 1987), xv.
48. Allen, "'Sired by a Hurricane,'" passim; Allen, *Western Rivermen,* 9–14, 25–26.
49. Allen, *Western Rivermen,* 9–14, 25–26.

Mike loved to joke, but warned he "told his jokes on purpose to be laughed at, and no man should 'make light' of them!" He was a trickster who, as noted, once swindled a farmer out of his sheep by convincing him they were dying of a nonexistent disease called the Black Murrain. In another trickster tale Mike was summoned to court in Louisville; he appeared before the judge in his keelboat, which had been loaded onto a wagon and "poled" up Main Street because Mike "felt at home nowhere but in his boat and among his men." But Mike could also fall victim to his own pranks. Once, mounting the back of a ferocious bull to torment him, Mike accidentally upset a hornet's nest; the terrified bull raced away, dragging Mike "over brier and stump in the field … like a fat bear with pack of hounds at his heels."[50]

To Mike Fink, fighting was great fun. Indeed, he once grew so restless he said he "must fight something or catch the dry rot." Mike fought his way across the trans-Appalachian West and licked the river pirates of Cave-in Rock. Like all Alligator Horses, Mike prefaced his fight with violent (and racist) oratory: "Hooray for me you scapegoats! … I can lick five times my own weight in wild-cats. I can use up Injens by the cord. I can swallow niggers whole, raw, or cooked. I can out-run, out-dance, out-jump, out-dive, out-drink, out-holler, and out-lick any white thing in the shape o' human that's ever put foot down within two thousand miles o' the big Massassip."[51]

Mike demanded strong drink and immoral women. One storyteller claimed he could "drink a gallon [of whiskey] in twenty-four hours without its effect being perceptible in his language or demeanor." His promiscuity, we are told, stemmed from true love gone bad. As a youth in western Pennsylvania, Mike was smitten with one Mary Benson, only to have his heart broken when her father forced her to marry an evil man named Taggart. Mike never got over this hurt; he never married, instead

50. Casseday, *History of Louisville,* 73–79; Scroggins [pseud.], "Deacon Smith's Bull; or Mike Fink in a Tight Place," *Spirit of the Times,* March 22, 1851, p. 52.

51. "Reverend Peter Cartwright, Jocose Preacher," in Blair and Meine, *Half Horse, Half Alligator,* 216–19; Colonel Frank Triplett, "Mike Fink—Last of the Flatboatmen," in Blair and Meine, *Half Horse, Half Alligator,* 238–40; Menra Hopewell, *Legends of the Missouri and the Mississippi* (London, Eng., 1874), 396–97.

cavorting with numerous women he met in taverns and inns along the western rivers. In one outrageous story, a jealous Mike suspects his girlfriend Peg has flirted with another man. To teach her a lesson, he covers her in dry leaves, sets them afire, and holds her at gunpoint until she promises never to flirt again. Another tale has Mike shooting a whisky cup from between a girlfriend's thighs.[52]

The preceding stories form the tip of a racist iceberg, for the folkloric Mike Fink also aimed his rifle at African and Native Americans. A story published in 1837, "Trimming a Darky's Heel," is purported to be true. Here Mike is arrested for shooting at a Black man in the Saint Louis port. Taken to court for severing "the hinder part of [a] nigger's heel," Mike demands the judge pay *him* "fur trimmin' the heel of one of your town niggers." The story ends with Mike sending "a handful of silver to the darky to extract the pain from his shortened heel." Thomas Bangs Thorpe published a related story, "The Disgraced Scalp Lock," in 1842. This time Mike shoots off an Indian's ponytail; the Indian, Proud Joe, is so enraged at this disrespect he stalks Mike and tries to kill him. Mike carries the day when he kills Joe in a knife fight.[53]

Coming of age near Fort Pitt, Mike earned a reputation as a legendary crack shot. One storyteller claims that whenever a shooting match prize was a side of beef, Mike was given the beef hide and tallow simply for agreeing *not* to compete! Another tale has him killing an Indian and a deer with the same bullet. And there are dozens of varied accounts of Mike shooting a cup of whisky off a fellow boatman's head (à la William Tell). In the standard tale type, Mike positions the whisky cup on his own head, paces off three or four dozen yards, and yells, "Blaze away!" The "sharp crack of the rifle" is heard, and the cup goes flying. Then Mike returns the favor, and the two men

52. Casseday, *History of Louisville,* 73; Joseph Field, "Mike Fink: The Last of the Boatmen," in Blair and Meine, *Half Horse, Half Alligator,* 93–142; Charles Cist, *The Cincinnati Miscelleny; or, Antiquities of the West* (Cincinnati, Ohio, 1845), 156–57; Henry Howe, "A Talk with a Veteran Boatman," *Historical Collections of Ohio,* 2 vols. (Columbus, Ohio, 1888), 1:322.

53. Thorpe, "The Disgraced Scalp-Lock," *Spirit of the Times,* July 16, 1842, p. 230; Solitaire [John S. Robb], "Trimming a Darky's Heel," *Spirit of the Times,* Feb. 13, 1837, p. 605.

finish the ritual toasting and share a round of drinks. There are numerous variants including Davy Crockett or a girlfriend, as related above. The most recurrent version is set at the mouth of the Yellowstone River, where the real Mike Fink died in an 1823 shooting fray. In this tale, Mike and an estranged friend named Carpenter trade shots, but Mike shoots Carpenter in the head and is in turn murdered by Carpenter's friend Talbot.[54]

Although Mike Fink's shooting death was served up in scores of folk-based publications, a related tale tells much more about the significance of Mike Fink and the myth of the Alligator Horse. The tale of Mike's death was sometimes preceded by a story of why he chose to go to the Rockies in the first place. It seems that by the early 1820s the Mississippi Valley was getting too populated and "civilized" for Mike Fink. There was too much settlement and too many people; the frontier era was drawing to a close. "What's the use of improvement?" Mike asked in "The Disgraced Scalp Lock." "Who ever found wild buffalo or a brave Indian in a city? … Where's the fun, the frolicking, the fighting? Gone! Gone!"[55]

Mike's decision to move farther west is woven into a metaphoric tale. One day in 1822, Mike spies a steamboat belching smoke, working its way up the Mississippi. Mike despises steamboats; they represent the industrial revolution and the "progress" that is ruining his world and putting him and his fellow keelboatmen out of work. He keeps his fully loaded keel in the channel, sailing quickly downstream aimed right at the slow-moving steamer. Soon the two boats collide: "Water pouring through [a] hundred gaping seams, told the weight and force of the collision." Having destroyed both the steamer and his own keel, Mike heads for shore "with a savage smile on his face." Soon, in Saint Louis, he signs a contract to work as a Missouri River keelboatman and trapper for the Rocky Mountain Fur Company.[56]

This story is one example of a tale type so important it became

54. Casseday, *History of Louisville,* 73, 76–77; Allen, *Western Rivermen,* 13–14, 138–39.
55. Thorpe, "Disgraced Scalp-Lock," 230.
56. Field, "Mike Fink," 127–28.

mythic. The legend of a lone frontiersman riding off into the sunset became classic fare for thousands of future western heroes. It emerged simultaneously with the dawn of the American industrial revolution, spawning stories of Daniel Boone moving his family west whenever he caught sight of chimney smoke and clearings, and Davy Crockett telling the voters they can "go to hell" while he goes to Texas. James Fenimore Cooper served it up in *The Last of the Mohicans* (1827); fifty years later, Huckleberry Finn, having finished his grand Mississippi River adventure, decides he must "light out for the Territory ahead of the rest" because folks want to "sivilize" him. And seventy years after *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn,* Joey Stark, played by the movie actor Brandon DeWilde, cries after the gunfighter hero Shane, played by Alan Ladd, "Come back, Shane! Come back!" as Shane rides alone into the Rocky Mountains.[57]

In one of the most famous of all these stories, the Black railroad laborer John Henry challenges the steam-driven hammer. John Henry's story is possibly connected to John William Henry, a Black worker on a postbellum Appalachian prison labor gang; Henry and his coworkers blasted the famed Big Bend and Lewis Tunnels for the Chesapeake and Ohio Railroad.[58] The legend of John Henry took shape in late-nineteenth-century oral tales and songs. Like Daniel Boone and Sergeant Alvin York, Appalachian heroes who preceded and followed him, the folkloric John Henry does not conform to all of the Alligator Horse motifs. Neither raucous nor braggadocio, John Henry is stoic—a strong, courageous, mountain hero. The fact he is Black and a former slave adds great power and irony to his heroism. In the face of a changing, industrializing world, John Henry says, "Enough." He tells his "captain" (foreman) that he can beat the steam-powered hammer with a sledge hammer and his own two hands. Although it is true that a "man ain't nothing but

57. Twain, *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn,* 229; George Stevens, dir., *Shane* (Hollywood, Calif., 1951), film.

58. Scott Reynolds Nelson, *Steel Drivin' Man: John Henry, the Untold Story of an American Legend* (New York, 2006), 38, 85–86, 92, passim.

a man," John Henry declares: "Before that steam drill shall beat me down / I'll die with my hammer in my hand, Lord, Lord / I'll die with my hammer in my hand." He proceeds to defeat the machine, then "he laid down his hammer and he died."[59]

Throughout the nineteenth century, Alligator Horse tales continued to evolve from oral tradition into popular print. Some were based on historic characters, while others featured invented heroes who wore the Alligator Horse costume. As we shall see, scores of Black Jack Tales combined African and cracker folkways to feature cotton plantation trickster heroes. Journalists wrote about the Revolutionary War veteran-turned-outlaw Simon Girty. Augustus Baldwin Longstreet populated his *Georgia Scenes* (1835) with tall-talking Alligator Horses, while Johnson Jones Hooper created a bombastic folk-based hero in *Adventures of Captain Simon Suggs, Late of the Tallapoosa Volunteers* (1845). In his classic short story "The Big Bear of Arkansaw," Thomas Bangs Thorpe presented an Alligator Horse hunting tale with a compelling, thoughtful, and ironic conclusion. Later, in *Sut Lovingood's Yarns* (1867), the Tennessean George Washington Harris molded the Alligator Horse into a hillbilly—a crude, violent, irreverent, and yet somehow amusing and engaging Appalachian trickster.[60]

At the same time Harris was writing his Sut Lovingood stories, a crucial new element was being added to this folkloric archetype: technology. Heretofore, the half-horse, half-alligator folk hero had always been a *pre-industrial* man, a sworn enemy of machines and progress who vowed to shun modernity and die with his hammer in his hand. But in 1881, Mark Twain simultaneously published *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* and *Life on the Mississippi,* extolling the heroics and antics of both pre-industrial *and* industrial folk heroes. He celebrated the "rude ways and tremendous talk" of jolly lumber raftsmen in chapter 3 of *Life on the Mississippi* (a passage originally written for *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*); yet mere pages later, he began

59. Guy B. Johnson, *John Henry: Tracking Down a Negro Legend* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1929), 2–3, 13, 89.

60. Justus, *Fetching the Old Southwest,* passim.

to fashion a technological variant. The steamboat pilot Stephen W. emerges from the pages of *Life on the Mississippi* as an industrialized Alligator Horse, a crackerjack, "harum-scarum devil-may-care" steamboat pilot who is also a trickster, complete with a fiddle and a pet cat. Stephen W. thus stands heroically behind the wheel of the same kind of smoke-belching monster that runs down Huck and Jim in a pivotal chapter of *Huckleberry Finn:* "She was a big one … big and scary, with a long row of wide open furnace doors shining like red-hot teeth … as Jim went overboard on one side and I on the other, she comes smashing straight through the raft."[61]

Soon thereafter, storytellers and singers celebrated the brave railroad engineer John Luther "Casey" Jones. Born in 1863 in the Missouri Bootheel and raised in the western Kentucky village of Cayce (pronounced "Casey"), Jones was a handsome man who stood six foot four. He worked his way up in the railroading trade from brakeman to fireman to engineer on the prestigious Illinois Central line, running the Mississippi Valley from Chicago to New Orleans. Casey Jones became known for his railroading skills, work ethic, daring, and love of Engine Number 638, a "black gleaming monster designed for heavy freight." But his real claim to fame came behind the throttle of Engine 382 near Vaughan, Mississippi, on April 30, 1900. Ninety-five minutes behind schedule when he boarded, Casey made up all but two minutes by traveling at an amazing (and reckless) speed of 75–100 miles per hour. At 3:52 a.m., however, he crashed into another train and died instantly in the wreckage. Stories of Casey's daring spread; then Willis Saunders, a Black mechanic for the Illinois Central, penned a song that circulated in hundreds of variants: "Come all you rounders if you want to hear / The story told of a brave engineer / Casey Jones was the rounder's name / A high right-wheeler of mighty fame."[62]

As Casey Jones's legend migrated into early blues music, his mystique evolved from that of a noble Daniel Boone and John

61. Twain, *Life on the Mississippi,* 12, 82–83, passim; Twain, *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn,* 78–79.

62. Dorson, *America in Legend,* 235–41.

Henry to a trickster like Davy Crockett and Mike Fink. Sexual innuendo and hard living were woven into the story of Casey's heroism; singers told of Casey ignoring the warnings of railroad flagmen and dying because he was so drunk he saw two sets of tracks. Meanwhile, his folkloric family grew callous: "When Casey's wife heard dat Casey was dead / She was in de kitchen, makin' up bread / She says, 'Go bed, chillums, an' hol' yo' breath / You'll all get a pension at yo' daddy's death.'" Other tunes alluded to Casey's promiscuity. Learning "that Casey was dead," his old lovers "went home and re-ragged in red" and came "a-slippin' an' slidin' up and down the street / In their loose mother-hubbards and their stockin' feet." Consoling her oldest son, Casey's wife scolds, "Quit cryin' boy, an' don't do that / You got another papa on the same damn track"![63]

The stories of Stephen W. and Casey Jones marked a change, yet the Alligator Horse entered the twentieth century retaining many of his frontier traits. He certainly kept his penchant for adaptability. Euro-American and African-American folk of the Mississippi Valley would continue to put the Alligator Horse to good use in twentieth-century tales, songs, nonverbal folkways, and popular culture—movies, radio, and television.

BELLE AND JOHNNY ON THE EDGE

Belle Starr, "the Outlaw Queen," and Johnny Appleseed were significant nineteenth-century Mississippi Valley folk heroes, yet their stories do not neatly fit into the popular Alligator Horse tale type. Johnny and Belle lived their historic lives on the edge of American frontier settlement, and so their legendary lives developed on the frontiers of American oral tradition. The tales and printed stories of Johnny and Belle were formed at widely disparate points where the American folkloric imagination borders good and evil.

Perhaps there is a connection between the rise of Johnny Appleseed, the decline of Mike Fink, and the crescendo of the

63. Ibid., 240.

Second Great Awakening. Though Big Mike had affable traits, he was not exactly a role model for Sunday school children, and during the decade before the Civil War religious storytellers began to cast him in the villain's role. Of course, the stories often ended with a fight, and at this point Mike began to lose fights to strong, righteous challengers, including preachers. In 1850, the Columbus, Georgia, *Southern Sentinel* reprinted a tale about the well-known Kentucky circuit preacher Peter Cartwright beating up Mike Fink at a camp meeting. Mike and his fellow "coarse, drunk ruffians" were interrupting the Reverend Cartwright's sermon, so he stepped down from the pulpit, took off his coat, and announced, "Wait for a few minutes, my brethren, while I go and make the devil pray." Soon a "quick, shooting punch of his herculean fist" sent Mike to the ground. Mike rose and attacked again, but the Reverend Cartwright then "crushed him down as if he had been an infant." Cartwright asked Fink, "Will you pray now?" Thus a Mike Fink story ended with Mike reciting the Lord's Prayer! "By golly, you're some beans in a bar [bear] fight," Mike magnanimously praised Cartwright. "I'd rather *set to* with an old *he* bar in the dog days. You can pass in this 'ere crowd of nose smashers, blast your pictur'!"[64]

It seems Mike Fink had fallen on hard folkloric times, as it were. Mike had always been an unsavory character and, as public morals shifted during the Second Great Awakening, his drinking, fighting, and swearing no longer earned him the storytellers' unquestioned respect. Mike continued to lose fights to moral and upright characters. Ned Taylor, the "small quiet looking" sheriff of the Ohio River town of Westport, smacked Mike "with a tremendous blow under the ear … fell[ed] him to the ground," and kick-boxed him until "a worse whipped man than the jolly flatboatman was never seen." Menra Hopewell's *Legends of the Missouri and Mississippi,* published during the Civil War, characterizes Mike and his brethren as depraved men known for "vulgarity, swearing, carousing," and of course brawling. Hopewell introduces Jack Pierce, a boatman who seeks a more

64. "Rev. Peter Cartwright, Jocose Preacher" (1850), in *Half Horse, Half Alligator: The Growth of the Mike Fink Legend,* ed. Walter Blair and Franklin J. Meine (Chicago, Ill., 1956), 216–19.

moral life and whose "angel-virtue … was his love of his mother." Pierce defeats Big Mike in a fight by butting his head against Mike's so hard "the blows sound[ed] like a maul upon timber." When Pierce soon thereafter meets a tragic death in Saint Louis, Hopewell portrays Mike's glee in evil terms, writing that Mike and his men display "gratification" at Pierce's demise and celebrate, giving "full license to their depraved appetites." Mike Fink's day as a hero was done.[65]

John Chapman, known to this day as Johnny Appleseed, was a Christian pacifist. He was not a fighter like the Reverend Peter Cartwright or Jack Pierce, nor did he in any way resemble his coarse contemporary Mike Fink. Yet Chapman attained a folkloric status that surpassed Mike Fink's and ranks equally with that of the American icons Daniel Boone, Davy Crockett, and John Henry.[66] What was it about the stories of Johnny Appleseed that mid-nineteenth-century Americans found so appealing?

John Chapman was born in Leominster, in the Connecticut River Valley of Massachusetts, on September 26, 1774—very close to the birth years of Mike Fink (c. 1770) and Davy Crockett (1786). A direct descendant of 1630s English Puritan immigrants, Chapman grew up amid Revolutionary wartime struggle and postwar economic downturn. His father Nathaniel was off fighting the Revolutionary War when two-year-old John's mother Elizabeth died. Chapman apparently attended school for a short time, but in the mid-1780s Nathaniel was forced to sell their farm to pay the heavy tax levies that soon led to Shay's Rebellion. Sometime in the early 1790s, teen-aged John Chapman chose to leave New England for the Allegheny River Valley of northwest Pennsylvania. By the early 1800s, he

65. Colonel Frank Triplett, "Mike Fink—Last of the Flatboatmen," in Blair and Meine, *Half Horse, Half Alligator,* 238–40; Menra Hopewell, *Legends of the Missouri and Mississippi* (1862–63; repr. London, Eng., 1874), 376, 379, 394–97, 401–402. Hopewell's stories originally appeared in the *Missouri Republican* (St. Louis).

66. William Kerrigan's *Johnny Appleseed and the American Orchard: A Cultural History* (Baltimore, Md., 2012) and Robert Price's *Johnny Appleseed: Man and Myth* (Bloomington, Ind., 1954) are the best histories. See also Michael Pollan, *The Botany of Desire: A Plant's-Eye View of the World* (New York, 2002), 42–43, passim.

had crossed the Ohio River into the Muskingum River Valley of the new state of Ohio.[67]

In the Allegheny and Muskingum River Valleys, John Chapman was drawn to the first of the two great loves of his life—apple tree nurseries. The historian William Kerrigan has thoroughly chronicled Chapman's career in horticulture. Gathering apple seeds at cider presses, he began to plant and raise apple tree saplings to transplant and market. He initially planted seeds in secluded spots near streams on the public domain, but was eventually able to purchase land for his nurseries. Chapman chose to plant seeds, as opposed to grafting branches onto existing apple tree roots or branches. Seeds were free, they were easy to carry onto his isolated nurseries, and seedlings produced the hardy wild apples praised and coveted by frontier Americans. Although many of John Chapman's seedlings were lost to deer and the weather, enough survived for him to slowly build a highly marketable inventory. The image of a lone wanderer planting and tending to wilderness apple tree nurseries made for evocative oral tales and, later, published stories. The biographer W. D. Haley wrote in 1871, "The sites chosen by him [were] such as an artist or poet would select, rich, secluded spots, hemmed in by giant trees, picturesque now, but fifty years ago, with their wild surroundings and the primal silence, they must have been tenfold more so."[68]

John Chapman's second and stronger passion was religion, and his arrival in the trans-Appalachian West coincided with the stirrings of the Second Great Awakening. Chapman's own religious fervor was born of the unique writings of the eighteenth-century Scandinavian Christian prophet Emmanuel Swedenborg (1688-1772). Swedenborg was visited by angels with whom he spoke and traveled to visit heaven and hell, and from whom he learned the true word of God. Following his

67. Chapman's Massachusetts youth is traced in Kerrigan, *Johnny Appleseed and the American Orchard,* 18–35; his Pennsylvania sojourn is in ibid., 36–70, and Price, *Johnny Appleseed,* 20–45.

68. Kerrigan, *Johnny Appleseed and the American Orchard,* 4–5, 10–11, 58–59, 82–83; William Kerrigan, "The Invention of Johnny Appleseed," *Antioch Review* 70 (Fall 2012), 614 (qtn.). No nurseryman as skilled as Chapman would have planted seeds in the shade of "giant trees."

angelic conversations, Swedenborg wrote numerous volumes expounding a Christian theology peppered by remarkable new insights that Christ had already made his Second Coming to the spirit world (not the physical world) and that human beings could continue to seek salvation and a home in heaven even after their worldly lives had ended. Swedenborg also wrote that one could find the path to heaven in *any* Christian church, a belief in stark contrast to divisive Catholic and Protestant beliefs in only one true church. Swedenborg prophesied his teachings would one day be adopted by the "Old Church," producing a "Church of New Jerusalem"—or "New Church"—to welcome Christ's imminent Second Coming to the physical world. After his death, English followers veered from Swedenborg's call to reform from within, bolted from the Church of England, and founded the Church of New Jerusalem. John Chapman was ten years old when the New Church's doctrines spread to America.[69]

Swedenborgianism appealed to a bright Puritan descendant like Chapman. His love of horticulture was thus joined by religious enthusiasm, and he spent four decades spreading both apple seeds and the gospel of the Lord (which he called "good news fresh from heaven"). In 1817, in Manchester, England, leaders of the New Church published an annual report with remarkable news from the American West:

> There is in the western country a very extraordinary missionary of the New Jerusalem. A man has appeared who seems to be almost independent of corporal wants and sufferings. He goes barefooted, can sleep anywhere, in house or out of house, and live upon the coarsest and most scanty fare. He has actually thawed ice with his bare feet.
>
> He procures what books he can of the New Church; travels into remote settlements, and lends them wherever he can find readers, and sometimes divides a book into two or three parts for more extensive distribution and usefulness. This man for years past has been in the employment of bringing into cultivation, in numberless

69. Kerrigan, *Johnny Appleseed and the American Orchard,* 101–26; Swedenborgian Church of North America, swedenborg.org, accessed April 21, 2013.

> places in the wilderness, small patches (two or three acres) of ground, and then sowing apple seeds and rearing nurseries.
>
> These become valuable as the settlements approximate, and the profits of the whole are intended for the purpose of enabling him to print all the writings of Emmanuel Swedenborg, and distribute them through the western settlements of the United States.

Although the New Church never became a major force in America (by 1889 it could boast only 7,028 members), its beliefs mirrored important aspects of the radical Protestantism that transformed the nineteenth-century United States religious landscape. The New Church was a small part of a revivalist Protestant Christianity that fostered a spiritual and cultural revolution, producing abolitionism, pacifism, feminism, temperance, and vegetarianism movements along the way. And the New Church played a role in all of this while simultaneously producing a legendary American frontier folk hero.[70]

The quoted New Church report is the first formalized summary of oral stories that had for perhaps two decades been circling around the man who some called, and we will now refer to as, Johnny Appleseed. All legends are built on a core of truth that begins in recurrent oral tales and is modified and embellished with variant motifs. If the storytellers are literate, the legend eventually finds its way onto the printed page. Robert Price and William Kerrigan have traced the course of Johnny Appleseed's legend from word of mouth to newspaper and magazine articles, popular biographies, poems, short stories, novels, children's literature, television, movies, and historical and folkloric studies. A list of the most important purveyors of the Appleseed myth includes Rosella Rice, W. D. Haley, Lydia Maria Child, Vachel Lindsay, Rosemary and Stephen Vincent Benet, Howard Fast, and Walt Disney. Taken together, their portraits of Johnny Appleseed mirror an American archetype.[71]

70. Kerrigan, *Johnny Appleseed and the American Orchard,* 101–26 (New Church qtn., 102–103). For the "isms" see Tyler, *Freedom's Ferment,* Walters, *American Reformers,* and chapter 1, this work. In *Johnny Appleseed: Man and Myth,* 119–43, Price delineates Chapman's missionary work and declares Swedenborg's theology too abstruse to succeed on the American frontier.

Johnny Appleseed was known for what one contemporary called "his eccentricity and strange garb he usually wore." In place of a shirt and coat, he wore "a coarse coffee-sack, with a hole cut through the centre through which he passed his head." He wore a broad-brimmed cap, though writers later, and strangely, put a saucepan on his head, perhaps in homage to the Yankee trader folk type. For winter trousers he reportedly wore "the waists of four pairs of pants. These were cut off at the forks, ripped up at the sides and fronts thrown away, saving the waistband attached to the upper hinder part. These hinder parts were buttoned around him, lapping like shingles so as to cover the whole lower part of his body, and over all these were drawn a pair of what was once pantaloons." Almost all accounts describe Johnny as shoeless, walking barefoot no matter the season or terrain.[72]

While Johnny's hard work, ingenuity, and thrift denote a Yankee connection, his link to the Alligator Horse mystique was seen in his strength, courage, and endurance. Yet both these folkloric similarities are overshadowed by his unique religiosity. The Johnny Appleseed of history and legend was saint-like, exhibiting traits of piety, meekness, benevolence, and charity found in neither the Yankee nor Alligator Horse. Given his historic bachelorhood and possible celibacy, the mythic Johnny Appleseed was nearly Christ-like. "He was never known to hurt any animal or to give any living thing pain—not even a snake. The Indians all liked him and treated him very kindly," wrote one of his admirers. There are many stories of Johnny refusing to swat a mosquito or crush an ant. Rosemary and Stephen Vincent Benet echoed these praises in a poem: "Of Jonathan Chapman / Two things known, / That he loved apples, / That he walked alone. / … The stalking Indian, / The beast in its lair / Did no hurt / While he was there. / For they could tell, / As wild things can, / That Jonathan Chapman / Was God's own man." And Vachel Lindsay also celebrated Johnny Appleseed in verse: "A boy / Blew west, / And with prayers and incantations, / And

71. Kerrigan, "Invention of Johnny Appleseed," 608–25.
72. This description is drawn from Chapman's obituary, quoted in ibid., 608–609.

with "Yankee Doodle Dandy," / Crossed the Appalachians, / And was "young John Chapman," Then / "Johnny Appleseed, Johnny Appleseed, …":

> Trading hearts with all beasts and weathers
> He swept on, winged and wonder-crested,
> Bare-armed, barefooted, and bare-breasted.
> The maples shedding their spinning seeds,
> Called to his appleseeds in the ground,
> Vast chest-nut trees, with their butterfly nations,
> Called to his seeds without a sound.
> And the chipmunk turned a "summerset."
> And the foxes danced the Virginia reel;
> Hawthorn and crab-thorn bent, rain-wet,
> And dropped their flowers in his night-black hair;
> And soft fawns stopped for perorations;
> And his black eyes shone through the forest gleam,
> And he plunged young hands into the new-turned earth,
> And prayed dear orchard boughs into birth;
>
> …
>
> And so for us he made great medicine—
> Johnny Appleseed, medicine-man.
> Then
> The sun was their turned-up broken barrel,
> Out of which their juicy apples rolled,
> Down the repeated terraces,
> Thumping across the gold,
> An angel in each apple that touched the forest mold,
> A ballot-box in each apple,
> A state capital in each apple,
> Great high schools, great colleges,
> All America in each apple,
> Each red, rich, round, and bouncing moon
> That touched the forest mold.
> Like scrolls and rolled-up flags of silk,
> He saw the fruits unfold.[73]

73. This composite is drawn from my own analysis; Kerrigan, *Johnny Appleseed and the American Orchard;* Kerrigan, "Invention of Johnny Appleseed," 614 (qtns.); Rosemary and Stephen Vincent Benet, "Johnny Appleseed," in *A Book of Americans* (New York, 1933),

Johnny Appleseed's story fits into the overarching myth of the West—the epic legend of America's westward advance and the spreading of civilization across the frontier. While Boone, Crockett, and Fink all helped to advance, and came to symbolize, this westward course, their wild characteristics were unfriendly to civilization and progress. Johnny thus complements and counters the Alligator Horse, moving onto the frontier to sow orchards rather than slay Indians, and to befriend wild animals rather than hunt them down and eat them. Johnny is a frontiersman who ushers in religion and community. Kerrigan writes, "His story was free from the taint of … the vulgarity and violence of the Crockett myths, a more appealing champion. Johnny Appleseed, after all, was a man of extraordinary gentleness and peace."[74]

Yet, like the Alligator Horse, Johnny Appleseed had no place in the civilized world he helped to create. In both his historic and mythic lives, he could never live for long among those communities he nurtured, for Johnny was "eccentric." He had to keep moving farther west, leaving apple trees for the civilized folk who followed in his path. His was a mythic journey along the historic path he had followed from Massachusetts to Pennsylvania to Ohio and, at last, to the Wabash River Valley of Indiana. In 1845, near Fort Wayne, Indiana, at seventy-one years of age, Johnny Appleseed died, probably from complications of exposure to the elements—"the winter plague." His *Fort Wayne Sentinel* obituary read, "He followed the occupation of a nurseryman and has been a regular visitor here upwards of twenty years…. He is supposed to have considerable property … yet denied himself the most common necessities of life."[75]

Over the past two centuries, Johnny Appleseed's varied storytellers have naturally used his legend to stress points of view important to them. While early raconteurs emphasized westward

47–48; Vachel Lindsay, "In Praise of Johnny Appleseed," in *Johnny Appleseed and Other Poems* (New York, 1913), 82–92.

74. Henry Nash Smith, *Virgin Land: The American West as Symbol and Myth* (New York, 1950); Kerrigan, "Invention of Johnny Appleseed," 616 (qtn.).

75. Kerrigan, "Invention of Johnny Appleseed," 606, 608–609 (obituary). For Johnny's Indiana years see Price, *Johnny Appleseed,* 200–208.

expansion, nation-building, and religion, some of Johnny's later fans had a socioeconomic axe to grind. Johnny's eschewing monetary gain proved attractive to the socialist Vachel Lindsay and the Communist Howard Fast (*The Tall Hunter,* 1942), who saw him as a role model for wealth distribution. On the other hand, a columnist for the *American Fruit Grower* pointed out that Johnny was an astute capitalist, "an entrepreneur … who seems to have comprehended his market exactly." While Johnny was indeed an entrepreneur, he chose to channel all his wealth into Christian missionary work, investing in America's spiritual gross national product, as it were. Whatever their political bent, Lindsay, Fast, et al. shared an admiration of Johnny Appleseed absent from post-modern assessments of the past two decades. In *Botany of Desire,* Michael Pollan points a finger at Johnny's supposed role in America's thirst for alcoholic cider, while the biographer Howard Means asserts that, given his religious and behavioral eccentricities, "John Chapman almost certainly was insane" if judged by "modern" criteria![76]

However, William Kerrigan rightly concludes that making "any headway in upending the myth of Johnny Appleseed is unlikely." And, as in so many aspects of American popular culture, the Walt Disney Studios have played a crucial role in portraying and defining the myth of Johnny Appleseed. In 1948, nearly a decade prior to the release of the televised movies *Davy Crockett: King of the Wild Frontier* (1955) and *Davy Crockett and the River Pirates* (1956), Disney Studios released the eighteen-minute cartoon feature *Johnny Appleseed,* re-introducing Johnny to the baby boom generation. More important, it reiterated and established themes and motifs mirrored in children's storybook literature—individualism, courage, strength, hard work, thrift, and Christian pacifism and liberality. "Here I am 'neath the blue blue sky, doing as I please / Singing with my feathered friends, humming with the bees," Johnny sings as he tramps across the Ohio River Valley, sowing apple seeds and tending his nursery saplings. And, in a prayer that is still recited at American youth

76. Kerrigan, "Invention of Johnny Appleseed," 618–20, 622, 625.

camp gatherings and around family dinner tables, Johnny Appleseed praises God:

> The Lord's been good to me
> And so I thank the Lord
> For giving me the things I need
> The sun and rain and the apple seed
> Yes, He's been good to me.[77]

Antebellum American women's folklore was overshadowed by the masculine myth and printed tales of Daniel Boone, the Alligator Horse, and Johnny Appleseed. Many women's folkways—quilting, cooking, hair braiding, folk medicine, etc.—were nonverbal or partly verbal customs passed down through generations. Of course, women shared tales and songs, but the men who edited America's popular press publications were apparently uninterested in printing women's verbal lore. The market for newspapers, magazines, and almanacs was largely a male market, and so women's lore remained mostly within the women's sphere.[78]

Yet that sphere was slowly expanding. The long road to the formulation of a female Mississippi Valley folk hero began with various Jacksonian literary incarnations of Peg (Mrs. Mike Fink), their daughter Sal, and Mike's assorted girlfriends. Because the historic Mike Fink was apparently unmarried, and any offspring of the King of the Keelboatmen were unknown, male antebellum writers invented wives, girlfriends, and daughters for Mike. These women served mainly as abettors of Mike's sexist antics. He rescues them from Indians and rival Alligator Horses, and shoots whisky cups and combs off their heads. As noted, one storyteller has Mike shooting a whisky cup from in-between his

77. Wilfred Jackson, dir., *Johnny Appleseed,* in *Melody Time* (Burbank, Calif., 1948), film. See also Kerrigan, *Johnny Appleseed and the American Orchard,* 179–80.

78. Jane Curry, "The Ring-Tailed Roarers Rarely Sang Soprano," *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies* 2 (Autumn 1977), 129–40, and Rosan A. Jordan and Susan J. Kalcik, eds., *Women's Folklore, Women's Culture* (Philadelphia, Pa., 1985) focus on contemporary women's folkways, many of which are handed down through nineteenth- and early twentieth-century oral traditions. See introduction, ix–xiv, and Susan Roach, "The Kinship Quilt: An Ethnographic, Semiotic Analysis of a Quilting Bee," in Jordan and Kalcik, *Women's Folklore,* 54–64.

woman's thighs, while another tells of him covering his wife with leaves, setting them afire, and holding her at gunpoint until she promises not to wink at other men. The women in these stories are victims of the Alligator Horse, not heroines.[79]

Amid these tales, an unnamed Crockett almanac writer created a spunky daughter for Mike named Sal Fink, "the Mississippi Screamer." She was a chip off the old block. A "great she-human critter," Sal duels thunderbolts and rides the Mississippi "on an alligator's back" and gives a vicious beating to marauding Indians. Subsequent and equally lively Crockett almanac heroines—Katy Goodgrit, Sappina Wing, Sal Fungus, and Sally Ann Thunder Whirlwind Crockett—were later joined by women characters in the Paul Bunyan and Pecos Bill genre. This trend continued into the late twentieth century, when children's book authors hit upon Sal Fink as a means of achieving gender equity and toned down her more violent behavior to make her a role model for young American girls. Today, one can find children's books about Sal and other female folk heroes. In a related (but more naughty) vein, Lyle Saxon's early twentieth-century stories told of the herculean feats of Annie Christmas, the Louisiana saloon and whorehouse madam.[80]

Myra Belle Shirley, the first female Mississippi Valley folk hero, arose as Belle Starr, "the Outlaw Queen," amid the bloody guerilla warfare and crime sprees that plagued the Missouri Ozarks before, during, and following the Civil War. Belle's famous Starr surname was that of her second husband, the

79. "Colonel Crockett Beat at a Shooting Match," in Lofaro, *Tall Tales of Davy Crockett,* 11; Catherine Albanese, "Davy Crockett and the Wild Man; or, The Metaphysics of the *Longue Duree,"* in *Davy Crockett: The Man, the Legend, the Legacy,* ed. Michael Lofaro (Knoxville, Tenn., 1985), 85; Charles Cist, *The Cincinnati Miscelleny; or, Antiquities of the West* (Cincinnati, Ohio, 1845), 156–57; Howe, "Talk with a Veteran Boatman," 322; Blair and Meine, *Half Horse, Half Alligator,* 85–86.

80. Curry, "Ring-Tailed Roarers Rarely Sang Soprano," 136–37; "Sal Fink, the Mississippi Screamer," in *Native American Humor, 1800–1900,* ed. Walter Blair (New York, 1937), 284–85; "Doughty Dames," in *Davy Crockett: American Comic Legend,* ed. Richard M. Dorson (New York, 1939), 45–56; Jane Yolen, *Cut from the Same Cloth: American Women of Myth, Legend, and Tall Tale* (New York, 1993); Stephanie Paris, *Sal Fink: American Tall Tales and Legends* (Huntington Beach, Calif., 2010); Lyle Saxon, *Father Mississippi* (New York, 1927), 138; Richard M. Dorson, *American Folklore* (Chicago, Ill., 1959), 215.

Cherokee Indian criminal Tom Starr. The woman outlaw folk type is connected to male robbers and murderers in the post-Revolution Mississippi Valley. Stories of Samuel Mason, Micajah and Wiley Harpe, and the so-called River Pirates of Cave-in Rock sometimes included female consorts, none of whom attained significant folkloric status. The same can be said of Lizzie Powell, Maggie Creath, and Ann Walker (Nancy Slaughter), whose names pepper stories of the border wars of Civil War–era Missouri. Yet tales about their contemporary Myra Belle Shirley coalesced to define the folk type writers and folklorists commonly term Banditta, Outlaw Queen, Petticoat Terror, and Desperada. Belle thus set the folkloric stage for the legendary Calamity Jane, Bonnie Parker, and Ma Barker.[81]

While the myth of Belle Starr began in oral tales and was formalized in Richard K. Fox's sensationalized *Bella Starr, the Bandit Queen; or, The Female Jesse James* (1889), history students are fortunate Belle also attracted an accomplished scholarly biographer, Glenn Shirley, whose *Belle Starr and Her Times: The Literature, the Facts, and the Legends* (1982) remains the authoritative account. An important part of Belle's mystique was her supposed tie to the southern planter class through genteel birth and upraising, and there is a core of truth to that story. Myra Belle Shirley was born February 5, 1848, to Virginia migrants to the Mississippi Valley. John and Elizabeth Hatfield Shirley traversed Tennessee, Kentucky, and Iowa before settling in the southwestern Missouri Ozark country around 1840. The Shirley family worked hard and prospered at farming their Jasper County acreage; John Shirley purchased slaves, raised fine racing horses, influenced state Democratic Party politics, and moved into a town house in Carthage, Missouri. John and

81. Dee Brown, *The Gentle Tamers: Women of the Old Wild West* (1958; repr. Lincoln, Nebr., 1981) 262–64; Joan Jensen and Darliss A. Miller, "The Gentle Tamers Revisited," *Pacific Historical Review* 49 (May 1980), 181–82, nn25–26. The Desperada folk type is described in Teresa Jordan, *Cowgirls: Women of the American West* (Garden City, N.Y., 1982), xix–xxi. For male outlaw mystique, see Richard E. Meyer, "The Outlaw: A Distinctive American Folk Type," *Journal of the Folklore Institute* 17 (May–December 1980), 94–124, and Mody G. Boatright, "The Western Bad Man as Hero," *Publications of the Texas Folklore Society* 27 (1957), 96–105. Mason, the Harpes, and Murrell are discussed in chapter 3, this work.

Elizabeth sent their budding teenaged daughter Myra Belle to the Carthage Academy for Young Women, where she studied "reading, writing, grammar, algebra, deportment, Greek, Latin, Hebrew," and learned to play the piano. But Myra Belle also roamed the surrounding Ozark foothills. Her love for horseback riding and pistol shooting was instilled by her beloved older brother Edwin, whom the family called Bud.[82]

Carthage, Missouri, lay in the heart of the region that included the new states of Arkansas and Missouri, the Oklahoma Indian Territory, and Kansas-Nebraska Territory; Texas was only a two-day ride south. Bordering the Ozark Mountains to the north is the valley of the Osage River, a Missouri River tributary; to the south is the valley of the Canadian River, a tributary of the Arkansas. This isolated part of the United States was populated by a diverse humankind—Anglo- and Celtic-American farmers and planters, slaves and free Blacks, Tejanos, Native Osage Indians, members of the relocated Indians of the Creek, Choctaw, Chickasaw, and Cherokee tribes, and folk who boasted descent from varied combinations of this ethnic patchwork. Because this unique region was situated where the trans-Appalachian frontier slowly turned into the trans-Mississippi frontier, it was also the place where the Mississippi Valley Alligator Horse folk hero type slowly turned into the cowboy outlaw folk heroes of the Wild West.[83]

Southwest Missouri was also the scene of violent disagreements over slavery, free soil, states' rights, and secession. A half dozen years before Abraham Lincoln was elected president, civil war erupted in these borderlands. Here, the differences between pro- and antislavery stalwarts and common criminals became blurred, and remained so throughout the Civil War and Reconstruction. This region was known for the murderous abolitionist John Brown and hard-riding Unionist Jayhawkers. Standing against them were legendary Rebel "Bushwhackers" like Todd "Bloody Bill" Anderson, William

82. Glenn Shirley, *Belle Starr and Her Times: The Literature, the Facts, and the Legends* (Norman, Okla., 1983), 32–34; Glenn Shirley, "Outlaw Queen," *Old West* 1 (Spring 1965), 26, 27 (qtn.).
83. Shirley, *Belle Starr and Her Times,* 34–39.

Quantrill, Frank and Jesse James, and the Younger Brothers (Cole, John, Jim, and Bob). As a staunch southern Democrat and proud Rebel, John Shirley applauded his son Bud for helping to organize Jasper County's own band of Confederate Bushwhackers. Teenaged Myra Belle idolized her older brother, whom she watched ride off to war.[84]

Just as Andrew Jackson somehow gained a reputation for Revolutionary War heroism despite the fact that he was too young to actually fight in the Revolution, tales of Myra Belle Shirley manage to insert her in the middle of the Missouri border wars. Storytellers put Belle in scouting parties aiding William Quantrill's Rebel band, and they celebrate her "daring ride" to warn Bud and his comrades of approaching Union cavalry. The myth is built on a tiny grain of truth. Like her father and brother, Belle supported the Confederate cause. When Union soldiers killed Bud in June of 1863, she did travel with her father to retrieve the body, and she vowed revenge. Yet the tale tellers have her brandishing Bud's (unloaded) pistol against the "damned blue-bellies" and swearing, "I'm going to make these bastards pay." What we know is that the Shirleys retrieved Bud's body and buried him, but the Federals soon burned Carthage, Missouri, to the ground. The Shirley family members then retreated to Texas to recoup their fortunes and were living on a farm near Dallas when the Civil War ended. By 1868, teenaged Belle had turned into what one biographer describes as a "buxom, black-haired, black-eyed lass of twenty."[85]

From this point on the stories fly fast and furious. Belle rides alongside a string of outlaw husbands and lovers in a twenty-year crime spree that stretches from Dodge City, Kansas, to Fort Smith, Arkansas. One tale has her dressing up as a man to rob a

84. Shirley, *Belle Starr and Her Times,* 39–45; Shirley, "Outlaw Queen," 26–27. For the Missouri border wars, see James M. McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom: The Civil War Era* (New York, 1988), 783–88, and Shelby Foote, *The Civil War: A Narrative* (New York, 1974), 578–9, 1021–22.

85. Shirley, "Outlaw Queen," 27, 28 (qtn.); Brown, *Gentle Tamers,* 263–64; Shirley, *Belle Starr and Her Times,* 52–62 (qtn., 60). The recurrent revenge motif reminds one of teenaged Andy Jackson reputedly swearing vengeance on British cavalrymen after they raided his family's North Carolina farm. The recurrent long ride tale type can be traced to ancient Marathon.

Creek Indian chief of $30,000. Certainly, Belle was promiscuous and spent the last half of her short life with a handful of criminals who were her husbands, common-law husbands, and lovers. Jim Reed, Belle's first husband, was a Confederate Army veteran turned horse and cattle thief shot dead by a territorial sheriff in 1874. In 1880, she married Sam Starr, a Cherokee Indian, Confederate sympathizer, and gunman seven years her junior, from whom she gained her mythic surname. Between short stints in California and Texas, she resided on Sam Starr's Canadian River farm, which she dubbed Younger's Bend, in honor of the Younger brothers, Rebel Bushwhackers who rode with Frank and Jesse James. Belle mothered two children. Pearl was rumored to be Cole Younger's daughter, while Ed, Belle's son by Jim Reed, was destined to become a convicted assailant and whisky trader who was killed in a Wagner, Oklahoma, gunfight.[86]

Belle and Sam Starr were arrested for horse stealing and tried in 1883 by Isaac C. Parker, the legendary "hanging judge" of Fort Smith, Arkansas. The trial was widely covered in national newspaper stories focusing on Belle's beauty and embellished criminal résumé. The horse-stealing case was Belle's only criminal conviction, though she was subsequently thrice indicted for robberies. Belle and Sam Starr spent six months in the Detroit, Michigan, federal house of correction. Returning home, Belle might have pursued love affairs with Felix Griffin (the feared outlaw dubbed "Blue Duck") and John Middleton (an accused murderer, robber, and arsonist) before Sam was shot to death in a drunken brawl at a dance in 1886. In 1888, she formed a traditional Indian tryst with Sam's twenty-four-year-old cousin Jim July, perhaps aiming to keep her Younger's Bend abode legally safe from discontented and litigious Cherokee relatives.[87]

Belle Starr was shot dead in the back on or around February 3, 1889, in the Canadian River Valley near Briarstown, Oklahoma. Her murderer was never charged and tried, though four suspects drew suspicion. Edgar Watson, Belle's disgruntled tenant farmer,

86. Shirley, "Outlaw Queen," 29–30; Brown, *Gentle Tamers,* 263–64.
87. Brown, *Gentle Tamers,* 263–64; Shirley, "Outlaw Queen," 30.

was a fugitive Florida murderer who might have feared Belle was going to turn him in. Ed Reed, Belle's son, had bitterly opposed her marriage to Jim July. Old Tom Starr, Sam's father (and Jim's uncle), also opposed the marriage and coveted the Younger's Bend property. And Jim July himself was a suspect, perhaps only because Belle seemed wired for promiscuity and duplicity. The unsolved murder served as the coda to the emerging myth of the Outlaw Queen.[88]

Belle Starr's career resembled that of Davy Crockett in several important ways. Like Crockett, her mythic persona was being developed and marketed to the public during her lifetime, beginning with press coverage of her and Sam's trial for horse theft. Also like Crockett, Belle played a role in the cultivation of her own mystique. There is an 1886 photograph of her in Fort Smith, sitting sidesaddle on a well-groomed horse, resplendent in a velveteen dress and rakishly creased and flowered hat, and sporting holstered pistols. And finally, like Crockett, Belle died in dramatic fashion; her intriguing 1889 murder turned out to be an upwardly mobile folkloric career move. Before the year was out, Richard K. Fox, publisher of *National Police Gazette,* released his "biography" *Bella Starr, the Bandit Queen; or, The Female Jesse James,* which was billed as "a full and authentic history of the dashing female highwayman, with copious extracts from her journal."[89]

Unlike Davy Crockett, however, Belle Starr was an *outlaw,* a criminal who was also a folk hero. The outlaw plays an important role in the Myth of the West—he (or she) is a wild foe of civilization and thus the nemesis of the western hero. The outlaw folk type descends from English stories of Robin Hood and is seen in many American variations. While there are evil men with no admirable qualities ("bad guys" like Samuel Mason, the Harpes, and John Murrell), there are also outlaw heroes who possess redeeming characteristics. Belle Starr broke the mold in

88. Shirley, *Belle Starr and Her Times,* 234–40.

89. Richard Kyle Fox, *Bella Starr, the Bandit Queen; or, The Female Jesse James* (New York, 1889). Neither the public nor Belle's subsequent biographers adopted Fox's "Bella" flourish. The photo is reproduced in Shirley, "Outlaw Queen," 28.

rising to fame as a *female* outlaw who showed heroic qualities some (not all) of the time. Though Belle did not take from the rich and give to the poor like Robin Hood, Jesse James, or her Canadian River Valley successor Pretty Boy Floyd, she was loyal to the South and to her brother, and was said to have avenged his death in honorable fashion. After the Civil War, Belle Starr became a common criminal while continuing to show grit, horsemanship, and sharpshooting skills.[90]

Moreover, Belle Starr's mystique is located where the Myth of the West meets the Myth of the Lost Cause. The Lost Cause myth is made up of a complex set of stories about the Old South that, in part, portray Confederates as honorable and valiant countrymen, true to their principles to the end of their fight against mighty (and cruel) Yankee forces. Belle (as in "southern belle") and her family fit this story nicely, and taletellers invent whatever embellishments are necessary. Moreover, Belle Starr *feminizes* both the western and Lost Cause myths. Fox dubs Belle "the female Jesse James," a fusion of gender and myth unprecedented in America before her rise. It is this blending of femininity with violence that gives Belle her edge. In her stunning 1886 photograph, she actually uses her pistols as fashion accessories. These motifs will later be reprised by Annie Oakley, Bonnie Parker, Patty Hearst, and in the popular 1991 western movie *Thelma and Louise*.[91]

Just as Johnny Appleseed countered the rough antics of the Alligator Horse, Belle Starr's stories were a folkloric reaction to heroes like saintly Johnny and the Reverend Peter Cartwright. As the Second Great Awakening waned, the Civil War darkened the mythic imagination and cleared a path for the outlaw folk heroes of the late nineteenth century. The Mississippi Valley would not

90. This is my own analysis, informed by Meyer, "The Outlaw: A Distinctive American Folk Type," and Boatright, "The Western Bad Man as Hero."

91. Rollin G. Osterweis, *The Myth of the Lost Cause, 1865–1900* (Hamden, Conn., 1973); William C. Davis, *The Cause Lost: Myths and Realities of the Confederacy* (Lawrence, Kans., 1996); Glenda Riley, *The Life and Legacy of Annie Oakley* (Norman, Okla., 1994). For Oakley, see also Larry McMurtry, *The Colonel and Little Missie: Buffalo Bill Cody, Annie Oakley, and the Beginnings of Superstardom in America* (New York, 2005). Ridley Scott and Callie Khouri, dirs., *Thelma and Louise* (Los Angeles, Calif., 1991), film.

be cleansed of their outlawry until a new generation arose and was drawn to the bravery and virtue of Sergeant Alvin York, Charles Lindbergh, and Amelia Earhart.

JACK, JOHN, JUBILEE

African American slaves told many stories about a trickster named Jack, and several of the tales tell about Jack trying to get something special to eat. In one, Jack's master—Massa—invites the local white preacher to Sunday dinner and orders Jack to cook up a big duck. Jack does a good job, and the cooked bird looks delicious. But Jack is so hungry that he yields to temptation and eats first one duck wing, then another, and finally eats the entire bird. Realizing his predicament, and seeing Massa sharpening a knife to carve and serve the duck, Jack takes the preacher aside. He gravely informs him that Massa "is sharpening his knife to kill you." Immediately, the preacher breaks into a run and escapes up the plantation road. Meanwhile, Jack calls out to Massa, "There he goes with the duck!"[92]

The French and Spaniards expanded their vast Caribbean and Latin American slavery system to the southeast of North America (Florida and Louisiana) in the 1600s, and in 1619 English Virginians brought Africans to the New World as unwilling indentured servants to harvest their tobacco crops. Some of these indentured servants were freed at the end of their contracts, creating the nucleus of a free Black southern population. But most (90 percent) were not freed, and by 1650 colonial law identified Black slaves as *chattels personal durante vida* in statutes known as Black Codes. Slavery spread to the English colonies of Maryland, Delaware, Virginia, and North and South Carolina. By the time of the American Revolution, one out of every five Americans (400,000 in a population of three million) was African American. After the Revolution, African American slaves forcibly arrived in the Mississippi Valley via the western rivers and over the Appalachians. The invention of the

92. Levine, *Black Culture and Black Consciousness,* 128–29.

cotton gin soon accelerated the growth of slavery in the southern U.S. Cotton Kingdom. By 1820, there were 1.5 million African American slaves; by 1860, there were approximately 4 million, 15 percent of the overall population.[93]

The African-American contribution to American folk life is enormous. Yet, like European-American folklore studies, formal scholarly inquiry into Black folklore developed very slowly during the course of the twentieth century. W. E. B. DuBois and Zora Neale Hurston addressed folk life in, respectively, *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903) and *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1937), and Benjamin Botkin and Eugene Genovese later wove descriptions of slave song and religion into cultural histories of American slavery.[94] In the 1960s and '70s, social historians successfully tapped the wealth of information contained in African-American folklore. Social historians realized the only way to write a thorough history of the United States of America was to explore all groups, not just literate folk. To them, traditions like song, dance, superstitions, food, material culture, and tales provided a strong lens through which to view the past. Two pathbreakers were John Blassingame and Lawrence Levine, authors of, respectively, *The Slave Community: Plantation Life in the Antebellum South* (1972) and *Black Culture and Black Consciousness: Afro-American Folk Thought from Slavery to Freedom* (1977).[95]

93. Ira Berlin, *Many Thousands Gone: The First Two Hundred Years of Slavery in North America* (Cambridge, Mass., 1998), 29–46; Berlin, *Generations of Captivity: A History of African American Slaves* (Cambridge, Mass., 2003), 163–74; Kenneth M. Stampp, *The Peculiar Institution: Slavery in the Ante-Bellum South* (New York, 1956), 14–27. See also Hugh Thomas, *The Slave Trade: The Story of the Atlantic Slave Trade, 1440–1870* (New York, 1997). Slavery is discussed in chapter 3 and throughout, this work.
94. W. E. B. [William Edward Burghardt] DuBois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903; repr. New York, 1989); Zora Neale Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1937; repr. New York, 2008); Jerrold Hirsch and Benjamin Botkin, *Lay My Burden Down: A Folk History of Slavery,* rev. ed. (New York, 1994); Eugene Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll: The World the Slaves Made* (New York, 1974). Hurston is discussed in chapter 7, this work.
95. John W. Blassingame, *The Slave Community: Plantation Life in the Antebellum South* (New York, 1972); Levine, *Black Culture and Black Consciousness,* xi. More recent works are Charles Joyner, *Shared Traditions: Southern History and Folk Culture* (Urbana-Champaign, Ill., 1999), and Shane White and Graham White, *The Sounds of Slavery: Discovering African American History through Songs, Sermons, and Speech* (Boston, Mass., 2005). Joyner is discussed in chapter 8, this work.

Blassingame blended psychology, anthropology, economics, and folklore to write his social history of slavery. His thesis was that slaves developed folk traditions to endure and survive slavery's abuses:

> Black slaves created several unique cultural forms which lightened their burden of oppression, promoted group solidarity, provided a way for verbalizing aggression, maintaining hope and building self-esteem, and often represented areas of life largely free from control of whites. However oppressive or dehumanizing the plantation was, the struggle for survival was not severe enough to crush the slave's creative instincts. Among the creative elements of slave culture were: an emotional religion, folk songs and tales, dances, and superstitions[,] … language, customs, beliefs, and ceremonies … [causing] personal autonomy and positive self concept.[96]

In the face of their masters' overwhelming power, slaves could find one avenue for hope in superstition, magic, and conjurors. All human traditions exhibit beliefs in magic, and American slaves blended their African practices with those of Anglo, Celtic, Franco, Hispanic, Indian, and other American folk. Some magic beliefs came from Caribbean and Louisiana slaves who practiced Hoodoo. Many plantations boasted conjurors, shrewd men and women who claimed to possess powers to counter those of the master. Witchcraft, fortunetelling, spells, and folk medicine all became part of the conjuror's repertoire.[97]

Slaves beseeched conjurors to ease their workloads, prevent floggings, reunite separated families, and, of course, help them in romance through love potions. One escaped slave remembered a conjuror named Dinkie who wore a snakeskin around his neck and carried dried or petrified frogs and lizards in his pockets. Dinkie reportedly never worked, nor was he ever whipped; his owners acknowledged his status and power, and they left him free to wander the plantation and surrounding countryside. In this they were not unusual; there are accounts of slave masters

96. Blassingame, *Slave Community,* 41.
97. Blassingame, *Slave Community,* 32–33, 45–49.

who deferred to Black conjurors and sought them out to remedy their own ills.[98]

William Webb, a Kentucky conjuror, cast spells to make his master treat the slaves more humanely; early one morning he instructed slaves to march around their cabins, pointing bags containing magical roots towards the master's house. The master soon had a dream in which the slaves avenged themselves; meanwhile, Webb was treated to the best food, and female companionship. Some conjurors dispensed justice in the slave quarters, identifying a guilty thief as one who could not hold a Bible in his hand, or one who refused to drink water sprinkled with graveyard dust.[99]

Conjurors were also healers who could treat sickness with a variety of incantations and natural (root and herbal) medicines. These treatments reflect African, Indian, and European folk medicine traditions; while some cures seem purely superstitious, others have been confirmed useful by modern medical scientists. And if the medicines and spells did not actually heal, they nevertheless brought hope and confidence, placebos as it were. Indeed, Blassingame concludes the conjuror's greatest power was providing "a psychological defense against total dependence on and submission to their masters… Whatever his power, the master was a puny man compared to the supernatural."[100]

African-American English, a dialect of American English, developed slowly in the slave quarters. The first generation of forced laborers retained their African speech, and in isolated Carolina plantations subsequent generations continued to use African languages. But in general, American-born slaves came to speak their own brand of American English. Certainly nineteenth-century Mississippi Valley slaves north of the Louisiana parishes were exclusively English speakers, even though their speech retained African influences, intonations, words, and constructions. Slave folk told their stories in this rich vernacular English.[101]

98. Ibid., 45.
99. Ibid., 48.
100. Ibid., 45; Levine, *Black Culture and Black Consciousness,* 69–70, passim.

In the slave quarters, Alligator Horse tales blended with African (and Indian) folklore to produce a hybrid folk hero. The hero went by the name John or Jack, and was sometimes represented by an animal character. In the song "John the Rabbit," for example, slaves sang of a sneaky animal fetching food from Massa's garden. Massa's wife tells the story, with the slaves responding "Yes, Ma'am" to each recitation of her woes: "Oh, John the rabbit, Yes, Ma'am / Got a mighty habit / Yes, Ma'am / Jumping in my garden / Yes, Ma'am / Cutting down my cabbage / Yes, Ma'am / My sweet potatoes / Yes, Ma'am / My fresh tomatoes / Yes, Ma'am / An' if I live / Yes, Ma'am / To see next fall / Yes, Ma'am / I ain't gonna have / Yes, Ma'am / No garden at all / Yes, Ma'am." In related tales, drawn in part from Anglo stories like "Jack and the Beanstalk," a slave named Jack emerges as a trickster hero in human or symbolic animal form. According to Zora Neale Hurston, Jack is "the wish-fulfillment hero of [his] race."[102]

In typical tales, writes Blassingame, Jack (or John) "makes fools of whites, [and] pretends to be more ignorant than he is." One Christmas season Jack asks his master, "How much Christmas kin I have?" He is told that when Christmas comes he is to build a fire and celebrate until the back log in the fireplace burns out. Jack immediately prepares by sawing a gum tree log and soaking it in a ditch for several days; next, he dries the outside of it so it will catch fire. Throwing the log in the back of the fire on Christmas morning, Jack celebrates while the waterlogged fuel burns for seven days![103]

As we have seen, Jack often uses his wiles to get something to eat. Once Jack was so hungry he stole chickens from Massa and cooked them on his cabin stove. But Massa surprises him, entering the cabin to see what is cooking. Jack lies, telling Massa he is cooking up some possums he had hunted; Massa then announces he is staying to eat some of the possum. Jack delays him for an hour, but Massa insists on looking in the pot, where

101. Blassingame, *Slave Community,* xv–xvi.
102. Ibid., 59 (Hurston quoted); Levine, *Black Culture, Black Consciousness* 81–135, passim.
103. Blassingame, 59; Levine, *Black Culture and Black Consciousness,* 130.

he finds the chickens. "Wal," Jack immediately explains, "dey wuz possums when Ah put 'em in dar." In a variant, Jack again tries to pass chickens off as possums; this time when he is discovered, he tricks Massa by telling him all the slaves have spit in the pot: "Us nigguhs allus spits in possum gravy" to make the meat tender. Cursing the slaves as "damned savages," Massa hastily departs and the slaves sit down to a chicken dinner.[104]

Animal trickster tales allowed slaves to use symbolic animal characters to represent their will and ability to triumph over authoritarianism. The best-known animal stories were recorded and published in antebellum popular literature by the white author Joel Chandler Harris. Born in 1848 to humble Celtic-American parents, Harris went to work at age thirteen; he was a printer on a Georgia cotton plantation so large and influential it published a regional newspaper, the *Countryman.* Harris matured, becoming a *Countryman* editor, and forming strong friendships with plantation Blacks. A mere decade after Sam Clemens began learning Missouri slave lore, Harris's friends Old Harbert and Uncle George Terrell were teaching Harris a series of animal stories he would record, transcribe, and embellish in the famed *Uncle Remus: His Songs and His Sayings* (1880) and ten subsequent volumes. The character Uncle Remus is the literary version of Old Harbert and Uncle George, and every story begins with Remus telling a tale to a small white boy on the plantation, just as Harris himself had first heard them.[105]

"The Tar Baby" is one of Harris's most famous stories; it was told, retold, published, and reprinted. Eventually, it served as a centerpiece for Walt Disney's 1946 animated movie *Song of the South.* The tale is named after a tar and turpentine doll that Brer (Brother) Fox makes to trap and eat his nemesis, Brer Rabbit. This story is based on an African tale in which a rabbit is tricked into attacking, and thereby becoming entrapped within, an image covered with bird feces.[106] The African story seems

104. Levine, *Black Culture and Black Consciousness,* 128.
105. Thomas Daniel Young et al., eds. *The Literature of the South,* 2d ed. (Glenview, Ill., 1968), 535–36.
106. Blassingame, *Slave Community,* 26–27.

outrageous, but in fact the folkway is practiced in variant form to this day. Contemporary American adolescent tricksters are known to fill paper bags with their own excrement, light them afire on individuals' porches, ring the doorbell, and stand back and watch the fun as their victim stomps out the burning turd-filled bags! No wonder Harris, and later Disney, altered the story so the Fox makes the doll out of a different sticky substance.

The Tar Baby story is part of a tale cycle in which Uncle Remus tells the little boy of numerous confrontations between Rabbit and Fox (and Bear), who wants to eat him. Of course, Brer Rabbit always outfoxes his enemies, but in this tale he seems to have run out of luck. Desirous of a rabbit stew, Brer Fox "got 'im some tar, en mix it wid some turkentime, en fix up a contrapshun wat he call a Tar-Baby." Fox dresses the baby up and sets him in the road "en den he lay off in de bushes" and waits for Rabbit. "Bimeby here comes Brer Rabbit pacin' down the road—lippity-clippity, clippity-lippity—dez ez sassy ez a jay-bird." Brer Rabbit, always gregarious, stops and says "Mawnin'!" to the baby, but gets no reply. He tries again to be polite and is again rebuffed. Slowly, Rabbit becomes annoyed by Tar Baby's rudeness and warns, "I'm gwineter larn you howter talk to 'specttuble fokes" or "bus' you wide open." He punches him, and of course "his fis' stuck, en he can't pull loose." So he punches Tar Baby with his other fist and gets that stuck too; then he starts kicking and sticks both of his feet in the Tar Baby; finally, Rabbit head-butts Tar Baby "en his head got stuck." At this point, Brer Fox comes out of hiding, saunters on over, and says, "You look sorter stuck up dis mawnin'… en den he rolled de groun', en laughed en laughed twel he couldn't laugh no mo.' 'I speck you'll take dinner wid me dis time, Brer Rabbit'… sez Brer Fox."[107]

"Did the fox eat the rabbit?" the little boy asks Uncle Remus. As usual, Uncle Remus keeps up the suspense, sending the boy back to the white folks' house without an answer—"Dat's all de fur de tale goes… He mout, en den again he moutent."[108] When

107. Joel Chandler Harris, "The Wonderful Tar-Baby Story," in Young et al., *Literature of the South,* 538–39.
108. Ibid., 539.

the little boy returns the next day, he hears the next installation of the story: Fearing he will end up in Fox's cooking pot, Rabbit digs down deep into his bag of tricks and uses psychology to foil Fox. Rabbit begins to beg; he says to Fox he knows that he is doomed, and asks only that he not be thrown into a nearby briar patch. To hear Rabbit describe it, this briar patch is the worst of all fates. "Do *anything* with me," Brer Rabbit begs Fox, "jus' don' throw me in dat Briar patch!" Very, very slowly, and after hearing much pleading, the stupid Fox begins to think throwing Rabbit in the briar patch is *his own* idea, and a great idea at that! So he hurls him in the patch, and Rabbit of course is now free to extricate himself from Tar Baby and go about his business. "Born and bred in de briar patch!" he taunts Fox at story's end. Like the African-American slaves he represents, Brer Rabbit has used his wiles to triumph over bigger and more powerful creatures.[109]

Like folktales, music was extremely important in the African Americans' ability to survive the ordeal of slavery.[110] Slaves sang, played musical instruments, and danced to secular and sacred music that reflected both African and European forms.[111] From Africa, they brought a musical tradition of syncopated rhythm, call and response, improvisation, and enthusiasm—their songs accented the second and fourth beats, with words and notes echoed in unique, lively phrases. At the same time, slave masters and their poor white neighbors introduced Blacks to two- and three-chord Anglo and Celtic folk tunes that told stories through metaphor and were sung a capella (or with simple accompaniment) and harmonization.

Slaves made rough-hewn musical instruments, fashioning crude guitars and fiddles and carving fifes from tree branches. The banjo, an instrument of African origin, could be made with a few thin wires or pieces of string and a cigar box. Slaves strummed primitive basses they made by hammering one end of

109. Joseph Sherman, *Trickster Tales: Forty Stories from Around the World* (Little Rock, Ark., 1960), 9–10.

110. Levine, *Black Culture and Black Consciousness,* 7–8. See also White and White, *Sounds of Slavery.*

111. Blassingame, *Slave Community,* 28, passim.

a rope, string, or wire onto a porch post and nailing the other end, strung tight, to the plank floor (the washtub bass was a variant). Homemade tambourines, triangles, log drums, and dried pork or beef rib bones (or wooden spoons) served percussionists as well. And many slaves simply used their own bodies as rhythm instruments, clapping their hands, patting their stomachs, and slapping their knees, chests, and cheeks in a style dubbed "patting juba."[112]

During leisure time, slaves danced to their music. While their European dance repertoire included waltzes, minuets, reels, quadrilles, and square dances, they preferred line and circle dancing and an Africanized version of Celtic clogging and toe dancing that became known as American tap dancing. One slave remembered individual clog and toe dancers and their

> shuffling of the feet, swinging of the arms and shoulders in a peculiar rhythm of time [that] developed into what is known today as the Double Shuffle, Heel and Toe, Buck and Wing, Juba, etc. The slaves became proficient in such dances, and could play a tune with their feet, dancing largely to an inward music, a music that was felt, but not heard.[113]

Slaves danced together in traditional African style, in lines and circles featuring individual dancers and couples. One dance consisted of male and female dancers in two separate lines; they simultaneously moved back and forth toward one another, swaying to rhythmic drum and vocal accompaniment. In another dance, circles of clapping dancers formed around one or two individual dancers who performed solos in rapid and sexually suggestive torso movements; the "physical strength required is tremendous," an observer noted. Like conjuring and oral tales, dancing helped slaves earn prestige and find pleasure while venting their frustrations via the steam valve of the dance experience.[114]

112. Ibid., 55–56.
113. Ibid., 45.
114. Ibid., 44–45, 65–66; Levine, *Black Culture and Black Consciousness,* 16–17. The best history of tap dancing is Brian Seibert, *What the Eye Hears* (New York, 2015).

Work songs and "field hollers" incorporated syncopation, call and response, metaphor, and enthusiasm to make bearable the hard work of lifting, hoeing, and chopping. One traveler recalled hearing a slave exhorting his fellows to work, calling, "Come, bredren, come / let's go at it / come now, eoho! rollaway! / eeoho-eeoho-weeioho-i!" Another song, a call and response, signaled the time to end the day's labor: "Ooooh, the sun going down / And I won't be here long / Ooooh, the sun going down / And I won't be here long / Ooooh, then I be going home / Ooooh, I can't let this dark cloud catch me here / Oooooh, I can't be here long / Ooooooooooh, I be at home."[115]

Work songs provided entertainment and helped jobs pass more pleasantly. Corn shucking songs were sung in myriad versions. One call-and-response tune describes a corn shucking party thrown by the master. To quickly bring the harvest into storage, he promised to reward the workers with liquor and a big meal: "All dem puty gals will be dar / Shuck dat corn before you eat / Dey will fix it fer us rare / Shuck dat corn before you eat / I know dat supper will be big / Shuck dat corn before you eat / I think I smell a fine roast pig / Shuck dat corn before you eat / I hope dey'll have some whisky dar / Shuck dat corn before you eat / … I think I'll fill my pockets full / Shuck dat corn before you eat." Corn is also featured (with wheat and chicken) in a song that would not have been sung in front of the master: "We raise de wheat / Dey gib us the corn / We bake de bread / Dey give us de cruss / We sif de meal / De gib us de huss / We peal de meat / De gib us de skin / And dat's de way / Dey take us in."[116]

On the Mississippi and its tributaries, Black boatmen and steamboat deckhands sang call-and-response work songs. Keelboat and flatboat oarsmen called, "Sing fellows, for my true love / and the water with the long oar strike / See! see! the town! Hurrah! Hurrah!" In the tune "Cross Ober Jordan," the Jordan River symbolizes the Ohio and the slave boatmen's desire to reach freedom north of the Ohio: "I'll sail de worl' clar roun' and roun' / All by de railroad underground / We'll cross ober Jordan,

115. Levine, *Black Culture and Black Consciousness,* 202–17, 218–19.
116. Blassingame, *Slave Community,* 51–52.

we'll land on tudder shore / Den make room in de flatboat for one darky more."[117] Such references to the Jordan River and the Holy Land were based on the strong influences of European sacred music on African slave folkways.

In religion, as in so many aspects of their culture, Black slaves blended African, Anglo, Celtic, Franco, and Spanish forms. As noted above, slaves converted to Christianity early on, encouraged by their masters, who believed religious slaves would accept slavery as their fate on earth knowing they would receive a heavenly reward upon death. This idea that slaves must wait for death to be free does appear in certain religious expressions and songs, for example, "A few more beatings of the wind and rain / Ere the winter will be over / Glory Hallelujah! / Some friends has gone before me / I must try to go to meet them / Glory Hallelujah!" "When we all meet in Heaven," another popular church song proclaims, "There is no parting there / When we all meet in Heaven / There is no parting more."[118]

While the master's self-serving idea that Christianity taught the slaves they would not be free until the afterlife reflected one reading of the Bible, it was most certainly not the only or most common one. Millennialism—a religious belief system (discussed above) that swept across America and the Mississippi Valley during the Second Great Awakening—taught something very different. Millennialist Christians believed the return of Christ would be accompanied by one thousand years of "heaven on earth."[119] This strong belief in the coming of a kingdom of earthly peace was of enormous interest to the slaves. Millennialism meant God promised they could be *saved and even freed during their lifetimes*, and need not await the afterlife.

Slave millennialism found expression in the music of the Jubilee—based on Old Testament tales of the Jews setting slaves free and Jews themselves escaping Egyptian slavery. The Day of Jubilee and the slaves' belief there was "a better day a coming"

117. Constance Rourke, *American Humour: A Study of the National Character* (New York, 1959), 79, 87–88; Blassingame, *Slave Community,* 53.
118. Blassingame, *The Slave Community,* 69–70, 73.
119. Walters, *American Reformers,* 21–27. See chapter 1, this work.

became the most recurrent motifs in Black Christian music. Slave hymns were based on the European church music introduced to them by their masters, but the slaves infused African musical traditions to radicalize the genre. They changed some of the words and song structures and incorporated syncopated rhythms. They fused long-standing European call and response (between preacher and congregation) with a much livelier, enthusiastic style. The result was a jubilant brand of church songs we now call gospel music.[120]

Through metaphor, gospel songs reflected hope beneath slavery's harsh exterior. One gospel song assures singers and listeners, "No more rain fall for wet you, Hallelujah / No more sun shine for burn you / Dere's no whips a-crackin' / No evil-doers in de kingdom / All is gladness in de kingdom."[121] Another song seems to begin as a lament, but grows more hopeful as a story unfolds: "See these poor souls from Africa / Transported to America / We are stolen and sold in Georgia / Will you go along with me? / We are stolen, and sold in Georgia / Come sound the jubilee! / See wives and husbands sold apart / Their children's screams will break my heart / There's a better day a coming / Go sound the jubilee!"[122]

The sacred music of African American slaves—like their folk beliefs, religion, medicine, superstitions, conjuring, folktales, dance, and secular music—shows that the slaves were perseverant survivors, not hapless victims of the slaveholders. Black folk survived the ordeal of slavery by building community, family, and folk culture. In the slave quarters, away from the master's gaze and authority, African Americans gathered and celebrated their traditions. Through their religion, they prayed and sang for deliverance from tyranny and freedom in heaven on earth:

O, gracious Lord! When shall it be,

120. Blassingame, *Slave Community,* 71–74; Bill Malone, *Country Music, USA,* rev. ed. (Austin, Tex., 1985), 10–14; Levine, *Black Culture and Black Consciousness,* 18–55, passim.
121. Blassingame, *Slave Community,* 69–70.
122. Ibid., 69–71.

That we poor souls shall all be free;
Lord break them slavery powers—
Will you go along with me?
Lord break them slavery powers,
Go sound the jubilee!

Dear Lord, dear Lord, when slavery'll cease,
Then we poor souls will have our peace;—
There's a better day a coming,
Will you go along with me?
There's a better day a coming,
Go sound the jubilee![123]

SO COME, ALL YOU BOLD RAFTSMEN!

The songs of the Mississippi Valley boatmen are based largely on Anglo and Celtic folk traditions, with important Franco, Spanish, and African-American influences. As with all the folklore discussed above, it is sometimes difficult to find boatmen's songs and glean historical evidence from them, but the effort is essential. Lawrence Levine writes, "Many of the voices that make up any society as large as ours are stilled and we are lulled into the belief that those voices that are recoverable from traditional sources are the only ones that were." Levine concludes that historians utilizing early American folksongs must learn as much as possible about the sources of the songs, the way they were collected, edited, and published, and then must allow the folklore "to speak for itself and … understand that it will only speak to those who are willing to take the lore and its creators seriously."[124]

Most Mississippi Valley rivermen were raised amidst Anglo- and Celtic-American secular and religious folksong traditions. As we have seen, these British songs consisted of only two or three chords sung with harmonies and limited instrumental accompaniment. These were storytelling songs that employed

123. Ibid., 73.
124. Levine, "How to Interpret Folklore Historically," 338–40; Carl Carmer, *Songs of the Rivers of America* (New York, 1942), ix–xi.

symbolism and metaphor. By the time the songs crossed the Appalachian Mountains, they had ceased to be purely British in form. Singers adapted and melded French and Spanish boatmen's styles and lyrics and, in the case of mixed race (Euro-Indian) voyageurs, American Indian folkways. As we have seen, African-American musicians introduced whites to syncopated rhythm, improvisation, and more enthusiastic call-and-response singing. The results could be heard aboard flatboats, keelboats, and lumber rafts sailing the western rivers.[125]

Like slave work songs, boatmen's work songs created a rhythmic medium that rivermen used to synchronize their rowing and receive commands from the captain. At the same time, songs provided psychological benefits, making rivermen's work more fun (or at least less onerous). On the lower Mississippi in 1810, the traveler John Bradbury witnessed Canadian voyageurs rowing, "measuring the strokes of their oars by songs, which were generally responsive betwixt the oarsmen at the bow and those at the stern; sometimes the steersman sung and was chorused by the men." In Bradbury's translation of an old French folksong, we hear a story in which the first, third, and fifth line of each stanza is sung by the *patroon* (steersman) while the oarsmen's responses constitute the second, fourth, and sixth lines. The first stanza begins, "Behind our house there is a pond / Fal lal de ra / There came three ducks to swim thereon / All along the river clear / Lightly, my shepherdess dear, Lightly / Fal de ra." The second stanza continues the tale, "There came three ducks to swim thereon / Fal lal de ra / The prince to chase them he did run / All along the river clear / Lightly, my shepherdess dear, Lightly / Fal de ra." And, finally, "The prince to chase them he did run / Fal lal de ra / And he had his great silver gun / All

125. This section is a revision of Michael Allen, "Row, Boatmen Row! Songs of the Early Ohio and Mississippi Rivermen," *Gateway Heritage, Quarterly Journal of the Missouri Historical Society* 14 (Winter 1993–94), 46–59, 75, and Allen, *Western Rivermen,* 70, 110, 189–90, 232–35. See Mary Wheeler and William J. Reddick, *Roustabout Songs: A Collection of Ohio River Valley Songs* (New York, 1939); and Sue Hetherington, "Lost Channels," *Missouri Historical Review* 36 (July 1942), 447–58. The best audio collection is Cathy Barton and Dave Para, *Living on the River,* 2000, Roustabout Records, B000JCUQ7G, CD.

along the river clear / Lightly, my shepherdess dear, Lightly / Fal de ra [repeated]."[126]

In a popular Ohio River flatboat work song, the captain or pilot sings out to his men, who respond enthusiastically as they maneuver huge "sweeps" (oars) at starboard and port: "Some goes up, but we goes down!" the pilot sings, adding, "All the way to Shawneetown!" to which the boatmen respond, "Pull away! Pull away!" Because flatboating downstream included some leisure time, there are accounts of rivermen gathered around a fiddler, "singing catches" to pass the time and help in their work. Firsthand witnesses observed boatmen singing while at their leisure and work. The Englishman James Flint was sailing on board an Ohio River flatboat on a Sunday when he observed that one of the boatmen "commenced a song." Criticized for singing on the Sabbath, the riverman "alleged he was in a 'land of liberty' and that no one had a right to interfere."[127]

Songs both reflected and romanticized the boatmen's lifestyle. Robert Carlton remembered an Ohio riverman singing to the tune of "Yankee Doodle": "Get up good sirs, get up I say / And rouse ye, all ye sleepers / See! down upon us comes a thing / To make us use our peepers … / Yet what it is, I cannot tell / But 'tis as big as thunder / Ah! if it hits our loving arks / We'll soon be split asunder! / Yankee Doodle, keep it up…." The flatboatman William Richardson composed a song about rivermen "gently gliding" while "whiskey kept in constant motion / soothes them with its lullaby." "Woman in our Towdn [Town]" was a tune about a loose woman who "loved her husband dear-i-lee / But another man twyste as wed'l [well]."[128]

The nineteenth-century Saint Louis newspaperman Joseph M.

126. Allen, "Row! Boatmen Row!" 56; John Bradbury, *Travels in the Interior of America, 1809–1811,* in *Early Western Travels, 1748–1846,* ed. Reuben Gold Thwaites (Cleveland, Ohio, 1904), 5:39–40n10.

127. Allen, "Row! Boatmen Row!" 46; Hall, *Letters From the West,* 182–84; James Flint, *Letters from America ...* , in Thwaites, *Early Western Travels,* 9:109. The song "Row! Boatmen Row!" is reproduced on Barton and Para, *Living on the River*.

128. Robert Carlton, *The New Purchase, or Seven and a Half Years in the Far West*, 2 vols. (New York, 1843), 1:53. William Richardson, *Journal from Boston to the Western Country and down the Ohio and Mississippi Rivers to New Orleans (1815–1816*) (New York, 1940), 30; Twain, *Life on the Mississippi,* 12.

Field stated that the song "Neal Hornback" was written and sung by Big Mike Fink. This is doubtful; according to Richard M. Dorson, the tune is a "home-made local ballad [that] rings true to indigenous American minstrelsy, with its account of a small personal incident and characters known only to the immediate circle, and the caricaturing of hapless Neal Hornback in the style of the solemnly intoned mock ballad." In this song, Neal blames two of his fellow boatmen for stealing kegs of whiskey that were in fact stolen by a shrewder river man:

My name it are Neal Hornback
I sail-ed from Mudford shore,
And ven-tur-ed up the Poll-ing fork,
Where Indians' rifle roar.

Oh, the matter it are conclu-di-ed,
It are hard for to unbin-d,
I waded the forks of Salt Riviere,
And left my kegs behind.

An hour or two before day,
I pick-ed up my gun,
Returned to my periogue,
And saw the mischief done.

I laid it on Tom John-sti-on,
Who were innercent and clear,
But for to destroy my charac-ture,
It plainly did appear.

I call-ed my friends er-round me,
And thus to them did s-a-a-a-y,
Macdannilly and Tom John-sti-on,
Have stoled my kegs er-way.

Oh, if they are the lads whot stoled your kegs,
They have done the verri thing,
And if your kegs are miss-ing,
You'll not see them er-gin.[129]

James Hall recorded boatmen's love songs that were

despondent and "of a very pathetic nature." "Oh! its love was the 'casion of my downfall," one boatman sang, adding "I wish I hadn't never lov'd none at all!" In another song, a womanless boatman lamented, "an *onconstant* lover / Is worse nor a thief / … An *onconstant* lover / Will bring you to the grave!" But Hall also published a more upbeat tune "*verbatim*, as it flowed from the lips of an Ohio boatman." The song expressed the boatman's infatuation with a lass who was "so neat a maid" that she carried her stockings and shoes in her "lilly white hands / For to keep them from the dews." Another riverman, more resigned to his solitary life, sang, "Here's to those that has old clothes / And never a wife to mend 'em / A plague on those that has haltjoes [coins] / And hasn't a heart to spend 'em!"[130]

Like other Ohio and Mississippi boatmen, log and lumber raftsmen sang tunes both for leisure and to aid them in rowing and navigation. Because of the proximity of many (not all) raftsmen to the north woods and the Mississippi's Minnesota headwaters and Wisconsin tributaries, their tunes contain more British-Canadian folk elements than any other river lore. There are many rafting songs, some of which, according to one collector, "could never be put into print for polite readers."[131]

A migratory tune entitled "One-Eyed Riley" depicted a raftsman who was a womanizer, con man, and hell-raiser: "He was a prime favorite out our way / The women folks all loved him dearly / He taught the parsons how to pray / An' got their tin or pretty nearly / He's the man they speak of highly! / W-a-h-hoop! / Riddle, liddle, linktum / ONE-EYED RILEY!!!" In "The Rafter's Chant," rivermen proudly sang of their lives floating along "on a white hick of pine" and chided landsmen who knew nothing of their distinctive trade: "But true to our course, though weather be thick / We set our broad sail as before / And stand by the tiller that governs the hick / Nor care how we look from the shore."[132]

129. Allen, "Row! Boatmen Row!" 55; Blair and Meine, *Half Horse, Half Alligator,* 136–37; Dorson, *America in Legend,* 89–90.
130. Allen "Row! Boatmen Row!" 49; Hall, *Letters from the West,* 90–93.
131. Allen, "Row! Boatmen Row!" 50–51; Brooks, "Rafting on the Allegheny," 225.

Less whimsical songs depict raftsmen as womanless drifters assuming a melancholy, sometimes tragic pose. "The Jam on Geary's Rock" (also known as "Gallant Young Monroe") is an upper Mississippi version of a northeastern (Maine and Maritime Canada) and Ontario river song about "Gallant Jimmy Whalen." The tune tells how Monroe and six raftsmen met "a watery grave" trying to break up a logjam on the Wisconsin River: "'Twas on a Sunday morning in the springtime of the year / The logs were piling mountain high, and we could not keep them clear / 'Turn out, turn out,' our foreman cried, with language void of fear / 'we'll break the jam on Geary's Rock, and for Saginaw town we'll steer.'" Under Monroe's direction the men set to work, but their plan soon goes awry: "They had not rolled off many logs, till the boss to them did say / 'I would have you boys be on your guard, for this jam will soon give way' / He had no sooner spoke those words, till the jam did break and go / And carried off six youthful boys, with foreman Young Monroe." The raftsmen die and the community grieves the loss, but not so much as "a maid from Saginaw" who soon dies of a broken heart: "And her last request was to be laid by the side / Of her raftsman, Young Monroe."[133]

Another popular Wisconsin River ballad, "On the Banks of the Little Eau Pleine," resembles "The Jam on Geary's Rock." A young schoolteacher grieves when she learns that the raftsman Johnny Murphy, her lover, has drowned in the Wisconsin Dells. She is so distraught she vows to run away from the Mississippi Valley to Europe: "But I'll never forget you Johnny Murphy / Nor the banks of the Little Eau Pleine."[134]

"The Fatal Oak" tells the true story of the 1870 drowning deaths of three young Kickapoo Valley raftsmen, Frank Lawton, Aaron Hatfield, and Jim Roberts: "'Tis a mournful story I relate / Of three young men, who met their fate / While folded in the

132. Brooks, "Rafting on the Allegheny," 225.

133. "The Jam on Geary's Rock," Bert E. Walters to Charles E. Brown, Jan. 19, 1931, typescript, in "The Fatal Oak, by Mrs. Truman Payne" folder, State Historical Society of Wisconsin, Madison.

134. "On the Banks of the Little Eau Pleine," in ibid.; Carmer, *Songs of the Rivers of America,* 192.

arms of sleep / They sank beneath the billows deep." After rafting their timber down the Kickapoo and Wisconsin Rivers to the Mississippi River juncture, the men tied up to a huge old oak tree: "When night came on they made for shore / Where they had often stayed before / 'Neath the same oak which had been their stake / They went to sleep, no more to wake." Next morning, "with a crash, down came the oak," sinking the raft and drowning three raftsmen as their captain cried, "Awake my boys or you must die." The captain and one raftsman survived to tell the story to "kindred friends whose hearts were broke / By the sudden fall of the fatal oak."[135]

Finally, in "Jack Haggerty" (a song also known as "The Flat River Girl"), the listener meets "a heart-broken raftsman" who has fallen for a "dear little lassie … a blacksmith's daughter on the Flat River." The song begins, "My occupation is raftsman when the white waters roll / My name is engraved on the rocks and sand shores / Through shabbers and housetops I'm known of renown / And they call me Jack Haggerty, the pride of the town." Unfortunately, Jack's deep love is foiled by the Flat River girl's meddling mother. This evil woman "caused her to leave me" and "cast off the riggin' that God would soon tie / And … left me to wander till the day that I die." The song ends with Jack imploring his fellow river men:

> So come, all you bold raftsmen with hearts stout and true
> Don't depend on the women, you're beat if you do
> For when you meet one with a dark chestnut curl
> Oh, just remember Jack Haggerty and his Flat River girl.[136]

The folksongs of the Mississippi Valley boatmen help us understand both historic and mythic rivermen. "Jack Haggerty," "The Jam on Geary's Rock," "On the Banks of the Little Eau Pleine," and "The Fatal Oak" reflect the loneliness and dangers facing Mississippi Valley lumber and log raftsmen. Rivermen

135. "The Fatal Oak, by Mrs. Truman Payne," typescript, State Historical Society of Wisconsin; Allen, "Row! Boatmen Row!" 52.
136. Allen, "Row! Boatmen Row!" 51; "Jack Haggerty," in untitled essay, 12, Bessie Stanchfield Papers, box 1, Minnesota Historical Society, St. Paul.

who sang the "Onconstant Lover" and "The Fatal Oak" had experienced hard work, solitude, and tragedy in their lives. Yet songs like "Neal Hornback" and "One-Eyed Riley" show the happy-go-lucky side of riverboating—drinking, gambling, lovers, and good times. Just as important, all of the songs show romanticization of brave, independent boatmen who leave the mundane lifestyle on shore to sail the western rivers in search of wealth, fun, and adventure.

Folklore does (and always will) reflect the most important values, ideals, concerns, and tensions of the American people. The combined lore of Mississippi River Valley folk—their food and workways, rituals and superstitions, Alligator Horse folk heroes, cracker and African-American folk culture, and river songs—reveals a great deal about early American civilization. Folkways mirror what Turner describes as the American frontier character: coarse, egalitarian, itinerant, patriotic, pragmatic, innovative, violent, anti-intellectual, anti-authoritarian, nostalgic, religious, courageous, hard-working, and freedom-loving. With great strengths and failings, this was the exceptional character of the Mississippi Valley heartland folk.[137]

137. Dorson, *America in Legend,* xiv; Turner, "The Significance of the Frontier in American History," passim; Seymour Martin Lipset, *American Exceptionalism: A Double-Edged Sword* (New York, 1996), passim.

Chapter 3

THE PATHS OF INLAND COMMERCE

> The immigrant into the West embarked in the ark to seek his home, and his prosperity was built up by the sale of goods taken to market in the ark… In an age when the square, boxlike ark was the chief means of transportation, there grew up the psychology of the Middle West, which for good or ill has become the psychology of the country. Perhaps it is not too much to say that out of the womb of the ark was born the nation.
>
> Leland D. Baldwin, *The Keelboat Age on Western Waters*[1]

In *The Paths of Inland Commerce* (1920), Professor Archer B. Hulbert of Marietta College spotlighted the Natchez Trace as an important early conduit for American commerce. Hulbert was among the first academic historians to link the "Trace"—an eighteenth-century term for a primitive path or trail—to Ohio and Mississippi flatboatmen. Flatboats were downstream craft sometimes called "arks," and flatboatmen returned north along the Trace after trips to Natchez or New Orleans. Back in the days before Ohio Valley boatmen could book passage home on the deck of a northbound steamer, a trek over the Trace was their only option to shipping aboard a New Orleans merchant ship or settling anew in the Old Southwest. Stretching from Natchez, Mississippi, to Nashville, Tennessee, the Natchez Trace played an important role as Americans took their first steps towards building a new economy west of the Appalachian Mountains.[2]

1. Leland D. Baldwin, *The Keelboat Age on Western Waters* (Pittsbugh, Pa., 1941), 4.
2. Archer B. Hulbert, *The Paths of Inland Commerce* (New Haven, Conn., 1920), 95–99. The best

The Natchez Trace was not one established route: it was an intersecting series of old Choctaw and Chickasaw Indian trails moving northeasterly four hundred fifty miles from the lower Mississippi Delta to the far western foothills of Tennessee's Appalachian Mountains. Although the name Natchez Trace was coined by early westerners, it did not see widespread use until the 1830s, well after the route's 1783–1815 heyday. Other than the infrequent federal postal rider or government official, the Trace's small collection of humankind was limited to Indians, frontiersmen, rivermen, and criminals. Flatboatmen who sold cargoes in Spanish New Orleans trekked north to the Natchez trailhead on a well-traveled Louisiana wagon road, but the Trace itself was extremely isolated and dangerous. There were no Euro-American towns or villages between Natchez and Nashville, only a wilderness dotted with small Indian villages, a Tennessee River ferry, and perhaps a half dozen "stands" where locals provided trekkers with simple meals and a rude pallet for a night's sleep. In between lay swamps, canebrakes, and foothills of near-impenetrable forest.[3]

The hardships of traveling the Natchez Trace are apparent in the American ornithologist Alexander Wilson's description of one party of trekkers he encountered:

> I … met several parties of boatmen returning from Natchez and New Orleans… These were dirty as Hottentots, their dress a shirt and trousers of canvas, black greasy and sometimes in tatters; their skin burnt wherever exposed to the sun; each with a budget [clothing and other necessities] wrapped up in an old blanket; their

study is William C. Davis, *A Way through the Wilderness: The Natchez Trace and the Civilization of the Southern Frontier* (New York, 1995). The field was pioneered by the National Parks historian Dawson Phelps in his "Travel on the Natchez Trace: A Study of its Economic Aspects," *Journal of Mississippi History* 15 (July 1953), 155–64. Flatboats (arks) are discussed below.

3. Phelps, "Travel on the Natchez Trace," 155–64; Michael Allen, *Western Rivermen, 1763–1861: Ohio and Mississippi Boatmen and the Myth of the Alligator Horse* (Baton Rouge, La., 1990), 78–9. The 1783–1815 Trace heyday commenced at the end of the Revolutionary War and ended with the conclusion of the War of 1812 and the beginnings of western rivers steamboat commerce.

> beards eighteen days old added to the singularity of their appearance, which was altogether savage.

Francis Baily, an English scientist, led a small party on horseback north along the Trace in 1797 and kept a thorough diary of the grueling journey. Baily learned about poison ivy the hard way, as his legs swelled up so badly he could not wear his boots. While attempting to ford the rushing Tennessee River, he and others fell overboard and were swept downstream, "our heads just above the water, our hands clinging to the raft." Cherokee Indians came to their rescue on this and other occasions.[4]

Baily complained of the "pilfering disposition of the [Chickasaw] Indians" who stole two of his company's horses under cover of darkness, and he derided "the dirty hole of a place" in which another band of Chickasaws lived. Yet he never declined the Indians' hospitality. Farther up the Trace, Baily's group encountered more Cherokee, who shared their meal of roasted venison dipped in honey ("No meal was ever so grateful as this," he wrote) and gave them extra venison for their trek. He also encountered white frontiersmen, "who from habit and disposition prefer the Indian mode of life." When Baily and his companions finally approached Nashville, "Nothing could exceed our joy." "The sight of it gave us great pleasure," because his party could at last rest, "completely happy in having performed this laborious and troublesome journey."[5]

THE BUSINESS OF VICE IN NATCHEZ

Historians have written a good deal about the colonial and early national Mississippi Valley economy,[6] and there are separate

4. Wilson quoted in Allen, *Western Rivermen,* 80; Davis, *Way through the Wilderness*, 14–25 (Bailey qtns., 21). Hulbert also uses Baily's lively, quotable diary.
5. Davis, *Way through the Wilderness,* 18–19, 23–25.
6. Daniel H. Usner, *Indians, Settlers, and Slaves in a Frontier Exchange Economy: The Lower Mississippi Valley before 1783* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1992); John G. Clark, *New Orleans, 1718–1812: An Economic History* (Baton Rouge, La., 1970); Arthur Preston Whitaker, *The Spanish-American Frontiers, 1783–1795* (1927; repr. Lincoln, Nebr., 1969); Whitaker, *The Mississippi Question, 1795–1803: A Study of Trade, Politics, and Diplomacy* (1934; repr. Gloucester, Mass., 1962); Nancy Surrey, *The Commerce of Louisiana during the French Regime,*

historical studies of crime in the Mississippi Valley.[7] Yet the two should be connected, and not because land and river pirates robbed rivermen and merchants. Business and vice intersect because certain kinds of law-breaking were important economic endeavors in the lower Mississippi Valley. In the early trans-Appalachian West, many purveyors of vice—most notably tavern-keepers, gamblers, and prostitutes—were budding capitalists who excelled at their trades.

River and land pirates were in business to be sure, but they were not true capitalists. These outlaws created no new wealth—they only stole and spent what had been created by others. The town of Natchez and the Natchez Trace environs attracted an abundant share of these men. The exaggerated (and often concocted) stories of Samuel Mason, Micajah and Wily Harpe ("Big Harpe" and "Little Harpe"), and John Murrell are based on the fact that robbery was common in the lower Mississippi Valley in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.

The Mississippi Territorial Governor W. C. C. Claiborne wrote Colonel Daniel Burnett of Walnut Hills in 1802 complaining of "a set of Pirates and Robbers who alternately infest the Mississippi River and the Road leading from this District to Tennessee." Continuing, Claiborne erred in his sensational claim that the band was led by both Samuel Mason and Wily Harpe ("Little Harpe"). Mason, an American Revolutionary War veteran turned Ohio Valley outlaw, and Harpe, a murderous Kentuckian, probably never crossed paths. Yet this fabrication led to many tales, including those of lawmen severing Mason's head from his body and planting it on a stake at the Natchez Trace trailhead as a warning to robbers. In fact, Claiborne's men drove Mason across the river, where he was captured and tried by the Spaniards, who then attempted to deliver him back to Claiborne. En route from New Orleans to

1699–1763 (New York, 1916); John Reda, *From Frontier to Farms: The Transformation of the Mississippi Valley, 1762–1825* (DeKalb, Ill., 2016).

7. Dennis Charles Rousey, *Policing the Southern City: New Orleans, 1805–1889* (Baton Rouge, La., 1996); Phillip D. Jordan, *Frontier Law and Order: Ten Essays* (Lincoln, Nebr., 1970).

Natchez in 1803, Samuel Mason murdered his captor (Captain Roberto Mackay), escaped, and was never seen again. Meanwhile, the folktales "Harpe's Head" and "Mason's Head" spread throughout the Ohio and Mississippi Valleys and soon found their way into Southwestern literature, beginning with the work of James Hall. Many of the same stories are told as historical fact to this day.[8]

Some of the most unreliable scholarship on the subject of land and river piracy appears in, and is later drawn from, Robert M. Coates's popular book *The Outlaw Years* (1930). Otto Rothert's classic *The Outlaws of Cave-in Rock* is a better-researched book, but Rothert was a folklorist, playwright, and historian with a gift for weaving fact and oral tradition into a lively narrative. His recounting of robberies at Cave-in Rock (on the lower Ohio River near its juncture with the Mississippi), based almost entirely on oral tradition, later became enshrined in the Walt Disney movie *Davy Crockett and the River Pirates* (1956). Other storytellers have linked the infamous Tennessee outlaw John A. Murrell to the Natchez Trace and Stack Island, on the Arkansas side of the Mississippi. Murrell's story is especially riveting because it includes his supposed plot to foment a southern slave rebellion as a crescendo to his crime spree. Yet during John A. Murrell's brief 1830s stint as a petty criminal, boatmen no longer walked the Natchez Trace, and there is no documented account of Murrell's involvement in Mississippi River flatboat robberies. Storytellers and journalists so often recycled tales of river piracy and Natchez Trace holdups for dramatic effect that it was quite natural for them to add Murrell to their mix. James L. Penick finally got Murrell's history right in *The Great Western Land Pirate* (1981).[9]

8. Allen, *Western Rivermen,* 80–82; W. C. C. Claiborne to Colonel Daniel Burnett, April 27, 1802, in *Official Letter Books of W. C. C. Claiborne, 1801–1816,* ed. Dunbar Rowland, 6 vols. (Jackson, Miss., 1917), 1:91–92; "A Letter from Governor Manuel de Salcedo to the Cabildo Requesting a Sum of Money to Be Advanced to Captain Roberto Mackay to Meet the Expenses Incurred in Capturing Some River Pirates," in "Letters, Petitions, and Decrees of the Cabildo of New Orleans, 1800–1803," ed. and trans. Ronald Rafael Morazan, Ph.D. diss., 2 vols. (Louisiana State University, 1972), 2:191–200; James Hall, *The Harpes' Head: A Legend of Kentucky* (Philadelphia, Pa., 1833).

It is important to reiterate that there *were* robbers working the Natchez Trace during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Horse thieves, white and Indian alike, robbed locals and returning flatboatmen, and 1780s Spanish court records tell of "highway robbers who by force of arms strip travelers and enter the houses of citizens and plunder their most valuable effects." Newspapers carried stories of banditry on the Trace, and veteran rivermen recalled "bands of robbers who had infested the lower part of the Ohio and Mississippi Rivers." Despite all of the exaggerations, many firsthand accounts of piracy written before the 1830s (and the advent of published folktales in southwestern literature) are probably true.[10]

Drinking, gambling, and prostitution were the most common and lucrative vices practiced in or near Natchez, Mississippi. Unlike robbers, the gamblers and prostitutes (and the tavern-keepers who sustained them) were not technically criminals. Both gambling and prostitution were often legal in varying forms and jurisdictions, and in an age that saw the beginnings of freewheeling American capitalism, businessmen who owned gambling dens and brothels, and the card dealers and prostitutes who worked for them, were very much a part of the mix. Although the New Orleans river neighborhood known as the Swamp was the most infamous of these vice markets, Natchez

9. Robert M. Coates, *The Outlaw Years: The History of the Land Pirates of the Natchez Trace* (New York, 1930); Otto Rothert, *The Outlaws of Cave-in Rock: Historical Accounts of the Famous Highwaymen and River Pirates Who Operated in Pioneer Days upon the Ohio and Mississippi Rivers and over the Old Natchez Trace* (Cleveland, Ohio, 1924); James L. Penick, Jr., *The Great Western Land Pirate: John A. Murrell in Legend and History* (Columbia, Mo., 1981), 61–65, passim. See also Joshua D. Rothman, *Flush Times and Fever Dreams: A Story of Capitalism and Slavery in the Age of Jackson* (Athens, Ga., 2012), 51–90, passim; Thomas Ruys Smith, *River of Dreams: Imagining the Mississippi before Mark Twain* (Baton Rouge, La., 2007), 149–53; and Larry D. Ball, "Murrell in Arkansas: An Outlaw Gang in History and Tradition," *Mid-South Folklore* 6 (Winter 1978), 67.

10. Jack D. L. Holmes, "Law and Order in Spanish Natchez, 1781–1798," *Journal of Mississippi History* 25 (July 1963), 192–93; Holmes, "Livestock in Spanish Natchez," *Journal of Mississippi History* 23 (January 1961), 23; May Wilson McBee, ed., *The Natchez Court Records, 1767–1805: Abstracts of Early Records, 1767–1805,* 2 vols. (Greenwood, Miss., 1953), 2:247; *Kentucky Gazette* (Lexington), Sept. 14, 1801; *Western Sun* (Vincennes, Ind.), Oct. 2, 1819; James McBride, *Sketches of the Lives of Some of the Early Settlers of Butler County, Ohio,* 2 vols. (Cincinnati, Ohio, 1869), 1:319.

Under-the-Hill ranked a smaller but no less remarkable second place.[11]

Natchez Under-the-Hill lay literally and figuratively beneath the respectable homes, businesses, and government buildings that sat atop the Natchez Bluff. Throughout the 1790s, Spanish Governor Gayoso forbade rivermen to ascend the hill and thus left them to grovel in their excesses below. In 1810, the traveler John Bradbury insultingly described the "Kentucky men" drawn to Natchez taverns and concluded, "There is not, perhaps, in the world a more dissipated place" than Under-the-Hill. Writing two decades later, J. H. Ingraham labeled Natchez Under-the-Hill a "moral sty" and "nucleus of vice" populated mainly by indolent men, "highly rouged females, sailors, Kentucky boatmen, negroes, mulattoes, pigs, dogs, and dirty children." A visiting Methodist minister was appalled at the sight of "lawless men and women, whose sole object seemed to be to beguile, entrap and ruin their heedless victims."[12]

One long, rutted street ran along the Natchez river wharf, with taverns, gambling dens, houses of prostitution, and various combinations of the three woven throughout. "Every house is a grocery, containing gambling, music, and dancing, fornicators, etc.," wrote the traveler Henry Ker. Flimsy frame buildings were complemented by shacks and tents. Some tavern-keepers remodeled spent flatboats to ply their trade, or broke them up and used the scrap lumber to build anew. Garbage and animal excrement were scattered about, and vultures reportedly "strode along the streets" looking for a meal.[13]

W. J. Rorabaugh has documented early national America's status as "a nation of drunkards," and Natchez did more than its share to raise the per capita liquor consumption rate. At any

11. Smith, *River of Dreams,* 145–49; Allen, *Western Rivermen,* 128.
12. Jack D. L. Holmes, *Gayoso: The Life of a Spanish Governor in the Mississippi Valley, 1789–1799* (Baton Rouge, La., 1965), 42, 62, 109–10, 112; John Bradbury, *Travels in the Interior of America, 1809–1811,* in *Early Western Travels, 1748–1846,* ed. Reuben Gold Thwaites, 32 vols. (Cleveland, Ohio, 1904–1907), 5:211; quotes following Bradbury from Davis, *Way through the Wilderness,* 242–43. For an overview, see Allen, *Western Rivermen,* 109–30, and D. Clayton James, *Antebellum Natchez* (Baton Rouge, La., 1968).
13. James, *Antebellum Natchez,* 169 (qtn.); Allen, *Western Rivermen,* 129–30.

given time at least a dozen taverns operated in Under-the-Hill, while another dozen flourished atop the bluff. The pool of customers never seemed to wane; one contemporary observed rivermen from "150 boats … spending days in the lowest orders of dissipation." Hard-drinking women joined men who imbibed remarkable quantities of beer, cider, and hard liquor. Bartenders mixed mint juleps in variations, adding cognac, rum, and port to the familiar whisky, sugar, and mint concoction (one tavern even boasted crushed ice in season). William C. Davis tells of a fellow who, in one sitting, drank three pints of whisky and three quarts of cider. "An Englishman could not drink as the Americans do," a Briton observed. "It would destroy them." In 1808, the American traveler Christian Schultz visited Natchez Under-the-Hill and witnessed a fight between "some drunken sailors" in one of the first recorded accounts of the boastful "alligator; half man, half horse" American folk hero type.[14]

Schultz also observed gambling dens where boatmen could quickly lose "the hard earned wages of a two month voyage." Roulette, billiards, dice, faro, poker, three-card monte (a pea under shells game played with cards), and blackjack amused those not pitching coins at a wall or attending one of the Natchez's many cockfights and horse races. The traveler William Hall walked into a crowded tavern in Under-the-Hill and wound his way through prostitutes dancing to a four-piece band (two fiddles, a clarinet, and drum) before entering a crowded adjoining card room with a roulette wheel. There he saw men gambling with piles of silver, paper scrip, and bone and wooden chips. From the time of Spanish rule, respectable townspeople had tried sporadically to run the gamblers out of town. But they always returned, and, until well into the antebellum period, gambling's revenue stream seemed to salve the many irritations it caused Under-the-Hill.[15]

14. W. J. Rorabaugh, *The Alcoholic Republic: An American Tradition* (New York, 1979), ix–xi, 140, 142–43; James, *Antebellum Natchez,* 169 (dissipation qtn.); Davis, *Way through the Wilderness,* 245–46; Christian Schultz, *Travels on an Inland Voyage ... in the Years 1807 and 1808,* 2 vols. (1810; repr. Ridgewood, N.J., 1968) 2:145–46. See also Jack D. L. Holmes, "Spanish Regulation of Taverns and the Liquor Trade in the Mississippi Valley," in *The Spanish in the Mississippi Valley, 1762–1804,* ed. John Francis McDermott (Urbana, Ill., 1974), 149–82.

Then, too, there were the "Houses of ill fame" ("cribs" and "whorehouses" in the local patois) where, one boat captain wrote, "debauchery is practiced in a manner degrading to the human species." Flimsily dressed "faded young girls" made up the workforce in this, the most shameful of Natchez's business endeavors. Yet where there is a demand, the supply appears, as it always has in the history of the world's oldest profession. On a stretch of the wharf dubbed Maiden Lane, a dozen or more brothel proprietors sold their wares. Advertisements pitched Black and mulatto slave girls who were fully "capable of business"; Schultz returned to his boat one morning to find three "copper-coloured" girls, "who it seems had undertaken to enliven the idle hours of our Canadian crew." Venereal disease was an occupational hazard the women shared with their patrons, and violent fights broke out amid the liquor, gambling, and prostitution in Under-the-Hill. One night, tavern patrons reportedly dragged a dead man outside, deposited him on the sidewalk, and returned to the bar "where the revelry went on at white heat." However, unlike the vices that bred it, murder was against the law in Under-the-Hill.[16]

Although the characterization of the lower Mississippi Valley as a "Spillway of Sin" has been exaggerated and (somehow) romanticized, vice was ever present, and gamblers and prostitutes provided valuable services in a freewheeling frontier economy. With the notable exception of the Spanish regime, national, state, and local governments seldom regulated or taxed

15. Schultz, *Travels on an Inland Voyage*, 1:203; John Findlay, *People of Chance: Gambling in American Society from Jamestown to Las Vegas* (New York, 1986), 44–55; Jordan, *Frontier Law and Order,* 43–61; Davis, *Way through the Wilderness,* 247–48. See also Thomas Ruys Smith, ed., *Blacklegs, Card Sharps, and Confidence Men: Nineteenth-Century Mississippi River Gambling Stories* (Baton Rouge, La., 2010).

16. "Journal of a Trip from Champaign County, Ohio, Down the Mississippi River to New Orleans with a Cargo of Flour, Nov. 25, 1805—July 26, 1806," typescript, Illinois State Historical Society Library, Springfield, 37 (debauchery qtn.); Virginia P. Matthias, "Natchez Under-the-Hill as It Developed under the Influence of the Mississippi River and the Nachez Trace," *Journal of Mississippi History* 7 (October 1945), 214 (faded young girls qtn.); Davis, *Way through the Wilderness,* 247. Noah Major tells of the tavern murder in Logan Esarey, ed., "The Pioneers of Morgan County: Memoirs of Noah J. Major," *Indiana Historical Society Publications* 5 (1915), 404.

casinos or "Houses of ill Fame" in these early days. But as the Mississippi Valley economy began to diversify, more stable family settlements replaced the largely male frontier demographic. Throughout the Age of Jackson, the free market in gambling and prostitution slowly receded before the advance of new regulations and taxes (though it never entirely disappeared). A good lens through which to view this civilizing process is the Natchez Flatboat War of 1837.[17]

The so-called Flatboat Wars were a series of late 1830s and early 1840s altercations between rivermen and city government officials in Natchez, Memphis, Vicksburg, and Saint Francisville (Louisiana). Storytellers have exaggerated them to portray rivermen as violent and rowdy Alligator Horses, and those stories have found their way into history books; in fact, the behavior of these rivermen during the Jacksonian era (approximately 1815-48) was considerably improved over that of their predecessors. Yet boatmen naturally buckled when river town lawmen began to enforce taxes and wharf fees. Although the rivermen honestly believed there was no precedent for the new taxes, the Spaniards and French had in fact taxed river craft, and the new American officials in New Orleans continued the practice. Wharf taxes slowly moved upstream to the northern Louisiana, Mississippi, and Tennessee river towns. A typical duty was two dollars a day for the first two days in port and fifty cents a day thereafter; then, too, there were forms to fill out, local and state sales taxes on flatboat vendors, and fines for noncompliance. With the American Revolution and Whisky Rebellions only a generation past, boatmen focused their anger on the local wharf master assigned to collect the new taxes. Town fathers shrewdly granted this evil fellow the right to rake 15 percent off the top of his haul.[18]

Natchez Under-the-Hill was the scene of the first

17. Allen, *Western Rivermen,* 194–96. The "Spillway of Sin" phrase is used by Jordan in *Frontier Law and Order.*

18. City of New Orleans, *Police Code* (New Orleans, La., 1808), 156; *Louisiana Gazette* (New Orleans), Aug. 29, 1806; City of Vicksburg, *Revised Ordinances* (Vicksburg, Miss., 1855), 90–95. The Flatboat Wars are discussed in Allen, *Western Rivermen,* 197–204.

confrontation, in November of 1837, and its peaceful resolution marked the course for subsequent "wars." Under Mayor Henry Tooley, Natchez passed a one-time ten-dollar wharf and hospital tax on each boat in port and hired M. Wells as wharf master to enforce it. When nine boat captains refused to pay, Wells seized their cargoes to auction them off. A *Natchez Free Trader* article reported the boatmen arrived at the auction "armed with bowie knives," but local militiamen called up for the occasion carried guns. There was a great deal of shouting and threating, but no actual fighting, much less shooting. Two rivermen landed in jail, and the rest paid their taxes. "Mercenary ruffians will find threats of violence against the law to be as ineffectual as they have now proved to be," the *Free Trader* declared. The irony of a newspaper called the *Free Trader* lauding taxes and regulations was apparently lost on the local populace.[19]

Each of the lower Mississippi river towns tamed the boatmen in similar fashion. Then, town leaders dealt a rougher hand to the gamblers and prostitutes the boatmen had patronized. New Orleanians were the most lenient and shrewd. They chose to isolate the casinos and bawdy houses within their river district, where they could tax and regulate them. Thus they kept order while simultaneously funding city and parish governments. River townspeople to the north chose a stricter course and passed laws abolishing the vice trade. Memphis, Vicksburg, and Natchez either purged the sinners or drove them underground, where the black market became the free market. And only three years following its Flatboat War, Natchez witnessed an occurrence some deemed providential. A great tornado passed directly through the city, obliterating Under-the-Hill. An old boatman recalled that the 1840 storm "swept from sight" all of the ramshackle taverns, houses of prostitution, and gambling dens that had "so long served as a rendezvous for the thousands of desperate and dissolute that congregated there." After the tornado, Natchez, Mississippi, stood cleansed of sin, literally and figuratively.[20]

19. *Natchez Free Trader,* n.d., reprinted in *Register* (Vicksburg, Miss.), Nov. 29, 1837.
20. Findlay, *People of Chance,* 63–71; Allen, *Western Rivermen,* 204 (qtn.).

The lower Mississippi Valley economy was rapidly diversifying. The early frontiersmen's trade in furs, dried corn, ginseng, venison, salt, and pork was revolutionized by the 1811 invention of the steamboat. Cured tobacco, baled hemp, grist-milled corn, iron products wrought from blacksmiths' forges, and imports were shipped on western rivers. The ranks of merchants and land speculators were joined by regional bankers and exporters.[21] Then, steam power combined with the cotton gin (1793) to give birth to the Cotton Kingdom, a double-edged sword that produced wealth yet sharply increased the demand for Black slaves. Although Mississippi Valley folk would never be able to fully embrace capitalism until the eradication of slavery, they were nevertheless making important strides towards a modern economy. Criminal robberies continued, and so did gambling and prostitution; their role in the Mississippi Valley economy decreased but they never vanished. Today, casinos line the Canal Street block where the New Orleans French Quarter abuts the Mississippi River. And Under-the-Hill, a faux steamboat gambling casino, greets thousands of tourists visiting modern Natchez.

And what became of the Natchez Trace? It was relegated to the position of a safe but minor thoroughfare in the antebellum South's expanding transportation network. The Trace slowly saw improvements in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Then, in the 1930s, the National Park Service began constructing the Natchez Trace Parkway, a paved two-lane highway following and paralleling the route of the fabled trail. Modern tourists can traverse the entire four-hundred-mile route of the Trace in two days. After visiting Natchez's antebellum homes they can, if they choose, stop in Tupelo for the night (and visit Elvis Presley's birthplace), or stay over in one of the remote Tennessee towns that still skirt the Trace. Locals make supplementary income from the small tourist trade and the federal jobs (and road repair) that accompany the Trace. The parkway features campgrounds and historic site pullouts,

21. Malcolm J. Rohrbough, *The Trans-Appalachian Frontier: People, Societies, and Institutions, 1775–1850* (Belmont, Calif., 1990), 22–28; Rorabaugh, *Alcoholic Republic,* 126–28.

including former Indian encampments, Civil War battlefields and skirmish lines, and the gravesite of Captain Meriwether Lewis (who died on the Trace under mysterious circumstances in 1808). Over long weekends and in the summertime, the Natchez Trace is peppered with motorcyclists, alone and in groups, who enjoy the leisurely pace (50 mph speed limit) and beautiful vistas. During the fall, the colored foliage of the vast deciduous forests lining the Trace is spectacular.[22]

THE UPPER CUMBERLAND

From the eighteenth through the early twentieth centuries, keelboatmen, flatboatmen, raftsmen, and steamboatmen faced hard work and many dangers as they plied the upper Cumberland River, from Burnside, Kentucky, to Nashville, Tennessee. Yet they also sailed the river's course with an optimism borne of hope for a better life and firm belief that Nature's river was there for them to use and prosper. In their work, these upper Cumberland rivermen mirror a lifestyle emerging and evolving throughout the Mississippi Valley. The upper Cumberland provides a microcosm—a case study of riverboating in the early republic.[23]

Near the Cumberland Gap, where eighteenth-century American long hunters and pioneers first crossed over the Appalachian Mountains, the Cumberland River is formed by combination of the Poor Fork, Clover Fork, and Martins Fork Rivers. "All three are considerable streams in their own right, rising far back on the western slopes of the Cumberland Mountain watershed," writes James McCague, author of *The Cumberland* in the acclaimed Rivers of America Series. "Thus the Cumberland springs to life full-blown, as it were, and boasts a quite respectable size from the outset."[24]

22. "Natchez Trace," National Park Service, https://www.nps.gov/natr/index.htm, accessed Nov. 6, 2012.
23. This section is a revised and expanded version of Michael Allen, "'Hard Way to Make a Living': Life and Leisure on the Cumberland River," in *People of the Upper Cumberland: Achievements and Contradictions,* ed. Michael E. Birdwell and William Calvin Dickinson (Knoxville, Tenn., 2016), 27–52. See also Allen, *Western Rivermen,* 66–78, 144–51, 159.

The first upper Cumberland rivermen were Cherokee, Shawnee, and Iroquois Indians. They hunted buffalo, bear, and deer, and traded along the river and an elaborate system of mountain trails.[25] Indians paddled sleek log canoes that served both peaceful and military purposes. Canoes moved families, hunting parties, and cargoes up and down the river. In wartime they facilitated rapid movement, attack, and retreat of war parties; on the lower river, in the 1780s and 1790s, Shawnee Indians effectively used canoes to attack European-American flatboatmen. In absence of canoes, or of the time to build them, southeastern Indians used crude craft called bullboats. They constructed them by forming saplings and tree branches into a circular bowl shape and packing them together with sap, clay, and mud compounds as sealants. Indians navigated these boats with oars. The bullboat was obviously a stopgap measure, good for only a few trips or crossings before repair or replacement.[26]

As we have seen, as early as 1761, European-American hunters and trappers were following the Indians' river routes. These men were called long hunters because they hunted for one to three years at a time, returning to civilization with their ponies bearing the weight of hundreds of animal skins. A tale about the long hunters Isaac and Abraham Bledsoe provides a clue to the quantities of game these men harvested in a season's hunt. Robbed of all their cache by Indians, the forlorn Bledsoe brothers reportedly carved on a tree, "lost 2300 deerskins ruination by god."[27]

Long hunters adapted the Indian canoes to commercial uses. Enterprising hunters shipped skins, bear grease, and salted deer, bear, and buffalo meat as far south as Natchez and New Orleans. In 1766, the Philadelphian George Morgan wrote of "twenty large Perrirgous ["pirogues"] up from New Orleans, killing

24. James McCague, *The Cumberland* (New York, 1973), xiii.
25. George E. Webb, "Peaceful Natives: Indians in the Upper Cumberland," in *Lend an Ear: Heritage of the Tennessee Upper Cumberland,* ed. Calvin Dickinson, Larry Whiteaker, et al. (Lanham, Md.,1983), 7, 12, 16–17.
26. Leland Baldwin, *The Keelboat Age on Western Waters* (Pittsburgh, Pa., 1941), 39–42; Michael Allen, *Western Rivermen,* 59.
27. McCague, *Cumberland,* 36.

buffaloe chiefly for tallow." Bragging on the quality of his salted buffalo meat, Morgan wrote, "All ours is good now as the day it was killed."[28] As the late eighteenth century progressed, upper Cumberland settlers and merchant boatmen introduced larger river craft than those in use on the lower Cumberland and Ohio and Mississippi Rivers. Keelboats, flatboats, and rafts came to dominate upper Cumberland River Valley immigration and trade until slowly replaced by steamboats and, ultimately, railroads.[29]

Keelboats—"keels"—most closely resembled what modern Americans would call a large sailboat or very small schooner. Keels were sleek, prowed (not flat-bottomed) boats, averaging sixty feet in length and eight feet in width. Because they drew only a foot or two of water loaded, keels could run the Cumberland's shallow currents (shoals) in summer, early autumn, and winter. Unlike flatboatmen, keelboatmen possessed the equipment and skills to take their crafts upstream as well as down.[30]

Keel sails and rigging resembled that of sailboats, but wind power was only one of several methods boatmen used to propel their crafts. Floating downstream, they drifted in the current, with the captain at the large fifteen-to-twenty-foot stern oar, or sweep. Rowing was another means of steering, but was used mainly for propulsion upstream. If rowing failed, then keelboatmen shouldered their famed poles and literally *pushed* their boats upstream against the current. Another method was hand-winching, whereby keelboatmen tied a thick, strong line to an upstream tree. The line emanated from a large wooden reel on the bow; together the men literally reeled in the line, thereby pulling the keelboat upstream. A more arduous method accomplishing the same end was for the crew to simply jump in the water, grab hold of the line, and, using sheer muscle-power, pull the keel upstream.[31]

Keelboating on the upper Cumberland flourished after the

28. Ibid., 39.
29. Allen, *Western Rivermen,* 65–66, 144–48.
30. Ibid., 66. See also Baldwin, *Keelboat Age on Western Waters.*
31. Allen, *Western Rivermen,* 69–72.

founding of Nashborough (Nashville). Young Andrew Jackson migrated to Nashville in 1788 and, alongside practicing law and growing tobacco, became a Cumberland River keelboat builder and merchant navigator. Jackson started a general store, stocking it with goods he shipped upstream from Ohio River ports. He exported goods downstream to Natchez and New Orleans and also entered in the Pittsburgh trade. Jackson conducted most of his river dealings in boats he and his partners built themselves at their Clover Bottom shipyard. They built one huge keel that reportedly carried a ninety-ton cargo. Jackson noted that in 1804, two of his keelboats, manned by sixteen rivermen, made the journey from the mouth of the Cumberland to Nashville, consuming "20 gallons whiskey" during their arduous sixteen-day journey.[32]

The vast majority of presteam upper Cumberland riverboats were the flatboats. Indeed, these ubiquitous flat-bottomed (as opposed to keeled) boats accounted for 90 percent of nonsteam commerce and continued to prosper well into the steam era and late nineteenth century. Among the attractive characteristics of flatboats were their low cost and relative ease of construction; even an amateur boat builder could, for about fifty dollars, fashion a flatboat out of timber he felled himself in the surrounding forest. This was true free market capitalism. Upper Cumberland flats were built on the Wolf River, near Byrdstown, and as far upstream as Laurel River, below Cumberland Falls in Whitley County, Kentucky. Navigators seeking more seaworthy craft might engage the services of professional boat builders. Boatland, a village on the East Fork of the Obey River, became known as a good place to buy inexpensive, reliable flatboats.[33]

Flatboats were boxlike craft averaging fifty feet in length and twelve feet in width. Unlike the sleek keels, flatboats were extremely difficult to navigate; boatmen steered with a long stern oar (a sweep) and smaller oars on the port, starboard, and bow.

32. "Account of Expenses," June 1804, in *Correspondence of Andrew Jackson,* ed. J. S. Bassett, 7 vols. (Washington, D.C., 1926–35), 1:95.
33. Lynwood Montell, *Don't Go up Kettle Creek: Verbal Legacy of the Upper Cumberland* (Knoxville, 1983), 130–32.

Flatboats ran in high water (early spring and late fall) to avoid running aground. Western rivers flatboatmen soon learned the safest strategy was to simply reach to their destination running day and night (sometimes as fast as four miles an hour) and never landing until journey's end. If and when they must land, the best plan was to steer into a thick stand of submerged willows, cane, or brush to cushion the collision. After selling their cargoes, flatboatmen usually walked home, because, unlike keels, flatboats traveled downstream only.[34]

Upper Cumberland flatboat commerce paralleled the founding of Nashville. Records show scores of upriver flatboatmen, including the Cason and Peterman families of Jackson and Clay Counties. Downriver, Dr. John Bedford kept an elaborate journal record of an 1807 trip he made to New Orleans on the *Barge Mary*.[35] There was upriver flatboat commerce as late as 1880. County histories and oral traditions tell of the Stone, Watson, and Willis families making flatboat trips to New Orleans. John Willis "built a flatboat every year, and loaded it [with] … turkeys and wheat and corn," his Cumberland County great-grandson recalled. "They'd sell all these products in New Orleans and then they'd walk back." Gladys Stone, of Celina, Tennessee, told of her husband's grandfather, who "made flatboats and put his hogs and what corn he had on hand, and run it to New Orleans."[36]

Unlike the storied New Orleans trekkers, most nineteenth-century upper Cumberland flatboatmen were bound for Nashville or lower Cumberland River markets. This was a typical pattern, especially while the Spaniards still owned Natchez and the Louisiana territory. Even after the Louisiana Purchase, there were very few downstream markets between the Cumberland's Ohio River mouth and Natchez, Mississippi. As settlement advanced, flatboatmen sailed farther southwest, but they also began shorter runs, between Kentucky villages and the Tennessee River towns Celina, Burnside, and Carthage. While

34. Allen, *Western Rivermen,* 67–69, 74–75, passim.
35. John R. Bedford, "A Tour in 1807 Down the Cumberland, Ohio, and Mississippi Rivers from Nashville to New Orleans," *Tennessee History Magazine* 5 (April 1919), 63, passim.
36. Montell, *Don't Go up Kettle Creek*, 130–32.

it is true that many walked home, after the 1811 invention of the steamboat, flatboatmen could commute home for cheap deck passage of two or three dollars.[37]

At journey's end, after their cargoes were unloaded and sold, flatboatmen dismantled their boats and sold the lumber. Many sidewalks and outbuildings in Ohio and Mississippi Valley towns were built with salvaged upper Cumberland flatboat timber; there are stories of flatboat churches that, on hot and humid Sundays, began to reek from their waterlogged timbers![38]

Keel and flatboat cargoes varied. Tobacco and corn were important; sometimes the corn was loaded as meal or, more often, as distilled spirits. Hearty fruits and vegetables—apples, potatoes, onions, etc.—made excellent cargo because they did not easily spoil in spring and autumn. Salted pork was a mainstay, as were animal skins and dried venison. Tar, turpentine, saltpeter, tallow, beeswax, and hemp all floated south. Sometimes livestock were loaded and shipped on the hoof; chickens sailed in crates. Although human chattel sailed as slave cargo on the lower Cumberland River, there was little such trade on the upper, where high altitudes were unfriendly to cotton cultivation.[39]

In high water there was sometimes smooth sailing, but hazards and dangers always lay in wait. For starters, in the early spring and late fall, freezing rain, sleet, and snow made riverboating a rough business. Although rivermen always tried to run straight through, fog forced them to make dangerous landings. Despite precautions, boats ran aground (on shallow reefs, sandbars, or shoals), whereupon boatmen jumped into ice-cold water to muscle them off. Other river hazards were boulders and floating debris, especially uprooted trees. Some trees, called "planters," were buried underwater in mud, and their submerged treetops gouged the boats' bottoms; "sawyers" swayed below and above water, moved by swift currents.

Following introduction of the steamboat, a whole new set of hazards immediately appeared. Slow maneuvering flats were

37. Ibid.
38. Allen, *Western Rivermen,* 67.
39. This and the subsequent two paragraphs are based on ibid., 72–78.

sometimes run over by steam-belching downstream craft. There was no love lost between flatboatmen and keelboatmen! Ironically, the flatboat's last stand in the late nineteenth century was to serve as a barge towed by a steamer. Other dangers could take the form of Indians and robbers. Upper Cumberland rivermen who sailed the river's length to the Ohio in the 1790s were caught up in the Shawnee Indian wars. Those sailing as far south as Natchez or New Orleans found robbers on the Natchez Trace more troublesome than Indian attacks. The long walk on the Trace—from Natchez, Mississippi, to Nashville—could result in a boatman's profits or wages ending up in saddlebags astride a bandit's pony galloping down the Trace. Despite much romantic nonsense that has been written, a brief look at the history of Cumberland boatmen shows that boating was a hard, hard way to make a living.

What kind of man would take these risks? What kind of man would pursue a career on the river? Late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century language about men "on the make" who were "chasing the main chance" describe such boatmen. The modern word *entrepreneur* certainly applies. Even the lowliest upper Cumberland deckhand was looking to get ahead, aiming to make a few dollars to get a start in life, or enhance a career already begun.[40] The average upper Cumberland boatman was a white male of Anglo or Celtic ancestry, averaging twenty-eight years old. Although Indian, Black, German, and Franco men, and some women, sailed the Cumberland, they are exceptions that prove the above rule. Taking the demographic group described, one can further divide them into four major professional categories—merchant navigators, professional boatmen, farmer flatboatmen, and common hands.[41]

The first three groups were men in their late twenties, thirties, or older. Merchant navigators were businessmen (like Jackson

40. Michael Allen, "The Riverman as Jacksonian Man," *Western Historical Quarterly* 21 (August 1990), 305–20.

41. Ibid. My categorizations are based in part on those of Harry N. Scheiber, "The Ohio-Mississippi Flatboat Trade: Some Reconsiderations," in *The Frontier in American Development: Essays in Honor of Paul Wallace Gates,* ed. David M. Ellis (Ithaca, N.Y., 1970), 277–98.

and Bedford) who speculated in Cumberland River goods, built or bought boats to transship cargoes, and sometimes piloted the craft themselves. If they could not navigate, they hired a professional boatman to do so for a fee (sometimes they accompanied him; sometimes he was charged with business and navigational chores). A farmer flatboatman was a seasonal entrepreneur. Late fall and early winter was a slow time on the farm and a perfect time for marketing surplus harvest in return for cash to make land payments, or marry off a daughter or son and establish them on their own farmsteads. Deckhands were often teenaged boys, the sons of farmers or other young men from the neighborhood. While they were looking for some spare cash, they also sought a little adventure. During the decades between the War of 1812 and the Mexican War, and during the decades immediately following the Civil War, riverboating became a rite of passage for young Cumberland River Valley youth. A trip to Nashville and points southwest became a substitute for a stint in the army. Many rivermen no doubt took a quick trip on a flatboat, keel, or raft, and then spent decades entertaining family and friends with "stretchers" about when they "saw the elephant" on the mysterious river below.[42]

Of course, not all presteam rivermen were professionals. Thousands of frontier emigrants plied the upper Cumberland in flats and keels during the trans-Appalachian Great Migration of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Men and women hauled their children, dogs, pigs, cattle, and horses up and down the river in search of cheap land and a new chance in life. On these emigrant boats, women played an important navigational role, assisting as deckhands, manning the sweeps, and standing their own watches. An infamous early river traveler was Colonel (and former vice president) Aaron Burr. Before he led his ill-fated armed flotilla down the Ohio and Mississippi in 1806–1807, Burr purchased a dozen Cumberland River flatboats from his friend Andrew Jackson. The boats were delivered downstream, and Burr soon founded himself indicted for

42. Allen, *Western Rivermen,* 94–102.

treason, accused of making war against the United States and planning an invasion of Spanish Texas. Yet commerce, not military fame, was the predominant motive of upper Cumberland navigators.[43]

Log and lumber rafting on the upper Cumberland is so important that it warrants a separate and detailed discussion. Upper Cumberland rafts plied in numbers that grew for a century; indeed, 1920s Cumberland raftsmen moved timber in a manner reminiscent of their Jacksonian forebears.[44] The purpose of log rafting was, of course, to move newly cut timber to downstream sawmills. Then, a lumber raft might further move the newly milled boards to downstream markets. Rafts were large rectangular affairs, often three hundred feet long, composed of two thousand logs.[45]

Raftsmen built their rafts—sometimes called drifts—in a manner similar to the modern barge tow. They first constructed a number of small rafts—stringers or blocks—and then pieced them together into the large navigable unit. To secure the logs they strapped and pegged them together with hickory (or other deciduous) saplings and strips (whaling); some hardwoods required metal chain dogs instead of wooden pegs. Raftsmen formed the blocks into the larger raft using wooden pegs or chain dogs to secure the unit. After this arduous task, they proceeded into the challenges and hazards of downstream navigation.[46]

The rafting schedule differed slightly from that of flats, keels, and steamers, because raftsmen sailed in late spring and winter. One Cumberland County raftsman recalled a typical trip: "We rafted 'em down the Cumberland to Celina and sold 'em to Kyles [Brothers Lumber Company]. Millard Kyles measured 'em up and gave us our checks and we walked back home then. Yeah,

43. Ibid., 3, 35, 90.
44. Steven A. Schulman, "Rafting Logs on the Upper Cumberland River," *Pioneer American* 6 (1974), 14–24. See also Schulman, "Reminiscence of Logging on the Cumberland," *Kentucky Folklore Record* 18 (1972), 97, passim.
45. Jeannette Keith, *Country People in the New South: Tennessee's Upper Cumberland* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1995), 23–24.
46. Schulman, "Rafting Logs," 16–19.

a heap of a-times when you didn't wait for a [steam]boat, you would walk back."[47]

Upper Cumberland rafting could be deadly. In *Don't Go up Kettle Creek,* William Lynwood Montell recounts the harrowing story of the Cumberland River log raftsman John Cummings. Floating downstream in the dead of winter, Cummings and his fellow rivermen came upon two stranded Wolf River raftsmen:

> We went to them. One of them was dead, and the other was just barely breathing. We got him out first. Went back and got the other one… The [other rescuers] had a covered wagon there and a big fire; had bed blankets and everything. And we took the live one out. There's one old man there. He said, "I've brought a quart of moonshine whiskey." They just jerked the buttons off the freezing man's clothes and stripped him off. The old man went to bathing him in that whiskey. Had it milk warm, and [the raftsman] was a-breathing pretty good when we took the dead one out.[48]

In 1811, Nicholas J. Roosevelt steered the *New Orleans* down the Ohio and Mississippi in the first American western rivers steamboat voyage. As he passed the mouth of the Cumberland, the history of Cumberland River steamboating began.[49] Eight years passed before the *General Jackson* arrived in Nashville, Tennessee, and another decade passed before steamers plied as far north as Carthage, Tennessee. In 1833, E. S. Burge piloted the *Jefferson* to Point Isabel, a town later renamed Burnside, Kentucky. Because of treacherous shoals directly north of the village, Burnside would remain the head of Cumberland River navigation for one full century of steamboating.[50]

To learn about the technology and design of upper Cumberland steamboats, one must immediately forget gaudy images of the Hollywood movie *Showboat* steamers or huge modern tourist boats like the *Mississippi Queen* (or even the humbler *Delta Queen).* The typical nineteenth-century steamboat

47. Ibid., 22.
48. Montell, *Don't Go up Kettle Creek,* 106.
49. Byrd Douglas, *Steamboatin' on the Cumberland* (Nashville, Tenn., 1961) is a general history. The best source on the upper river is Montell, *Don't Go up Kettle Creek,* 132–61.
50. Montell, *Don't Go up Kettle Creek,* 132–33.

was, above all, a workboat; most steamers did not sport fancy trappings and luxurious amenities. They were small (three-hundred-ton) sternwheelers, with shallow (two to three feet) drafts suitable for navigating low water depths. Powerful boilers made these sleek craft fast, dexterous, and dangerous. A steamer's average lifespan was five years. Boats carried crews of ten or twelve men, including a captain, pilot, engineer, mate, and deckhands. Although the upriver trade began with several independent operators, larger companies like the Burnside and Burkesville Transportation Company handled most upriver freight, passenger service, and transshipment.[51]

Upper Cumberland steamboats ran whenever they could, but peak shipping was the same as that of flats, keels, and rafts—the high water of late fall and late spring. Steamboatmen also faced danger during fog and freezing temperatures, and from floating and sunken logs, caved-in banks, and shoals. The "Army Engineers" (today's Army Corps of Engineers) performed the vast majority of their antebellum dredging and infrastructure work on the lower, not the upper, Cumberland River. Not until 1888 did the corps build locks and dams to facilitate longer upriver steamboat navigation seasons; state and local governments also subsidized improvements. In 1915, Lock 21, built thirty miles below Burnside, improved navigation to that upriver port.[52]

As noted, steamboats arrived late and stayed late in the upper Cumberland compared to other western rivers. By 1850, five or six upriver steamers arrived in Nashville weekly, carrying agricultural produce, raw materials, and passengers; those boats turned right around to deliver manufactured and store-bought goods and food from Nashville to the upstream towns and farms. Upper Cumberland landings proliferated—Carthage and Burnside were joined by Gainesboro, Burkesville, Albany,

51. Louis C. Hunter, *Steamboats on Western Rivers: An Economic and Technological History* (Cambridge, Mass., 1949); Eric F. Haites, James Make, and Gary M. Walton, *Western River Transportation* (Baltimore, Md., 1975), passim; Montell, *Don't Go up Kettle Creek,* 146.

52. Michael C. Robinson, *History of Navigation of the Ohio River Basin,* National Waterways Study NWS-83-5 (Washington, D.C., 1983), 33; Anne Paine, "Cumberland Once Busy [and] Colorful," *Nashville Tennessean,* Jan. 27, 1985, p. 2.

Butler's Landing, Creelsboro, Celina, and scores more. Indeed, by the early twentieth century, there were one hundred twenty-one landings between Burnside and Carthage, and this figure does not include unofficial farmers' landings, where steamers would often stop whenever someone flagged them down. All steamers had whistles the pilots sounded as they approached a port. One old-timer recalled, "The way these steamboats would echo up these valleys … you'd hear the whistle, then you'd see the boat."[53]

Steamers hauled just about everything, including the kitchen sink. Agricultural produce and livestock, tobacco, dry goods, dress materials, shoes, fruit, wagons and buggies, fertilizer, and Sears and Roebuck parcels all traveled the river. "They carried everything that a farmer would use, or a merchant would sell in country store," recalled the pilot Escar O. Coe.

> We made two trips a week. Would leave Burnside on Saturday night, go to Lee's Landing, Tennessee [Nashville], and arrive back at Burnside on Wednesday morning. We'd bring egg cases down for people to put eggs in to ship back… And bales of wire, roofing, and nails, and all kinds of hardware and groceries shipped to merchants. We'd pick up produce, chickens, eggs, livestock, lumber, staves, and what-have-you that you could load on a boat.[54]

As the twentieth century progressed, upper Cumberland steamboating slowly faded away. True, the Cumberland Transportation Company began using gasoline-powered boats to haul groceries upriver, and some steamers began to push or pull cargoes in river barges.[55] But these harbingers of modern towboats never prospered upriver for several reasons, the most important of which concerned the Army Corps of Engineers. Beginning with the Ward Engineering Company's invention of the twin-screw, internal combustion engine–powered "pushboat"[56] (the universally used term *towboat* is in fact a

53. Montell, *Don't Go up Kettle Creek,* 139.
54. Ibid.
55. Ibid., 145–46.
56. George P. Parkinson, Jr., and Brooks F. McCabe, Jr., "Charles Ward and the *James V. Rumsey:*

misnomer), the lower Cumberland River slowly transitioned to diesel-powered boat commerce. This process was furthered by Great Depression public works infrastructure projects under the auspices of the Works Progress Administration and Tennessee Valley Authority; state government and private capital also contributed to the internal improvements effort. Like steamers before them, towboats dotted the lower Cumberland River, navigating in all seasons via a series of fourteen new and refitted locks and hydroelectric dams constructed by the Army Corps of Engineers.[57]

Towboats never came upriver because the corps built and refitted the upriver hydroelectric dams *without* locks. Without modern lockage, diesel towboats, unlike their low-draft steamboat predecessors, could not navigate the upper Cumberland. The corps thus joined other federal and state economic planners in deeming the upper river navigation tangential to modern towboat commerce and designating Nashville the head of navigation on the Cumberland. Slowly, the upper Cumberland River began to grow quieter; the sound of steam whistles echoing up the valleys became less and less frequent.[58]

Today, aluminum canoes, fishing boats, houseboats, speedboats, and water skiers dot the many recreation sites along the upper Cumberland River. Modern Kentuckians and Tennesseans vacation and play along the great waterway that their ancestors plied for two hundred years in keels, flatboats, rafts, and steamers.

LIVER EATIN' CAPITALISTS

To many Americans, the term *mountain man* brings to mind wild images of early nineteenth-century Rocky Mountain fur

Regional Innovation in Steam Technology on the Western Rivers," *West Virginia History* 39 (January–April 1978), 143–80. See Induction Biography, Charles Edwin Ward File, National Rivers Hall of Fame, National Rivers Museum, Dubuque, Iowa.

57. Robinson, *History of Navigation,* 28–33.
58. Paine, "Cumberland Once Busy"; Robinson, *History of Navigation,* 46–47.

trappers like Jedediah Smith, Jim Beckwourth, Jim "Old Gabe" Bridger, Milton "Thunderbolt" Sublette, Louis "Old Vaskiss" Vasquez, and of course Jeremiah "Liver Eatin'" Johnson. Yet, as we have seen, the first American mountain men were in fact *Appalachian,* not Rocky, mountain men, and their ranks included the mid-eighteenth-century Kentucky hunter, trapper, and real estate speculator Daniel Boone. After Boone's land dealings turned sour in 1799, the sixty-five-year-old frontiersman led his family across the Mississippi River to Spanish Saint Louis in search of new opportunities. The Boones spent the next two decades farming, hunting, and speculating in the lower Missouri River valley.[59] Daniel Boone died in Missouri in 1820, only a few years after army exploratory expeditions led by Captains Meriwether Lewis and William Clark, Captain Zebulon Pike, and Major Stephen Long had passed his way. During the first two decades of the nineteenth century, Daniel Boone's Missouri River perch also gave him a perfect vista of civilian business adventurers—a new generation of mountain men—bound for the fur-trapping frontier on the far western fringe of the Mississippi Valley.

During the Age of Jackson, mountain men were as much businessmen as romantic adventurers. Their status as "expectant capitalists" was best described five decades ago in path-breaking work by the late William H. Goetzmann. While Goetzmann mined firsthand accounts to show the entrepreneurial side of the Rocky Mountain trappers, he also noted their mythic significance and appeal to the American imagination. Jacksonian Americans did not view mountain men as market entrepreneurs; they idealized them as brave, rugged, independent (and violent) frontier folk heroes. Thus, mountain men closely resembled their rivermen contemporaries in more ways than their skillful navigation of keelboats. Both groups of workingmen followed similar economic and mythic paths. Like Jacksonian rivermen, Rocky Mountain fur trappers were folk heroes who were very much a part of the emergent capitalist economy. And though

59. Nathan Boone, *My Father, Daniel Boone: The Draper Interviews with Nathan Boone,* ed. Neal O. Hammen (Lexington, Ky., 1999), 107–40.

the lifespan of their industry was short, the mountain men's mythic life has endured and equaled that of the Alligator Horse boatmen.[60]

An intervening era of Canadian and West Coast fur trapping connects Rocky Mountain and Appalachian mountain men. In the late eighteenth century, seagoing British and Spanish fur traders vied to buy sea otter pelts from Pacific Northwest Indians. Fur entrepreneurs always faced the choice of whether to "trap or trade," and these men chose the latter. But by the early nineteenth century, trapper employees of Montreal's Northwest Company had penetrated the Canadian interior and were themselves harvesting fur-bearing animals along western river systems whose mouths lay on the Pacific Ocean. Soon, John Jacob Astor's American Fur Company sought a piece of this action, founding Fort Astoria where the Columbia River empties into the Pacific and trading for furs with Indians at Fort Spokane, their upper Columbia post. However, by the end of the War of 1812 Britain had purged the Astorians, and in 1821 the British-Canadian Hudson's Bay Company bought out the Northwesterners. Trapping and trading, Hudson's Bay Company ruled the coastal fur trade while forming plans to expand its posts east into the American interior near the headwaters of the Mississippi River's far western tributaries. There the British would meet America's Saint Louis–based fur companies and their employees, the mountain men.[61]

North American Indians and biracial Franco-American *voyageurs* played a huge role in this economic mix. From colonial times, the French had proven adept at trapping fur-bearing fox, beaver, wolves, and bear in eastern Canada, the Great Lakes, and along the upper Mississippi and Ohio River Valleys. Early

60. William H. Goetzmann, "The Mountain Man as Jacksonian Man," *American Quarterly* 15 (Autumn 1963), 402–15; Michael Allen, "Riverman as Jacksonian Man," 305–20. The best recent overview is Terry L. Anderson, *The Not-So-Wild West: Property Rights on the Frontier* (Stanford, Calif., 2004), 77–95. The use of the term *Jacksonian* here is socioeconomic, not a political reference to the Democratic Party. See Goetzmann, "Mountain Man as Jacksonian Man," 402–403, 405–406.

61. Carlos Arnaldo Schwantes, *The Pacific Northwest: An Interpretive History,* rev ed. (Lincoln, Nebr., 1996), 62–72, esp. 46–52. For "trap or trade" see Anderson, *Not-So-Wild West,* 81–86.

travelers to the trans-Appalachian West noted skilled and "stout Canadian" keelboatmen, "descendants of the original French settlers." These men were known as devout Catholics who were strong, "patient, steady, and trustworthy" workers. Travelers often described Frenchmen as "resembl[ing] the Indians both in their manners and customs." While it is true many *voyageurs* were European frontiersmen who had become culturally Indianized, many were also the offspring of French and Indian parents. One keelboat crew, stripped naked except for breechcloths, moccasins, and head scarves, protested an Ohio boatman's asking the name of their tribe: "We no Indians, we French, we French," they insisted. But interracial liaisons were common on the Mississippi Valley fur-trapping frontier, and racial intermingling would continue as fur trappers and keelboatmen migrated up the Missouri River to the Rocky Mountains.[62]

Auguste Chouteau dealt in furs from the time he and Pierre Laclede founded Saint Louis in 1763, and his widow Marie and sons Rene-Auguste and Jean-Pierre carried on the family business. The Chouteaus' eyes were still turned toward the Mississippi River when Manuel Lisa, a strong competitor of mixed Spanish and French ancestry, set his gaze in a northwesterly direction up the Missouri. Lisa was more interested in trapping than trading, and he pored over Lewis and Clark's geographic data and descriptions of abundant beaver, fox, wolf, elk, deer, and bear in the upper Missouri River Valley. In 1807, Lisa personally led forty-two men up the river to the Montana country, where they built Manuel's Fort at the juncture of the Yellowstone and Bighorn Rivers. Like any good businessman, Manuel Lisa hired experienced subcontractors. George Drouillard and John Colter, both members of Lewis and Clark's Corps of Discovery, marketed their geographic expertise to Lisa much like Daniel Boone had earlier parlayed his own

62. F[ortescue] Cuming, *Sketches of a Tour to the Western Country, through the States of Ohio and Kentucky,* in Thwaite, *Early Western Travels,* 4:147; John Bradbury, *Bradbury's Travels in the Interior of America, 1809–1811,* in ibid., 5:207–208; "Journal of a Trip from Champagne County, Ohio, Down the Mississippi River to New Orleans with a Cargo of Flour, Nov. 25, 1805–July 26, 1806," manuscript, Illinois State Historical Society Library, Springfield.

knowledge to real estate investors. Lisa dispatched the men from Manuel's Fort to gather information, and although their adventures led to Drouillard's slaying at the hands of Blackfeet Indians, Colter lived to help lay the groundwork for the 1809 formation of Lisa's Missouri Fur Company.[63]

In the employ of Manuel Lisa, John Colter became the first in a line of iconic Rocky Mountain trapper folk heroes. Heading upstream in 1807 to scout fur grounds, he became the first non-Indian to gaze upon Jackson Hole and Wyoming's majestic Teton Range, and he trekked across what we know today as the Wind River Valley and Yellowstone National Park. On a subsequent trip, Colter lived to tell the amazing story of how fierce Blackfeet warriors captured him, stripped him naked, and then, in a sadistic and deadly game, forced him to run for his life as they followed in hot pursuit. He escaped only after a five-mile barefoot dash across a rocky plain, jumping into the ice-cold Madison River and hiding inside a log jam. When the Indians at last gave up the search and departed, he walked two hundred miles to rejoin Lisa's men. Dispatched again in 1810, Colter somehow managed to survive another Blackfeet attack. He then returned downriver and used his fur trapping and scouting savings to get married and buy a Missouri farmstead.[64]

Following the adventures of Lisa, Drouillard, and Colter, the economic disruption accompanying the War of 1812 stalled the upper Missouri fur trade for ten years. Then, on March 22, 1822, Major Andrew Henry (another member of Manuel Lisa's party) and his business partner William H. Ashley published what is perhaps American history's most famous help-wanted ad, in the Saint Louis *Missouri Republican:*

63. Auguste Chouteau, "Narrative of the Settlement of St. Louis," in *The Early Histories of St. Louis,* ed. John Francis McDermott (St. Louis, Mo., 1952), 45–59; William H. Goetzmann, *Exploration and Empire: The Explorer and the Scientist in the Winning of the American West* (New York, 1966), 17–25. See also Richard Oglesby, *Manuel Lisa and the Opening of the Missouri Fur Trade* (Norman, Okla., 1963). Although former rivals, the Chouteaus became investors in Lisa's company. See Jay Gitlin, *The Bourgeois Frontier: French Towns, French Traders, and American Expansion* (New Haven, Conn., 2010).

64. Goetzmann, *Exploration and Empire,* 19–24. Colter died of gout in 1813.

> To enterprizing young men. The subscriber wishes to engage one hundred young men to ascend the Missouri River to its source, there to be employed for one, two, three years. For particulars enquire of Major Andrew Henry … who will ascend with, and command, the party. [signed William H. Ashley.][65]

Ashley and Henry had no trouble finding "enterprizing" adventurers to form the band that would, after several reconfigurations and buyouts, become the famed Rocky Mountain Fur Company. Ascending to the juncture of the Yellowstone and Missouri Rivers, the advance party built Fort Henry (renamed Fort Union) in 1823. Ashley and Henry's twenty-five-man troop boasted legendary rivermen and trappers with credentials that both support and qualify Goetzmann's entrepreneurial archetype. Big Mike Fink, the "King of the Mississippi River," was certainly an entrepreneur. We learned earlier that Fink, born in western Pennsylvania around 1770, entered the keelboat trade near Pittsburgh in the 1790s, acquired his own keelboats, and successfully subcontracted his services along the western rivers for two decades. It is possible that, like Boone, Fink lost some of his land in a lawsuit (in 1818, in Saint Genevieve, Missouri). Ashley and Henry were no doubt pleased to hire a man as experienced as Fink to move their boats up the treacherous Missouri, but upon arrival at Fort Henry he proved troublesome. A cryptic account of his death appears in the records of the Rocky Mountain Fur Company: "In 182[3] Mike Fink shot Carpenter—Talbot soon after shot Fink and not long after was himself drowned at the Tetons." Thus Big Mike Fink committed a murder and was himself murdered before he was able to restore his fortunes in the Rocky Mountain fur trade.[66]

65. Dale L. Morgan, ed., *The West of William H. Ashley: The International Struggle for the Fur Trade of the Missouri, the Rocky Mountains, and the Columbia ...* (Denver, Colo., 1964), 39–41; Morgan, *Jedediah Smith and the Opening of the West* (Indianapolis, Ind., 1953), 45–49.
66. *Nicholas Hartzell v. Michael Fink,* microfilm, Sainte Genevieve, Missouri, Archives, Joint Collection, State Historical Society of Missouri, Columbia, folder 460, p. 252; see also ibid., folder 689; Jedediah Smith, David Jackson, and William Sublette, "A Brief Sketch of Accidents, Misfortunes, and Depredations…on the East & West Side of the Rocky Mountains," microfilm, William Clark Papers, Kansas Historical Society, Wichita, Kans., vol.

Hugh Glass's brief and wild trapping career gives new meaning to the subject of workplace injuries. Probably born in Pennsylvania around 1780, Glass shipped as a deep sea sailor and might have been involved with John Laffite's Gulf Coast pirates before signing on with the 1823 Ashley and Henry expedition. During a trapping foray, it was Glass's misfortune to encounter a mother grizzly bear and her cubs. She tore his throat open and mauled him so badly his brigade left him in the company of two comrades, who soon abandoned him for dead. But Hugh Glass was alive, and he somehow survived on spring water, berries, and abandoned game carcasses as he struggled a hundred miles across western South Dakota. Rescued at last by friendly Indians, he vengefully hunted down one of the men who abandoned him. Yet when Glass at last found seventeen-year-old Jim Bridger, he forgave him.[67]

During the next four decades, Bridger (who as he aged became known as Old Gabe) explored the central Rockies and Great Basin of Utah, formed several fur companies (including the third configuration of Ashley and Henry's Rocky Mountain group), built forts and trading posts, undermined the Mormons while assisting non-Mormon overland trekkers, and subcontracted numerous times as a scout for the U.S. Army. In all this he was assisted by his Indian wives—Cora (Flathead), Mary (Shoshone), and a Ute wife whose name is unknown. They bore him some half dozen children, all formally educated by religious missionaries. Like John Colter, Jim Bridger eventually returned to civilization and a Missouri farm. Never one to turn down federal largesse, Old Gabe spent his golden years demanding government reimbursements for services rendered and money for property he (falsely) claimed the Mormons stole from him. He died in 1881.[68]

Yet another of Ashley's and Henry's "enterprizing young men"

6, p. 298. The account erroneously states Fink was murdered in 1822, one year prior to the expedition. For the folkloric significance of Mike Fink's death see chapter 2, this work.

67. Robert V. Hine and John Mack Faragher, *The American West: A New Interpretive History* (New Haven, Conn., 2000), 151. Glass's story was the basis for the movie *The Revenant* (2015).

68. Ibid.; Goetzmann, *Exploration and Empire,* 118–20, 278–79, 299, 310, 401, 405.

was Jedediah Strong Smith. Smith was born in 1799 and, like nearly all of the Rockies mountain men, began his trade in the Mississippi River Valley. He grew up in western New York and Pennsylvania but by age twenty-four had worked his way west to the Rock Rapids on the upper Mississippi. He joined Ashley and Henry in Saint Louis and ascended the Missouri alongside Mike Fink and Hugh Glass. Like Glass, Smith traversed the western Dakotas and lived to tell of a fearsome grizzly bear attack. His compatriot James Clyman recalled the bear took nearly all Smith's head into his mouth "and laid the skull bare to near the crown of the head leaving a white streak whare his teeth passed." Bleeding profusely, Smith instructed Clyman to fetch a "needle and thread" and sew his face back together again. He then rode his horse back to their Black Hills camp, where he convalesced for ten days before resuming his duties as brigade captain.[69]

Jedediah Smith rose very fast in the fur trade and he soon became a full partner in a company begat by Ashley and Henry—Smith, Jackson, and Sublette. Along the way he fought Plains Indians and led the Ashley and Henry group out of dangerous Blackfeet country into safer central Rocky fur regions he had himself explored and mapped. Smith trekked across the Great Basin and Sierra Nevada into California, where he gazed upon the Pacific Ocean. He quickly made a fortune, sold out to his partners, and departed the mountains for Saint Louis. There, he and his brother founded a merchant supply house while Jedediah invested in a nearby farm and furnished his Saint Louis townhouse. A devoutly religious man, Smith had vowed to lead a more moral life, assisting the poor. But in 1831, he made the mistake of pursuing yet one more speculative opportunity. Leading a supply-laden wagon train westward to Santa Fe, Jedediah Smith crossed paths with Comanche Indians who killed him with spears in the prime of his remarkable life.[70]

Perhaps as many as one quarter of the mountain men lost their lives in the fur trade. Most of those who survived prospered. As the 1820s turned into the 1830s, the mountain men's work

69. Goetzmann, *Exploration and Empire,* 112–15 (qtns., 113–15).
70. Ibid., 115–41, passim; Hine and Faragher, *American West,* 151–52.

patterns and lifestyle reflected those of their Appalachian forebears. Some six hundred "free trappers" (subcontractors) worked the Rocky Mountains during the heyday of the trans-Mississippi fur trade. The long hunt of Daniel Boone and his cohort—leaving home during fall to spend the winter trapping when fur-bearing animals wear their thickest and most resplendent coats—also became the regimen of the Rockies mountain men. They trapped in groups composed of fellow subcontractors, sometimes accompanied by Indian wives and children. Many exemplified upward mobility as they advanced in the ranks and acquired enough capital to purchase their own outfits (horses, traps, weapons, food and supplies), captain their own brigades, form fur companies or, more commonly, leave the trade and use their capital to take up "civilized" careers as ranchers, farmers, miners, carpenters, storekeepers, distillers, Indian agents, bankers, politicians, and more. Thus they mirrored seemingly contradictory values—a daredevil streak that drew them to the wilderness and a bourgeois desire for material comforts and respectability. The historian Marvin Meyers once labeled men like this "venturous conservatives."[71]

The American penchant, then and now, to overlook mountain men's pragmatism and view them as romantic adventurers is tied to portrayals of the rendezvous, an important annual meeting in which they all took part. First developed by Ashley and Henry in 1825, the rendezvous had a simple purpose—to gather together the trappers and purchase their furs to ship back east. During July and August, after trapping season's end, the fur companies designated a central Rockies rendezvous point—the Green and Bear Rivers, Jackson's Hole and Pierre's Hole, the Wind River Mountains, and other locales. Mountain men arrived, accompanied by their trapping partners, their Indian families, and other Indians involved in the trade (indeed, the fur companies modeled their rendezvous after traditional Indian

71. Schwantes, *Pacific Northwest,* 75–77; Goetzmann, "Mountain Man as Jacksonian Man," 409; Marvin Meyers, *The Jacksonian Persuasion* (Palo Alto, Calif., 1957), 33–56. The six hundred figure is a central Rockies estimate; including Canada and portions of northern Mexico would push the annual number over a thousand.

gatherings and trade fairs). Fur company officials brought trade goods, traps, ammunition, and bills of credit. The gathering included people of all ethnicities—Indians, French, British (including Anglo and Celtic [Scottish] former Hudson's Bay Company employees), and Hispanic (Spanish and mestizo Mexican) trappers and traders from the southern Rocky Mountains.[72]

Frontier historians have written vivid narratives describing the revelry accompanying these get-togethers. Months of solitude in the Rockies left mountain men starved for the pleasure of "a wild debauch," so they drank "St. Louis whiskey and Taos lightning (*aguardiente*—brandy flavored with red peppers)," gambled at dice and cards, raced horseback and on foot, cavorted with Indian women, and sometimes fought one another. Ray Allen Billington's selective description of "scene[s] of roaring debauchery" during which the "Mountain Men drank and gambled away their year's earnings" are based on truthful observations, but there is more to the story. In such a dangerous trade, a few of these "half-wild, half-tamed outcasts" no doubt threw away a year's wages partying in a Rocky Mountain meadow. Goetzmann's figures show high mortality and thus ample motivation to enjoy life while they could. But the data also show many men leaving the fur trade with savings and higher aspirations. Not all mountain men thoughtlessly gambled away "their year's earnings." Nor were these rendezvous typically violent and lawless affairs—a recent study by Terry Anderson shows thievery and violent crime were rare.[73]

At the rendezvous of 1832, Rocky Mountain Fur Company men were treated to a sobering spectacle: the arrival of competing agents from John Jacob Astor's American Fur Company. Having overcome his War of 1812 losses, Astor marshaled considerable capital to challenge and overtake the

72. Ray Allen Billington, *Westward Expansion: A History of the American Frontier* (1949; repr. New York, 1974), 384–85; Hine and Faragher, *American West,* 153–54. Hawaiian Islanders from British vessels frequented the Hudson's Bay Company's Fort Vancouver trade.

73. Schwantes, *Pacific Northwest,* 76; Goetzmann, "Mountain Man as Jacksonian Man," 409–11. Quotations from Hine and Faragher, *American West,* 154, and Billington, *Westward Expansion,* 385; Anderson, *Not-So-Wild West,* 88–89.

Rocky Mountain Fur Company. Sailing up the Missouri aboard sleek new steamers, American Fur Company traders challenged their rivals in the central Rockies and, to the north, succeeded in winning the heretofore unattainable trade of the fierce Blackfeet Indians. Economists sometimes refer to this process by which innovative market capitalists wipe out less efficient competitors as "creative destruction." After a decade on top, the Rocky Mountain Fur Company was forced to sell out to the American Fur Company in 1832.[74]

Warren A. Ferris is a good example of the increasingly sophisticated mountain men employed by interloping corporate fur traders. An upstate New Yorker, Ferris entered the trade in 1830—more than two decades after Manuel Lisa and nearly a decade after Jedediah Smith—when he went west to work as a trapper for Astor's American Fur Company. He traversed the central and southern Rockies, fueled by "curiosity, a love for wild adventure, and perhaps also, a hope for profit." He gained all that he sought, rising to the posts of clerk and trader in only six years. After he accumulated enough capital to return east in 1835, Ferris joined a number of writers in packaging and romanticizing the mountain man mystique. In a series of articles for the Buffalo (New York) *Western Literary Messenger,* he depicted the free trappers as rugged individualists, wandering the Rocky Mountains' "snowclad pyramydic peaks of granite … jutting into the clouds":

> Stern, solemn, majestic, they rose on every side of these giant forms, overlooking and guarding the army of lesser hills and mountains that lay encamped below, and pointing proudly up their snow-sheeted crests, on which the stars at evening light the sentinel fires of ages.[75]

Immediately after John Jacob Astor bought the Rocky Mountain Fur Company, he was challenged by his old, and well-

74. Billington, *Westward Expansion,* 386–88; Joseph Schumpeter, *Capitalism, Socialism, and Democracy* (1942; repr. New York, 1947), 81–86.
75. Warren A. Ferris, *Life in the Rocky Mountains,* ed. Paul C. Phillips (Denver, Colo., 1940), 1, 44. The newspaper articles ran 1843–44.

capitalized, nemesis, the Hudson's Bay Company. All competing trappers hunted on what were essentially public lands; the only valid claims to private property, those of the Indians, went unheard except when defended by their war parties. Without enforcement of property rights, creative destruction was particularly damaging to natural resources. Capitalists are better stewards of land they themselves own than land of a commons that everybody (or, rather, nobody) owns. Moreover, dropping fur prices also worked against conservation, and by the mid-1830s the over-harvested beaver had begun to disappear. Because the Hudson's Bay Company had a diverse business plan (fishing, logging, agriculture, merchandising, etc.), they simply trapped out beaver, ran their smaller competitors out of business, and turned to other more lucrative pursuits. Meanwhile, fashion-conscious easterners and Europeans shunned beaver for nutria and raccoon hats (à la Boone and Crockett) and silk top hats. The year 1840 marked the fur traders' last rendezvous. The glorious history of the Rockies mountain men had lasted a mere seventeen years.[76]

The year 1840 falls exactly within the period of time when American journalists and writers began marketing published stories of frontier folk heroes. Like their riverboating Alligator Horse and Appalachian mountain counterparts, Rockies mountain men took their place in the pantheon of folk-based popular culture icons. Americans pored over almanac stories, newspaper articles, and, eventually, full-length biographies of men such as John Colter, Jedediah Smith, Jim Beckwourth, James Pattie, Hugh Glass, Mike Fink, Tom "Broken Hand" Fitzpatrick, Milton "Thunderbolt" Sublette, "Cannibal Phil" Gardner, "Peg-Leg" Smith, and Louis "Old Vaskiss" Vasquez.[77]

Thus some Rockies mountain men became media

76. Anderson, *Not-So-Wild West,* 77–79, 82, 85, 89–95; Hine and Faragher, *American West,* 156–57. See Garrett Hardin, "The Tragedy of the Commons," *Science* 162 (1968), 1243–48, and Tibor R. Machan, *The Commons: Its Tragedies and Other Follies* (Stanford, Calif., 2001).

77. Washington Irving, *The Rocky Mountains: or, Scenes, Incidents, and Adventure in the Far West,* 2 vols. (Philadelphia, Pa., 1837); Irving, *Astoria: or, Enterprise Beyond the Rocky Mountains* (London, 1836); James P. Beckwourth and Thomas D. Bonner, *The Life and Adventures of James P. Beckwourth, Mountaineer, Scout, Pioneer and Chief of the Crow Nation of Indians* (1856;

personalities, as it were. In this, they were not far behind David Crockett, who had proved that a Tennessee mountain man could parlay his mystique into almanac and book sales and a congressional seat. The fur entrepreneur William Ashley also went to Congress, Charles Bent became governor of New Mexico, and Joshua Pilcher was appointed superintendent of Indian Affairs. William Sublette helped manage the Bank of Missouri and served on the Electoral College (as an 1844 elector for James K. Polk). Benjamin Wilson was elected as the first mayor of Los Angeles.[78] Yet it was Jim Beckwourth who arguably became Crockett's closest rival in successfully marketing the frontier myth during his own lifetime.

Born in 1798, James Pierson Beckwith was the mixed-race son of a Virginia slave woman and her master. Freed in Louisiana Territory around 1810, he adopted the name Beckwourth and worked as a teamster (wagon driver) and blacksmith. He joined Ashley and Henry's 1823 brigade and worked his way up in their company, living among the Crow Indians and marrying several Indian women along the way. Always the businessman, Jim returned to the settlements in 1833 (without any of the Indian wives) and parlayed his expertise into consulting and scout work over the next two decades. The Mexican-American War and Colorado gold rush found him again out west, where he contracted the journalist Thomas D. Bonner to write his memoirs. During a time when the Rockies mountain men were gone in history but rising in mythology, Bonner's 1856 biography *The Life and Adventures of James P. Beckwourth, Mountaineer, Scout, Pioneer and Chief of the Crow Nation of Indians* added to Beckwourth's growing fame. Although Jim Beckwourth probably told more lies than Crockett, he was not as good a liar, and his *Life and Adventures* lacks the artistry of Crockett's *Narrative* tales. Nevertheless, Americans avidly read about Beckwourth's feats for over a century, and he ranks alongside John Henry in the history of African American folk heroes.

repr. London, 1892); James Ohio Pattie, *The Personal Narrative of James O. Pattie, of Kentucky*, ed. Timothy Flint (1831) in Thwaites, *Early Western Travels,* 18.

78. Goetzmann, "Mountain Man as Jacksonian Man," 411.

Americans could not resist the mystique of the Black mountain man and "Chief of the Crow Nation of Indians."[79]

As we have seen, the first American era of frontier folk heroes in popular culture coincided with the industrial revolution. Jacksonian Americans lived and worked in the decades preceding the Civil War and were beginning the transition from agriculture to industry via steamboats, railroads, and factories. The mountain men were gone, but their myth lived on among modernizing Americans with a yearning for what they perceived to be a simpler and more virtuous time. As the nineteenth century turned into the twentieth, the myth of the mountain man grew, thanks to western novels, Hollywood movies, and television shows.[80]

Today, were you to ask an educated American to identify a mountain man by name, they would be likely to say Jeremiah Johnson. This is remarkable, because the man known today as Jeremiah Johnson was not in any way a participant in the historic 1823–40 Rocky Mountain fur-trapping frontier. The age of the real mountain men was long gone by the first appearance of "Liver Eatin' Johnston," alias Jeremiah Johnston, John Garrison, or, simply, "Liver Eater." John Garrison was born in New Jersey in 1824, one year after Ashley and Henry's brigade ascended to the Missouri. He worked as a farmer, teamster, U.S. Navy sailor (Mexican-American War), and U.S. Army private (Plains Indian Wars) and was known as Jeremiah Johnston, not Johnson. Johnston did live an adventurous life as a gold miner, trapper, hunter, guide, scout, deputy, and trader in the Colorado and Montana Rockies during the 1850s and 1860s. He was also known as a brawler and Navy deserter, but the story about him killing a Crow warrior and eating his liver is unverified.[81]

79. Beckwourth and Bonner, *Life and Adventures of James P. Beckwourth*. My account is based on Goetzmann, *Exploration and Empire,* 121, 123, and Billington, *Westward Expansion,* 385–86. Although it is highly doubtful Beckwourth was a Crow "Chief," he did marry a Crow woman and reportedly commanded tribal respect.

80. Henry Nash Smith, *Virgin Land: The American West as Symbol and Myth* (New York, 1950); Allen, *Western Rivermen,* 215–24.

81. Nathan E. Bender, "Perceptions of a Mountain Man: John 'Jeremiah Liver-Eating' Johnston at Old Trail Town, Cody, Wyoming," *Rocky Mountain Fur Trade Journal* 1 (2007), 93–106;

Unlike Crockett and Beckwourth, Johnston had no official biographer during his lifetime. But stories of his adventures swirled in oral tradition and showed up in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century dime novels, western adventure magazines, and books. Mid-twentieth-century authors retold Johnston's story: Raymond W. Thorp and Robert Bunker's *Crow Killer* (1958) attracted an audience expanded by Vardis Fisher's novel *Mountain Man* (1965). And while the tale of Jeremiah Johnston appealed to mainstream fans of 1950s westerns, moviemakers thought it might also strike a responsive chord among the 1960s and '70s college students and the back-to-nature crowd. These included hippies who themselves sported fringed leather jackets, moccasins, and "leatherstockings." The result was the hugely popular movie *Jeremiah Johnson* (1972), filmed in Utah, directed by Sidney Pollock, and starring Robert Redford as Johnston without the T. It is Redford's Jeremiah Johnson who remains the modern pop culture embodiment of the Rockies mountain men who had preceded the career of Jeremiah Johnston by more than a generation.[82]

QUEEN CITY OF THE WEST

As Americans poured over the Appalachians and down the Ohio and Mississippi Rivers during the years following the War of 1812, their advance paralleled and propelled a revolution in transportation and market capitalism. This migration was by no means a solely rural phenomenon, as urban pockets quickly developed within the agricultural frontier. New Orleans, Saint Louis, Pittsburgh, Lexington, Louisville, and Cincinnati constituted what the historian Richard C. Wade dubbed the "urban frontier" of the Mississippi Valley. By 1825, Cincinnati, strategically located on the upper Ohio River with a growing

Nathan E. Bender, "The Abandoned Scout's Revenge: Origins of the Crow Killer Saga of Liver-Eating Johnson," *Annals of Wyoming* 78 (Autumn 2006), 2–17.

82. Raymond W. Thorp and Robert Bunker, *Crow Killer: The Saga of Liver-Eating Johnson* (Bloomington, Ind., 1958); Vardis Fisher, *Mountain Man: A Novel of Male and Female in the Early American West* (New York, 1965); Sydney Pollack, dir., *Jeremiah Johnson* (Sanford Productions, Warner Brothers, 1972), film.

population of 25,000, had become the hub of the Ohio and upper Mississippi River Valleys. A lucrative river trade with the Cotton Kingdom and completion of New York's Erie Canal assured Cincinnati's economic strength in the Old Northwest, and Cincinnati experienced a golden era in its history. Nestled in the American wilderness, Cincinnati, Ohio, typified the freewheeling capitalism of Jacksonian America. From 1825 to 1835, Cincinnati came to be known as the Queen City of the West.[83]

The Jacksonian traveler found Cincinnati resting on a four-mile-square plain ringed by heavily forested foothills. Boatloads of settlers and supplies arrived at the wharf daily via the winding Ohio. "Notwithstanding all that I have heard about the improvement and growth of Cincinnati," wrote an 1829 traveler, "the sight of it filled one with astonishment. I could not have imagined … anything like it … either to extent or style or magnificence." "Magnificence" is certainly too positive a descriptor here, yet the degree of the traveler's surprise is understandable, for Cincinnati was barely fifty years old. In the 1780s, the Federalist judge John Cleve Symmes' friends in Congress sold him 300,000 acres of good farm land between the Great and Little Miami Rivers for pennies an acre. He resold it in 1788 to the founders of Losantville, who quickly renamed their little village Cincinnati, after the Roman soldier and statesman Cincinnatus (prominent members of the Revolutionary War Veterans' Society of Cincinnati simultaneously settled upstream in Marietta, Ohio). Amid Indian wars, the U.S. Army built Fort Washington at Cincinnati in 1790. After General "Mad Anthony" Wayne defeated some of the Ohio Valley Indians in the Battle of Fallen Timbers, the upper Ohio Valley saw a period of rapid growth. As the region grew, so did Cincinnati.[84]

83. Richard C. Wade, *The Urban Frontier: Pioneer Life in Early Pittsburgh, Cincinnati, Lexington, Louisville, and St. Louis* (Chicago, Ill., 1959). See also Henry A. Ford and Kate Ford, *Cincinnati, Ohio: With Illustrations and Biographical Sketches* (Cleveland, Ill., 1881). For an alternate view of market capitalism, see Charles Sellers, *The Market Revolution in Jacksonian American, 1815–1846* (New York, 1991).

84. Wade, *Urban Frontier,* 101, 304; Robert E. Chaddock, "Ohio before 1850," *Studies in History, Economics, and Law* 31 (1908), 28.

By 1800, Cincinnati's population stood at seven hundred fifty; supplies and manufactured goods came downstream from Pittsburgh and eastern cities, while most of the Cincinnati region's raw materials—farm produce, corn (and whisky), and pork—were shipped downstream for sale in lower Ohio and Mississippi River ports. Despite a smallpox epidemic, Cincinnati's population marked 2,500 when the steamboat *New Orleans* arrived in port in 1811. While the War of 1812 and Panic of 1819 temporarily checked growth, the city sprang back in the 1820s. Doctor Daniel Drake, a leading citizen, author, and booster, optimistically proclaimed, "The inhabitants of this region are obviously destined to an unrivalled excellence in agriculture, manufacturing, and internal commerce; in literature, and the arts; in public virtue, and in national strength."[85]

As the Ohio legislature chartered Cincinnati's government in 1819, the mayor and council faced many problems. With an annual budget of $40,000, they focused on drinking water, street construction and maintenance, and sanitation. There was no fire department, and "We seldom pass a week," lamented the *Cincinnati Liberty Hall,* "without reading some melancholy account of the disasters occasioned by the most destructive of all elements, fire." A volunteer fire company formed in 1825, but a huge downtown blaze in 1829 destroyed or damaged thirty-three buildings.[86]

Criminals, "unseemly dregs," arrived early on to "defile" the city, and reports of beatings and robberies appear daily in newspaper reports. At night, the waterfront, with its saloons, brothels, and gambling rooms, was the most dangerous part of town. The city council voted funds to erect "public lamps" in 1827; a volunteer night patrol policed the town until councilmen created a professional police force in the 1830s. Although home to Cincinnati Medical College, the Queen City endured

85. William L. Downard, *The Cincinnati Brewing Industry: A Social and Economic History* (Athens, Ohio, 1973), 6–10; Thomas Senior Berry, *Western Prices before 1861: A Study of the Cincinnati Market* (Cambridge, Mass., 1943), 6–8; Charles N. Glaab (ed.), *The American City: A Documentary History* (Belmont, Calif., 1963), 45–46 (Drake qtn.).

86. Wade, *Urban Frontier,* 73, 86, 91, 95, 272–75, 282, 292–93, 332.

numerous health and sanitation problems. Standing pools of water covered dead dogs and cats and bred disease. Despite reluctance to regulate the marketplace, waste from the city's huge pork slaughtering plants necessitated "intervention of the powers of the [city] council." But *live* hogs actually helped to combat sickness according to Mrs. Frances Trollope. In their constant search for food, the porkers ate much of the waste and garbage that filled the city's streets:

> In truth the pigs are constantly seen doing Herculean service in this way through every quarter of the city; and though it is not very agreeable to live surrounded by herds of these unsavory animals, it is well they are so numerous, and so active in their capacity as scavengers, for without them the streets would soon be choked up with all sorts of substances in every stage of decomposition.[87]

One could say that Trollope, the author of the above quotation, was Cincinnati's most famous early citizen but for the fact she was a foreign visitor who really did not like the Queen City at all. Victim of a marriage that had slowly depleted two ample family estates, Frances Trollope (with her children) arrived in New Orleans in 1828. Although she initially came to assist her friend, the British feminist Frances Wright, in her West Tennessee utopia Nashoba, Trollope quickly tired of social work among freedmen. Within weeks she was on a steamer bound for Cincinnati, where she aimed to recoup her fortunes. A series of spectacularly disastrous business ventures in the Queen City followed and seemed to end that plan. Then Frances Trollope stumbled upon a gold mine: She wrote a book exposing just what a bunch of ignorant louts Americans really were. *The Domestic Manners of the Americans* (1832), a book with a title dripping in irony, was bound to sell tens of thousands of copies to European and American readers alike. One of the recurrent motifs in *Domestic Manners* is Trollope's critique of American materialism and love of money. Though she was herself on the make, she

87. Ibid., 88–89, 96–97, 116, 122, 284, 289–91, 298; Berry, *Western Prices,* 8; Frances Trollope, *Domestic Manners of the Americans* (1832; repr. Gloucester, Mass., 1974), 39. For Trollope see chapter 1, this work.

saved her sharpest barbs for American money grubbers and sharpers:

> During nearly two years that I resided in Cincinnati or its neighborhood, I [never saw] a man of sufficient fortune to permit his ceasing his efforts to increase it; thus every bee in the hive is actively employed in search of that honey of Hybla, vulgarly called money; neither art, science, learning nor pleasure can seduce them from its pursuit.[88]

Jacksonian America was certainly a nation of energetic, individualistic entrepreneurs, and Cincinnati was a model Jacksonian city. Most nineteenth-century travelers sensed that energy the minute they disembarked a river vessel and stepped onto the public landing that lay between Front Street and the Ohio. Picking their way through crates of agricultural produce and barrels of salted pork and tobacco, they gazed upon Front Street's two- and three-story brick buildings, banks, a public lands office, blacksmith forges, taverns, lawyer and doctor offices, and warehouses. Main Street stretched upward for a mile, also lined with stables, inns, print shops, and bookstores. There were hotels, four public markets, a city hall and courthouse, hospital, schools, two theaters, twenty churches, two museums, two colleges, and a branch of the Second Bank of the United States. Construction projects were under way, and brick and stone masons' carts blocked the roadway. The air was alive with the smell of bakeries, saddletrees, market vendors, livery stables, and, yes, hog butchers. Streets filled with hundreds of people, horses, dogs, pigs, and the occasional milk cow. Boys played marbles and rolled hoops while locals shopped, gossiped, and talked politics and business.[89]

Amidst this engine of wealth creation, the role of federal, state, and local government was minimal. There were important exceptions. Whig politicians supported protective tariffs and subsidized river improvements via the army engineers, and there

88. Trollope, *Domestic Manners of the Americans,* 43.
89. Charles Fenno Hoffman, "A Winter in the West, 1833–34," in *A Mirror for Americans,* ed. Warren S. Tryon (Chicago, Ill., 1957), 551–52.

was local regulation of the pork slaughterhouses as mentioned above. Below the Ohio River, government officials subsidized and abetted the slaveholding class. But compared to the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, economic regulation was minuscule, and politicians believed their only job was to keep taxes low and protect the people's right to earn and keep their property. Meanwhile, Cincinnatians pursued the "honey of Hybla" in three broad areas of economic pursuit: the downtown business district and market; numerous manufacturing and industrial ventures located throughout the city; and an expansive Ohio and Mississippi Rivers trade.

The downtown business district was the most visible sector of the Queen City's booming commercial life. Scores of shops lined Front, Main, and adjacent streets, selling a variety of goods to meet the demands of the growing populace. Folks bought their food at one of four market houses. The oldest of these, two blocks north of Front Street, was located under a long shed supported by brick columns; the market boasted daily offerings of pork, beef, poultry, fish, corn, vegetables, assorted foodstuffs, and dry goods and other merchandise. "For excellence, abundance, and cheapness," wrote one traveler, "[the market] can hardly, I should think, be surpassed in any part of the world." The markets operated from sunup to sunset. Farmers arrived first, driving ox-carts laden with produce; soon after came the merchants, dressed in black coats with linen aprons. Customers gathered with their baskets in early dawn to get the best bargains. In 1829, beef sold for four cents per pound; chickens were twelve cents apiece; flour sold for three dollars per barrel; a barrel of corn was twenty-five cents; ginseng was fourteen cents per pound; coffee was fourteen cents per pound; calico cost twenty cents per yard; and gun powder sold for six dollars a barrel. Eggs and butter were plentiful, but with the exception of apples and watermelon, fresh fruit was rare. Frances Trollope expressed dismay at the watermelon eaters, "groups of men, women, and children … sucking prodigious quantities of this watery fruit" while "streams of the fluid" dripped from their mouths and "hard

black seeds are shot out in all directions, to the great annoyance of all within reach."[90]

Surrounding the downtown core was a growing industrial and manufacturing complex. Following the Panic of 1819 downturn, town leaders had embraced the industrial revolution as their path to prosperity. "It is well known," one proclaimed, "that a great city can be raised and an immense population supported by extensive manufacturing establishments," and by 1825 Cincinnati had become the most industrialized city west of the Appalachians. Fifteen shore-based steam engines were in operation, and the city housed iron and tin foundries, machine shops, textile and woolen concerns, coach makers and boat builders, tanneries, tobacco processing shops, plow and axe makers, paper mills, a sugar refinery, plate glass manufacturers, furniture and barrel shops, a score of lumber mills, and small producers of salt, flour, corn meal, and whiskey. In the 1830s German immigrants brought Old World beer-making expertise that would soon make Cincinnati the "Brewing Capital of the Nation." Together, these companies employed thousands of skilled and unskilled workers. Men earned varying wages, from four to ten dollars per week, while women and children took home two dollars on average.[91]

"It hardly seems fair to quarrel with a place because its staple commodity is not pretty," wrote Trollope, trying her best to sound fair and balanced, "but I am sure I should have liked Cincinnati much better if the people had not dealt so very largely in hogs." Most Cincinnatians were more supportive of their town's leading industry, and affectionately dubbed the Queen City "Porkopolis." During the Jacksonian era, Cincinnatians annually slaughtered 120,000 pigs in a number of plants (capitalized at $2,000,000) to lead the nation in sales of salted and pickled pork. The pigs, pastured by farmers in the upper Ohio Valley's rich deciduous forests, were annually driven or

90. R. Carlyle Buley, *The Old Northwest: Pioneer Period, 1815–1840* (Bloomington, Ind., 1950), 527; Trollope, *Domestic Manners,* 60, 85.

91. Chaddock, "Ohio before 1850," 22; Buley, *Old Northwest,* 551–52; Wade, *Urban Frontier,* 57; Downard, *Cincinnati Brewing Industry,* 5–8.

shipped to Cincinnati for processing. The Queen City's streets were continually filled with transient porker herds, or strays in search of freedom, or at least a bite to eat. In the slaughterhouses on the city's outskirts, hogs were killed and rendered with mechanical precision. One typical plant was built of brick and measured three stories high and one hundred feet by one hundred feet. Frederick Marryat, an Englishman, expressed amazement at the efficiency of the business:

> The hogs confined in a large pen are driven into a smaller one; one man knocks them on the head with a sledge-hammer and then cuts their throats; two more pull away their carcass, when it is raised by two others who tumble it into a tub of scalding water. His bristles are removed in about a minute and a half by another party, when the next duty is to fix a stretcher between his legs. It is then hoisted up by two other people, cut open, and disemboweled; and in three minutes and a half from the time he was grunting in his obesity, he has only to get cold before he is again packed up and reunited in a barrel to travel the world.[92]

The New York City poet Charles Fenno Hoffman also gave a detailed description of "doomed porkers" in "these swinish workshops," where the "minute division of labor … gives dignity to hog-killing in Cincinnati." He too described each specialized task of the gruesome process, concluding, "When the fearful carnival comes on, [and] the deep forests of the Ohio have contributed their thousands of unoffending victims, the gauntlet of death is run by those selected for immolation." Trollope devoted one of her accounts to the slaughterhouses' impact on the natural world. Out for a hike on a beautiful hill bordering the city, "we found the brook we had to cross at its foot red with the stream from a pig slaughtering house," and she was subjected to "odours which I will not describe, and which I heartily hope my readers cannot imagine."[93]

92. Trollope, *Domestic Manners,* 88; Harriet Martineau, *Retrospect of Western Travel,* 3 vols. (1838; repr. New York, 1969), 233; Wade, *Urban Frontier,* 197; Frederick Marryat, *A Diary in America, with Remarks on its Institutions* (1839; repr., New York, 1962), 222–3.
93. Hoffman, "Winter in the West, 1833–34" 554; Trollope, *Domestic Manners of the Americans,* 88.

While the downtown shops and markets and the industrial plants provided great economic stimulus, the key to Cincinnati's prosperity was the Ohio and Mississippi Rivers trade. Farmers across the upper Ohio Valley shipped their raw produce downriver, as did Cincinnati's emergent industrial plants. Manufactured goods from back east came to Cincinnati down the Ohio, while imported commodities like coffee and sugar traveled upstream from New Orleans. During the 1820s and '30s, steamboats slowly came to dominate the trade, pushing out the keelboats, the only prior upstream craft. Interestingly, and as we have seen, the downstream-only flatboat trade continued to flourish for another forty years despite the new technology. Flatboats were cheap to make and appealed to humble but striving farmer speculators. Moreover, steamboats offered flatboatmen a convenient ride home. By eliminating the arduous walk home over the Natchez Trace, steamers turned flatboatmen into commuters.[94]

"The invention of the steamboat was intended for us," bragged the editor of the *Cincinnati Gazette.* "The puny rivers of the East are only as creeks or convenient waters on which experiments may be made for our advantage." By 1830, less than twenty years since the *New Orleans'* 1811 voyage, more than four hundred steamboats regularly navigated the western rivers. The three months it had taken a keelboat to travel upstream from New Orleans to Cincinnati was cut to less than three weeks. This new technology also expanded Cincinnati's boatbuilding industry, and the Queen City took pride in locally built craft dubbed "waterskimmers" because of their light construction and resultant low draft (the depth necessary to navigate). The only remaining bottleneck on the path to and from New Orleans was the Great Falls of the Ohio at Louisville, Kentucky. Louisville, one of the Cincinnati's chief competitors, hesitated to build a canal around the falls for fear of losing a lucrative portage trade. Yet by 1825, a joint public/private company formed and completed the Louisville Canal in 1830.[95]

94. Chaddock, "Ohio before 1850," 21; Wade, *Urban Frontier,* 40–41; Michael Allen, *Western Rivermen,* 144–45.

The 1820s saw two more major developments in the transportation revolution that would rock Cincinnati and all of the Mississippi Valley. In 1825, New York State completed construction of the Erie Canal, linking the Great Lakes to the port of New York City and the Atlantic trade. Construction of the Erie Canal was paralleled by a "canal craze" across the upper Ohio Valley; several canal projects aimed at linking the Ohio River to the Great Lakes and New York City. Yet the canals were soon superseded by an even more powerful technological breakthrough. In 1829, the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad (B&O) successfully tested a new American-made steam engine, and the American railroad age began. Soon, railroads would further strengthen the growing links between Cincinnati and the northeastern states of the United States of America.[96]

Cincinnati's African-American population grew amid this turbulent economic revolution, suffering racial persecution while performing menial labor and roiling the politics of the Queen City. Although slavery was banned above the Ohio River by the Northwest Ordinance of 1787, slaveholding Kentucky lay just across the river. By 1830, free Blacks represented 10 percent of the Queen City's populace, residing in two poor, segregated neighborhoods known as Bucktown and Little Africa. Escaped slaves joined their ranks, and Blacks found work as steamboat deckhands, day laborers, porters, vendors, shoeblacks, and domestic servants. Poor white laborers resented the competition, and in 1829 there were race riots in the Queen City. Approximately fifteen hundred Blacks reportedly fled the city, but most returned, and Cincinnati's free Black population continued to grow.[97]

Despite Cincinnati's racism and closeness to slave territory, the key to understanding its 1820s and '30s economic growth

95. Wade, *Urban Frontier,* 70–71, 192–96, 53–56; Allen, *Western Rivermen,* 158; Francis S. Philbrick, *The Rise of the West, 1754-1830* (New York, 1965), 314–15, 334–38.
96. George Rogers Taylor, *The Transportation Revolution, 1815–1860* (New York, 1951), 32–36, 45–48, 102–103; David H. Mould, *Dividing Lines: Canals, Railroads, and Urban Rivalry in Ohio's Hocking Valley, 1825–1875* (Lanham, Md., 1994).
97. Marryat, *Diary in America,* 222; Chaddock, "Ohio before 1850," 84–85; Wade, *Urban Frontier,* 213–16, 122–23.

was the fact it was *not* a slaveholding city. Cincinnati's wharves may have looked across the Ohio at Kentucky, but the city's future lay on the path of the industrial revolution, not the precapitalist slaveholding system. All of the crucial elements of the transportation revolution—steamboats, canals, and railroads—pointed the Queen City north, not south like during the early keelboat era. While the Jeffersonian and Jacksonian Democrats' strategy of linking the South and West had initially succeeded, it was ultimately doomed by the industrial revolution. The vast majority of Ohioans, even as far south as Cincinnati, were becoming Yankees. And when the Civil War came, most (not all) Ohio Valley men would fight for the Union and America's future, not its past.[98]

Though no one in the 1820s and '30s saw it coming, the railroad age would create strong competitors who challenged the Queen City's preeminence. Cincinnati's perch atop the emerging urban frontier was already being contested, and not just by Saint Louis and Pittsburgh. Chicago was founded in 1833, sitting along Lake Erie and near the headwaters of the Illinois River, on a flat prairie landscape perfect for building a transcontinental railroad. Decades later, the great Illinois poet Carl Sandburg would celebrate Chicago as "Hog Butcher for the World, / Tool Maker, Stacker of Wheat, / Player with Railroads and the Nation's / Freight Handler; / Stormy, husky, brawling, / City of the Big Shoulders." By the eve of the Civil War it was obvious that the Ohio Valley's Porkopolis was being replaced by the Hog Butcher for the World.[99]

During 1825–35, however, at the height of Jacksonian optimism and exuberance, Cincinnati was booming. The city's rapid growth was spurred on by emergent middle-class Americans striving to improve their stations in life. It is these middle-class Americans who caused Trollope's discomfort, and she recurrently expressed disdain for folks who honestly

98. Michael Allen, *The Confederation Congress and the Creation of the American Trans-Appalachian Settlement Policy, 1783–1787* (Lewiston, N.Y., 2006), 155.
99. Carl Sandburg, "Chicago," *Poetry: A Magazine of Verse* 3 (March 1914), 191–92. See also William Cronon, *Nature's Metropolis: Chicago and the Great West* (New York, 1991).

believed they were her *equals*—socially, politically, and economically. Most Cincinnatians believed that if they worked hard and planned ahead, happiness and prosperity would one day be theirs. It was this desire for self-improvement that had pulled thirty thousand diverse individuals west of the Appalachians to settle Cincinnati. That some of them did not succeed is more than balanced by the fact that most of them did. And in so doing, they built the Queen City of the West.

THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF SLAVERY

"I was born a slave on a plantation in Franklin County, Virginia," writes Booker T. Washington in *Up from Slavery* (1901), a detailed memoir of his progress from the slave quarters to the founding presidency of Alabama's Tuskegee Institute. Born in 1856 in the upper Ohio River Valley region we now call West Virginia, Washington spent nearly nine years of his childhood as a slave. He remembered his mother working long days in their master's house and tending to her three children as best she could. He never knew his father, a white man from a neighboring plantation. "Whoever he was, I never heard of his taking the least interest in me or providing in any way for my rearing." Nor did Booker T. Washington express interest in learning more about his father, whom he dismisses as "simply another unfortunate victim of the institution which the Nation unhappily had engrafted upon it at that time."[100]

"My life had its beginning in the midst of the most miserable, desolate, and discouraging surroundings," Washington continues. His earliest recollections are of constant work doing odd jobs, carrying water to the field slaves, grinding corn, and swatting flies at his master's dinner table. His family lived in a small cabin, and he could not recall "having slept in a bed until after our family was declared free by the Emancipation Proclamation. Three children—John, my oldest brother, Amanda, my sister, and myself—had a pallet on the dirt floor,

100. Booker T. Washington, *Up from Slavery* (1901; repr. New York, 2000), 1–2. Tuskegee Institute is now Tuskegee University.

or, to be more correct, we slept in and on a bundle of filthy rags laid upon the dirt floor." The children's workdays kept them separated from one another and their mother until bedtime came again. "I cannot remember a single instance during my childhood or early boyhood when our entire family sat down at the table together, and God's blessing was asked, and the family ate a meal together in a civilized manner."[101]

Many of Washington's adult traits can be traced back to his childhood. Decades after emancipation, he found it difficult to enjoy leisure time or to play at games with his own children. He confessed he knew nothing about football, cards, or other amusements because "there was no period of my life that was devoted to play." Washington has been ridiculed for his compulsive quest (at Tuskegee and elsewhere) for "absolute cleanness of the body" and advocacy of what he soberly called "the gospel of the toothbrush." All of this springs from repulsive memories of the filth in which he was raised. A poignant moment in *Up from Slavery* is his recalling the cleanliness and order of his alma mater, Hampton Institute (Richmond, Virginia), where he ate regular meals served on a tablecloth with napkins, slept for the first time in clean sheets, and bathed regularly. "Since leaving Hampton, I have always in some way sought my daily bath."[102]

Booker T. Washington's enrollment at Hampton, and his eventual founding of Tuskegee, can also be traced back to his upper Ohio Valley slave childhood. *Up from Slavery*'s opening chapter reveals his aching desire to enjoy the opportunities afforded his master's children—their comforts, seeming carefree childhoods, playtime, and even the ginger cookies they were given. Charged with carrying his young mistress's books to school, Washington was struck by the opportunities an education might hold. As an older man, he could still recall the image of the white boys and girls studying in a country schoolroom: "I had the feeling that to get into a schoolhouse and study in this way would be about the same as getting into paradise."[103]

101. Ibid., 1–6.
102. Ibid., 39–40; Ishmael Reed, introduction to Washington, *Up from Slavery,* xiv.

"During the campaign when Lincoln was first a candidate for the Presidency," Washington continues, "slaves on our far-off plantation … knew what the issues involved were." As the Civil War commenced and slowly ground on, they heard news reports from Virginia battlefields east of the Appalachians and southwestward along the course of the Mississippi. Late one night, "I was awakened by my mother kneeling over her children and fervently praying that Lincoln and his armies might be successful." He remembers that in his part of the upper Ohio Valley, the slave community slowly came to the realization they might all soon be free. As this was happening, thoughts of clean sheets, daily baths, ginger cookies, and going to school germinated in the mind of young Booker T. Washington.[104]

Slavery was already in use among native inhabitants at the time Europeans first penetrated the western hemisphere in the late fifteenth century. The origins of Europeans' use of slaves can be traced back to the ancient Near East and, later, Greek, Roman, and Arab slavery systems. By 1650, colonial Spanish, French, and British slaveholders had, for the most part, failed at enslaving Indians and instead introduced captured African slaves to their Caribbean and South American holdings.[105]

North American slaves constituted 10 percent of all slaves shipped to the western hemisphere; the Spanish, French, and British worked 90 percent of the slave population in the Caribbean and in Central and South America. In the lower Mississippi Valley, French and Spanish slaveholders were followed by Anglo and Celtic Americans, who brought their African-American slaves across the Appalachian Mountains during the decades following the American Revolution. They

103. Washington, *Up from Slavery,* 5.

104. Ibid.

105. Louis Filler, *The Rise and Fall of Slavery in America* (Englewood, N.J., 1980), 4–7; Kenneth M. Stampp, *The Peculiar Institution: Slavery in the Ante-Bellum South* (New York, 1956), 14–16. For North American Indian enslavement of Indians and Blacks, see Robert H. Ruby and John A. Brown, *Indian Slavery in the Pacific Northwest* (Spokane, Wash., 1993), and R. Halliburton, *Red over Black: Black Slavery among the Cherokee Indians* (Westport, Conn., 1977). See also Seymour Drescher and Stanley L. Engerman, eds., *A Historical Guide to World Slavery* (New York, 1998).

migrated from the southern colonies—Virginia, Maryland, Delaware, North and South Carolina, and Georgia—where American slavery had begun in the mid-1600s. As discussed earlier, 10 percent of African Americans held the legal status of free Blacks that resulted from manumission or the end of their original contracts as indentured servants. The vast majority, however, were enslaved for life—*chattels personal durante vita*—under Black Codes passed in colonies south of the Mason-Dixon line and the Ohio River. Although the percentage of Blacks in the overall American population actually decreased between the Revolution and the Civil War (from 20 percent to 15 percent), this was due to heavy European immigration and a booming white birth rate. Even with the 1808 American ban on the global slave trade, the Cotton South in 1861 held a population of approximately four million slaves, up markedly from approximately four hundred thousand in 1776.[106]

Historians go round and round about the "profitability" of slavery.[107] These arguments stem from strongly held opinions over whether or not slavery was part of America's emerging free-market capitalist system. The quick answer to this question is no. True, the Yankee capitalists' burgeoning textile factories were fed with slave-harvested cotton. Yet Eugene Genovese shows in *The Political Economy of Slavery* that southern slaveholders were "premodern … pseudo capitalist[s]" who "impeded the development of every normal feature of capitalism." Although capitalism sometimes grows alongside and encourages pre-capitalist systems, Genovese writes, it is "pointless to suggest therefore that nineteenth century India and twentieth century Saudi Arabia should be classified as capitalist countries."

106. Ira Berlin, *Many Thousands Gone: The First Two Centuries of Slavery in North America* (Cambridge, Mass., 1998), 29–46, 77–90; Berlin, *Generations of Captivity: A History of African American Slaves* (Cambridge, Mass., 2003), 163–74; Stampp, *Peculiar Institution,* 14–27. See also Robert Gudmestad, *Steamboats and the Rise of the Cotton Kingdom* (Baton Rouge, La., 2011).

107. Eugene D. Genovese, *The Political Economy of Slavery: Studies in Economy and Society* (New York, 1965), 3–5, 19–30; Robert William Fogel and Stanley L. Engerman, *Time on the Cross: The Economics of American Negro Slavery* (1974; repr. Lanham, Md., 1984), 4–6; Sven Becket and Seth Rockman, eds., *Slavery's Capitalism: A New History of American Economic Development* (Philadelphia, Pa., 2016), passim.

Southern white slaveholders held aristocratic aspirations and a marked hostility towards industry, infrastructure, and modern farming techniques (including crop rotation and fertilizer). Slaveholders thus "represented the antithesis of capitalism."[108]

African-American slaves harvested agricultural produce less efficiently and less profitably than free laborers using modern technology ultimately performed the same tasks. Slavery endured amid rising antebellum capitalism in large part because northern businessmen, for varied and complex reasons, chose to temporarily abide its sins and inefficiencies. Though some slaveholders did make money (a few made a great deal), slavery certainly was not part of a laissez-faire system with a minimal government economic role. Indeed, the forceful hand of the government was essential to slavery's survival against free markets, and slaveholders could not have existed without it. In addition to the masters' brutal plantation regimes, state and federally enforced Black Codes, fugitive slave laws, and slave patrols (in which white service was mandatory and refusal punishable) kept the slaveholders' world intact at the taxpayers' expense. Meanwhile, taxpayers also funded endeavors like the Mexican-American War, wherein federal troops conquered new southwestern territories to replace the exhausted soil of the Cotton South's wasteful and immoral labor system.[109]

Although there was urban slavery, most slaves worked in the South's agricultural fields. Twelve percent of all slaveholders held most of the South's slaves (half of Cotton Belt farms were slaveless). They worked them on large plantations, growing crops of tobacco, rice, sugar cane, indigo, and, of course, cotton. While field hands did the harvesting, a smaller contingent of house slaves (like Booker T. Washington's mother) worked in or near the master's home. An even smaller number of slave

108. Genovese, *Political Economy of Slavery,* 19, 23, 26. For opposing views, see Becket and Rockman, *Slavery's Capitalism,* and Walter Johnson, *River of Dark Dreams: Slavery and Empire in the Cotton Kingdom* (Cambridge, Mass., 2013).

109. Mark Thornton, "Slavery, Profitability, and the Market Process," *Review of Austrian Economics* 7 (1994), 27; Genovese, *Political Economy of Slavery,* 19, 23, 26. See also Thomas D. Morris, *Southern Slavery and the Law, 1619–1860* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1996), and Andrew Fede, *People without Rights: An Interpretation of the Law of Slavery in the U.S. South* (New York, 1992).

artisans—blacksmiths, butchers, barrel-makers, distillers, etc.—labored nearby. Work conditions and treatment ranged across great extremes. Solomon Northrup recalled one brutal beating he got from a slave trader during which "I thought I must die beneath the lashes of the accursed brute… I was all on fire. My suffering I can compare to nothing else than the burning agonies of hell." Yet Frederick Douglass stated, "A city slave is almost a free citizen," enjoying "privileges altogether unknown to the whip-driven slaves on the plantation."[110]

Presiding over all of this were the so-called plantation aristocrats. Because the American Revolution put an end to what little hereditary aristocracy existed in the United States, there were no true American aristocrats in the European mold (and, indeed, Europe's own supply was dwindling). Yet slaveholders did aspire to that status of republican gentlemen, and this was reflected in behaviors some historians label aristocratic: plantation architecture (with faux Roman columns and Greek façades); ample libraries for gentlemen scholars; aspiration to genteel manners, dress, and dining; and an abiding love for the art of politics (southern gentlemen, Genovese writes, "lived for politics, not, like the bourgeois politician, off politics"). Slaveholders touted their beliefs in virtue, family, patriarchy, and honor, the latter mirrored in their anachronistic practice of settling disputes via a *code duello.* Unlike their capitalistic Yankee countrymen, slave masters shunned hard work and sought lives of leisure. Booker T. Washington observed that the slave labor system "took the spirit of self-reliance and self-help out of the white people… They unconsciously had imbibed the feeling that manual labour was not the proper thing for them."[111]

Slaveholders slowly developed an elaborate intellectual defense of their "right" to enslave nearly four million human beings. This rationalizing was no mean feat given America was a

110. Eugene Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll: The World the Slaves Made* (New York, 1972), 66, and Jeffrey Rogers Hummel, *Emancipating Slaves, Enslaving Free Men: A History of the American Civil War* (Chicago, 1996), 42.

111. Genovese, *Political Economy of Slavery,* 28–34 (politics qtn., 28); Washington, *Up from Slavery,* 12.

democratic republic founded on Thomas Jefferson's stated belief that all men are created equal. Jefferson and many Revolutionary era southerners honestly viewed slavery as a necessary evil, and some even tried to legislate its extinction. The gentlemen of the post–cotton gin South made no such pretense of guilt or shame—indeed, John C. Calhoun and his brethren pronounced slavery to be a "positive good." Their argument was based on a strong dose of anticapitalism that today incongruously looks a little like Marxism. To Calhoun, Yankee laborers were simply wage slaves lacking caring patriarchs like himself to watch over them. This belief was spiced with a selective reading of the Old Testament to proclaim the slaveholders heirs to the venerable traditions of the Hebrew prophets (and the Greek and Roman republican slaveholders who followed them). But woven throughout all of this was racism, a deeply held belief in the innate inferiority of African Americans. One could believe in both the justness of slavery and that all men are created equal only if one believed Black slaves were not men—that they were subhuman. In such a mental landscape, southerners imagined slavery to be the only solution to the labor needs of the nineteenth-century American economy. Calhoun wrote in 1838 that slavery, far from being a "moral and political evil," was "in its true light … the most safe and stable basis for free institutions in the world."[112]

The masters' belief in Black inferiority was proven false each day by slave men, women, and children who survived and eventually triumphed over the South's peculiar institution. We have seen how slaves worked to build lives for themselves. They marshaled resources, raised families, practiced folk medicine and conjuring, danced and sang, and told folktales that gave them strength and hope. Some resisted their masters through slacking and acts of sabotage. Hundreds followed Gabriel Prosser, Denmark Vesey, and Nat Turner in violent and failed slave

112. Elizabeth Fox-Genovese and Eugene D. Genovese, *Slavery in White and Black: Class and Race in the Southern Slaveholders' New Order* (New York, 2008), passim; Richard Hofstadter, "John C. Calhoun: The Marx of the Master Class," *The American Political Tradition* (New York, 1948), 80–89; Hummel, *Emancipating Slaves, Enslaving Free Men*, 23 (Calhoun qtn.).

revolts. Frederick Douglass, Sojourner Truth, Harriet Jacobs, and thousands like them managed to escape to the North. Yet the vast majority of Blacks remained slaves and endured. In this task they were bolstered by their religion, an Africanized and enthusiastic Protestant Christianity. Most slaves survived, all the while awaiting "a better day a comin'."[113]

It is impossible to describe the psychology of the day-to-day coexistence of white masters and their slaves. As above, the truth no doubt lies somewhere between the horrific and the barely tolerable, between the opposing caricatures of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and *Gone with the Wind*.[114] There was a norm. Although many masters adequately fed, clothed, and cared for their slaves, there are disturbing written records (and a few photographs) of bloody abuse. According to Ira Berlin, the slave masters "employed force freely and often… If they sometimes extended the carrot of privilege, the stick was never far behind." The growth of a large biracial (mulatto) population evidences the rape of Black women by their white masters and overseers. Yet some of these "pseudo capitalist[s]" no doubt understood the monetary value of a slave (approximately $1,200 in 1850) and sought to avoid beating slaves and breaking up their families.[115]

Then, too, connections and relationships somehow formed between master and slave on the isolated plantations dotting the American South. "One may get the idea, from what I have said, that there was a bitter feeling towards the white people on the part of my race," Booker T. Washington wrote. "This was not true." Washington was not the only slave to feel loyalty towards his owner, a fact that speaks more to the magnanimity of the slave than that of the master. Yet Washington simultaneously and strongly condemned slavery and stressed that he had "never seen [a slave] who did not want to be free, or one who would return to slavery." He concluded, "I pity from the bottom of my heart

113. Fogel and Engerman, *Time on the Cross,* 109–26; John W, Blassingame, *The Slave Community: Plantation Life in the Antebellum South* (New York, 1972), passim; Lawrence Levine, *Black Culture and Black Consciousness: Afro-American Folk Thought from Slavery to Freedom* (New York, 1977), passim. See also chapter 2, this work.

114. Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll*, 123–33.

115. Ibid.; Berlin, *Generations of Captivity,* 178; Fogel and Engerman, *Time on the Cross,* 5, 109–57.

any nation or body of people that is so unfortunate as to get entangled in the net of slavery."[116]

The lives and careers of two Black rivermen reflect differing ways in which slaves endured before the Civil War. Simon Grey was an exceptional Natchez, Mississippi, slave who worked his way up to a status scarcely distinguishable from that of a free Black citizen. Grey's owner subcontracted him to the Andrew Brown and Company lumber firm in 1835, where he learned how to fell timber and raft it down the Yazoo River. Brown soon promoted Grey to flatboat captain and sent him "coasting" finished lumber to customers along the Mississippi from Natchez to New Orleans ("coasting" was the business practice of retailing goods from a traveling boat store). Brown trusted Grey with large sums of money ("He is a first rate fellow," Brown wrote) and eventually let him pursue his own business enterprises and keep the profits. Simon Grey lived with his wife and children in a company house in Natchez and apparently left the firm after emancipation.[117]

"I was born in Lexington, Kentucky, [to a master who] owned about forty slaves," remembered William Wells Brown (1816–84), who used a river career to escape to freedom and become an abolitionist writer, lecturer, novelist, and playwright. William Wells Brown's master, Dr. John Young, took him and his mother to Missouri, where they lived on lower Missouri River Valley farms and Young subcontracted out the teenaged William as a steamboat deckhand. William and his mother's unsuccessful 1832 escape attempt led Young to sell her downriver, and William never saw his mother again. Soon, Captain Enoch Price bought him and put him to work on his own steamboat, but William vowed to escape.[118]

116. Washington, *Up from Slavery,* 8–11.

117. John Hebron Moore, "Simon Grey, Riverman: A Slave Who Was Almost Free," *Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 69 (December 1962), 472–84.

118. Williams Wells Brown, *The Travels of William Wells Brown, including Narrative of William Wells Brown, a Fugitive Slave, and The American Fugitive in Europe: Sketches of Places and People Abroad, ed.* Paul Jefferson (1848 and 1855; repr. New York, 1991), 28–62 (qtn., 28); James Brewer Stewart, *Holy Warriors: The Abolitionists and American Slavery* (New York, 1976), 137–38.

It was when Captain Price landed in Cincinnati in 1832, William recalled, that "at last the time for action arrived." While unloading cargo he snuck off and hid in the woods until dark. Setting out, he caught "sight of my friend—truly the slave's friend—the North Star!" William hiked to Cleveland, where he found work aboard Lake Erie steamers and helped other escaped slaves flee to Canada. He eventually moved to Farmington, New York, a town with strong abolitionist sentiments, where he joined the Western New York Anti-Slavery Society and served as a lecturer. William Wells Brown's published autobiography, *Narrative of William W. Brown, a Fugitive Slave* (1847), sold 10,000 copies. He traveled to Europe, wrote several more antislavery works, and with the publication of *Clotel* (1853) and *The Escape* (1858), became America's first Black playwright and novelist. He published *My Southern Home; or, The South and Its People* in 1880, four years before he died in Cambridge, Massachusetts.[119]

William Wells Brown's career paralleled and contributed to the rise of both abolitionism and the political Free Soil movement. Although abolitionists like William Lloyd Garrison castigated Free Soilers because they opposed only slavery's westward expansion, and not slavery itself, Frederick Douglass and pragmatic abolitionists saw the utility of infiltrating the political party system. The Whigs (and Federalists before them) had always boasted an antislavery core. The Liberty Party challenged both Whigs and Democrats in 1840, begetting the Free Soil Party of 1848. Eventually, Liberty men, Free Soilers, Whigs, and some northern Democrats formed the Republican Party in Ripon, Wisconsin, in 1854. It was the Republicans' successful 1860 presidential candidate for whom Booker T. Washington's mother prayed during the long course of America's Civil War.[120]

Religion and opposition to slavery, of course, went hand in hand. Tens of thousands of slaves who flocked to Ulysses S. Grant's conquering Union Army believed, with good reason, that God had sent Yankee soldiers to punish their sinful masters and set the slaves free. A postwar observer noted that the "great mass

119. Brown, *Travels of William Wells Brown,* 61–63, passim.
120. Stewart, *Holy Warriors,* 97–123; Washington, *Up from Slavery,* 5.

… of negro people" who welcomed Union General William Tecumseh Sherman and his troops showed "how true and strong their faith was in the armed deliverance which Providence had ordained for their race."[121]

Meanwhile, in the upper Ohio Valley, slaves on the farm with nine-year-old Booker T. Washington also knew the end of the Civil War was near. He recalled, "Finally the war closed and the day of freedom came… As the day grew nearer, there was more singing in the slave quarters than usual. It was bolder and had more ring, and lasted into the night." Millennialism was not an abstract belief to these Black men and women. Only their white masters believed their songs about freedom "referred to the next world and had no connection with life in this world," Washington reflected. "Now [the slaves] gradually threw off the mask, and were not afraid to let it be known that the 'freedom' in their songs meant freedom of the body in this world."[122]

STEAMBOATS, TRAINS, AND CARS

Steam engine technology, first developed in Europe and the eastern United States, crossed the Appalachian Mountains during the second decade of the nineteenth century. Presteam rivermen were reportedly astounded to see Nicholas Roosevelt's *New Orleans* belching smoke and chugging along the Ohio and Mississippi in 1811. Their quiet machineless world soon became much noisier, and the boatmen's awe turned to anger and fear of losing their jobs to a more efficient mode of transportation. Yet during the decades that followed Roosevelt's voyage, only keelboatmen were run out of business by steamers. Most rivermen adjusted, becoming steamboatmen themselves or enjoying the boom in flatboating that accompanied the steamboat age. "During the half century following the introduction of the steamboat," wrote the historian Louis C. Hunter, "the West experienced an extraordinary growth."[123]

121. Victor Davis Hanson, *The Soul of Battle: From Ancient Times to the Present Day, How Three Great Liberators Vanquished Tyranny* (New York, 1999), 159–67 (qtn., 163).
122. Washington, *Up from Slavery,* 13.

Like the upper Cumberland and Cincinnati steamers described above, Mississippi Valley steamboats were work horses, not show horses. The historian Adam Kane describes them as "marvel[s] of modern engineering," thrust by "powerful, inexpensive, wasteful, and lightweight high-pressure steam engine[s]." Steamers were small, light, low-draft craft carrying manufactured goods, foodstuffs, cotton, tobacco, whiskey, passengers, and many other cargoes in high (and often low) water. By 1818, Henry Miller Shreve had succeeded Roosevelt, replacing the inefficient side-wheeler with his powerful stern-wheeler, a two-and-a-half-foot draft prototype. In the 1820s, the Army Corps of Engineers contracted Shreve to clear snags and improve navigation channels along the Mississippi and Arkansas Rivers. These improvements, Kane writes, ensured "a vital means for the settlement and development of the lands of the public domain."[124]

The average Mississippi Valley steamer's accommodations were not resplendent. Though first-class passengers could book comfortable cabins, most paying customers rode deck passage. They found berths on the lower decks amidst the cargo (including livestock). Yet the low fare (approximately two dollars from New Orleans to Saint Louis) brought the freedom of mobility to countless common folks—European immigrants, northbound flatboatmen, and farm families—who could now travel hundreds of miles in a few days for a few dollars. While the makeup of steamboat crews initially resembled that of presteam rivermen, increasing German, Irish, and Scandinavian immigration combined with a pool of free Black and slave workers to greatly diversify the fleet's workforce. Women

123. Louis C. Hunter, *Steamboats on the Western Rivers: An Economic and Technological History* (Cambridge, Mass. 1949), 11–12, 29; Allen, *Western Rivermen,* 140–41. See also Eric F. Haites, James Mak, and Gary M. Walton, *Western Rivers Transportation* (Baltimore, Md., 1975); William J. Petersen, *Steamboating on the Upper Mississippi* (Iowa City, Iowa, 1968), and Gudmestad, *Steamboats and the Rise of the Cotton Kingdom*.

124. Adam I. Kane, *The Western Rivers Steamboat* (College Station, Texas, 2004), 127–29; Paul F. Paskoff, *Troubled Waters: Steamboat Disasters, River Improvements, and American Public Policy, 1821–1860* (Baton Rouge, La., 2007), 187–88; Hunter, *Steamboats on Western Rivers,* 75–76, 197–203. *Draft* refers to the minimum water depth necessary to navigate without running aground.

shipped as galley workers and maids. Steamers were crewed by a captain and pilot, engineer, cook, two mates, and deckhands, all of whom took turns sleeping as the boat worked around the clock. Steamboating was a hard way to make a living, but during the Age of Jackson it could provide aspiring men a start in life and a chance for adventure, and perhaps produce enough savings for land payments and even marriage.[125]

Successful steamboat pilots possessed great knowledge and skill, as described by Mark Twain in his 1875 *Atlantic Monthly* articles that became the opening chapters of *Life on the Mississippi* (1883). As noted above, Twain's famed depiction of piloting ultimately meanders into semifictional anecdotes, yet the opening sections are the best depiction of steamboat piloting ever published. Twain systematically divides his complicated subject into four portions, all served up as a memoir of his own training as a cub pilot under Captain Horace Bixby ("Mr. B—"). He begins by learning visible physical and geographic features (islands, bluffs, trees, etc.) but then is required to learn the changing *shape* of such features for night navigation. The third portion, perhaps the most famous, is a "lesson on water-reading" as Mr. B— teaches Twain to examine the surface of the water to identify dangerous snags, rocks, sandbars, shoals, and eddies. But just as the cub concludes he has learned everything he needs to know, Mr. B— forces him to start all over. River stage assessment, the fourth lesson, teaches that during floods or low water all of the above features change so much the pilot must learn them all anew. In a famous passage, Twain concludes that the river "became a wonderful book—a book was a dead language to the uneducated passenger, but which told its mind to me without reserve, delivering its most cherished secrets as clearly as if it uttered them with a voice."[126]

Americans have always been fascinated with steamboat racing,

125. Michael Allen, ed., "Reminiscences of a Common Boatman, 1849–51," *Gateway Heritage* 5 (Fall 1984), 36–49; John Habermehl, *Life on the Western Rivers* (Pittsburgh, Pa., 1901), 30, 55–56.

126. Mark Twain, "Old Times on the Mississippi," reprinted in *Great Short Stories of Mark Twain* (New York, 1967), 13–26. See also George Byron Merrick, *Old Times on the Upper Mississippi* (1909; repr. St. Paul, Minn., 1987).

and Twain wrote of the "vast importance" and "consuming excitement" that preceded a race: "Politics and weather were dropped, and people talked only of the upcoming race."[127] Like Twain's lower Mississippi, the Ohio River and its tributaries saw their share of steamboat racing. One upper Cumberland resident, Claude Hackett remembered, "We had a few steamboat races that burned up all the lard and meat and everything to make more steam. Sometimes they'd adjust the safety valve to where it was dangerous." Winners of an annual Cumberland River race were entitled to hold the rotating trophy; another race produced a folksong from which a short verse is preserved: "The Harley and the Hardison had a race / The Harley threw water in the Hardison's Face."[128]

Yet romantic stories about racing often ignore one of their most dangerous outcomes: steam engine explosions. From 1825 to 1850, one hundred fifty major steamboat explosions killed more than fourteen hundred people. Although these numbers are minuscule when set in the context of the overall amount of steamboat traffic on western rivers, they do give cause for reflection. Like modern Americans, Jacksonians were in a hurry to get someplace, and they were willing to take chances to get there fast. These chances, as Hackett recalled above, sometimes included tampering with steam engine safety valves in order to build more steam and increase boat speed. "I tell you stranger, it takes a man to ride on one of these alligator boats," one steamboat deckhand bragged, "head on a snag, high pressure, valve soddered down, 600 souls on board & in danger of going to the devil!"[129]

Baron von Gerstner, a European traveler, offered an astute analysis of the racing explosions, blaming them on America's overly acquisitive and dynamic culture. He described Americans as eager strivers who "never like to remain one behind another:

127. Twain, *Life on the Mississippi,* 96–97.
128. Montell, *Don't Go up Kettle Creek,* 153.
129. Michael Allen, "The Ohio: Artery of Movement," in *Always a River: The Ohio River and the American Experience,* ed. Robert L. Reid (Bloomington, Ind., 1991), 118–19; Daniel Boorstin, *The Americans: The National Experience* (New York, 1965), 98–101.

on the contrary, each wants to get ahead of the rest." He asserted, "When two steamboats happen to get alongside each other, the passengers will encourage the captains to run a race." The eager boat engineers stoked their steam engine boilers, intended for a pressure of 100 pounds, to "150 and even 200 pounds" and this led to explosions and death. And yet the steamboat races continued. Why? "The life of an American is, indeed, only a constant racing, and why should he fear for it on board the steamboats?"[130]

The first two decades of Mississippi Valley steamboat commerce proved to be the most profitable of the entire Steamboat Age. Hundreds of small entrepreneurs entered the trade, while the federal and state governments stayed out of it (with the notable exceptions of improvements and wharf taxes). This relatively free market produced huge profits but never created the corrupt government/capital collusion and monopolies that characterized the transcontinental railroads. By 1830, however, there was too great a supply of steamers and too little demand, and the Panic of 1837 further weakened the market. Business leveled out during the two decades immediately preceding the Civil War, and steamboat businessmen once again prospered. But steamboating never returned to the glory days of 1811–30. As noted, the launch of the first American steam-powered railroad in 1829 had doomed the steamboat trade.[131]

Railroads were superior to steamboats in several ways. While steamboats were bound to the river valleys, railroads could go anywhere men could lay track. Low water, ice, and fog did not hinder the railroads, which offered direct, year-round service to not only port cities but also towns far away from navigable rivers. By the 1850s steam-powered locomotive trains served all of the major Ohio and Mississippi Valley port cities, and businessmen could choose between them and the steamboats. Producers of every major product except coal gradually moved

130. Boorstin, *Americans,* 98–99.

131. Erik F. Haites and James Mak, "Steamboating on the Mississippi: A Purely Competitive Industry," *Business History Review* 45 (Spring 1971), 66–67. Allen, "Ohio," 120; George Rogers Taylor, *The Transportation Revolution, 1815–1860* (New York, 1951), 32–36, 45–48, 102–103.

their business from riverboats to railroad cars. As tobacco, cotton, pork, and corn producers were shifting to railroads, the Civil War intervened, severely limiting all river commerce. The Union Pacific, America's first transcontinental railroad, was finished in 1869.[132]

Steamboats continued to ply the western rivers in diminishing numbers into the early decades of the twentieth century. They served small producers who could not secure bulk railroad rates and those river towns the railroads had bypassed. One such market was mountainous river valleys. On the upper Ohio River and its tributaries in Kentucky and West Virginia, steamboats were the preferred conveyors of coal, and the isolated villages along the upper Cumberland River utilized steamboats through the 1920s. The historian Jeannette Keith writes that while the rest of the nation embraced railroads, "the river defined the economy" of Tennessee and Kentucky's upper Cumberland region.[133]

Railroads continued to grow, their steam locomotives crisscrossing America's midwestern heartland. Founded in 1851, the Illinois Central Railroad stretched from Chicago to New Orleans, paralleling the Mississippi from Cairo southward. As Thomas D. Clark has shown, the southern portion of the Illinois Central was initially built to aid the Cotton Kingdom and "free New Orleans of the danger of becoming a victim of slow-moving river traffic." Railroaders aimed to directly connect slaveholders with food and farming supply outlets in the Old Northwest. However, after the outbreak of the Civil War, the Union army used the Illinois Central line to send men and war materiel south to crush the slaveholders, and they also destroyed track to keep Rebels from using it. After the war, the Illinois Central hastened Reconstruction through connections to the North and the new industrial economy. While goods flowed south, poor white southerners flowed north; freedmen also rode the Illinois Central north to new lives in Chicago and the upper Midwest.

132. Hunter, *Steamboats on Western Rivers,* 584, 603–604.
133. Haites and Mak, "Steamboating on the Mississippi," 66–67; Montell, *Don't Go up Kettle Creek,* 160–61; Jeannette Keith, *Country People in the New South,* 10, 13, 81.

Railroad men even began to supplant rivermen in myth and legend. Casey Jones, the Illinois Central's most famous engineer, became a folk hero celebrated in tale and song. And the Illinois Central's most famous train, the "City of New Orleans," symbolized the Chicago to New Orleans route whose legendary stature was comparable to the Natchez Trace and Oregon Trail.[134]

The dawn of the new century marked yet another phase of the transportation revolution. Less than one hundred years after the voyage of Roosevelt's *New Orleans,* the internal combustion engine made steam-powered transport obsolete. Henceforth, gasoline- and diesel-powered transport would supplant both steamboats and steam-powered railroad locomotives. The development of the snub-nosed, twin-screwed diesel towboat revolutionized river commerce. On land, automobiles and trucks began to traverse the Midwest, and state and federal governments built roads to expedite this new mode of travel.[135]

The U.S. road system had slowly evolved in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries to facilitate postal delivery and movement of federal troops in the Indian Wars. The Natchez Trace and the National Road (also known as the Cumberland Road) served as models for federally subsidized land transportation, and the Civil War vastly escalated improvements and construction of new roads throughout the Mississippi Valley. Meanwhile, state roads and privately owned toll roads added many routes and facilitated travel well into the beginnings of the twentieth century. With the arrival of cars and trucks, federal and state governments took on a much more active role. Governments used the power of eminent domain to push the toll roads out of business, while increased taxes replaced (and

134. Thomas D. Clark, *A Pioneer Southern Railroad from New Orleans to Cairo* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1936), 5–6. See also Wayne A. Johnston, *The Illinois Central Heritage, 1851–1951: A Centenary Address* (Princeton, N.J., 1951). For Casey Jones, see chapter 2, this work.

135. Michael C. Robinson, *History of Navigation in the Ohio River Basin* (Washington, D.C., 1983); Michael Allen, "Life on the Mississippi, Towboat Style," *The Lookout* 74 (June–July 1982), 13–16; George F. Parkinson, Jr., and Brooks McCabe, Jr., "Charles Ward and the *James Rumsey:* Regional Innovation in Steam Technology on the Western Rivers," *West Virginia History* 39 (January–April 1978), 143–80.

exceeded) toll fees that had previously gone to private entrepreneurs. Governments built a series of one- and two-lane dirt and gravel roads traversing the United States of America; many of these paralleled, or were built upon, existing roads. Eventually the most important of these became paved government highways.[136]

The modern federal road system, which greatly affected the Mississippi Valley, was spurred by the growth of Progressivism—the early twentieth-century political reform movement that sought to further expand the government's role in regulating the nation's economy. Progressives combined the Constitution's commerce clause with the enumerated powers of military defense and postal delivery in their call for a network of modern national highways. In 1914, the American Association of State Highway Officials (AASHO) formally requested federal assistance; the result was the Federal Aid Road Act, signed by President Woodrow Wilson in 1916. In 1921, the Senate Post Office and Post Roads Committee, under the Republican Chester Townshend, drafted the Federal Highway Act. This law established a federally regulated highway system based on existing state and federal roads, but with new construction on the horizon. The Federal Highway Act created the grid of numbered two-lane U.S. Highways. Highways running east and west were assigned even numbers (e.g., U.S. 2, U.S. 6, etc.) while those roads running north and south were numbered odd (e.g., U.S. 101, U.S. 99, etc.).[137] Thus was born the Mississippi Valley's famed U.S. Highway 61, the Great River Road.

Highway 61 arguably ranks alongside Route 66 as one of America's most iconic paved highways. In creating 61, state and federal road-builders connected existing routes with new stretches of road paralleling the Mississippi River from north-central Minnesota to New Orleans; the route also parallels the Illinois Central Railroad from Cape Girardeau, Missouri, southward. Local businessmen and chambers of commerce saw

136. William Kaszynski, *The American Highway* (Jefferson, N.C., 2000), 13–23.
137. Earl Swift, *The Big Roads: The Untold Story of the Engineers, Visionaries, and Trailblazers Who Created the American Superhighways* (New York, 2011), 40, 45–46, 69–70, 74, 95.

the potential of such a route not only for traditional commerce, but also as a destination highway for motor tourists and campers. Great River Road (originally dubbed the Mississippi Valley Road) boosters organized in 1938 to promote Highway 61 and worked to enhance tourists' scenic views along the route by incorporating a number of smaller state highways (e.g., Wisconsin 35, Illinois 96, and Mississippi 1) into the system. The smaller roads retained their old numbers and state jurisdiction but were included as alternate routes of the Great River Road.[138]

The most recent installation of this story of Mississippi Valley highways began with the 1956 Federal-Aid Highway Act creating the Dwight D. Eisenhower System of Interstate and Defense Highways, enhancing and replacing the U.S. Highways. Interstate 55, running north and south from Lake Superior to New Orleans, replaced U.S. 61 as the major Mississippi Valley automobile and truck thoroughfare. Yet many tourists and aficionados nevertheless remained attached to 61, as 55's vistas of the Mississippi River are few and far between, and do not compare with those of the Great River Road. Then, in the late 1960s, the Minnesota singer and songwriter Bob Dylan recorded his hugely successful *Highway 61 Revisited* record album, and the Great River Road was immortalized in America's popular culture as well as its transportation history.[139]

The internal combustion engine also led to development of airplane transportation in the Mississippi Valley, a story that begins with single-engine props and ends with Saint Louis's McDonnell Douglas Aircraft Corporation and Chicago's famed O'Hare International Airport. Whereas Mike Fink, Mark Twain, and Casey Jones came to symbolize the keelboat, steamboat, and railroad eras, the Mississippi Valley aviator Charles Lindbergh became the icon of airplane pilots. A Minnesotan, Lindbergh (1902–74) spent his youth in homes in Little Falls, Minnesota (on

138. Warren Brant, *A Log to the Upper Mississippi River [U.S Highway 61, The Great River Road]* (Prairie du Chien, Wisc., 1975), 2–6.; Kaszynski, *American Highway,* 42, 140–41, 153. See Great River Road/Mississippi Parkway Collection, National Rivers Museum, Dubuque, Iowa, passim.

139. Swift, *Big Roads,* 186–87; Kaszynski, *American Highway,* 168. For Bob Dylan, see chapter 8, this work.

the Mississippi River), Detroit, and Washington, D.C., where his father served in the U.S. Congress. Fascinated with the emergent field of aviation, he earned a pilot's license in 1923 and became the first airmail pilot serving Chicago and Saint Louis. Of course, Lindbergh's great ambition was to become the first aviator to cross the Atlantic Ocean in a nonstop flight to Paris, France, a feat he accomplished in his custom-built aircraft, the *Spirit of St. Louis,* on May 20–21, 1927. From the moment he landed in France to the welcome of two hundred thousand admirers, Lucky Lindy became a modern-day folk hero with stature equal to that of his contemporaries Sergeant Alvin York and Babe Ruth.[140]

The myth of Charles A. Lindbergh combined traditional characteristics of courageous, independent frontier folk heroes with modern technology. Lindbergh became a "contemporary ancestor," a modern-day American aviator possessing the pioneering skills of historic Americans like Daniel Boone. This mystique later became the basis for Billy's Wilder's movie *Spirit of St. Louis* (1957), starring James Stewart and utilizing a screenplay based on Lindbergh's widely read autobiography. The movie spotlights Lindbergh's youthful Alligator Horse daring—his Harley Davidson motorcycling and U.S. Army adventures. One scene shows Lindy parachuting out of a stalled airplane into a Missouri snowstorm, landing, and then catching a train back to Saint Louis to deliver the mail! The myth-making relied in large part on western images, Charles A. Lindbergh's status as a Mississippi Valley man and favorite son of Saint Louis, the vaunted gateway to the American frontier. Lucky Lindy's feats in the *Spirit of St. Louis* fit nicely into the folk traditions of the trans-Appalachian West.[141]

Charles Lindbergh was flying mail between Chicago and Saint Louis during the twilight of steamboat traffic in the Mississippi

140. John William Ward, "The Meaning of Charles Lindbergh's Flight," *American Quarterly* 10 (Spring 1958), 3–16.

141. Billy Wilder, dir., *The Spirit of St. Louis* (Warner Brothers, 1957), film. For more on "contemporary ancestors," see discussions of Casey Jones and Alvin York in chapters 3 and 6, this work.

Valley. Although the steamboat vanished as airplanes, railroads, and U.S. Highways crossed the Mississippi Valley, thousands of enthusiasts and scholars preserved memories of the Steamboat Age. The Sons and Daughters of Pioneer Rivermen formed, and James V. Swift published an Old Boats column in the *Waterways Journal* (written by the late Alan L. Bates after Swift's passing, the Old Boats column still runs weekly, written now by Keith Norrington). State museums and historical societies built steamboat collections, and smaller museums dotted the Ohio and Mississippi River Valleys. The Cincinnati Public Library and University of Wisconsin, LaCrosse, established dedicated steamboat collections, while the University of Memphis developed the Mississippi Valley Collection that included the steamboat era. Dubuque citizens built a museum that became the National Rivers Hall of Fame, today's National Rivers Museum. Louis C. Hunter and "Steamboat Bill" Peterson wrote their classic works on the Steamboat Age.[142]

One of the most significant and interesting of the steamboat enthusiasts was Ruth Ferris of Saint Louis, Missouri. Born in Moberly, Missouri, in 1897, Ferris carried a childhood fascination with steamboats throughout a long and productive life in the field of elementary education and museum curation. After graduating from the University of Missouri, Columbia, she moved to Saint Louis and began thirty-five years of tenure at the Community School. There she built an elementary social studies curriculum around the microcosm of the Steamboat Age.[143]

At the Community School, Ferris influenced many students, one of whom grew up to be the innovative folk musician and diesel towboat pilot John Hartford. In his riverboat album *Headin' Down into the Mystery Below,* Hartford pays tribute in a song entitled "Miss Ferris." During his 1947 fourth-grade year, Ferris started him "dreamin' about boats on the Mississippi

142. *Waterways Journal* (Saint Louis) and *The Reflector* (Marietta, Ohio). *The Reflector* is the official publication of the Sons and Daughters of Pioneer Rivermen.

143. Ruth Ferris File, National Rivers Museum, Dubuque, Iowa; Ruth Ferris, *St. Louis and the Mighty Mississippi in the Steamboat Age: The Collected Writings of Ruth Ferris* (St. Louis, Mo., 1993), 5–10; Keith Norrington, "Remembering Ruth Ferris," *Waterways Journal,* July 8, 2013, pp. 13–14.

River" when she took advantage of the sinking of the steamer *Golden Eagle.* After considerable "politicking," Hartford and his schoolmates found the *Eagle's* detached wheelhouse on their school playground. Hartford sings,

> Now, I had a teacher when I went to school,
> She loved the river, and she taught about it too.
> I was a pretty bad boy, but she called my bluff,
> With her great big collection of steamboat stuff.
>
> She had log-books and bells and things like that,
> And she knew the old captains and where they were at.
> She rode the *Alabama* and the *Gordon C. Greene.*
> As the *Cape Girardeau* she was later renamed.[144]

The "great big collection of steamboat stuff" was one of the largest private collections of riverboat artifacts in the world. Ferris was named founding curator of the Missouri Historical Society in 1957, and in 1986 she donated her collection of artifacts and twenty-five vertical file cabinets of information about steamboats, crews, flooding, folklore, and river art to the Saint Louis Mercantile Library. Following her 1993 death, at age ninety-five, a collection of Ruth Ferris's writings, *St. Louis and the Mighty Mississippi in the Steamboat Age,* appeared. Five of the essays, with topics ranging from steamboat art and décor to the Civil War experiences of Captain Beck Jolly, were reprinted articles Ferris had published in the *Bulletin of the Missouri Historical Society* (now *Gateway Heritage*). Three were previously unpublished essays.[145]

In "Experiences of a Collector of Mississippi River Lore," Ferris reflects on her long career studying the Mississippi Valley. "I did not choose to become a collector; I was just caught in the current and carried away," she writes. Although Ferris "navigate[s] the whole length of the subject," she encourages

144. John Hartford, "Miss Ferris," *Headin' Down into the Mystery Below,* 1978, Flying Fish Records, LP.

145. Ferris, *St. Louis and the Mighty Mississippi in the Steamboat Age,* 13–173. The Mercantile Library is now part of the University of Missouri, Saint Louis, library.

others to "explore some small chute" so as to "make a contribution that will help others to understand and enjoy the culture of the Mississippi." Interestingly, Ferris ends this chapter on steamboating with an allusion to modern diesel towboating: "While lore of the old packets persists, the collector finds a new lore equally fascinating has developed along with the rise of towboat and barge traffic." As we shall see, John Hartford carried on his mentor's work, creating a significant body of artistic work portraying the life and culture of Mississippi Valley diesel towboatmen.[146]

146. Ibid., 13, 21. See epilog, this work.

Chapter 4

LITERATURE, ARTS, AND "SIVILIZATION"

> The Widow Douglas, she took me for her son, and allowed she would sivilize me.
>
> Huck Finn

> High and fine literature is wine, and mine is only water; but everybody likes water.
>
> Mark Twain[1]

William Faulkner spent parts of two decades of his career working on an elaborate short story, "The Bear." Set in the late nineteenth century, deep in the woods of Faulkner's fictional Yoknapatawpha County, Mississippi, "The Bear" is about young Ike McCaslin's coming of age on a hunt with Sam Fathers, Boon Hogganbeck, and Sam's dog, Lion. They seek Old Ben, a fierce, huge black bear with a mutilated paw who has eluded Sam and Boon for decades. Faulkner's story first appeared as "Lion" in the December 1935 *Harper's Magazine,* but he continued to hone the tale and published it as "The Bear" in the May 1942 *Saturday Evening Post.* It simultaneously appeared under the same title as a pivotal chapter of Faulkner's collection of intertwined Yoknapatawpha County short stories, *Go Down, Moses* (1942). Widely anthologized, "The Bear" appeared in a final, revised

1. Mark Twain, *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1884; repr. New York, 1977), 7; Mark Twain [Samuel Langhorne Clemens] to William Dean Howells, Feb. 15, 1887, in *The Complete Letters of Mark Twain* (Teddington, Middlesex [Eng.], 2007), 312.

version in Faulkner's story collection *Big Woods* (1955). One of William Faulkner's greatest works, "The Bear" is a dramatic, violent story mirroring themes of wilderness, civilization, tradition, modernity, family, masculinity, southernness, and race.[2]

In his 2001 book *The Bear,* Michael Pastoreau analyzes the role of bears as cultural icons and argues that, by the 1300s, bears had ceased to be powerful and awe-inspiring images in western folk tradition. He contends that as humans became more knowledgeable and resourceful, they devalued the animal world.[3] This Euro-centric analysis, with its fourteenth-century cut-off date, is highly debatable. In the Mississippi Valley of North America, bears have always been and remain powerful symbols. William Faulkner's story "The Bear" is a polished rendition of American hunting tales that descend from Mississippian Mound Builder and Indian lore, the stories of Daniel Boone, Mike Fink, and Davy Crockett, the Leatherstocking novels of James Fenimore Cooper, and the short stories of Thomas Bangs Thorpe and southwestern humorists.

Black bear hunting was important to trans-Appalachian westerners for both economic and folkloric reasons. Mississippian Mound Builders and their Indian descendants traded in bearskins, feasted on bear steaks, and made ceremonial masks and other objects celebrating the bears' size and strength. Euro-American settlers also hunted bears, ate bear meat, and traded bearskins. They told bear hunting stories that sometimes found their way into print. The nineteenth-century author William Post Hawes called the black bear "Sir Bruin" and wrote that bears walk at a "thoughtful and philosophical" pace. One of the most noted Mississippi Valley bear hunts was a failure that was ironically judged to be a success. Touring the Mississippi River Delta in 1902, President Theodore Roosevelt refused to shoot a black bear that locals had corralled in the mistaken

2. William Faulkner, *Go Down, Moses* (1942; repr. New York, 1973), 191–331; William Faulkner, "The Bear," *The William Faulkner Reader* (New York, 1953), 253–352.
3. Jonathan Sumpton, "The History of a Fallen King," review of *The Bear,* by Michael Pastoureau, *Wall Street Journal,* Nov. 19–20, 2011, C-9.

assumption the great sportsman would kill the defenseless animal. This famous incident gave birth to the moniker "Teddy Bear."[4]

Daniel Boone's long hunts in the Appalachian wilderness fostered a number of stories. North Carolina was teeming with black bears, and bear bacon became a staple in the hunter's diet. The bearskins were also highly marketable. North Carolina's Bear Creek supposedly got its name from the season Daniel Boone killed ninety-eight bears there. An important part of the Boone bear hunting legend was a tree carving found along a tributary of the Watauga River: "D. Boon CillED A. Bar on tree in the YEAR 1760." While historians question the authenticity of this and a score of other Boone graffiti, the recurrence of the carvings and interest in them underscore the mythic power of Boone's bear hunting in the American imagination.[5]

The most famous bear hunt stories have an epic quality. Both the bear and the hunter are the stories' heroes, because they are wild characters who represent the old, vanishing Mississippi Valley wilderness. In the wake of the Boone legend, early national Americans heard tales and read printed stories about the hunting exploits of David Crockett. The Tennessean Crockett recalled in his *Narrative of the Life of David Crockett* that it was around 1810 in "Lincoln County, on the Mulberry fork of the Elk river … that I began to distinguish myself as a hunter." Crockett bagged many deer "and smaller game" (wildcats, raccoons, etc.) but complained the black bears "were not so plenty as I could have wished." He continued to move west, eventually settling in the Obion River country of west Tennessee. Following service in the War of 1812 and a stint in the Tennessee state legislature, he returned to his hunting full time.[6]

4. Daniel Justin Herman, *Hunting and the North American Imagination* (Washington, D.C., 2001), 52–53, 205–207; "The Story of the Teddy Bear," National Park Service, https://www.nps.gov/thrb/learn/historyculture/storyofteddybear.htm, accessed April 24, 2011.
5. John Mack Faragher, *Daniel Boone: The Life and Legend of an American Pioneer* (New York, 1992), 31, 57–58.
6. David Crockett, *A Narrative of the Life of David Crockett, by Himself* (1834; repr. Lincoln, Nebr., 1987), 52–53, 69.

In the Obion River Valley in the winter of 1823–24, Crockett found "bear very plenty and, indeed, all sorts of game and wild varments, except buffalo." There Crockett killed a huge bear in a hunt to which he devoted a significant portion of his *Narrative.* This story contains elements that later appear in classic bear hunting stories from Thorpe to Faulkner. The hunt begins with a premonition. Crockett had a dream that provided "a sign I was to have a battle with a bear; for in a bear country, I never know'd such a dream to fail." Soon afterward, he hiked up a branch of the Obion and his dogs caught bear scent and led him to where "I saw in and about the biggest bear that was ever seen in America." A long chase ensued during which Crockett shot the bear twice to no effect. Although holding "my tomahawk in one hand and my big butcher knife in the other … I know'd if he got ahold of me, he would hug me altogether too close for comfort," and so Crockett "shot him the third time, which killed him good." Soon thereafter, with the help of two men and four horses, he butchered and hauled the "six hundred pound" bear out of the woods and "continued through the winter to supply my family abundantly with bear-meat and venison from the woods."[7]

The best published nineteenth-century bear hunting story is the southwestern humorist Thomas Bangs Thorpe's "Big Bear of Arkansaw." In this 1841 tale, we first hear the voice of an educated steamboat passenger who tells of an old hunter he meets onboard, a regular rip-snorting Alligator Horse from the wilds of "Arkansaw." Then the hunter takes over the story, and Thorpe's prose transitions from formal English to folk vernacular. Interestingly, the unnamed hunter calls himself the "Big Bar of Arkansaw" because he so identifies with his life's quarry. Like Crockett (and Sam Fathers), he has pursued "the greatest bar … that ever lived, *none excepted.*" "I determined to catch that bar, go to Texas, or die," he states. However, as the story progresses, the hunter expresses mixed emotions about the bear. While he likens the chase to "hunting the devil himself," he also recalls, "I loved him like a brother." The hunter's final

7. Crockett, *Narrative,* 161–65.

success is an accident—while in a thicket moving his bowels ("from *habit*"!) the bear stumbles in and the hunter shoots him dead. Yet this comic context and final success only sadden the hunter, and the story ends with a strong ironic tone. The old hunter concludes the bear "was in fact a creation bear, and if it had lived in Samson's time, and had met him in a fair fight, it would have licked him in the twinkling of a dice box." The bear hunt has made the old hunter introspective. "My private opinion is, that that bar was an *unhuntable bar, and died when his time come.*"[8]

While William Faulkner likely would have read all of the above tales, he needed no instruction in the art of telling bear hunting stories. Faulkner grew up in a northwestern Mississippi hunting culture, and "The Bear" reflects an intimate connection to wilderness through young Ike McCaslin's "unforgettable sense of the big woods … tremendous, primeval, looming, musing downward on the puny evanescent clutter of human sojourn." Like his mentor Sam Fathers, the son of a Chickasaw Indian and African American slave, Ike becomes a hunter. After his first kill, Sam "marked his face with the hot blood which he had spilled and he ceased to be a child and became a hunter and a man." Old Ben the black bear, of course, symbolizes the Mississippi wilderness, "that doomed land where the old bear had earned a name." Like the deep, dark woods, " the old bear, solitary, indomitable, and alone," is also doomed to extinction.[9]

For two weeks each November, Ike, Sam, Sam's dog Lion, and Boon Hogganbeck (also of Indian ancestry) "depart for the Big Bottom, the big woods" of the Tallahatchie River Valley, to Major DeSpain's hunting camp. There they "keep yearly rendezvous with the bear … [the] pageant-rite of the old bear's furious

8. Thomas Bangs Thorpe, "The Big Bear of Arkansaw," in *American Literature: The Makers and the Making,* Book B: *1826–1861,* ed. Cleanth Brooks, R. W. B. Lewis, and Robert Penn Warren (New York, 1974), 1112, 1114–15. Thanks to John Griffith. See also Thomas Ruys Smith, *River of Dreams: Imagining the Mississippi before Mark Twain* (Baton Rouge, La., 2007), 74–76, and Paul Lawrence Lumsden, "The Bear in Selected American, Canadian, and Native Literature: A Pedagogical Symbol Linking Humanity and Nature," Ph.D. dissertation (University of Alberta, 1997).

9. Faulkner, *Go Down, Moses,* 175, 177–78, 193.

immortality." The bear carefully watches the men, and on occasion they cross one another's paths. In telling of the hunts, Faulkner follows Crockett's and Thorpe's narrative trajectory, but in a much more elaborate and extended form. Over the seasons, the men and the dog Lion track the bear, but the bear is too smart for them. They ruminate over this, and the bear hunt becomes more and more important in each of their lives. The final hunt is described in great detail and, like Crockett's bear, Old Ben goes down in a terrible, glorious fight. During the chase, Sam Fathers collapses from a seizure; the bear tries to retreat, but Lion clamps his throat in a death grip. Then Boon jumps the bear with knife in hand:

> It fell just once. For an instant they almost resembled a piece of statuary: the clinging dog, the bear, the man stride its back, working and probing the buried blade. Then they went down … then the bear surged erect, raising with it the man and the dog too, and turned, and still carrying the man and the dog it took two or three steps toward the woods on its hind feet as a man would have walked and crashed down. It didn't collapse, crumple. It fell all of a piece, as a tree falls, so that all three of them, man, dog, and bear, seemed to bounce once.

Old Ben is dead, and Lion dies soon from horrible wounds sustained in the fight; Sam Fathers also succumbs. Only Ike and Boon survive. At story's end, Ike McCaslin, now grown into manhood, returns to the final scene of the hunt. "He went back one more time before the lumber company moved in and began to cut the timber." Surveying his beloved wilderness—the deep Mississippi forest where Old Ben lived his long life—Ike feels great sadness. He knows the woods will "retreat year by year before the onslaught of axe and saw and log-lines and then dynamite and tractor plows."[10]

AMUSEMENTS IN ATHENS

William Faulkner's writings constitute a pinnacle of artistic

10. Ibid., 194, 241, 315, 353–54.

achievement in a region that fostered a lively culture for common folk. The early Mississippi Valley's entertainments show wide breadth and shallow depth, as reflected in accounts of antebellum boatmen. After landing in port and unloading their cargoes, these men often sought out amusements other than the taverns, casinos, and houses of ill repute that brought them infamy. Some patronized museums, theaters, circuses, and musical performances. One crew of upper Ohio raftsmen "went to see the great European Magician Herr Alexander [Alexander Hermann] perform at the National Theatre" in Cincinnati. One flatboatman saw Edwin Forest, "the greatest tragedian in the world," perform Shakespeare's *Richard III.* Ashore in Memphis, the flatboatman Miles Stacy "went to see Joseph Jefferson play 'Rip van Winkle.'" A few boatmen were actors of sorts, more than willing to take liberties with the classics. A troupe of actors performed Shakespeare onboard a traveling flatboat fitted out as a theater. However, when *"Macbeth* was performed, Duncan [was] got rid of by throwing him into the river instead of stabbing him"![11]

This flatboat show was a rough version of the emergent showboat theaters traversing the western rivers before and after the Civil War. It took some time for entertainers to acquire the capital and expertise to construct dedicated theater-boats. The itinerant showmen Joseph Jefferson and Solomon Smith sailed the western rivers, but they staged their performances in rented city halls and theater venues. In 1815, Samuel Drake, Sr., left New York for the Ohio Valley with a theater troupe later named the American Theatrical Commonwealth Company. When Noah Ludlow took charge, he bought a keelboat dubbed *Noah's Ark* to carry the actors and their accoutrements. Although Ludlow's company also initially performed only in shore venues, in

11. Henry Baxter, "Rafting on the Allegheny and Ohio, 1844," *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 51 (1927), 52, 222; Captain Miles Stacy, "Flatboating on Old Man River: The Flatboat Reminiscences of Captain Miles Stacy," typed transcription, Campus Martius Museum, Ohio Historical Society, Marietta, Ohio, 13; Alexander Mackay, *The Western World; or, Travels in the United States, 1846–47,* 3 vols. (London, 1849), 3:41; Michael Allen, *Western Rivermen, 1763–1861: Ohio and Mississippi Boatmen and the Myth of the Alligator Horse* (Baton Rouge, La., 1990), 192–93.

December 1817 they probably used their keelboat to stage *Catherine and Petruccio* for an audience at Natchez Under-the-Hill, making *Noah's Ark* the first Mississippi River showboat.[12]

Fourteen years later, the English dramatist William Chapman, Sr., and his family sailed the *Floating Theatre,* an elaborately fitted barge (a large flatboat), down the Ohio and Mississippi in the first of their troupe's annual seasonal tours. Because it was extremely difficult to move barges upstream, at each tour's end Chapman would sell the craft for scrap timber, returning with his troupe to the Ohio headwaters to build another *Floating Theatre* to sail south. The actor Tyrone Power recalled Chapman "takes his departure early in the fall, with scenery, dresses, and decorations… At each village or large plantation he hoists banner and blows trumpet and few who love a play suffer his ark to pass the door, since they know it is to return no more until the next year." While the newly developed steamboats did not allow as much room for a theater and seating as barges, the steamboats' upstream mobility was highly desirable, and by the 1840s and '50s a half-dozen steam-powered showboats worked the western rivers. The *Huron* and the *Banjo* seated only two hundred, but the *Floating Circus Palace* seated an amazing three thousand paying customers. Showboats continued to work the western rivers well into the twentieth century, and the historian Philip Graham has cataloged nearly fifty dedicated showboat craft. These include the famed *Cotton Blossom,* featured in the popular 1920s Broadway musical *Showboat*.[13]

Friedrich Gerstaeker, a young German touring America in the late 1830s, attended an Ohio River wharf showboat production that ran amok. The players had commenced their performance of Shakespeare's *Hamlet* when the dock lines broke, and the theater, actors, and audience were all swept downstream. Yet the show

12. Phillip Graham, *Showboats* (Austin, Texas, 1951), 4–8; Noah Ludlow, *Dramatic Life as I Found It* (St. Louis, Mo., 1880), 237–38. Thanks to Marcia Mauer.

13. Graham, *Showboats,* 9–18 (Power qtn., 17–18), 197–202; Keith Norrington, "A Majestic Legacy," *Waterways Journal* 125 (Feb. 13, 2012), 17–18; Norrington, "Golden Anniversary of the Goldenrod Fire," *Waterways Journal* 126 (June 11, 2012), 17–18. See also Billy Bryan, *Children of Ol' Man River: The Life and Times of a Showboat Trouper* (New York, 1936). For the Broadway and movie musical *Showboat,* see chapter 6, this work.

went on. "The Ghost was at the point of vanishing through the middle door," Gerstaeker recalled, "when the boat got such a terrible bump from something that the specter lost his equilibrium" and "toppled backwards onto the body of the unfortunate Polonius who, scared to death, forgot he had been murdered and jumped up swearing." Soon, Ophelia chimed in, "Well, if we ain't going down to New Orleans!" This kind of provincial improvisation (like the murder of Duncan in *Macbeth* above) may well have fueled Mark Twain's depiction of the Duke and the King's outrageous performances of Shakespeare in *Huckleberry Finn.* Although classical and modern plays were a showboat mainstay, troupes immediately branched out into circus acts, variety and magic shows, "museum" exhibits, educational (Chautauqua-type) lectures, and, of course minstrel shows.[14]

Minstrelsy was born in the 1820s Mississippi Valley and enjoyed great popularity throughout the United States during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The white actor Thomas Dartmouth Rice became the first known professional performer of African American Crow dance steps (imitating the rapid walking motion of a crow) during a Louisville, Kentucky, performance of the play *The Rifle.* Rice's Jim Crow act fostered a host of imitators who smeared burnt cork or soot on their faces in "blackface minstrel" style to sing and "jump Jim Crow." The minstrel stage character that developed was a fun-loving, braggadocio, profane, and self-deprecating trickster rooted in both African-American and southwestern Alligator Horse folktales (Rice's character bragged he was part "snapping turtle" and could "eat an Alligator"). As minstrel shows developed, Tom Rice's lone Jim Crow act evolved into large, blackface minstrel troupes performing full evening shows of singing, dancing, acting, and banjo playing. Originally patronized by working-class Americans, middle-class audiences soon flocked to see the minstrel shows of J. H. Haverly, Ned Davis, Edwin P. Christy, and many others.[15]

14. Friedrich Gerstaeker, "The Floating Theatre," trans. Ralph S. Walker, *Early American Life* 8 (1977), 43.

Minstrels stereotyped Black Americans in demeaning, racist ways, creating the caricature of the shuffling, happy-go-lucky but slow-witted "darky." Yet minstrelsy also showcased racial irony and contradictions. As we have seen, the Black trickster character is a fellow who pretends to be stupid while he simultaneously outfoxes and makes fools of white folks. Reconstruction-era minstrelsy opened the door to all-Black troupes of "blackface" entertainers (e.g., Haverly's Colored Minstrels) whose performances often poked subtle fun at their white audiences. The famed blues musician W. C. Handy began his career as a minstrel, and he recalled minstrelsy as an economic and professional opportunity for aspiring Black entertainers. Handy said minstrel shows were "one of the greatest outlets for talented musicians and artists. All the best [Black] talent of that generation … composers, the singers, the musicians, the speakers, the stage performers—the minstrel show got them all." Minstrelsy thus endured into the twentieth century in a variety of biracial entertainment forms that stretch from Al Jolson's *Jazz Singer,* Hollywood movies, and musicals, to the Harlem Globetrotters, to *Amos and Andy* and *Sanford and Son,* to film and pop music portrayals of braggart, fast-talking ghetto youth and hustlers "playing the dozens."[16]

Minstrels were joined by nonblackface entertainers on showboats and shore, singing tunes about the Mississippi and Ohio Rivers. Some sang folksongs with anonymous authorship, but minstrelsy combined with the rise of songwriters like Stephen Foster, who composed a number of popular river tunes.[17] The most famous, "De Boatmen's Dance" (or "The Boatmen's Dance"), written by the American minstrel Dan

15. Leroy Ashby, *With Amusement for All: A History of American Popular Culture since 1830* (Lexington, Ky., 2006), 11–21, 52–57, 85–90 (Rice qtns., 16). See also Robert Toll, *Blacking Up: The Minstrel Show in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York, 1974), and Ann Ostendorf, *Sounds American: National Identity and Music Cultures of the Lower Mississippi Valley, 1800–1860* (Athens, Ga., 2011), 168–71.
16. Ashby, *With Amusement for All,* 88–90 (Handy qtn., 88). See Black tricksters in chapters 2 and 7, this work. "Playing the dozens" is a verbal game in which adversaries "trash talk" (insult) one another until one of them backs down. See Roger D. Abrahams, "Playing the Dozens," Journal of American Folklore 75 (July–September 1962), 209–20.
17. Michael Allen, "'Row! Boatmen Row!' Songs of the Early Ohio and Mississippi Rivermen,"

Emmett, became so popular that it migrated offstage and was sung by working rivermen who circulated it in varying renditions. Emmett wrote "De Boatmen's Dance" in 1843, a year that also saw the rise of the Mike Fink tales, southwestern humor newspaper stories, and George Caleb Bingham's *Jolly Flatboatmen* paintings. The song's lyrics reflect the popular image of the Alligator Horse riverman as an adventurous and boisterous frontier folk hero. The boatman "blows his [fog] horn" to announce his arrival in port, and townsmen had best be wary, "For dey whole hoss, and dey a bully crew / Wid a hoosier mate an' a captin too." In a recurrent verse, the singer declares:

> High row, de boatmen row, floatin' down de river de Ohio.
> De boatmen dance, de boatmen sing; de boatmen up to ebry ting.
> An when de boatmen gets on shore, he spends his cash and works for more.
> Den dance de boatmen dance, O dance de boatmen dance.
> O dance all night till broad daylight, an go home wid de gals in de morning.[18]

The popular Mississippi Valley lumber raftsmen's song "Jolly Raftsman's Life for Me" (1844) is also a composed minstrel tune. "My raft is by de shore, she's light and free / To be a jolly raftsman's the life for me," the minstrels proclaimed. "And as I pole along our song shall be / O darlin' Dinah, I love but thee." In "Down the River," minstrels borrow the refrain of "De Boatmen's Dance," adding, "Oh, the master is proud of the old Broadhorn [flatboat] / For it brings him plenty of tin / Oh, the crew they are darkies, the cargo is corn / And the money comes tumbling in." And in "The Moon Is Up—Row, Boatmen, Row!" E. P. Christy's Minstrels sang, "The moon is up, the hour is late / And down the stream, the black girls wait / Our tardy coming, to prolong / The dance, the revel, and the song / Row, boatmen, row!" Like "Down

Gateway Heritage: Quarterly Journal of the Missouri Historical Society 14 (Winter 1993–94), 46–59.

18. "De Boatmen's Dance, an Original Banjo Melody by Old Dan D. Emmett" (Boston, Mass., 1843), sheet music, box 1, Bessie Stanchfield Papers, Minnesota Historical Society, Saint Paul; Bessie Stanchfield, "De Boatmen's Dance," unpublished essay, ibid., 41–43, 90n6. For rivermen folk heroes, see chapter 2, this work.

the River," "The Moon Is Up—Row, Boatmen, Row!" borrows lines from "De Boatmen's Dance" and is an excellent example of the image of fun-loving, mischievous, romantic rivermen in nineteenth-century American popular culture.[19]

The Ohio River lumber raftsman Henry Baxter, a patron of the arts as it were, sought cultural uplift in each of the port cities he visited. He struck gold one night when he saw Edwin Forrest performing Shakespeare's *Richard III*. "As he commenced 'Now is the Winter of our discontent,'" Baxter reminisced, "it seemed as if his whole soul worked up in revolt at the proceedings which had taken place." Not all western theatrical performances matched Forrest's performance. In *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn,* Mark Twain's outrageous rendering of the Duke and the King performing "the swordfight scene in *Richard III,* and the balcony scene in *Romeo and Juliet"* (with chunks of *Hamlet* and "The Royal Nonesuch" thrown in), is likely drawn from Twain's youthful attendance of coarse Mississippi Valley theatricals. Even Big Mike Fink became grist for the dramatists' mill. The first known use of the Mike Fink character was in Alphonso Wetmore's early Saint Louis play *The Pedlar* (1821), staged before the death of the historic King of the Keelboatmen. One of the most well-known frontier plays, *The Lion of the West* (1830), featured a rip-snorting hero who puts a European dandy in his place via a duel fought not with formal dueling pistols, but with Kentucky rifles instead.[20]

Although *The Lion of the West* was not written or first performed in the West, its roots lay deeply planted in southwestern soil. In 1830, the actor and producer James H. Hackett advertised a contest for an original American comedy.

19. "Jolly Raftsman's Life for Me," in *Handbook of American Sheet Music,* ed. H. Dichter (Philadelphia, Pa., 1951), no. 1614. Mark Twain refers to "Jolly Raftsman" in *Life on the Mississippi* (1883; repr. New York, 2001), 17. "The Moon Is Up—Row, Boatmen, Row!" in E. P. Christy, *Christy's Plantation Melodies, Number 4* (Philadelphia, Pa., 1851), 37. See also Allen, "'Row, Boatmen Row!'" passim.

20. Baxter, "Rafting on the Allegheny and Ohio," 52; Twain, *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn,* 105–106, 110–12; Richard M. Dorson, *America in Legend: Folklore from the Colonial Period to the Present* (New York, 1973), 91; Walter Blair to Michael Allen, June 20, 1986, author's possession; Walter J. Meserve, *Heralds of Promise: The Drama of the American People during the Age of Jackson, 1829–1849* (Westport, Conn., 1986), 109–11, 146.

James Kirke Paulding, a Virginia attorney and newspaperman (and Jeffersonian Republican) with an artistic bent, won the three hundred dollar prize with *The Lion of the West.* The play debuted at New York City's Park Theater on April 25, 1831, and one year later the *Cincinnati Daily Gazette* advertised Mr. Hackett's upcoming performance as "The Kentuckian"; the play was subsequently revised and retitled *The Kentuckian; or, A Trip to New York*.[21]

Paulding's play ranks alongside the Mike Fink and Davy Crockett stories and James Fenimore Cooper's *Last of the Mohicans* (1827) in establishing the American western genre. The Kentuckian Nimrod Wildfire (a very thinly disguised Davy Crockett) visits New York City, and a riotous comedy of low and high culture—wild versus tame and frontier versus civilization—ensues in a style that has continued in American popular culture through *Tarzan's New York Adventure* (1942), *Coogan's Bluff* (1969), *Crocodile Dundee* (1986), *City Slickers* (1991), and today's reality TV survivor shows. Wildfire's nemesis is Mrs. Amelia Wollope, an even more thinly disguised Mrs. Frances Trollope, the snooty English travel writer Americans loved to hate. Wollope's dastardly and debauched brother Lord Grandby is, of course, trying to swindle money from the honest Freeman family (while Caesar, a free Black waiter, does an early version of dancing Jim Crow). Wildfire intervenes to save the day. Interwoven are references to revivalist camp meetings, Wildfire's (Crockett's) enmity towards Andrew Jackson and the Democrats, and Wildfire's telling of one of the first of a long line of Mississippi River catfish stories:

> Well, what do you think if a varmint as big as an alligator didn't lay hold [of the fish hook] and jerk me plump head foremost into the river—I wish I may be stuck into a split log for a wedge! There was I twisted about like a chip in a whirlpool! Well, … all of a sudden I grabbed him by the gills and we had a fight—he pulled and flounced—I held fast and swore at him! Aha, says I, you may be a

21. James Kirke Paulding, *The Lion of the West:* Retitled *The Kentuckian; or, A Trip to New York,* ed. James N. Tidwell (1831; repr. Stanford, Calif., 1954), 7–14. For Crockett and *The Lion of the West,* see chapters 1 and 2, this work.

> screamer but perhaps I am a horse! The catfish roll'd his eyes clean round till he squinted—when snap went to line, crack went his gills, and off he bounced like a wild Ingen.[22]

Cincinnati, Ohio, was a logical place for James Hackett to market his theatrical talents. Acknowledged as an economic leader in the trans-Appalachian West, Cincinnati also aspired to be a center of artistic life. Boosters pointed proudly to their theater, museum, art exhibits, concerts, circulating libraries, reading rooms, schools and academies, and college. "First in art, first in knowledge, first in civilization," James Hall bragged of Jacksonian-era Cincinnati. "It requires no prophet's eye to see … the future seat of literature and learning; the Athens of Western America." The *Cincinnati Chronicle* agreed: "The refinements of society, both of a social and a moral kind," an editor gushed, "exist in a degree that would justify comparison with the larger and older cities in the East."[23]

The professional dramatists Mr. and Mrs. Alexander Drake established Cincinnati's first theater in 1825, featuring a fifty-foot-by-hundred-foot stage, orchestra pit, "punch room," and seats for eight hundred, including two tiers of box seats. The Drakes produced *Hamlet, Othello,* and *The Hunchback* to reportedly sparse crowds. Edwin Forrest appeared there in 1829, and by 1835 competitors had launched a second theater. Lobby posters reminded patrons "to avoid the uncourteous habit of throwing nutshells, apples, etc. into the pit."[24]

Although Eckstein's Academy of Fine Arts folded in six months for lack of students, the Cincinnati portrait painter James Beard built a studio and gallery and was commissioned to paint John Quincy Adams and Henry Clay. A June 28, 1828,

22. Paulding, *The Lion of the West,* passim (qtn., 25). Trollope is discussed in chapter 3, this work.
23. Robert E. Chaddock, "Ohio before 1850," *Studies in History, Economics, and Law* 31 (New York, 1908), 148; Richard Wade, *The Urban Frontier: Pioneer Life in Early Pittsburgh, Cincinnati, Lexington, Louisville, and St. Louis* (Chicago, Ill., 1959), 243; *Chronicle* quoted in Frances Trollope, *Domestic Manners of the Americans* (1832; repr. Gloucester, Mass., 1974), xx; Smith, *River of Dreams,* 60.
24. Trollope, *Domestic Manners of the Americans,* 74, 129, 132–33; Wade, *Urban Frontier,* 143–46, 256–57.

advertisement in the *Cincinnati National Republican* informed readers that "an exhibition of splendid paintings is now ready for their reception, at the corner of Main and upper Market streets." For twenty-five cents, art lovers could view a 336-square-foot rendering of "Napoleon Crossing the Alps" and a 252-square-foot canvas of "General Bolovar Hunting Bisons." Quantity also outweighed quality in John Banvard's "Panorama," a traveling show that featured a twelve-foot-high and half-mile-long canvas slowly unrolled to reveal a representation of the entire Mississippi River. Mr. Dorfeuille's Western Museum boasted a miniature version of "Hell," including fierce wax animals in a murky swamp and Satan himself! Mrs. Trollope aimed to stage "Musical Fantasies" for a dollar admission, but after one month she abandoned "this species of amusement, so popular of late years, both in Paris and London." Cincinnatians preferred attending circuses, one of which advertised wire-walkers, tumbling, sleight of hand, riding, singing, dancing, "Mme. Roberta who balances a musket with fixed bayonet point down on her tooth," and a "Grand Menagerie" of "Elephants, Lions, a Giraffe, and a Rhinoceros."[25]

Meanwhile, a few hundred miles south, in Lexington, Kentucky, boosters took sharp exception to any upstart Ohio town claiming to be the Athens of the West. Alluding to the divide between commerce and the arts among the ancient Greece city-states, one newspaperman noted, "Cincinnati may be the Tyre, but Lexington is unquestionably the Athens of the West." Another agreed Lexington was "the headquarters of *Science and Letters* in the Western country." While the debate between these infant communities over Athenian qualities is humorous, there is evidence that supports Lexington's claims to superiority, relatively speaking. In 1815, Lexington's lending library boasted

25. R. Carlyle Buley, *The Old Northwest: Pioneer Period, 1815–1840* (Bloomington, Ind., 1950), 344–47, 576–78; John Francis McDermott, "Banvard's Mississippi Panorama Pamphlets," *Papers of the Bibliographical Society of America* 43 (March 1949), 48–62; Trollope, *Domestic Manners,* ix, lvi–xlix, 62–66; Harriet Martineau, *Retrospect of Western Travel,* 3 vols. (1838; repr. New York, 1969), 2:235; Charles Fenno Hoffman, "A Winter in the West, 1833–34," in *A Mirror for Americans,* ed. Warren S. Tryon (Chicago, Ill., 1957), 553; Chaddock, "Ohio before 1850," 30.

two thousand volumes covering all fields and supplemented by school libraries, private collections, a number of bookshops, and at least one coffeehouse whose members' dues maintained more than three dozen current newspaper subscriptions. The Lexington Musical Society presented amateur vocal and instrumental music, and touring theater troupes made Lexington a regular stop on their circuits. The New Theatre, constructed on the second floor of a brewery prior to the War of 1812, hosted the traveling companies as well as amateur players from the local Roscian Society and Military Society fraternal clubs.[26]

Transylvania University was the jewel in Lexington's crown. Created as a seminary at the end of the American Revolution, Transylvania (which meant only "across the mountains" to pre-Frankenstein America) was chartered a university in 1799 and remained trans-Appalachia's only institution of higher learning until Cincinnati's medical college opened a decade later. It was gift books from Transylvania University that seeded Lexington's public library, and Transylvania thespians who staged the city's first dramatic productions, *The Busy Body* and *Love a la Mode,* on a stage built in the city courthouse. Transylvania lured promising youth from other Ohio Valley cities and, according to one critic, turned them into profligates and radicals: "If you wish [your son] to become a Robespierre or a Murat, send him to learn the rudiments of Jacobinism and disorganization," one cynic wrote. Perhaps this is what happened to Transylvania's most famous alumnus, Jefferson Davis.[27]

Davis was just a child when another Transylvania graduate, William O. Butler, published his poem "The Boatman's Horn" in the July 1821 number of Lexington's *Western Review* and in a collection of his verse, *The Boatman's Horn and Other Poems* (1821). "The Boatman's Horn" is the best-known poem written in the antebellum Mississippi Valley. In its romanticism, aspiration, and evocation of regional pride, the poem reflects some of the first tender shoots of an aesthetic sensibility growing in native soil.

26. Wade, *Urban Frontier,* 330–31 (qtn.), 139–40, 143, 147.
27. Ibid., 136, 138, 141, 143, 330–34 (qtn., 333).

The Boatman's Horn

O, boatman! Wind that horn again,
For never did the listening air,
Upon its lambent bosom bear
So wild, so soft, so sweet a strain!

What, though thy notes are sad and few,
By every simple boatman blown,
Yet is each pulse to nature true,
And melody in every tone.

How oft in boyhood's joyous days,
Unmindful of the lapsing hours,
I've loitered on my homeward way
By wild Ohio's bank of flowers;
While some lone boatman from the deck
Poured his soft numbers to the tide,
As if to charm from storm and wreck
The boat where all his fortunes ride!

Delighted Nature drank the sound,
Enchanted echo bore it round
In whispers soft and softer still,
From hill to plain and plain to hill,
Till e'en the thoughtless, frolic boy,
Elate with hope and wild with joy,
Who gamboled by the river side,
And sported with the fretting tide,
Feels something new pervade his breast,
Change his light step, repress his jest,
Bends o'er the flood his eager ear
To catch the sounds far off, yet dear—
Drinks the sweet draft, but knows not why
The tear of rapture fills his eye.[28]

THE BEST DAMNED ARTISTS IN MISSOURI

President Harry S. Truman once called Thomas Hart Benton

28. William O. Butler, "The Boatman's Horn," reprinted in *Western Pennsylvania Historical Magazine* 1 (1918), 26.

"the best damned painter in America," an apt way to describe an artist like Benton, whose work was so strongly connected to folk idiom. Perhaps this compliment had some small connection to the fact that Benton, like Truman, was a proud native of western Missouri, but Truman was no doubt sincere. In addition to Benton, the high artistic achievement of the Show Me State is evidenced in the careers of Mark Twain, George Caleb Bingham, Kate Chopin, Sara Teasdale, Eugene Field, John Henton Carter, and others. Missouri has produced its fair share of the best damned folk-based artists in America.[29]

American painting came of age very slowly during the colonial and revolutionary eras. The paucity, in an emerging democracy, of enlightened patrons and a market for art proved to be a huge barrier to artists, and indeed continues to this day. Early American painters had to scratch out a living painting portraits of wealthy families or hustling commissions to do large "patriot paintings" of revolutionary heroes. Although this patriot genre focused on America, it nevertheless drew from European and classical forms, substituting a Washington for a Julius Caesar and sometimes dressing the founding father in roman toga and sandals.[30]

However, as the nineteenth century began, American painters discovered there was a market for paintings of America's natural beauties—landscapes—and the Hudson River School of art was born. Soon, Hudson River style painters turned their eyes westward to the Mississippi River Valley. Incorporating methods later characterized as local color and genre painting, they began to repopulate their canvases with frontier figures, not members of the upper or ruling classes. Their paintings of western folk in natural settings could be both engaging and marketable. Some of the most popular subjects for the canvases were Mississippi Valley landscapes with western boatmen, and mid-nineteenth-

29. Truman quoted in Ken Burns, dir., *Thomas Hart Benton* (Alexandria, Va., 1988), DVD; William Drake, *Sara Teasdale: Woman and Poet* (Knoxville, Tenn., 1979). Chopin is discussed below.

30. Joseph J. Ellis, *After the Revolution: Profiles in Early American Culture* (New York, 1979), 44–53, 122–24.

century artists produced hundreds of sketches, drawings, illustrations, and paintings of flatboatmen, raftsmen, keelboatmen, and steamboatmen. Karl Bodmer was joined by his contemporaries Charles Wimar, George Catlin, Thomas Doney, Henry Lewis, Currier and Ives lithograph artists (of the 1860s), and more. They often painted western boatmen in a characteristic pose, lounging aboard a southbound flat or raft, lazily enjoying the spring weather and the fiddling and dancing of their fellow rivermen. Many of their paintings borrow from a contemporary, George Caleb Bingham of Missouri.[31]

George Caleb Bingham (1811–79) rose from obscurity to become one of the greatest American genre painters. Born in 1811 in Augusta County, in Virginia's Piedmont region, Bingham's life changed dramatically when his family moved to Franklin, Missouri, in 1819. With the sudden death of his father in 1823, Bingham and his family made a living at farming. Teenaged George was drawn to the Missouri countryside, and especially the Arrow Rock bluff, where he could view the Missouri River Valley and passing flatboats, rafts, and steamers. Apprenticed at age sixteen to a Columbia, Missouri, cabinetmaker, he followed that occupation into sign painting and, eventually, portraiture. By age twenty-two, and despite his lack of professional training, George Caleb Bingham had taught himself enough to make a living as a portrait painter. Acquiring a solid reputation in the lower Missouri Valley, Bingham opened a Saint Louis studio in 1835, but soon realized that without further education and exposure he had hit an artistic wall. He studied at the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts in 1837, traversing the Northeast at the same time the Hudson River School was gaining popularity. In 1840, Bingham moved to Washington, D.C., to

31. "The American Cousin," in Joshua C. Taylor, *America as Art* (Washington, D.C., 1976), 37–95; David C. Hunt and Marsha V. Gallagher, *Karl Bodmer's America* (Lincoln, Nebr., 1984); E. Maurice Bloch, *George Caleb Bingham: The Evolution of an Artist* (Berkeley, Calif., 1967), 5–7; John Francis McDermott, "Jolly Flatboatmen: Bingham and his Imitators," *Antiques* 73 (March 1958), 267–69; Nenette Luarca-Shoaf, Claire M. Barry, Nancy Heugh, Elizabeth Mankin Kornhauser, and Dorothy Mahon, *Navigating the West: George Caleb Bingham and the River* (Fort Worth, Texas, 2014).

resume portrait painting; in 1844 he returned to Missouri ready to put his growing talents to profitable use.[32]

From 1845 to 1855, George Caleb Bingham painted Mississippi River Valley canvases that are still viewed and admired. Bingham's childhood remembrances of Franklin and Arrow Rock on the lower Missouri River provided a wealth of material. He painted landscapes peopled by fur trappers, Indians, soldiers, common folk, and politicians (a staunch Whig, Bingham was elected Missouri state legislator, treasurer, and adjutant general). In a classic European technique he learned in his studies, Bingham pyramided his characters. However, he did so on vibrantly colorful—*luministic* is an applicable modern term—canvases modeled after the Hudson River school. These paintings emphasize direct or reflected light on water, the sky, and human characters. Bingham thus combined western settings and folkloric characters with sophisticated European and northeastern painting styles. And while earning a reputation as "the Missouri artist," he simultaneously cultivated a market and following among more urbane easterners hungry for rural color and scenes from the Wild West.[33]

George Caleb Bingham's most famous and beloved paintings are his rivers series and depictions of "Jolly Flatboatmen." Bingham painted over a dozen significant paintings of boatmen and riverboating. The first of these, *Western Boatmen Ashore* (1838), has been lost, but *Fur Trappers Descending the Missouri* (1845) and *Boatmen on the Missouri* (1846) attest to Bingham's artistry. *The Jolly Flatboatmen* appeared in 1846 and proved so successful that Bingham eventually painted three other versions in 1848, 1857, and 1878. In between, he explored numerous facets of the boatmen's lives in *Raftsmen Playing Cards* (1847), *The Wood Boat* (1850), and *Mississippi Boatman* (1850). These paintings, combined with the later works *In a Quandary* (1851), *The Trapper's Return* (1851), *Woodboatmen on a River* (1854), and

32. John Francis McDermott, *George Caleb Bingham, River Portraitist* (Norman, Okla., 1959), 3–48; Bloch, *George Caleb Bingham,* 8–48. See also Helen Fern Rusk, *George Caleb Bingham, the Missouri Artist* (Jefferson City, Mo., 1917).

33. McDermott, *George Caleb Bingham,* 48–83; Bloch, *George Caleb Bingham,* 84–110.

Raftsmen by Night (1854), demonstrate Bingham's strong technique while simultaneously offering clues about the boatmen's actual lifestyle.[34]

Historians can use works of art as evidence to learn about the past. Paintings, drawings, and sketches sometimes contain historically accurate details about the subjects they portray.[35] George Caleb Bingham's three *Jolly Flatboatmen* paintings (the fourth, finished in 1878, has never resurfaced) are all similar in content and depict members of a flatboat crew during a relaxed moment on a clear, beautiful day, making music with a fiddle and a frying pan, one of them dancing a merry jig atop their flatboat's deck. *The Jolly Flatboatmen in Port* adds a supporting cast of landsmen to admire the jaunty Alligator Horse, and a bustling urban wharf scene (perhaps Saint Louis) to complement the mighty Mississippi. The effect is striking, the colors are bold, and the flatboatmen emerge from these paintings as working-class folk heroes.[36]

Are they realistic? One common criticism of Bingham's depiction of flatboatmen is that his river men are too clean and never at work. This critique is telling, but not quite fair. In fact, real boatmen spent a great deal of their time (certainly over half) in idleness and at their leisure. While the clothes of the *Jolly Flatboatmen* are indeed too clean, the cotton breeches, suspenders, square-toed boots, and felt and straw hats do typify workingmen's apparel of the Jacksonian era. And the paintings abound in other details: the cargo hold and its contents, boat construction, navigation tools and oars, the steersman's technique, boat lines (hawsers), a whiskey jug and tobacco, wood shavings left by a whittler, a shirt hung out to dry, a raccoon pelt

34. The paintings are discussed at length in McDermott, *George Caleb Bingham, River Portraitist,* and Bloch, *George Caleb Bingham: Evolution of an Artist*. Some of the best reproductions of the river series appear in Albert Christ-Janer, *George Caleb Bingham: Frontier Painter of Missouri* (New York, 1975). See also, Luarca-Shoaf et al., *Navigating the West.*

35. Jules Prown, "Style as Evidence," *Winterthür Portfolio* 15 (Autumn 1980), 197–210; "The 'Noble Savage' and the Artists' Canvas, Interpreting Pictorial Evidence," in James West Davidson and Mark Hamilton Lytle, *After the Fact: The Art of Historical Detection* (New York, 1982), 113–38.

36. For *The Jolly Flatboatmen*, see McDermott, *George Caleb Bingham,* 55–57, 124–25; Bloch, *George Caleb Bingham,* 86–88, 92; Christ-Janer, *George Caleb Bingham,* plates 20, 43, 69.

nailed to the bulkhead, cooking utensils, buckets, baskets, and flour sacks.[37] Similarly, viewers of two other Bingham canvases, *Boatmen on the Missouri* and *Mississippi Boatman,* can also learn a good deal about material culture—boat structure, equipment, clothing, etc. This world the boatmen knew was also the world George Caleb Bingham knew.

One of the most striking aspects of these paintings is the depiction of the rivermen themselves. In *Boatmen on the Missouri,* two hands are teenaged Missourians, while the steersman is an older riverman. All three sport long, dark, unkempt hair. The boys' faces appear dreamy, but in them one detects a sense of longing and a slight boredom. The *Boatmen on the Missouri* are not swashbuckling rivermen, nor is the *Mississippi Boatman.* Indeed, the latter appears as a grizzled old boatman in his forties, bearded, shabbily dressed, smoking tobacco in a long-stemmed pipe. He has just completed the arduous task of unloading barrels from the hold of a nearby flatboat, and he is obviously tired. In the background, storm clouds approach. This boatman's pensive expression, his wrinkled, weathered face, and his greying hair show that river life has taken its toll.[38]

Less austere is *Raftsmen Playing Cards,* one of Bingham's finest depictions of the western boatmen. The painting is detailed, with a scaled representation of lumber raft construction, a sand-filled cooking box, tools, and clothing, and, once again, a striking portrayal of the boat hands themselves. These raftsmen are not mythic red-shirted, ring-tailed roarers shooting whiskey cups off one another's heads. While the steersman pulls hard at the oar, four raftsmen are involved in a game of cards. Two men play, two watch, and a fifth raftsman, barefooted, sits by their side lost in his own thoughts. The effect is realistic because it is unspectacular. These are common workingmen at their leisure, a little bored but content with their situation. They play at cards until a meal, some work, town, or a passing steamboat breaks the monotony. Meanwhile, the current carries them southward, past

37. Christ-Janer, *George Caleb Bingham,* plates 20, 43, 69.
38. Christ-Janer, *George Caleb Bingham,* plates 29, 53; McDermott, *George Caleb Bingham,* 54–55, 72–73; Bloch, *George Caleb Bingham,* 84, 107.

the bluffs and forests astride the lower Missouri or Mississippi River.[39]

George Caleb Bingham's eye for detail thus made the boatmen paintings a valuable source of historical information. This kind of realism is bolstered by Bingham's tendency to focus on the commonplace and more mundane aspects of the western boatmen's lifestyle. With the notable exception of the dancing rivermen featured in *The Jolly Flatboatmen* series, Bingham's boatmen always appear as rather ordinary fellows. As a writer in the *Missouri Republican* explained in 1847,

> [Bingham] has not sought out those incidents or occasions which might be supposed to give the best opportunity for display, and a flashy, highly colored picture; but he has taken the simplest, most frequent and common occurrences on our rivers—such as every boatman will encounter in a season—such as would seem, even to the casual and careless observer, of very ordinary moment, but which are precisely those in which the full and undisguised character of the boatmen is best displayed.[40]

On the other hand, while George Caleb Bingham's scenes are believable, they are never unpleasant. Bingham's boatmen never have to push their flat off a sandbar or get soaking wet in a Mississippi Valley thunderstorm. These very real aspects of their lifestyle are not portrayed while other more palatable aspects are. Though Bingham grew up on the frontier, his was a vanishing frontier, and he could never avoid waxing a bit romantic about the world of his youth on the Missouri River. Thus, as John Francis McDermott has observed, "a nostalgic glow of boyhood remembered is diffused over all [Bingham's] marvelously accurate delineations of western life. He has not merely recorded

39. Christ-Janer, *George Caleb Bingham,* 97–98, plate 41; McDermott, *George Caleb Bingham,* 61–62; George Caleb Bingham to Major J. S. Rollins, June 27, 1852, folder 18, James Sidney Rollins Collection, Joint Collection, State Historical Society of Missouri, Columbia. For *In a Quandary* (1851), another version of *Raftsmen Playing Cards,* see McDermott, *George Caleb Bingham,* 80–81.

40. Quoted in Sarah Burns and John Davis, eds., *American Art to 1900: A Documentary History* (Berkeley, Calif., 2009), 457.

magnificently his place and his people, but he has evoked life itself. He is not merely a reporter: he is a poet."[41]

In the volatile, industrializing America of the 1840s and 1850s, Jacksonian artists abandoned portraiture and classical motifs and began to experiment in genre painting and local vernacular. Like their literary contemporaries—James Fenimore Cooper, the southwestern humorists, and purveyors of the Davy Crockett and Mike Fink stories—genre painters' works were folk-based. They relied on local color and settings as they painted rural landscapes and common folk—including western rivermen—at work and play. George Caleb Bingham's paintings depicted a vanishing way of life that appeared simple and good, and by picking and choosing his realities he struck a responsive chord in the American public. Bingham's paintings thus say as much about antebellum Americans that embraced his depiction of *The Jolly Flatboatmen* as they say about the boatmen themselves.

John Henton Carter (1832–1910) of Saint Louis was a popular Mississippi Valley writer who, under the nom de plume Commodore Rollingpin, published nine volumes of prose and poetry and hundreds of newspaper and magazine articles. Born in 1832 in Marietta, Ohio, Carter took his first flatboat trip to New Orleans in 1846 and retained close ties to the river and rivermen for the remainder of his life. Unlike the three-year pilot stint of his contemporary Mark Twain (who, he claimed, "wasn't much of a pilot anyhow"), Carter shipped on western river steamboats off and on for nearly three decades. He mainly worked the Saint Louis to New Orleans trade in various capacities, including waiter, purser, steward, and galley cook and baker. Despite an informal education, Carter became a skilled prose stylist who aspired to write about life on the western rivers.[42]

41. McDermott, *George Caleb Bingham,* 4, 62, 170, 193.
42. Ruth Ferris, "John Henton Carter," typescript, box 19, Ruth Ferris Collection, Saint Louis Mercantile Library; John T. Flanagan, "John Henton Carter, Alias Commodore Rollingpin," *Missouri Historical Review* 63, no. 1 (1968), 38–54; James V. Swift, "From Pantry to Pen: The Saga of Commodore Rollingpin," *Missouri Historical Society Bulletin* 24, no. 2 (1968), 113–21. Remark about Mark Twain in John Henton Carter, *The Man at the Wheel* (St. Louis, Mo., 1898), 12.

John Henton Carter turned to journalism in the 1870s, writing for Saint Louis and New York City newspapers, including Joseph Pulitzer's *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* and *New York World*. From 1873 to 1880, he held the important post of river editor at the *St. Louis Times.* In addition to his columns, he wrote and published novels, essay collections, poems, and a popular almanac that included agricultural advice and astronomical observations. Mark Twain cites John Henton Carter's statistics on steamboat racing in *Life on the Mississippi,* and, like Twain, Carter became a popular, witty, and edifying public lecturer. Carter and his brother self-published some of his books in Saint Louis, and New York commercial houses also published several titles. All of John Henton Carter's books pertain to river life in particular or Mississippi Valley folk life in general, and they appear under both his given name and Commodore Rollingpin. The latter is a play on his cooking career in steamboat galleys and was accompanied by an illustrated coat of arms featuring crossed rolling pins.[43]

Carter wrote much of his work in phonetically spelled vernacular American English. *Out Here in Old Missoury,* Carter's 1900 poetry collection, begins, "Out here in ol' Missoury, we have ev'rything at's good / We're bankin, too, on Providence 'ats alus understood / We see Him in the fertile fields, the fruits and flowers, too— / An' thank Him fur each blessin' ez our fathers ust to do—". *Duck Creek Ballads* (1894) and *Log Cabin Poems* (1897) are also collections of verse, on topics ranging from river life and frontier history to religion and farming to a tribute to the deceased Saint Louis writer and lecturer Eugene Field. *The Log of Commodore Rollingpin: His Adventures Afloat and Ashore* (1874) is divided between creative nonfiction essays and poems focusing on steamboating. *Thomas Rutherton* (1890) is an autobiographical novel of Carter's first flatboat trip to New Orleans, while *The Man at the Wheel* (1899) is a collection of creative semi-fictional river essays. *Ozark Post Office* (1899), *The Impression Club* (1899), and *Mississippi Argonauts: A Tale of the South* (1903) are all novels set in the Mississippi Valley.[44]

43. Flanagan, "John Henton Carter," 38–40, 54; Ferris, "John Henton Carter," passim.
44. John Henton Carter, *The Log of Commodore Rollingpin: His Adventures Afloat and Ashore* (New

Like the paintings of his fellow Missourian George Caleb Bingham, John Henton Carter's writings teach us something of the social history of western rivermen. *Thomas Rutherton* is a fictionalized autobiography combining dramatic plot elements that mirror the lives of historic antebellum Ohio and Mississippi flatboatmen. *Thomas Rutherton* recounts the adventures of an orphan boy trying to get a start in life. There are mortgage foreclosures, dark secrets in the heroine's past, tall tales of a steamboat race, an alligator hunt, and the dramatic death of a mulatto flatboat gambler. In a chapter titled "The Wonderful Cave," Carter contributes to the Cave-in Rock legend, telling a story of the capture of a band of desperate river pirates by a wily boatman named Archie Fame.[45]

Carter's firsthand experiences enabled him to accurately write about the boatmen. He vividly describes "the impenetrable black forest" of the lower Mississippi Valley, and the great force of the Mississippi River current, "always present and rushing ceaselessly." River craft are described in minute detail, as are navigation techniques, methods of landing, and the boatmen's watch system. Because the hero of *Thomas Rutherton* ships aboard the flatboat as a cook, the reader learns a good deal about the galley, the cooking outfit, utensils, and menu, from beans and coffee to "Fried crackers." This firsthand view of the boatmen's lifestyle is sometimes surprising. For instance, Carter's flatboatmen spend as much time reading as they do hunting and spinning yarns, and two of the boatmen in *Thomas Rutherton* are teetotalers, products of the Jacksonian temperance movement.[46]

Thomas Rutherton, like Bingham's paintings, accurately portrays the kinds of men who worked aboard flatboats. The owner of Thomas's boat is described as a young entrepreneur

York, 1874); *Thomas Rutherton* (New York, 1890); *Duck Creek Ballads* (St. Louis, Mo., 1894); *Log Cabin Poems* (St. Louis, Mo., 1897); *The Man at the Wheel* (St. Louis, Mo., 1899); *Ozark Post Office* (St. Louis, Mo., 1899; *The Impression Club* (St. Louis, Mo., 1899); *Out Here in Old Missoury* (St. Louis, Mo., 1900); *Mississippi Argonauts: A Tale of the South* (New York, 1903). The poem is quoted from Carter, *Out Here in Old Missoury,* front matter.

45. Carter, *Thomas Rutherton,* 57, 70, 122–29, 131–32, 140, 142. Carter was not an orphan. For the river pirates of Cave-in Rock, see chapters 2 and 3, this work.

46. Carter, *Thomas Rutherton,* 134, 90–92, 96, 103, 105–109, 117, 152, 225.

who "had acquired a small fortune" in flatboating. Captain Rider, "a person of vigorous mind and body," is in his forties, but his assistant pilot is a young man of twenty-five. The deck crew consists of young, "experienced boatmen … who had been with Capt. Rider on former trips," except for Thomas and a hand named Jonas, both teenaged farm boys. While the owner, captain, and pilot are married men, nearly all of the hands are bachelors. All except Thomas have homes and families to whom they plan to return.[47]

John Henton Carter's use of dialect provides *Thomas Rutherton*'s readers some notion of how these rivermen might have talked and sounded. Captain Rider's commands of "Stand by your lines," "Throw her stern in," and "Turn out, boys" are always answered with a nautical "Aye, Sir!" The men speak in the rural voice one would expect of Ohio Valley farmers and rivermen. Although it is difficult to conjure up the sounds of a mid-nineteenth-century accent, Carter's characters' voices seem true to their antebellum Ohio River origins. Listen to Captain Rider's voice as he tells his pilot,

> I guess we'll run tonight Jack. We're purty well on top of the rise, an' it's easier to keep 'er in the river, so we'd better let her go through, 'thout stoppin' from this on, as long's we've the 'light to light moon' anyhow, an' stand dog watch. Me an' Wilke'll take her till twelve an' you an' Roseberry come on them.[48]

While *Thomas Rutherton* is a lively and dramatic story, Carter does not overdraw the boatmen as romantic, swashbuckling characters, and their adventures seem realistic. The crew experiences disaster when their boat wrecks and sinks, and yet they escape without harm and soon catch a ride to New Orleans aboard a southbound steamer. There, Captain Rider immediately files an insurance claim on his lost cargo and is reimbursed in full. When Thomas contracts typhoid fever, he is cared for in a modern hospital facility and soon recovers. It is true Carter depicts Thomas's trip as a grand adventure down "the most

47. Ibid., 90, 92, 27, 107. See Allen, *Western Rivermen,* 172–83.
48. Carter, *Thomas Rutherton,* 102, 108, 119–20.

wonderful valley in the world," and that his "old playmates" view Thomas's new job as a flatboatman with awe and envy. Yet the picture of flatboating that emerges from *Thomas Rutherton* is one of the workaday world. Captain Rider and his crew are not Alligator Horses—they are skilled workingmen employed in a demanding yet common occupation. In making his art, John Henton Carter, aka Commodore Rollingpin, teaches us something about the nation's past.[49]

In the early decades of the twentieth century, the Missouri painter Thomas Hart Benton (1889–1975) took the democratic arts to a new plane, and he did so amid much critical kicking and yelling along the way. Benton painted large storytelling murals that combined elements of high and low art to an end that was unmistakably American. The fact that his (many) critics sprang from both elitist and socially conservative camps attests to Benton's uniqueness and, arguably, his greatness. Whatever one's opinion of Tom Benton, it is indisputable that his work is a striking reflection of his Mississippi Valley roots.[50]

Thomas Hart Benton was born in Neosho, Missouri, in 1889, to a legendary Missouri family. Benton was named after his great-uncle, the venerable Jacksonian Democratic Senator; his father, "Colonel" Maecenas Benton, served four terms (1897–1905) as southwest Missouri's populist Democrat Congressman. Standing five feet, five inches tall, with dark hair and sparkling brown eyes, young Tom Benton grew into a talented and precocious young man. When not at home sketching on his tablets, cocky Tom found his way into the Neosho newspaper police blotter for fistfights and assorted misdemeanors almost always connected to his whisky drinking. Supported by his artistic mother, Elizabeth, he devoted much of his youth to disobeying and angering his father; Colonel Benton grew so tired of Tom's egotistical bantering of "I this, and I that" that he dubbed him "the Big I" and eventually sent him off to military school. Tom promptly flunked out and, in conspiracy

49. Ibid., 101, 156-59, 165–66.
50. Henry Adams, *Thomas Hart Benton: An American Original* (New York, 1989) is the best overview.

with his mother, succeeded in talking his father into enrolling him at the Art Institute of Chicago for the period 1907–1908.[51]

For a decade and a half, Benton followed the path of many aspiring American artists, rejecting his provincial midwestern origins and embracing a cosmopolitan European aestheticism. In 1910, he moved from Chicago to France, set up a studio on Paris's Left Bank, acquired a mistress, and studied and executed abstract modernist and cubist painting styles. When his mother refused to further subsidize these endeavors, Benton landed in New York City, where he continued his avant-garde pose. As the Jazz Age dawned, Tom Benton was barely supporting himself as a stage set painter, cartoonist, and art teacher for the Chelsea Neighborhood Association. He continued to experiment in abstract art forms and dabbled in Marxism and radical politics. Then, he met Rita Piacenza, the daughter of Italian immigrants. Against the wishes of both sets of parents, Tom and Rita married in 1922 and set up housekeeping in New York City, where Rita Benton began her lifelong work of managing Benton's business affairs and providing a stable home and family life for the temperamental artist. Rita proved indispensable to Benton's future success.[52]

From 1917 to 1929, Benton made the slow transition from abstract modernist to American storyteller. The change began with his World War I enlistment in the U.S. Navy, where he served as a draftsman and pored over the author and typographer J. A. Spencer's four-volume, illustrated *History of the United States* (1851). Honorably discharged in 1919, Benton returned to New York with both an emerging patriotism and a draftsman's eye for realistic artistic form. His paintings steadily veered away from the abstraction of his Parisian and early New York work. Called to his father's Springfield, Missouri, deathbed in 1924, the prodigal son at last buried the hatchet with the Old Colonel. Benton returned to New York with a growing

51. "Early Days" file, Thomas Hart Benton Collection, Newton County Historical Park, Neosho, Missouri; Thomas Hart Benton, *An Artist in America* (1938; rev ed., New York, 1951), 1–2.
52. Burns, *Thomas Hart Benton;* Benton, *An Artist in America,* 23–49 (Rita described, 48–49); Adams, *Thomas Hart Benton,* 81, 88.

appreciation for his family's and neighbors' values and Mississippi Valley folkways. Although he continued into the 1930s to associate with radicals and Communists (Benton never joined the Communist Party but recalled voting Communist as a "protest"), he slowly became disillusioned with both the artistic and political left. He was naturally drawn back to his family's Democratic populism, but shed of its segregationist (and isolationist) beliefs.[53]

During the 1930s, Thomas Hart Benton became the most famous, acclaimed, and despised painter in America. He had developed a technique of painting large murals by referencing small three-dimensional clay models he shaped to guide the pieces' spatial composition. In his murals, he wove together numerous painted images, telling stories about America's regional folk cultures. This kind of work was the antithesis of the modernism and Euro-centrism of the northeastern urban art scene that surrounded Benton. "I proclaimed heresies around New York," he recalled. "I wanted more than anything else to make pictures, the imagery of which would carry unmistakable American meanings for Americans." The immediate results were four stunning murals—*America Today* (1931), *The Arts of Life in America* (1932), *A Social History of Indiana* (1933), and *A Social History of the State of Missouri* (1936). These four were later joined by *Independence and the Opening of the West* (1962), *The Sources of Country Music* (1975), and myriad smaller murals and individual paintings to constitute the heart of Tom Benton's lifelong work.[54]

America Today adorned the walls of the New School for Social Research, and its bold colors focused on technology and the diverse working folk of modern America. Although classified as realistic, Benton was no George Caleb Bingham (or Norman Rockwell). In fact, he brought a touch of abstraction to his work, with the dreamlike arrangement of different stories on the same wall and images of the natural world and human characters

53. Burns, *Thomas Hart Benton;* Adams, *Thomas Hart Benton,* 58–88, 108–109, 225–35; Thomas Hart Benton, *An American in Art: A Professional and Technical Biography* (Lawrence, Kans., 1969), 164–92.

54. Adams, *Thomas Hart Benton,* 339–41.

whose features appear larger than life, perfectly muscled, forceful, tragic, and heroic. There are towering urban paintings of industrial welders, railroad men and their engines, surveyors, coal miners, and steel workers; he portrays women and men at their leisure in jazz clubs, diners, sporting events, and at home. There are also rural folk in *America Today*—Black sharecroppers and steamboat deckhands down south, and farmers, cowboys, loggers, and Indians out west. *The Arts of Life in America* concentrated more on social and cultural life than work, and featured fiddlers, card players, jazz musicians, radio performers, beauty contestants, and joyous whites and Blacks dancing hoedowns and breakdowns. Benton portrays each section of the nation in a style that was to be dubbed regionalism. Although criticized by leftists as overly patriotic and upbeat, these murals also reflect Depression-era poverty and labor strife. Meanwhile, conservatives criticized Benton's *Social History of Indiana,* a mammoth block-long mural painted for the state of Indiana's Chicago World's Fair exhibit, for its alleged celebration of labor radicalism, the inclusion of the Ku Klux Klan, and for focusing too much on America's struggles.[55]

Given a choice between living and working amid hostile leftist or conservative critics, Tom Benton evidently preferred the latter. In 1935, he denounced the New York City artistic community, its "European manners," "limp wristed" Harvard-trained museum curators, and communist pedants and *artistes.* "Mr. Benton Will Leave Us Flat," the *New York Times* trumpeted in a feature article explaining Benton was "Sick of New York" because the "place has gone insipid." Tom Benton's surprising announcement that he would relocate his home and studio to Kansas City, Missouri, marked his artistic, intellectual, and personal return to America's Mississippi Valley heartland.[56]

At forty-five years of age, Thomas Hart Benton returned to the

55. Lance Esplund, "A Time Capsule in Egg-Tempura," *Wall Street Journal,* Oct. 29, 2014, D5; Adams, *Thomas Hart Benton,* 156–75, 192–207; Benton, *American in Art,* 62–70; Burns, *Thomas Hart Benton.* There are good reproductions of the mural sections in both Burns and Adams; see also Matthew Baigell, *Thomas Hart Benton* (New York, 1973), 111–35.
56. Adams, *Thomas Hart Benton,* 240–43; Benton, *American in Art,* 70–71; Benton, *Artist in America,* 259–69.

state he had fled for Chicago and Paris two and a half decades prior. He, Rita, and their children, Thomas and Jessie, took up residence in a fine, unostentatious, two-story Victorian home built of native limestone in a leafy Kansas City neighborhood just a few blocks from the Missouri-Kansas state line. Nearby, downtown Kansas City was alive with jazz clubs, Negro League baseball, and barbeque joints, all presided over by the political boss Tom Pendergast. Benton soon converted the adjacent carriage house to a studio with an eight-foot-by-twelve-foot paned window. Appointed chair of the painting department of the Kansas City Arts Institute, Benton nevertheless commuted regularly to the Missouri state capitol in Jefferson City to paint his most elaborate mural, *A Social History of the State of Missouri.* Using now well-honed techniques, he produced gorgeous statehouse walls replete with a "multiplicity of subjects" telling the histories and stories of Huck Finn and Jim, a Jesse James bank robbery, the tragic Black lovers Frank and Johnny, Indian whisky traders, slavery and lynching, the politicking of Tom Pendergast, and even the Old Colonel, Congressman Maecenas Benton. Woven throughout are images of honest and hard-working common Missourians, male and female, Black, white, and Indian. Painting *A Social History of the State of Missouri,* Benton recalled, was "like living my boyhood over again."[57]

Tom Benton was also an excellent writer. His popular autobiography *An Artist in America* (dubbed by one reviewer "all Missouri, no compromise") and *An American in Art* (1969) are engaging, clear, forceful, and free of critical jargon. "I set out painting American histories in defiance of all the conventions of our art world," Benton recalled. For this he was maligned by the modernists for provincialism and naïveté, and by the leftists for being overly patriotic; conservatives in turn accused him of leftism and lewdness. Yet, as noted, Benton's realism in fact contains abstract components, and his nostalgia is replete with images of racism and life's tragedies. If he was a fellow traveler, this was news to the fellow who threw a chair at him at a 1930s

57. Burns, *Thomas Hart Benton;* Benton, *American in Art,* 71–74; Adams, *Thomas Hart Benton,* 254–75; Baigell, *Thomas Hart Benton,* 139–47.

John Reed Club meeting! If Tom Benton's sin was that his art expressed a love for America, with all its blemishes and greatness, then he was guilty. In this he was joined, and informed by, the fellow midwestern painters Grant Wood (Iowa) and John Steuart Curry (Kansas), cofounders of the so-called Prairie School of American regionalist art; in a broader context, this group also includes the members of the Arts and Crafts movement and the famed "prairie architect" Frank Lloyd Wright (Wisconsin). Its spirit and form endure today in the documentary art of Ken Burns, whose films lovingly portray the regionalists and their art.[58]

The 1930s marked the peak of Tom Benton's creativity, though he did not by any means fade away. Thereafter, Benton aimed to continue teaching at the Kansas City Arts Institute as an irascible instructor who forbade "bughouse art" and yet, ironically, also trained the famed abstract impressionist Jackson Pollock. In May of 1941, however, Benton's lifelong intolerance of homosexuals finally took its toll. Quoted in local newspapers saying, "The average museum is a graveyard, run by a pretty boy with a curving wrist," the institute's board of governors met, deliberated, and fired him.[59]

The subsequent bombing of Pearl Harbor hurled Benton into a flurry of gratis patriotic World War II work, but the postwar New York City abstract impressionist craze (and the rise of Benton's protégé Jackson Pollock) seemed to sound the death knell of regionalism. "The only way an artist can personally fail is to quit," Benton insisted, and he took work wherever he could find it, painting murals for a Kansas City department store and a country club. He traveled across the nation painting unpeopled

58. Benton, *American in Art,* 147–92; Mary Scholz Guedon, *Regionalist Art: Thomas Hart Benton, John Steuart Curry, and Grant Wood* (Metuchen, N.J., 1982), vii–xvii, 3–6; Burns, *Thomas Hart Benton;* Burns, dir., *Frank Lloyd Wright* (Alexandria, Va., 1998) DVD; T. Jackson Lears, *No Place of Grace: Anti-Modernism and the Transformation of American Culture, 1880–1920* (New York, 1981), 59–83. See also James M. Dennis, *Renegade Regionalists: The Modern Independence of Grant Wood, Thomas Hart Benton, and John Steuart Curry* (Madison, Wisc., 1998). For Ken Burns, see chapter 6, this work.

59. Burns, *Thomas Hart Benton;* Adams, *Thomas Hart Benton,* 302–38. Uncharacteristically, Benton never publicly criticized his former student Pollock.

landscapes, recognizable for the touch of abstraction he wove into realistic portrayals of the mountains, clouds, rivers, forests, and deserts of America's natural world. Rita, as always, worked to market these paintings and keep Benton's career afloat. Benton composed and transcribed musical scores for the harmonica (an instrument he played expertly), and he even recorded a harmonica album. Meanwhile, he and Rita raised their youngest child, Jessie, in their Kansas City neighborhood, with summers at Martha's Vineyard.[60]

"Old age is a wonderful thing," Tom Benton observed. "You outlive your enemies." In 1959, the former president Harry S. Truman contacted Benton. The two had a strong bond through their shared western Missouri heritage, Democratic populism, and civil rights advocacy, and Truman also thought modern art looked like "scrambled eggs." Then, too, Truman and Benton shared an affinity for whisky and the art of profanity. Their friendship resulted in *Independence and the Opening of the West,* the mural that greets visitors in the entry hall of the Harry S. Truman Presidential Library and Museum in Independence, Missouri. One might say its composition is predictable, because Benton had become formulaic in the way he designed and created his historic murals. Yet an entire generation of Americans had grown up with no firsthand knowledge of these striking murals, and another generation has followed; today, most tourists enter the Truman library doors and stand in awe.[61]

Meanwhile, and quite unexpectedly, reaction against 1960s political and cultural excesses seeded a renewed interest in artistic realism and regionalism, developments that prompted a bemused Benton to remark, "The human form is coming back into fashion. What are all these sons of bitches going to do? They never learned how to draw." Approached by a friend with news that the Kansas City Arts Institute sought a rapprochement to forgive and forget his firing, Benton relented in typical fashion, telling the friend to "bring the sons of bitches over here" to talk.

60. Burns, *Thomas Hart Benton.*
61. Adams, *Thomas Hart Benton,* 327; Burns, *Thomas Hart Benton;* Benton, *American in Art,* 74–75; Baigell, *Thomas Hart Benton,* 178–80.

When he was at last elected to the American Academy of Arts and Letters in the mid-1960s, Tom Benton traveled to New York City to accept the honor in person. But when the academy's president used the occasion to condemn American warfare in Vietnam, Benton angrily walked out of the ceremony, resigning his election to the academy after holding it for only a few minutes.[62]

In 1973, the country music star Tex Ritter contacted 83-year-old Thomas Hart Benton about creating a mural for the Country Music Association. The two sipped Jack Daniels bourbon together and agreed the painting should tell the story of country music's origins. This project, of course, was of great interest to the harmonica-playing Benton, who immediately began to research a storyline highlighting the British and African American, gospel-singing, fiddling, square-dancing, and cowboy folk whose images constitute *The Sources of Country Music* (1975). Benton completed the mural and, after dinner on January 19, 1975, he walked out to his studio to sign it. When he did not return, Rita went looking and found him lying on the studio floor, dead of a massive heart attack at age 85. He had fallen on, and broken, his pocket watch, recording his time of death at 7:05 p.m. *The Sources of Country Music* stands unsigned in the Country Music Hall of Fame. Benton's birthday was celebrated for years after his death by friends and admirers who staged an art show and dance at Kelly's Bar in Kansas City. Thomas Hart Benton's sister, Mildred Benton Small, provides the best epitaph for the beloved Missouri artist and his regionalist colleagues: "There's a great deal of force in the Middle West. It *is* the United States. The shores are the borders. Things go on in very lively fashion in San Francisco or New York City, but they aren't the United States."[63]

62. Burns, *Thomas Hart Benton.*

63. Adams, *Thomas Hart Benton,* 338–41. Small quoted in Burns, *Thomas Hart Benton.* Benton's painting *The Sources of Country Music* is dedicated to Tex Ritter, who died before its completion.

HOW TO MAKE A BOOK

In both the first and last chapters of *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn,* the narrator Huck refers to the process by which writers create literature, but he does so in a very casual, American fashion. Huck begins with a chapter I reference to *Adventures of Tom Sawyer,* a book that "was made by Mr. Mark Twain," and he ends by reusing the verb "to make" in the final paragraph of "Chapter the Last." Huck expresses great relief that *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* has finally come to an end, stating, "So there ain't nothing more to write about, and I am rotten glad of it, because if I'd a knowed what trouble it was to make a book I wouldn't a tackled it and ain't agoing to no more." As the down-to-earth voice of America's great democratic author, Huck Finn is not interested in analyzing art, or discussing how writers create artistic prose. Americans simply *make* things, and as Huck tells us, one of the many things Americans *make* is novels.[64]

Noah Webster saw Mark Twain coming, and so too did Alexis de Tocqueville. Webster understood that in the new American republic, the arts would of necessity become democratized and brought down to the level of the common man. He composed a dictionary of *American* English because he saw that, in the New World, the English language had come down to earth and that Americans wrote words like they sounded—*color,* not *colour, recognize,* not *recognise, theater,* not *theatre.* There was no longer an aristocracy to set the cultural bar; there were no kings and queens to patronize painters, musicians, and writers in their courts. Writing four years before Sam Clemens was born, Alexis de Tocqueville observed, "The inhabitants of the United States have then, at present, properly speaking, no literature. The only authors whom I acknowledge as American are the journalists. They indeed are not great writers, but they speak the language of their countrymen, and make themselves heard by them."[65]

Given Mark Twain's early career as a print shop typesetter

64. Twain, *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn,* 229.
65. Ellis, *After the Revolution,* 172–73, 208–210; Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America,* ed. Richard D. Heffner (1831; repr. New York, 1956), 169–78 (qtn., 174).

turned newspaper and magazine author, Tocqueville's observation is striking. So too are his forecasts about the future of American literature: Prose "will frequently be fantastic, incorrect, overburdened, and loose" and "bear the marks of an untutored and rude vigor of thought," Tocqueville predicted. In order to make money from a mass American market, "Authors will aim at rapidity of execution, more than at perfection of detail." Mark Twain certainly aimed at "rapidity of execution," and his desire to make art was always coupled with a need to keep the bill collectors at bay. There was, however, one book he could not seem to finish. For seven years—from 1876 through 1883—Mark Twain labored in "fits and starts" on *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn.* During the same period, his "rapidity of execution" enabled him to finish numerous magazine articles and several other books, including *Life on the Mississippi.* What happened? A brief examination of *Huckleberry Finn* and *Life on the Mississippi* provides answers to the question through the prism provided by Webster, Tocqueville, Bernard DeVoto, and Richard Bissell.[66]

Bernard DeVoto, the great Salt Lake City writer and critic, was the first to systematically tie Mark Twain's prose to the southwestern oral traditions and the printed folk humor that surrounded him as a young Missourian. DeVoto showed how in his most famous writings, Mark Twain used Mississippi Valley settings and vernacular American English (spelled phonetically to replicate folk speech) woven into an anecdotal, tale-telling style. This technique was perfect for magazine articles and short stories and was the key to Mark Twain's genius, but it had a drawback. As a storyteller, DeVoto explained, Twain experienced great difficulty writing novels and longer works of nonfiction: "He was incapable of sustained and disciplined imagination." A less delicate way of putting it is to say that whenever Mark Twain needed a paycheck, he started telling short stories, and the stories were often, but not always, brilliant.[67]

66. de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America,* 177; Richard Bissell, *My Life on the Mississippi, or Why I am Not Mark Twain* (Boston, 1973), 184–85.

67. Bernard DeVoto, *Mark Twain's America* (1932; repr. Boston, 1960), 240–68, 312 (qtn.).

Although the ties with *Tom Sawyer* (1876) are apparent, the history of *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* really begins with some magazine articles Mark Twain hoped to turn into a book. While Twain was laboring on *Huck Finn* in "fits and starts" during the 1870s and early 1880s, he was simultaneously enjoying accolades for "Old Times on the Mississippi," seven articles drawn from his three-year stint as a steamboat pilot and published in the *Atlantic Monthly* in 1875. As noted in this book's introduction, Twain was never one to miss an opportunity to sell his words twice or more, so in 1882 he took a steamboat voyage the entire length of the Mississippi River with the aim of padding the *Atlantic* articles with some contemporary observations and selling it all as *Life on the Mississippi*.[68]

Life on the Mississippi presented the problem of creating a sustained narrative, yet Mark Twain began, methodically, to "make a book." Because the "Old Times" articles covered only Twain's years on the Mississippi immediately prior to the Civil War (1857–61), he wrote brief chapters I and II covering the three hundred years prior. Next, he needed a chapter on lumber rafts and flatboats, so he cut and pasted an unpublished section from *Huckleberry Finn* wherein Huck secretly climbs aboard a lumber raft. Although the shortcut later forced Twain to excise this crucial, prepublished section from *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (causing several plot and artistic complications), it cleared the way for him to paste the "Old Times" articles, beginning with chapter 4 and filling in to chapter 20. He was thus one-third of the way toward making the weight demanded by the subscription book industry, in which publishers presold books to folks who expected lengthy and attractive editions. To these buyers, quantity was as important as quality.[69]

Next, two very short transitional chapters 21 and 22 ("A Section in My Biography" and "I Return to My Muttons") place

68. Mark Twain, "Old Times on the Mississippi," *Great Short Works of Mark Twain,* ed. Justin Kaplan (New York, 1967), 1–78. Kaplan itemizes Twain's use of new, old, recycled, and transcribed material in his introduction to *Life on the Mississippi,* ibid., xix–xx. See also introduction, this work.

69. Bissell, *My Life on the Mississippi*, 49–50, 91; Kaplan, introduction, *Life on the Mississippi,* xix–xx.

Mark Twain back on the river twenty years later to complete *Life on the Mississippi* with forty brief new chapters. Roughly organized around the geography and the experiences of his 1882 return voyage, these chapters are a hodge-podge of (mostly) river-related stories, travelogue, and river city chamber-of-commerce boosterism ranging from the engaging ("Vicksburg During the Trouble" [chapter 35]) to the ridiculous ("Speculations and Conclusions" [chapter 60]). Dick Bissell described the material in chapter 24 as "stuffing … a real pile of sawdust." Even at chapter 60's "Conclusions," the book was unfinished. Having not yet met the publisher's page requirements, Twain tacked on four appendices, one of which was a long, transcribed newspaper article by another author. He had at last made *Life on the Mississippi.* Although the result was not quite art, much of the book is actually pretty good.[70]

Mark Twain's 1882 return to the Mississippi River produced a great deal more than *Life on the Mississippi,* for it got him thinking again about finishing *Huck Finn.* Hal Holbrook and others have observed that Twain was profoundly moved by his return to the scenes of his childhood and young adulthood. He was probably also moved by the slowly fading dream of Black equality he witnessed along the Mississippi seventeen years after the end of the Civil War. Although Twain had originally conceived *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* as a sequel to *Tom Sawyer,* he had immediately turned away from the young reader's format toward a highly ambitious, artistic, folk-based portrayal of the evil of slavery in the antebellum South. No American author, not even Harriet Beecher Stowe, had succeeded in rendering slavery in artistic form. Twain's initial bursts of energy in 1876 and 1879 produced striking results. However, he had become stymied after having moved Jim and Huck downriver toward Cairo and freedom only to see their beloved raft chewed up in a monstrous steamboat collision. Following the 1882 Mississippi River trip, Twain realized how he could make the book. Although the resulting *Huckleberry Finn* was much more artistically significant

70. Mark Twain, *Life on the Mississippi* (1883; repr. New York, 2001), 131–356.

than *Life on the Mississippi,* Twain's method for completing it was not altogether different.[71]

The steamboat collision was a bottleneck because, in a real sense, Mark Twain had completed nearly all of his artistic goals. Through wondrous adventures gliding their raft down the Mississippi River, Huck and Jim had become close friends. Huck had come to realize that Jim was a human being, not a piece of property, and that he must somehow help him escape north from slavery. But Twain had accomplished all this in only about one third of a novel (chapters 1–16). How was Jim to be freed? And what would happen in the interim to enhance and solidify the plot? Twain needed to finish making the book, and he did so in bits and pieces, brick by brick, telling stories all the way.[72]

The first story takes place immediately after the steamboat wreck (chapter 17), as Huck finds himself unwittingly embroiled in the Shepherdson-Grangerford family feud. Next arrive the Duke and the King, two of Twain's greatest creations. These "aristocratic" scoundrels keep the adventure moving through a series of loosely related stories as they perform Shakespeare in country towns, con the local folk, sell Jim back into slavery, and nearly succeed in cheating the three orphaned Wilks sisters out of a sizable inheritance. Along the way, Huck witnesses Colonel Sherburn turn back a cowardly mob of Arkansas vigilantes, a powerful story by itself. Mark Twain stitches all of these stories together using the river trip southward and the pursuit of Jim's goal of freedom, but how was he to end it?[73]

Ultimately, Mark Twain takes the easy way out. In the last fifth of the novel (chapters 33–42), he brings back Tom Sawyer who, by an amazing coincidence, finds Huck and Jim at his Uncle Silas and Aunt Sally's Arkansas farm. Tom then concocts an outlandish scheme to free Jim in the style of his favorite European adventure romance, Alexander Dumas's *Count of Monte Cristo.* After much overdrawn nonsense, Twain at last

71. Hal Holbrook in Ken Burns, *Mark Twain* (Alexandria, Va., 2004), VHS, episode 2. A different perspective is Andrew Levy, *Huck Finn's America* (New York, 2015), passim.
72. Twain, *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn,* 1–78.
73. Ibid., 79–177; DeVoto, *Mark Twain's America,* 313–14.

allows Jim to escape. However, he is immediately recaptured while helping Tom, who has been shot and wounded during the escape. Then, Tom informs everyone that the deceased Miss Watson has in fact *already freed Jim* in her will. Thus, all the stories come to an end and Huck, after complaining about how hard it was to "make a book," announces he will "light out for the territory ahead of the rest" to escape Aunt Sally's attempts to "sivilize" him.[74]

Though legions of readers love *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn,* some rightly dislike the ending. They see that forcing Jim to engage in Tom's romantic farce contradicts the sensitive portrait of Huck's and Jim's friendship that Mark Twain has so carefully drawn in the beginning. There are other problems. Twain often, and caustically, satirized unbelievable aspects of the novels of Sir Walter Scott and James Fenimore Cooper, yet what about the huge holes in the plot of *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn?* Huck and Jim escape Missouri slavery by sailing south to Cairo, but, in fact, to enter a free state Jim need only sail (or swim) about a half mile across the Mississippi to Illinois! Nonetheless, the two proceed southward and, even after discovering they have passed Cairo, they inexplicably *keep on sailing* south, deeper into slave territory. Moreover—and Dick Bissel actually calculated this—if one factors the number of days Huck and Jim were afloat with the speed of an average downstream current, "by the end of the trip they must have been about fifty miles beyond the [Mississippi River mouth] Passes and out in the Gulf of Mexico." Mark Twain should have shown a bit more humility in his criticism of the "literary offenses" of Cooper and Scott.[75]

In *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn,* Mark Twain needs, and somehow manages to gain, his readers' collective suspension of disbelief. Twain's art requires an idyll. Twain needs Huck and Jim to float downstream for as long as possible amid the quiet

74. Twain, *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn,* 177–229 (qtn., 229).

75. Bissell, *My Life on the Mississippi,* 191–94 (qtn., 193); Leo Marx, "Mr. Elliot, Mr. Trilling, and *Huckleberry Finn," American Scholar* 22 (Autumn 1953), 423–39; Mark Twain, "Fenimore Cooper's Literary Offenses," *Great Short Works of Mark Twain,* 169–81. Typically, Twain published several reworked versions of his Cooper piece.

beauty of the Mississippi River wilderness. Readers require time to fully absorb and envision the promise of freedom offered by the Mississippi River. By sailing Huck and Jim to Cairo and southward, Twain gives his readers that time. "It was kind of solemn, drifting down the big still river," Huck recalls. He and Jim "catched fish, and talked, and we took a swim now and then," and Huck "slipped into cornfields and borrowed" vegetables and fruit for their rustic meals. "Take it all around, we lived pretty high":

> Two or three days and nights went by; I reckon I might say they swum by, they slid along so quiet and smooth and lovely. Here is the way we put in the time. It was a monstrous big river down there—sometimes a mile and a half wide; we run nights, and laid up and hid day-times… It's lovely to live on a raft. We had the sky, up there, all speckled with stars, and we used to lay on our backs and look up at them, and discuss about whether they was made, or only just happened—Jim he allowed they was made, but I allowed they happened; I judged it would have took too long to *make* so many. Jim said the moon could a *laid* them; well, that looked kind of reasonable, so I didn't say nothing against it, because I've seen a frog lay most as many, so of course it could be done. We used to watch the stars that fell, too, and see them streak down. Jim allowed they'd got spoiled and was hove out of the nest.[76]

In stark contrast to Huck's and Jim's idyllic river life, Mark Twain presents the reader with the drudgeries of life on shore and the evils of "sivilization." Pap, the Shepherdsons and Grangerfords, and the mob that menaces Colonel Sherburn are all on the shore. The steamboat—a product of the shore's industrial civilization—chews Huck and Jim's raft to pieces. When the Duke and the King leave the shore and come onboard, they defile Huck and Jim's new raft until they return to land (and their just deserts). The slave-catchers are also shore people who defile the river idyll until Huck outfoxes them. Tom Sawyer is ashore when he is shot. And when Jim is at last freed, Huck cannot bear to stay on the Arkansas shore to live with Aunt Sally.

76. Twain, *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, 55–56, 95–97.

Although he does not continue to sail the river southward, he departs for "the territory," another wilderness where he aims to continue his idyll.[77]

This weaving of an artful depiction of the Mississippi Valley wilderness and the fight against slavery into the wild versus tame (frontier versus civilization) tensions of the classic American western is one of Twain's great accomplishments. So too is *Huckleberry Finn's* voice—plainspoken, down-to-earth American English rendered into literary art. True, *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* has many failings, yet for many Americans, it is eternal. "Whatever else this frontier humorist did," DeVoto wrote, "whatever he failed to do, this much he did. He wrote books that have in them something eternally true to the core of his nation's life. They are at the center; all other books whatsoever are farther away."[78]

Mark Twain's modern critics—including those crusaders who seek to ban *Huckleberry Finn* from the public schools because of its racist language—ought to spend a few hours with another one of Mark Twain's books. Though seldom read, this book is pithy, impeccably drawn, authentic, and somehow manages to present an even harsher indictment of racism and slavery than *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*.[79]

Pudd'nhead Wilson (1894) is ostensibly a detective novel set in the antebellum Mississippi Valley, but its stark portrayal of slavery and race lift it from the emergent mystery genre. In *Pudd'nhead Wilson,* Twain reprises and Americanizes a European folktale—"The Prince and the Pauper"—to tell a story of two southern babies purposely switched at birth by Roxy, a mulatto slave. The rub is that one of the changelings is Roxy's master Percy Driscoll's white son and the other is her own son who, although only 1/32 Black, is "by a fiction of law and custom"

77. This is of course based on the work of the mid-twentieth-century American Studies myth/symbol school. See Leo Marx, *The Machine in the Garden: Technology and the Pastoral Ideal in America* (New York, 1964).

78. DeVoto, *Mark Twain's America,* 321; DeVoto, "Mark Twain's Books Reflect Real America," *Milwaukee Journal,* May 15, 1933.

79. Leonard Pitts, "Censoring 'Huckleberry Finn' Is an Act of Literary Graffiti," *Seattle Times,* Jan. 9, 2011.

considered a Black person. Thus Roxy raises Percy's white son Chambers as her own while ensuring her mulatto son Tom is raised (under her watchful eye) amid the wealth and advantages of the Missouri slaveholder's household.[80]

As Tom and Chambers grow to maturity, the plot turns sharply. Percy dies, Percy's brother, Judge York Driscoll, adopts Tom, and Roxy and Chambers accompany him to live at the judge's house. Despite all of his advantages, Tom grows into a dissolute gambler and spendthrift. He murders the judge to inherit his money and frames an innocent man (a young Italian aristocrat) as the apparent killer. However, as the case goes to trial, the local attorney David "Pudd'nhead" Wilson steps in to solve the mystery. In a dramatic courtroom finale, Pudd'nhead uses newly invented fingerprinting techniques to identify Tom as the true murderer while simultaneously exposing Roxy's switch of the white and Black babies.[81]

At the very outset of *Pudd'nhead Wilson,* the reader might incorrectly surmise Mark Twain has changed his *Huck Finn* viewpoint that the shores of the Mississippi are the home of a dark and dangerous civilization. In an evocative two-page introduction setting the scene, Twain paints a deceptively idyllic picture of the shore:

> The scene of this chronicle is the town of Dawson's Landing, on the Missouri side of the Mississippi, half a day's journey, per steamboat, below St. Louis.
>
> In 1830 it was a snug little collection of modest one and two-story frame dwellings whose whitewashed exteriors were almost concealed from sight by climbing tangles of rose-vines, honeysuckles, and morning-glories. Each of these pretty homes had a garden in front fenced with white palings and opulently stocked with hollyhocks, marigolds, touch-me-nots, prince's feathers, and

80. Mark Twain, *Pudd'nhead Wilson* (1894; repr. New York, 1959), 9 (qtn.). Typically, Twain first published *Pudd'nhead Wilson* as serialized articles, in 1893–94 issues of *Century Magazine,* and then recycled them in novel form. This was more than a decade after his novel *The Prince and the Pauper* (1881) served up the European folktale in what was, for Twain, unusually formal prose.

81. Ibid., passim.

> other old-fashioned flowers; while on the window-sills of the houses stood wooden boxes containing moss-rose plants and terra-cotta pots in which grew a breed of geranium whose spread of intensely red blossoms accented the prevailing pink tint of the rose-clad house-front like an explosion of flame. When there was room on the ledge outside of the pots and boxes for a cat, the cat was there—in sunny weather—stretched at full length, asleep and blissful, with her furry belly to the sun and a paw curved over her nose. Then that house was complete, and its contentment and peace were made manifest to the world by this symbol, whose testimony is infallible. A home without a cat—and a well-fed, well-petted and properly revered cat—may be a perfect home, perhaps, but how can it prove title? …
>
> The main street, one block back from the river, and running parallel with it, was the sole business street. It was six blocks long, and in each block two or three brick stores, three stories high, towered above interjected bunches of little frame shops…
>
> The hamlet's front was washed by the clear waters of the great river; its body stretched itself rearward up a gentle incline; its most rearward border fringed itself out and scattered its houses about its base line of the hills; the hills rose high, enclosing the town in a half-moon curve, clothed with forests from foot to summit.[82]

Then, at the beginning of chapter I's sixth paragraph, Twain abruptly shifts the mood when he writes:

> Dawson's Landing was a slaveholding town, with a rich, slave-worked grain and pork country back of it.

There will be trouble in Dawson's Landing.

As slavery again raises its ugly head to spoil an idyll, the story of Roxy, Tom, and Judge Driscoll commences. As noted, one of the few signs of hope on shore is David Wilson, an earnest but failed attorney who, since his arrival in Dawson's Landing, has become the butt of jokes and been labeled Pudd'nhead by townspeople too dim to understand his dry, ironic wit. It is David Wilson, however, who gets the last laugh.[83]

82. Twain, *Pudd'nhead Wilson,* 1–2. I have deleted portions of this beautiful passage.

"Though modern, the format of *Pudd'nhead Wilson* is that of an old-fashioned melodrama, as if its structure were borrowed from the plays performed on the riverboat theatres of that period," writes Langston Hughes in the introduction to the 1957 edition of *Pudd'nhead Wilson.* "Perhaps deliberately, Twain selected this popular formula in which to tell a very serious story. Moving from climax to climax, every chapter ends with a teaser that makes the reader wonder what is coming next while, as in Greek tragedy, the fates keep closing in the central protagonists. And here the fates have no regard whatsoever for color lines."[84]

In *Pudd'nhead Wilson,* Tom and Chambers stand at opposite ends of a stark racial divide, and yet, amazingly, no one in Dawson's Landing actually knows their true colors. This high irony has a historic context. Mark Twain published *Pudd'nhead Wilson* in 1894, at the same time *Plessy v. Ferguson* was winding its way from New Orleans to the infamous 1896 Supreme Court decision that constitutionalized racial segregation. The litigant Homer Plessy was so light in color that he easily entered a segregated ("whites only") train car without detection, but the police later arrested him for doing so. Booker T. Washington told a related story about a segregated train car confrontation in *Up from Slavery* (1901). Another 1890s development paralleling *Pudd'nhead Wilson* was the beginning of the study of behaviorist psychology and the nature versus nurture debate over determination of human character. In switching the babies, Roxy launches a psychosociological experiment of her own, one that mocks both the "one-drop rule" and what Hughes calls "the absurdity of man-made differentials, whether of caste or 'race.'" "It is this treatment of race," Hughes writes, "that makes *Pudd'nhead Wilson* as contemporary as Little Rock, and Mark Twain as modern as Faulkner."[85]

In the end, and as noted, Dawson's Landing's racist house of

83. Ibid., 2, 4–5.
84. Langston Hughes, introduction to Twain, *Pudd'nhead Wilson,* ibid., xii.
85. Ibid., vii, xi–xii; Booker T. Washington, *Up from Slavery* (1901; repr. New York, 2000), 69–70; *Plessy vs. Ferguson* (1896), in *The Patriot's History Reader: Essential Documents for Every American,* ed. Larry Schweikart, Dave Dougherty, and Michael Allen (New York, 2011), 219–28. Plessy purposely entered the car in order to launch the lawsuit.

cards is sent tumbling down by yet another modern development—criminological fingerprinting technique. Tom is convicted of murdering the judge and Chambers is set free, though he finds precious little happiness in the alien world of the white man. Roxy is utterly despondent, finding consolation only in "her church and its affairs." The locals finally pay David Wilson the respect he is due and confess that they are the true "pudd'nheads." Then, in a deliciously cruel twist, Tom's life is spared. Instead of dying at the gallows, he is sold into slavery downriver to settle one of the Driscoll family's outstanding debts. Thus, in art as in antebellum life, property law takes precedence over all.[86]

One year after publishing *Pudd'nhead Wilson,* Mark Twain declared bankruptcy. Twain's literary output—his "rapidity of execution" as Tocqueville would say—could never quite keep up with his expense account. Although he published another half dozen books before his 1910 death, none rivaled the work of his artistic peak, the two and a half decades that culminated in *Pudd'nhead Wilson.* Langston Hughes states, "Mark Twain, in his presentation of Negroes as human beings, stands head and shoulders above the other Southern writers of his times." Bernard DeVoto expands the comparative talent pool to declare Twain foremost among all American authors. While all of this is debatable, one thing is certain: By the time Mark Twain published *Pudd'nhead Wilson,* he had definitely learned how to make a book.[87]

THE WEST BANK

Mosquitoes (1927), William Faulkner's second novel, resulted from his brief attempt at living the bohemian life in the French Quarter of New Orleans. During six months of residence in 1925, Faulkner had the good fortune to meet the writer Sherwood Anderson, who took the young Mississippian under his wing and helped him publish his first novel, *Soldier's Pay*

86. Twain, *Pudd'nhead Wilson,* 142–43.
87. Hughes, introduction, *Pudd'nhead Wilson,* xi–xii.

(1926). Anderson also introduced Faulkner to his circle of friends, a motley tribe of poets, novelists, painters, and sculptors and their lovers, friends, and admirers. These artist folk became grist for the mill of *Mosquitoes,* a cynical yet humorous portrayal of a waterborne picnic gone bad.[88]

Mrs. Maurier is a wealthy Louisianan with a taste for high culture and rubbing elbows with *artistes.* She invites some artist acquaintances to join her and her friends for an overnight cruise on Lake Ponchartrain, dining, dancing, and playing bridge on her yacht *Nausikaa.* By the time *Nausikaa* weighs anchor, the guest list has grown. The affable writer Dawson Fairchild (whom Faulkner models after Anderson) brings along hard-drinking Major Ayers, a "Semitic man," and a lustful sculptor named Gordon; they join Mrs. Maurier's niece Patricia (Pat), who invites two working-class strangers she has just met, sultry Jenny and her "brother" (in fact, her lover) Pete. In addition, there is Mr. Talliaferro (Mrs. Maurier's sycophant and an utter romantic failure), effete, undersexed Miss Jameson, surprisingly lusty Mrs. Wiseman, and other assorted lost souls, including the ship's steward David, who is unwittingly drawn by Pat into the cruise debacle. Faulkner's setting and cast thus carry on an old literary tradition of putting a gaggle of diverse characters into a pot, turning up the heat, and watching them boil; *Mosquitoes* precedes Katherine Ann Porter's *Ship of Fools* by thirty-five years.[89]

As the cruise of the *Nausikaa* proceeds, Mrs. Maurier becomes despondent in increments. The boat runs aground (of course), and the guests find themselves stranded for several days. There is too much drinking and precious little card-playing. There is also much sex talk and cavorting—between lustful men and women, impotent men and unwilling women, and between women and other women—though none of this shipboard love is ever consummated. In between, the ship's fools spend much of their time defining art, artists, and aesthetics, with unsatisfactory and comic results. At one point Jenny tells Pat about a man named Faulkner. "Faulkner?" Pat responds, "Never heard of him."[90]

88. William Faulkner, *Mosquitoes* (1927; repr. New York, 2011), ix–xii.
89. Faulkner, *Mosquitoes,* passim; Katherine Ann Porter, *Ship of Fools* (Boston, 1962).

The real William Faulkner used the title *Mosquitoes* as a metaphor describing the artists of New Orleans (and perhaps all humankind), "a score of great grey specks hovering." Yet, in spite of the menacing insects, *Mosquitoes* ends with just a speck of hope. The *Nausikaa* is rescued and all guests arrive safely ashore. Fairchild, Gordon, and "the Semitic man" return to the French Quarter to continue drinking, and Gordon patronizes a brothel. They "walked in the dark city. Above them, the sky: a heavy voluptuous night and huge, hot stars like wilting gardenias. About them, streets: narrow, shallow canyons of shadow rich with decay and laced with delicate ironwork, scarcely seen." The novel continues, "Spring is in the world somewhere, like a blown keen reed, high and fiery cold—[Fairchild] does not yet see it; a shape which he will know—he does not yet see it."[91]

New Orleanians and their admirers share a belief that the city is America's Paris, where artists and literati flock in bohemian enclaves resembling the French capital city's Left Bank. There is some truth to this story, but it is nevertheless a story. During the twentieth century, a score of notable American writers—Anderson, Faulkner, Kate Chopin, Ernest Hemingway, F. Scott Fitzgerald, Tennessee Williams, William Burroughs, Jack Kerouac, Truman Capote, Lillian Hellman, Walker Percy, Charles Bukowski, and John Kennedy Toole—all resided in the Crescent City. But with notable exceptions, they did not stay long. Inspired by New Orleans, they went elsewhere to get their work done. A stint in New Orleans became an adornment to their literary résumés.

It was the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries that produced New Orleans' most stable and productive group of resident writers. The poets Julien Poydras and Dominique and Adrien Rouquette, the novelist Dr. Alfred Mercier, the Black poet authors of *Les Cenelles* (1845), and the playwright Victor Sejour, also a free person of color, all wrote in French. English prose ascended in the mid-nineteenth century through the work of the local colorists George Washington Cable, Grace King, Lafcadio

90. Faulkner, *Mosquitoes,* 150 (qtn.), 152, 186, 211–13.
91. Ibid., 140–41 179, 186 (qtn.), 354 (qtn.).

Hearn, and William S. Porter, a New Orleans newspaperman who wrote short stories under the pen name O. Henry. Of course, Mark Twain frequented the antebellum French Quarter as a steamboat pilot, not a writer; he was later befriended by both Cable and Hearn. In addition to poets and prose stylists, the Crescent City's early artistic community hosted the gifted painter John James Audubon, the symphony composer Louis Morreau Gottschalk, and the photographer John Ernest Joseph Bellocq, whose black-and-white images of Storyville prostitutes have drawn attention and acclaim for over a century.[92]

Though born and raised Kate O'Flaherty to Irish and Franco American parents in Saint Louis, Missouri, Kate Chopin became one of New Orleans' most famous and widely read authors. This is largely because of post-1960s feminists' discovery of *The Awakening* (1899), Chopin's novel about her heroine Edna Pontellier's anguished search for self-value and purpose. Chopin was a product and progenitor of one of America's great inventions, the cross-ethnic Catholic marriage. Wedded in 1870 to Oscar Chopin, a New Orleans Creole (French Louisianan) cotton broker, she resided in New Orleans for nine years and bore six children before moving to the Louisiana countryside near Natchitoches. Oscar's financial reverses and untimely death propelled Kate's 1883 return to Saint Louis, but she arrived home with a mind brimming over with story ideas from her thirteen-year New Orleans and rural Louisiana sojourn.[93]

Although known today mainly for her sensitive depiction of Edna Pontellier's path to suicide, Kate Chopin's stories of the lives of common Creole and Cajun Louisianans are of equal importance. First published as short stories in *The Youth's Companion, Century, Vogue,* and *Harper's Young People's Magazine,*

92. Walter Cowan et al., *New Orleans Yesterday and Today* (Baton Rouge, La., 1983), 208–20, 231–32; John Ernest Joseph Bellocq, *Bellocq: Photographs from Storyville,* ed. Susan Sontag (New York, 1996); Richard Campanella, *Bienville's Dilemma: A Historical Geography of New Orleans* (Lafayette, La., 2008), 41. For Audubon, see prolog, this work; for Gottschalk see Bill Malone, *Southern Music, American Music* (Lexington, Ky., 1979), 15–16. Sejour eventually settled in Paris.

93. Kate Chopin, *The Awakening and Other Stories,* ed. Lewis Leary (New York, 1970); Lewis Leary, introduction, to ibid., iii–xviii; Cowan, *New Orleans Yesterday and Today,* 210.

Chopin introduced all of America to Louisiana's unique characters and folkways. She later collected and published her tales as *Bayou Folk* (1894) and *A Night in Acadie* (1897). As we shall see, Kate Chopin and other local colorists set the stage for the ambitious, folk-based work of Zora Neale Hurston.[94]

It is twentieth-century New Orleans that most enjoys the bohemian mystique. In the years 1911 to 1929, the French Quarter furnished the kind of sensually pleasant and socially tolerant atmosphere which artists have sought and found in the Paris of Montparnasse and the New York of Greenwich Village," remembered James Feibelman, a 1920s poet turned Tulane philosophy professor. The contemporary urban geographer Richard Campanella agrees the city was a magnet for artists who sought

> cheap rent, good food, and abundant alcohol despite Prohibition. But most of all they found the same European atmosphere, tropical allure, and inspiring sense of place that "local color" writers described a generation earlier. *New Orleans allowed these migrants to expatriate culturally without actually leaving the country*. Moreover, upon finding kindred spirits in the bars and cafes, they formed intellectual and social networks among themselves.[95]

One should make some qualifications before declaring the French Quarter and neighboring Garden District branch offices of Paris's Left Bank. New Orleans, Campanella states, is a "great literary city … but never has been a particularly literate city." The number of libraries and bookshops in New Orleans is notably smaller than other cities its size and so too is the number of high school and college graduates per capita. Moreover, the Crescent City's twentieth-century literati were most often transplants, not native New Orleanians. "Culturally influential transplants" are the norm, according to Campanella. Truman Capote is an

94. Chopin is further discussed in chapter 7, this work.

95. Feibelman quote in Cowan, *New Orleans Yesterday and Today,* 213–14; Campanella, *Bienville's Dilemma,* 46; Campanella quoted in Chris Waddington, "You, Me, and Tennessee," *Times-Picayune* (New Orleans), March 20, 2012, C1. See John Shelton Reed, *Dixie Bohemia: A French Quarter Circled in the 1920s* (Baton Rouge, La., 2012). Italics my own.

exception, but he left his home town as a youth and returned for only a brief time as a writer. Reflecting on the members of the New Orleans' artistic tribe, Capote once reminisced, "I could list hundreds of them." Like Capote, they came and they went.[96]

Chroniclers of New Orleans often note that F. Scott Fitzgerald, one of the most well-known members of Paris's Lost Generation, landed in New Orleans in 1920. His interest actually began during his 1917 army service in Alabama, where he met his wife-to-be, Zelda. In late 1919, Fitzgerald used the money he made selling three short stories to buy a train ticket from his hometown, Saint Paul, Minnesota, to New Orleans, on the opposite end of the Mississippi River. He arrived in mid-January of 1920 and checked into a boardinghouse at 2900 Prytania Street; during his stay Fitzgerald twice traveled to Montgomery, Alabama, to visit Zelda and propose marriage. He continued to work on short stories (for the *Saturday Evening Post* and other magazines) and his novel *This Side of Paradise* (1920), but he left Prytania Street for New York after less than a month. In fact, Fitzgerald's most important connections to the Mississippi Valley are in his upper valley roots. *The Great Gatsby's* (1925) narrator Nick Carraway is a Minnesotan, Scott Gatsby is a North Dakotan, and Daisy is from Louisville. All three have gone east to escape their stifling midwestern roots. However, Nick feels distanced from New Yorkers, and he returns to the Midwest—to "that vast obscurity beyond the city, where the dark fields of the republic rolled on under the night"—after Scott Gatsby's demise. Although F. Scott Fitzgerald's name enters most discussions of New Orleans artists, he in fact did not like the Crescent City. "O. Henry said this was a story town," Fitzgerald wrote, "but it's too consciously that."[97]

96. Campanella quoted in Waddington, "You, Me, and Tennessee"; Capote quoted in Steve Garbarino, "Welcome to New Orleans: A Confederacy of Drunkards," *Wall Street Journal,* Feb. 28, 2006, D8.

97. Arthur Mizener, *The Far Side of Paradise: A Biography of F. Scott Fitzgerald* (New York, 1959), 101–103; F. Scott Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby* (1925; repr. New York, 2004), 180 (qtn.); Fitzgerald, *Novels and Stories, 1920–1922: This Side of Paradise; Flappers and Philosophers; The Beautiful and Damned; Tales of the Jazz Age* (1922; repr. New York, 2000); Thomas Bonner, "New Orleans and Its Writers: Burdens of Place," *Mississippi Quarterly* 63 (Winter 2010), 200

New Orleanians often refer to Ernest Hemingway's affection for the Hotel Monteleone (whose Carousel Bar he mentions in the short story "The Night before Battle"), yet Hemingway had even less connection to New Orleans than F. Scott Fitzgerald. Like Fitzgerald, Hemingway's important links to the Mississippi Valley lay north of New Orleans, through his Oak Park, Illinois, upbringing and six-month stint as a reporter for the *Kansas City Star.* In a vignette intended for *The Nick Adams Stories,* Hemingway wrote of Nick's first sighting of the Mississippi River:

> The Kansas City train stopped at a siding just east of the Mississippi… Nick opened his Saturday Evening Post and commenced reading, occasionally looking out the window to watch for any glimpse of the Mississippi. Crossing the Mississippi would be a big event he thought… He could see out of the window the engine of the train curving out onto a long bridge above a broad, muddy brown stretch of water. Desolate hills were on the far side that Nick could now see and on the near side was a flat mud bank. The river seemed to move solidly downstream, not to flow but to move like a solid, shifting lake, swirling a little where the abutments of the bridge jutted out. Mark Twain, Huck, Tom Sawyer, and LaSalle crowded each other in Nick's mind as he looked up the flat, brown plain of slow-moving water. Anyhow, I've seen the Mississippi, he thought happily to himself.

The above unpublished description provides the only glimpse of the Mississippi River in Hemingway's imagination.[98]

Sherwood Anderson, a founder of America's rural realist school of literature, is perhaps the most important of Campanella's "culturally influential transplants" to New Orleans. Born to a southern father and immigrant mother in Camden, Ohio, in 1876, Anderson did not become a professional writer until middle age, initially pursuing a career in advertising and business management. Anderson's decision to leave his wife,

(O. Henry qtn.). Fitzgerald's *This Side of Paradise* also uses an upper Mississippi Valley component, juxtaposing the midwesterner Amory Blaine with East Coast Princetonians.

98. Ernest Hemingway, *The Nick Adams Stories* (New York, 1972), 6; Hemingway, "Crossing the Mississippi," ibid, 133–34 (qtn).

family, and middle-class lifestyle takes the form of an oft-told story. Discontented with his job running an Elyria, Illinois, paint factory, one day he simply walked out the door and out of town and never returned. He moved with a second wife to New Orleans in 1922 and resided there during a period of time roughly paralleling the heyday of Paris's Lost Generation. Anderson told a friend he was "writing like a man gone mad," but according to some he was also drinking up a storm and patronizing Aunt Rose's, a house of ill repute. Anderson helped to found and edit *The Double Dealer,* a literary magazine that served as a springboard for writers like Hemingway, Thornton Wilder, and William Faulkner. As noted, Faulkner cast Anderson as Dawson Fairchild in *Mosquitoes* (though at book's end, he sends Gordon, not Dawson, to the house of prostitution). Indeed, one of Sherwood Anderson's most important accomplishments in New Orleans was befriending and housing the upstart Faulkner and helping him pursue a literary career.[99]

William Faulkner was born in New Albany, Mississippi, in 1897; his great-grandfather William was a writer, duelist, and railroad entrepreneur with honorable service as a Confederate colonel at the First Battle of Bull Run. The family moved to Oxford, Mississippi, where young William briefly attended Ole Miss before and after brief and undistinguished World War I service in the British Royal Air Force (he never flew an airplane nor left his Canadian training camp). Already a storyteller, he returned home in full dress uniform with an invented war record, complemented by a cane and affected limp. Faulkner cultivated a drinking habit as he flitted through jobs as a carpenter, house painter, fireman, postmaster (at Ole Miss), and, of course, struggling poet and author. In late 1924, at twenty-seven years of age, Faulkner moved to New Orleans to seek out his hero, Sherwood Anderson, then twenty years his senior. Faulkner resided in the Crescent City for six months.[100]

99. Sherwood Anderson, *A Story Teller's Story: Memoirs of Youth and Middle Age* (1924; repr. New York, 1969), 310–13; Garbarino, "Welcome to New Orleans," D8.
100. Frederick R. Karl, *William Faulkner: American Writer* (New York, 1989), xvii–193; Cowan et al., *New Orleans, Yesterday and Today,* 214.

William Faulkner quickly became known in New Orleans bars and cafes. He lived in a small room in Anderson's flat and then in some seedy apartments. Tourists still flock to his Jackson Square abode, a domicile he reportedly accessed by climbing the balustrades, foregoing the staircase (to avoid creditors? for exercise? in drunken fun?). In all this, he was fueled by whisky and water and the praise of Sherwood Anderson, who advised him to turn from poetry (he had just published *The Marble Faun* [1924]) to prose. Unlike most New Orleans literati, Faulkner was well able to keep up both his writing and his drinking. He published sketches in the New Orleans *Times-Picayune* while Anderson published his work in *The Double Dealer.* Anderson also helped him land a publisher for his first novel, *Soldier's Pay,* the tragic story of the Georgia homecoming of a wounded and impotent World War I soldier.[101]

As *Mosquitoes* attests, Faulkner beheld New Orleans artistes with bemused cynicism. He and his fellow New Orleans interloper William Spratling showcased this in a 1926 book of sardonic cartoon sketches of their circle of friends titled *Sherwood Anderson and Other Famous Creoles of New Orleans* (Spratling recalled their inspiration was Michael Covarrubias's contemporary *The Prince of Wales and Other Famous Americans*). "Sherwood said he didn't think it was very funny," Spratling recalled, but by the time *Mosquitoes* appeared, he and Faulkner had departed Louisiana for the Mediterranean, Paris, and the real Left Bank. Faulkner returned home to Mississippi in 1929. During the amazing span of years that began in New Orleans and ended back in Oxford, William Faulkner produced six novels and forty short stories, most set in Yoknapatawpha County, Mississippi, the fictitious locale that would bring him fame and fortune as an author, Hollywood screenwriter, and recipient of both the 1950 Nobel Prize and the 1955 and 1963 Pulitzer Prizes in literature. He died in Oxford in 1962.[102]

101. Garbarino, "Welcome to New Orleans," D8; Joseph Blotner, *William Faulkner: A Biography, One-Volume Edition* (New York, 1984), 120–47. Faulkner's impotent veteran in *Soldier's Pay* interestingly mirrors the main character of Hemingway's *The Sun Also Rises,* also published in 1926.

In *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* (1958), Thomas Lanier "Tennessee" Williams's character Big Daddy spoke of his beloved lower Mississippi Valley plantation as "the richest land this side of the valley of the Nile." New Orleans served as the capital city of Tennessee Williams's beloved valley of the Mississippi, just as Cairo did for the Nile, and Paris the Seine. Though Williams resided in New Orleans longer than most of the transplants, he did not stay long, and he later used his New Orleans apartment more for vacations than work.[103]

Tom Williams (he later adopted the family nickname "Tennessee") was born in 1911 in Columbus, Mississippi, to Correlius (a shoe salesman) and Edwina Dakin Williams, the daughter of genteel Clarksdale planters. Like the Faulkners, the Williams family fortunes had declined during the new century, and Tom would later base many of his stories on childhood memories of family strife and the struggles of the South's fallen upper class. These themes combined with memories of his beloved, mentally ill sister Rose to produce the lost gentility and wounded spirits of *The Glass Menagerie* (1944) and *A Streetcar Named Desire* (1948). The Williams family followed the shoe business from Mississippi to Saint Louis, where young Tom worked in a shoe factory, studied literature, saw his first musical theater production (*Showboat* in 1929), and began to write and produce his own plays. After earning a degree from the University of Iowa in 1938, twenty-eight-year-old Tennessee Williams moved to New Orleans.[104]

In February of 1939, Williams rented an attic room at 722 Rue Toulouse for $10.00 per month. He fell in love with New Orleans and waxed poetic in his letters and journals. "My happiest years

102. William Faulkner and William Spratling, *Sherwood Anderson and Other Famous Creoles: A Gallery of Contemporary New Orleans, Drawn by Wm. Spratling and Arranged by Wm. Faulkner* (1926; repr. Austin, Texas, 1966), 13, passim; Michael Gresset, *A Faulkner Chronology* (Jackson, Miss., 1985), passim. For Faulkner stories turned into movies, see chapter 6, this work.

103. Waddington, "You, Me, and Tennessee," C1. For the movie version of *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof,* see chapter 6, this work.

104. Lyle Leverich's *Tom: The Unknown Tennessee Williams* (New York, 1995) is an excellent documented, narrative history of Williams's formative years in the lower Mississippi Valley. For the movie version of *Streetcar Named Desire,* see chapter 6, this work.

were there," Williams later reminisced. The Vieux Carre was "a place in love with life," and New Orleans was his "favorite city of America … of all the world, actually."

> I'm crazy about the city. I walk continually, there is so much to see… The Quarter is really quainter than anything I've seen abroad… Food is amazingly cheap… Raw oysters twenty cents a dozen! Shrimp, crab, lobster, and all kinds of fish… The court-yards are full of palms, vines, and flowering poinsettia, many with fountains and wells, and all with grill-work, balconies, and little winding stairs.

Although Williams was broke within weeks (he hocked everything but his typewriter), he managed to attend the Sugar Bowl football game and Mardi Gras celebrations before leaving town. He returned to New Orleans in 1941 and stayed four months in an 1124 St. Charles (Lee Circle) room for $3.50 a week; he next moved to 708 Toulouse in the French Quarter. He worked as a waiter and dishwasher, and wrote "rather badly, or not at all. Washed up? No!" He bought a bicycle. "I am going to dress up and cruise about the old French Quarter," he wrote in his journal. "Maybe something will happen." Among New Orleans' many attractions, Tennessee Williams was especially drawn to the city's lively homosexual community and social life. Homosexuality would also become a recurrent theme in Williams's plays, and in later years he and his partner Frank Merlo enjoyed visiting their Crescent City apartment.[105]

Truman Capote was also drawn to New Orleans' homosexual neighborhoods and gay lifestyle. Capote was an actual New Orleans native (born in 1924), but he spent most of his childhood in Monroeville, Alabama, where he was raised by his "aunts" (cousins) and became a close friend of Harper Lee. He returned briefly to New Orleans at age nineteen and lived in a "decrepit roach-heaven apartment" in the French Quarter, where he recalled spending hours sitting on park benches "yawning and

105. Alexandra Kennon, "Tennessee in New Orleans," *Country Roads,* April 21, 2022, https://countryroadsmagazine.com/art-and-culture/literature/tennessee-in-new-orleans/, accessed May 18, 2022 (crazy about city quotation); Leverich, *Tom: The Unknown Tennessee Williams,* 277–80, 420–22. Garbarino, "Welcome to New Orleans," D8 (washed up qtn.).

scratching and talking" but not doing very much writing. Like his fellow New Orleans–born author Lillian Hellman, Capote found his muse, and his fortune, in New York City, though his stories often looked southward in *Other Voices, Other Rooms* (1948), *The Grass Harp* (1951), *The Muses Are Heard* (1956), *Breakfast at Tiffany's: A Short Novel and Three Stories* (1958), and *A Tree of Night* (1949), which includes "A Christmas Memory," poignantly recalling his Monroeville childhood.[106]

The beatnik poets of the 1940s and '50s were next in line in the New Orleans artistic queue. Charles Bukowski briefly moved there from California while resisting the draft during World War II. Jack Kerouac stayed in New Orleans for only a month in the late 1940s, but served it up in a famed passage in *On the Road.* Actually, Kerouac and Neal Cassady (*On the Road*'s Sal Paradise and Dean Moriarty) decamped across the river in the Algiers, Louisiana, home of their fellow beatnik William S. Burroughs (*On the Road*'s Old Bull Lee). Burroughs spent his Crescent City days mostly in talking, writing, and shooting up Benzedrine in attempts to fuel his creativity (a drug bust soon made him another Crescent City short-timer). Kerouac loved his time there, but he departed after writing a description (as romantic as Tennessee Williams's journal memories) of the "father of waters" rolling by, "bearing Montana logs and Dakota muds and Iowa vales, and things that had drowned in Three Forks, where the secret began in ice." In fact, Jack Kerouac's most powerful description of the Mississippi was set far upriver, in the upper Midwest of F. Scott Fitzgerald and Ernest Hemingway. In chapter 3 of *On the Road,* as Sal Paradise is beginning his epic journey across America, he experiences his own Nick Adams moment:

> I took over the wheel and, though I'm not much of a driver, drove clear through the rest of Illinois to Davenport, Iowa, via Rock Island. And here, for the first time in my life I saw my beloved Mississippi River, dry in summer haze, low water, with its big rank

106. Garbarino, "Welcome to New Orleans," D8; Cowan et al., *New Orleans Yesterday and Today,* 212–13. For Capote, Lee, and *To Kill a Mockingbird,* see chapter 6, this work.

smell that smells like the raw body of America itself because it washes it up.[107]

In the 1960s New Orleans saw the return of a long-term, resident artistic community more closely resembling the city's early eighteenth- and nineteenth-century literati than the Lost Generation and Beat transplants. Walker Percy was born in Birmingham, Alabama, in 1916, but following his father's suicide was raised in Greenville, Mississippi, by his uncle Will Percy (author of the 1941 memoir *Lanterns on the Levy: Recollections of a Planter's Son*). Just as Capote had grown up alongside Harper Lee, Percy met Shelby Foote in Greenville, and they became lifelong friends. The two attended the University of North Carolina together and both became novelists, though Percy's first career was as a physician. After earning a medical degree from Columbia University, Percy and his family returned to the South in 1946, residing first in New Orleans and finally settling in nearby Covington, Louisiana. At age forty-six, Walker Percy published his first novel. Set in the New Orleans Garden District and the suburb of Elysian Fields, *The Moviegoer* (1962) garnered Percy the National Book Award.[108]

Over the next two decades, Walker Percy published five more novels and numerous essays, but also worked as a college instructor (apparently even the National Book Award will not feed a family of four), a vocation he had begun as a 1940s medical professor at Columbia. A devout Catholic, he taught English composition and literature at Loyola College, a Jesuit school. In 1976, a woman knocked on Percy's Loyola office door and presented him with a weathered, food-stained manuscript written by her deceased son, John Kennedy Toole.[109]

107. Jack Kerouac, *On the Road* (1955; repr. New York, 1958), 14, 116–29 (qtns., 117, 14). Three Forks refers to the Montana juncture of the Madison and Gallatin Rivers forming the Missouri River. See Arthur S. Nusbaum, "Kerouac Meets Burroughs on the Road," Third Mind Books, www.thirdmindbooks.com/pdf/Kerouac%20Meets%20Burroughs%20On%20the%20Road.pdf, accessed Sept. 19, 2012.
108. Walker Percy, *The Moviegoer* (1960; repr. New York, 1998); "Loyola introduces new students to New Orleans culture with iconic novel," Loyola University, www.loyno.edu/news/story/2010/6/28/2158, accessed Sept. 21, 2012. For Shelby Foote, see chapter 6, this work.
109. "Loyola introduces new students to New Orleans culture with iconic novel."

Toole was born in New Orleans in 1937 and spent most of his thirty-two-year life in the Crescent City. A graduate of Tulane, he earned an MA in English from Columbia University and, before and after a stint in the U.S. Army, worked as a college instructor. He returned to New Orleans in 1963 to teach at Dominican College, an all-girl Catholic high school. Though they never met, Toole and Percy had several things in common—southern backgrounds, Catholicism, graduate degrees from Columbia, a strong taste for movies, literature, and whisky, and one additional link. Percy, whose father (and probably his mother as well) had taken their own lives, was no doubt drawn to an important aspect of the story Thelma Toole told him that day in his Loyola office. The unpublished manuscript she held was written by her son John prior to his 1969 suicide."Loyola introduces new students to New Orleans culture with iconic novel"; Cowan et al., *New Orleans, Yesterday and Today,* 209, 214. See Cory MacLauchlin, *Butterfly in the Typewriter: The Tragic Life of John Kennedy Toole and the Remarkable Story of* A Confederacy of Dunces (Boston, 2011).

As he began to read *A Confederacy of Dunces,* Toole's novel, Percy became captivated. Although it was arguably less a finished work than a clean draft manuscript, he persuaded Louisiana State University Press to publish it in 1980. University press novels are by definition doomed to obscurity, but not this book. In 1981, John Kennedy Toole was posthumously awarded the Pulitzer Prize in literature, and *A Confederacy of Dunces* has been a cash cow for LSU ever since. Ignatius J. Reilly, Toole's remarkable lead character, has become an unlikely member of America's literary pantheon, and his misadventures amidst the Crescent City's movie theaters, hot dog carts, and manufactories have somehow come to symbolize the quest for meaning in a mid-twentieth-century American world gone mad.[110]

A Confederacy of Dunces has proven to be a tough act to follow. Anne Rice, a native New Orleanian and devout Catholic, is no

110. "Loyola introduces new students to New Orleans culture with iconic novel"; Garbarino, "Welcome to New Orleans," D8; John Kennedy Toole, *A Confederacy of Dunces* (Baton Rouge, La., 1980). Toole's first novel, *The Neon Bible,* was published, posthumously, in 1989.

doubt the most famous and successful author in New Orleans today. Her *Vampire Chronicles,* however, hardly ranks alongside the works of Kate Chopin, Tennessee Williams, Truman Capote, Lillian Hellman, or Walker Percy. Yet the mystique of New Orleans as North America's Paris with its own Left Bank is alive and well. Campanella states that New Orleans continues to draw artists in "disproportionate numbers—more than any other American city its size." Exactly how many of the new millennium's New Orleans literati are Tulane and Loyola MFA students and their professors, or buskers and sidewalk portraitists in the French Quarter, is impossible to say. There may well be some geniuses among them. Then, too, there are probably several candidates for minor roles in *Mosquitoes*.[111]

REALISTS AND OTHER ROMANTICS

Henry Nash Smith waits until the closing sections of *Virgin Land: The American West in Myth and Legend* to discuss the late-nineteenth-century rural realist writers Hamlin Garland and Edgar Watson Howe. Their depictions of the upper Mississippi Valley in *The Story of a Country Town* (1883) and *Main-Traveled Roads: Stories of the Mississippi Valley* (1891) do not seem to belong alongside Smith's discussion of mythic portraits of the American West as the Garden of the World; their heroes are not equal to James Fenimore Cooper's Hawkeye or the dime novels' Deadeye Dick and Kit Carson. Howe and Garland, native midwesterners, painted scenes of backbreaking labor, harsh weather, economic exploitation, broken personal relationships, and bitter disappointment for those who migrated west searching in vain for the Garden of Eden. In writing unromantic fictional accounts of their Mississippi Valley world, Howe and Garland helped to found a school of rural realism characterized by an early generation of literary critics as the "Revolt of the Village."[112]

111. For the Rice phenomenon, visit the author's website, www.annerice.com, accessed Sept. 24, 2012. Campanella is quoted in Waddington, "You, Me, and Tennessee," C1.

112. Henry Nash Smith, *Virgin Land: The American West as Symbol and Myth* (New York, 1950); Edgar Watson Howe, *The Story of a Country Town* (1883; repr. Lanham, Md., 1962); Hamlin

The late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries saw a crescendo of rural realist poetry and fiction by Howe, Garland, Willa Cather, Edgar Lee Masters, Sherwood Anderson, Sinclair Lewis, and other upper Mississippi Valley writers. Highly critical, they portrayed the rural folk inhabiting midwestern farms and towns as exploited, impoverished, isolated, backward, narrow-minded, and anti-intellectual. In *Main Street,* Sinclair Lewis's character Guy Pollock diagnosed their intellectual malaise as the "Village Virus," which "infects ambitious people who stay too long in the provinces" and is enforced by "an oligarchy of respectability." Like their populist and progressive contemporaries, rural realists called for political as well as spiritual reform to improve the bleak lives of Mississippi Valley family farmers and small town residents.[113]

The preceding generalizations, the standard interpretation of rural realism, do not always withstand scrutiny. Closer examination shows recurrent doses of Henry Nash Smith's mythic and romantic West in rural realism, because Garland, Cather, Lewis, Anderson et al. felt loyalty and love as well as discontent for their native ground. The parallel with populism is important here. While the political Populists bitterly condemned the plight of American farmers, they simultaneously held a love of the land and idealistic hope that, with reform, they might yet attain an agricultural Eden. Populists were just as nostalgic for paradise lost as they were determined to shake up America's political, economic, social, and religious structure.[114] Thus populism was at once conservative and radical, and one can see the same ambivalence among the rural realists, populism's cultural wing. They do not utterly condemn the Mississippi Valley, and their art reflects a deep love of the midwestern landscape, the changing seasons, and even the small towns and

Garland, *Main Traveled Roads: Stories of the Mississippi Valley* (1891; repr. New York, 1962); Carl Van Doren, *The American Novel, 1789–1939* (New York, 1947), 225, passim.

113. Sinclair Lewis, *Main Street,* (1920; repr. New York, 1961), 153–54.

114. Richard Hofstadter, *The Age of Reform* (New York, 1955), 23–93. See also Hofstadter, "William Jennings Bryan: The Democrat as Revivalist," *The American Political Tradition* (New York, 1948), 186–205. A differing interpretation of populism is Charles Postel, *The Populist Vision* (New York, 2007).

townspeople whom they simultaneously chastise. Within their cynicism and criticism one detects a yearning for a rural world lost—the imagined agricultural utopia that has somehow eluded their grasp. It is this frustrated vision that makes the rural realists at once cynics and romantics.[115]

Edgar Watson Howe (1853–1937), perhaps the least known of the rural realists, first tapped the themes others would portray in more artful prose. An eastern Kansas newspaperman, Howe returned home from long workdays to write *Story of a Country Town* at his kitchen table. Ned Westlock, the novel's boy narrator, tells the tale based on Howe's own Missouri and Kansas childhood memories. It is a grim tale of poverty, marital failure, and suicide among "the poor, the indigent, the sick—the lower classes, in short—who come here to grow up with the country having failed to grow up with the country where they came from." However, Howe also peppers his novel with melodrama, youthful pranks, romantic yearning, and, in the end, the fruition of Ned's long-suppressed love in marriage. While the ending to *Story of a Country Town* is melancholy, it is not bitter.[116]

Edgar Watson Howe's disciple Hamlin Garland (1860–1940) also came of age in the postbellum upper Mississippi Valley during the waning days of the family farm. The Garland family failed at homesteading in Wisconsin, Minnesota, Iowa, and South Dakota, enduring blizzards, insect infestations, drought, and economic hardship. In the 1880s, Garland retreated to Boston to teach school, yet he soon returned to the upper Midwest where, "in spite of the dust and heat ricks," he "dreamt of poems and stories." The result was an 1891 collection of short stories, *Main Traveled Roads: Stories of the Mississippi Valley*. In "The Return of the Private," a weary Civil War veteran comes

115. Hofstadter, "William Jennings Bryan," passim. See Jon K. Lauck, "The Myth of the Midwestern 'Revolt from the Village,'" *MidAmerica* 40 (2013), 39–85; Lauck, "Typecast Rebels: The Strange Careers of *Winesburg, Ohio,* and *Main Street,*" in *The Midwestern Moment: The Forgotten World of Early Twentieth-Century Midwestern Regionalism, 1880–1940* (Hastings, Nebr., 2017); Lauck, *From Warm Center to Ragged Edge: The Erosion of Midwestern Literary and Historical Regionalism, 1920–1965* (Iowa City, Iowa, 2017), 11–35.

116. Howe, *Story of a Country Town,* 106, 164–65, 225, 232 (qtn.); Sylvia Bowman, introduction to Howe, *Story of a Country Town,* passim.

home to find his farm in utter disrepair but his loving wife and family loyally waiting. In "Under the Lion's Paw," a hard-working farmer faces losing his land to heartless bankers, while "Among the Corn Rows" and "The Creamery Man" tell of romantic love forsaken for hardships and "practical" (economically motivated) marriages. "Up the Coulee" and "A Branch Road" tell the stories of long-departed sons returning to their rural homes from the city and, like Garland, finding bravery and perseverance overwhelmed by hard work and failure. The answer to their problems is populist reform through regulation of the railroads and banks and an end to the gold standard.[117]

Hamlin Garland's quest for realism, however, was at odds with his penchant for sense of place. He had a good ear for upper Mississippi Valley dialect, and a fondness for the folkways and landscape. The opening descriptive scenes in "A Branch Road" and "Up the Coulee," when the prodigal sons return to their homes, show sensitivity and affection for the land of his midwestern youth. Like many populists, Garland loved his native region but hated the human misery, inequality, avarice, corruption, and inaction he blamed on businessmen and politicians. He believed the evil bankers portrayed in "Under the Lion's Paw" should be punished and leashed by reformers. Garland idealistically believed that populist reform, combined with the inherent strength of common folk and the rich countryside, would produce an agrarian land of milk and honey.[118]

Willa Cather's writings reflect the maturation of rural realism in the beginning decades of the twentieth century as political and cultural populism slowly melded into progressivism. Born in 1873 in Virginia's Shenandoah Valley, Cather found her life changed remarkably at age ten when her family migrated west to farm near Red Cloud, Nebraska. Red Cloud is on the far

117. Smith, *Virgin Land,* 284–85; Garland, *Main Traveled Roads,* ix, 13, 54, 98, 122, 141, 156; Mark Schorer, afterword to Garland, *Main Traveled Roads,* 260.

118. Garland, *Main Traveled Roads,* 140; Schorer, afterword to Garland, *Main Traveled Roads*, 265. For Garland's populism and agrarianism, see ibid., 261–69; Smith, *Virgin Land*, 289; Van Doren, *American Novel,* 226; and Lucy Hazard, *The Frontier in American Literature* (New York, 1961), 264.

western fringe of the Mississippi Valley, where the fertile tall-grass prairie becomes the short-grass prairie of the Great Plains. Though profoundly affected by life on the broad prairies, Cather, upon graduating high school, promptly boarded a train east to Lincoln and the University of Nebraska, where she developed the writer's craft and earned a degree in 1890. Moving next to Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, she edited *Home Monthly* magazine and wrote for Pittsburgh's *Leader.* In 1906, after the marriage of her ten-year friend and companion Isabelle McClung, Willa Cather moved to New York City. As editor of *McClure's Magazine,* Cather was at the epicenter of progressive muckrakers, the propaganda arm of the movement to regulate capitalism and expand democracy via women's suffrage. But Cather resigned from *McClure's* in 1912 to devote herself to writing fiction.[119]

Willa Cather initially fashioned and published an unsuccessful novel, *Alexander's Bridge* (1912), in the urbane style of her hero Henry James; much later, she tried her hand at southern fiction in *Sapphira and the Slave Girl* (1940), a reflection of her postbellum Virginia upbringing. It was her rediscovery of the Nebraska prairies that set Willa Cather's imagination afire. At forty years of age, Cather began to write about her native Midwest, a task she later reflected was "like taking a ride through a familiar country on a horse that knew the way." This resulted in *O! Pioneers!* (1913), titled after a Walt Whitman poem celebrating American westward expansion. Set near the fictional town of Hanover, Nebraska (modeled after Red Cloud), *O! Pioneers!* adds a woman's voice to rural realism, relating the experiences of Alexandra Bergson as she inherits and works her family's wheat farm. Cather followed *O! Pioneers!* with *Song of the Lark* (1915) and *My Antonia* (1918) to form her Nebraska trilogy and further refine the rural realists' ambivalent portrayals of the passing of the agricultural frontier.[120]

Nostalgic yearning combines with grim realism in *My Antonia* (1918), Cather's personal favorite of the Nebraska trilogy. The

119. Blanche H. Gelfant, introduction to Willa Cather, *O! Pioneers!* (1913; repr. New York, 1989), xviii–xxii.
120. Ibid., xxii.

story begins on a train "crossing the plains of Iowa," where the author meets a childhood friend, Jim Burden. The two reminisce about their farming childhoods in Black Hawk, Nebraska, and their mutual friend, the Bohemian immigrant Antonia Shimerda. The two part, pledging to set their memories of Antonia to paper, at which point Jim Burden's memoir becomes the voice of *My Antonia.* Jim's portrait of life in Black Hawk reflects many of the rural realist themes—homesickness, hard work, small town pettiness, and, in Antonia's case, seduction, betrayal, and her father's suicide. This is balanced by *My Antonia's* nostalgic, yearning passages describing the intimacies of family and friends amid the seasonal cycles of the Nebraska prairie. The novel's opening passage evocatively describes the Iowa landscape that Antonia (and Cather) loved:

> While the train flashed through the never-ending miles of ripe wheat by country towns and bright-flowered pastures and oak groves wilting in the sun, we [the author and Jim Burden] sat in the observation car… We were talking about what it was like to spend one's childhood in little towns like these, buried in wheat and corn under stimulating extremes of climate: burning summers when the world lies green and billowy beneath a brilliant sky, when one is fairly stifled in vegetation, in the color and smell of strong weeds and heavy harvests; blustery winters with little snow, when the whole country is stripped bare and gray as sheet-iron. We agreed that no one who had not grown up in a little prairie town could know anything about it. It was a kind of freemasonry.[121]

The greatest rural realist poet was Edgar Lee Masters (1868–1950), whose innovative *Spoon River Anthology* won the attention and acclaim of a sizable readership upon its 1915 publication. Born in Garnett, Kansas, and raised in rural Illinois, Masters gravitated to populism and agrarian reform. He did not become a professional writer until age forty, yet by career's end had produced more than fifty volumes of poetry and prose. Masters's concept for the *Spoon River Anthology* was radical. It

121. Willa Cather, *My Antonia* (1918; repr. New York, 1994), 27, passim; Sharon O'Brien, introduction to ibid., v–xx; Gelfant, introduction to Cather, *O! Pioneers!* xxiv–xxv.

consists of 244 fictional, free-verse (nonrhyming) poems, each spoken from the viewpoint of a resident of the small Illinois town of Spoon River. While free-verse poetry was still an experimental genre, the *Spoon River Anthology*'s most striking feature is its voice, for each of the speakers is *dead*. Their voices emanate from Spoon River's graveyard where, "all, all are sleeping on a hill."[122]

Masters's *Spoon River* themes are the same ones explored by Howe, Garland, and Cather: dissatisfaction with rural farm and small town life, failed love and unhappy families, political and economic corruption, greed, and general discontent and melancholy. The local banker Thomas Rhodes is an arch-villain who appears in several poems alongside disreputable characters like Hod Put, a robber and murderer, and Chase Henry, the town drunk. But not all the characters are "grotesques" (Sherwood Anderson's disarming description of the citizenry of *Winesburg, Ohio*). There is Fiddler Jones, who "ended up with a broken fiddle / And a broken laugh and a thousand memories / And not a single regret." Petit the Poet, Daisy Fraser, Russian Sonia, Mrs. Kessler the Laundress, and Yee Bow are all good people, yet powerless to change their unhappy lives. Elsa Wertman, a peasant girl from Germany, is raped by her wealthy employer Thomas Greene, whose long-suffering wife secretly raises the resulting child as her own. From her grave Elsa laments, "At political rallies, when sitters-by thought I was crying / at the eloquence of Hamilton Greene— / That was not it / No! I wanted to say: / That's my son! That's my son!" Herbert Marshall, unhappy in marriage, concludes, "This is life's sorrow: / That one can be happy only where two are; / And that our hearts are drawn to stars / which want us not." And Harry Williams, a casualty of America's Spanish-American War, derides the naïve patriotism of his rural youth: "Now there's a flag over me in Spoon River! A flag! A flag!"[123]

During its creation, *Spoon River Anthology* became a

122. May Swenson, introduction to Edgar Lee Masters, *Spoon River Anthology* (1915; repr. New York, 1962), 5–13.

123. Ibid.; Masters, *Spoon River Anthology,* 83, 86, 133, 220–21.

magnificent obsession for Edgar Lee Masters, and there is truth to criticisms of the work as overly long and redundant. On the other hand, Masters carries on the work of Walt Whitman's *Leaves of Grass* in his poems' scope, power, and audacity. One hundred years after the volume's publication, one is still struck by the intricate detail and diversity of the stories; the skill with which they are interwoven and cross-referenced has spawned literal schools of Spoon River genealogists. Masters influenced many artists who created and peopled their own imaginary midwestern small towns, from Sherwood Anderson's *Winesburg* to Garrison Keillor's *Lake Woebegone.* The great Minnesota playwright Thornton Wilder carried Masters's zest for artistic experimentation onto the 1930s and '40s New York stage. *Our Town* (1939), Wilder's paean to the New England village of Grover's Corners, perfects the rural realists' conflicted portrayal of small town life, and *Our Town's* concluding graveyard scene is reminiscent of Masters's graveyard in *Spoon River Anthology*.[124]

A key to understanding the art of Edgar Lee Masters and other rural realists is their attraction to melancholy. Critics have falsely portrayed Masters as a cold cynic who sits in condemnation of the rural Midwest of his youth, yet balancing *Spoon River's* dark Thomas Rhodes–type characters are those like Fiddler Jones. Few are happy, but who or what is to blame? Their lives were beyond their control, and so they reflect pensively from their graves. As John Cowper Powys observed long ago, Edgar Lee Masters does not condemn these men and women; he empathizes with them:

> With the exception of some half-dozen cold-blooded exploiters of the people, not a ghost among these wraiths but is understood, condoned, allowed for and forgiven. In the rank, mephitic arena of all this squalor, the poet preserves his grand, equal, unmitigated equilibrium.

Masters resists passing judgment on these folks. Nothing can

124. Thornton Wilder, *Our Town* (1939; repr. New York, 1998), 86–111.

be done for them; theirs is the fate of mankind. Masters can sympathize because he is one of them.[125]

Edgar Lee Masters dreamed of a Jeffersonian agrarian republic[126] to replace the lost rural world of his childhood. Typically, and ironically, he did much of his dreaming and writing in cities far removed from the Mississippi Valley heartland. Atop the Chelsea Hotel in New York City, with his English professor wife and literary friends, Edgar Lee Masters condemned modern poets because they possessed "no moral code and no roots" while he continued to write of his fellow midwestern townsmen. He published *Lincoln, the Man* in 1931, and, as the years passed, he grew more and more critical of New York and Chicago, and nostalgic about the rural Midwest. He developed an affinity for Jeffersonian political and social decentralization. In 1942, he published *The Sangamon,* a paean to the Land of Lincoln and one of the most evocative volumes in the Rivers of America Series. The Sangamon River folk were "hospitable, warm-hearted and generous beyond any people I have known," he recalled fondly. Southern Illinois, Masters wrote, holds a "magical appeal to me quite beyond my power to describe. I loved the people there then and I love their memory." The Mississippi Valley of Masters's youth had vanished, however, and so too had his many of his midwestern brethren. As he wrote in *Spoon River,* "All, all are sleeping, sleeping, sleeping on the hill."[127]

Edgar Lee Masters and Willa Cather led the way for the new

125. John Cowper Powys, "Edgar Lee Masters," *The Bookman* (August 1929), 653–54, passim; Swenson, introduction to Masters, *Spoon River Anthology,* 5–6, 10–12. See also Lauck, *From Warm Center to Ragged Edge,* 26–7.

126. For Jeffersonian and Jacksonian agrarianism, see John Taylor, *Arator: Being a Series of Agricultural Essays, Practical and Political: In Sixty-Four Numbers,* ed. M. E. Bradford (1818; repr. Indianapolis, Ind., 1977); John William Ward, *Andrew Jackson: Symbol for an Age* (New York, 1968), 9, 41–42, passim; A. Whitney Griswold, *Farming and Democracy* (New York, 1948); and Thomas Jefferson, *Notes on the States of Virginia,* ed. William Peden (1787; repr. New York 1972), 164–65, 292.

127. Edgar Lee Masters, "The Genesis of Spoon River," *American Mercury* 28 (January 1933), 39, 41, 55; Lois Hartley, "Edgar Lee Masters: Biographer and Historian," *Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society* vol. 54, no. 1 (Spring 1961), 77–83 Lauck, *From Warm Center to Ragged Edge,* 26–7. For the Rivers of America Series, see introduction, this work.

realism of the post–World War I writers Sherwood Anderson and Sinclair Lewis. Anderson and Lewis continued rural realism in a subtle, understated style, one lacking the "hard, fierce tension" of Edgar Watson Howe or the sentimental propagandizing of Hamlin Garland.[128] Their novels, *Winesburg, Ohio* (1919), and *Main Street* (1920), mark a crescendo in rural realist fiction.

Sherwood Anderson grew up in a twilight era, as Ohio's sleepy small towns and farms were transformed by the industrial revolution. As noted, Anderson abandoned an unhappy marriage and a business and advertising career, moved to New Orleans, and turned to writing fiction. In *Dark Laughter* (1925), he ruminates on the effect of industry and technology along the Mississippi and Ohio Rivers on human consciousness. *Poor White* (1920) is the story of Hugh McVey, an introspective Missouri drifter who initially finds purpose in engineering and industrial progress. Hugh's inventions become a catalyst for the transformation of Bidwell, Ohio, into a modern community, but he soon discovers he has created a monster. Bidwell's economy and population boom, but old craftsmen lose their jobs to machines and new workers who form a violent protest movement. Hugh rejects his belief in progress and retreats to the countryside. At story's end, he stands alongside wife Clara in their farmyard on Bidwell's outskirts, listening to the "whistling and screaming" of nearby factories: "The sound ran up the hillside and rang in the ears of Hugh as, with his arm around Clara's shoulder, he went up the steps and in at the farmhouse door."[129]

Like many Mississippi Valley authors, Sherwood Anderson was more a storyteller than writer of sustained fiction; he often wrote vignettes, little stories that captured moments reflecting larger themes. At the same time, his fiction was deeply

128. Alfred Kazin, *On Native Grounds: An Interpretation of American Literature* (New York, 1942), 205–207. For Anderson and Lewis, see Lauck, "Typecast Rebels: The Strange Careers of *Winesburg, Ohio,* and *Main Street,*" passim.

129. Malcom Cowley, introduction to Sherwood Anderson, *Winesburg, Ohio* (1919; repr. New York, 1960) 9–11; Anderson, *Poor White* (orig., 1920) in *The Portable Sherwood Anderson,* ed. Horace Gregory (New York, 1965), 436.

psychological, and his probing beneath the human surface found both happiness and terror.[130] In *Winesburg, Ohio* (1919), Anderson's penchants for storytelling and psychology combine to powerful end. *Winesburg's* lead character is young George Willard, an aspiring writer reaching maturity in a town of solitary and troubled people. These people have become emotional cripples, or "grotesques," and *Winesburg, Ohio,* is a collection of their separate, yet interrelated, stories and revelations. As it happens, George Willard is often present to hear these revelations; the unhappy folk are drawn to George and trust him to hear them out and possibly communicate their pain. Readers of *Winesburg, Ohio* see George Willard's coming of age amid the poignant crises of his fellows as their town approaches the dawn of the twentieth century.[131]

There is Elmer Cowley, the object of constant ridicule, who tells George his family intends to leave Winesburg: "We ain't going to keep on being queer." Alice Hindman, jilted by a lover who will never return but for whom she desperately waits, is "trying to face bravely the fact that many people must live and die alone, even in Winesburg." Seth Richmond is inexplicably unable to take the willing Helen White as his lover: "When it comes to loving someone, it won't never be me." And an old drunkard confesses to George, "I am a lover and have not found my thing to love. I have not lost faith [but] I know my faith will not be realized." Near the conclusion of the book, the troubled lives of Kate Swift and the Reverend Curtis Hartman are thrown together with George's on a stormy winter evening. Their meeting is electrifying and sets George on edge. His mother (another tortured soul) dies soon thereafter, and in the concluding chapter George leaves town on a train, headed for a new life in the city. Thus Sherwood Anderson fictionalizes his own flight from the Elyria, Ohio, paint factory, which mirrors Willa Cather's train ride to Lincoln (and then Pittsburgh), and Edgar Lee Masters's exit to New York City, all of which reflect

130. Kazin, *On Native Grounds,* 210, 214–16; Cowley, introduction to Anderson, *Winesburg, Ohio,* 1–20.

131. Cowley, introduction to Anderson, *Winesburg, Ohio,* 14–15.

the departures of thousands of young turn-of-the-century midwesterners from their small towns and farms to cities.[132]

Like Cather and Masters, Sherwood Anderson cannot condemn the unhappy rural folk; he loves and empathizes with them. At the same time, he shows love for the town of Winesburg and its surrounding countryside:

> The town lies in the midst of open fields, but beyond the fields are patches of woodlands. In the wooded places are many little cloistered nooks, quiet places where lovers go and sit on Sunday afternoons. Through the trees they look out across the fields and see farmers at work about the barns or people driving up and down the roads. In the town bells ring and occasionally a train passes, looking like a toy thing in the distance.

Anderson's character George Willard loves the rural Midwest of his youth, but his prevailing emotion is sadness—sadness at viewing the passing of a region of farmers and small townspeople whose dreams have gone unfulfilled. George Willard must leave Winesburg, for "his life there had become but a background on which to paint the dreams of manhood."[133]

Upon completing high school, Sinclair Lewis (1885–1951) could not run far enough or fast enough from his physician father and hometown of Sauk Centre, on the Minnesota prairie. Soon dropping out of Yale, Lewis became a vagabond in Europe and South America, a social worker, utopian socialist, and newspaper and magazine editor before he turned to writing fiction in his thirties. To gather grist for his artistic mill, however, Lewis relied on memories of his Sauk Centre childhood. The result was the fictional town of Gopher Prairie, Minnesota, in *Main Street* (1920), perhaps the best known of all the rural realist novels. Set in the years around World War I, *Main Street* is rich in detail, with descriptions of the natural setting, plants, and animals; ethnic dialect; comedy; satire; and development of the interesting minor characters Dave and Maud Dyer, the Haydocks, Miles Bjornstrom, the Widow Bogart, Erik Valborg,

132. Anderson, *Winesburg, Ohio,* 193, 120, 142, 144.
133. Ibid., 116, 247.

Guy Pollack, Raymie Witherspoon, and others. The result is a perfect setting for a marital battle of competing worldviews by the lead characters, Dr. Will and Carol Kennicott.[134]

Will and Carol's debate pits the values of conservative, rural Gopher Prairie against those of progressive, urban America. Will Kennicott is a country doctor, an aging bachelor who meets and marries a young professional woman from "the cities" and brings her to live in his beloved hometown. His bride Carol has earned a college degree in Saint Paul and worked as a librarian in Chicago, acquiring progressive, feminist beliefs. Carol sees herself as worldly and immediately sets out to "uplift" backward Gopher Prairie. She plans themed parties, organizes a dramatic troupe, lobbies for a new town hall, and voices her progressive political views. In all this she meets much resistance and becomes the object of gossip and derision. Her reaction is at first resolute and even droll ("Isn't it wonderful how much we all know about one another in a small town like this," she remarks pleasantly to Will's busybody Aunt Bessie).[135] Will's reactions range from bemusement, to embarrassment, and, finally, to anger. Making no progress in her civic improvement campaign, Carol becomes bitter and contemplates (but does not consummate) a love affair with a young Swedish tailor, Erik Valborg. She even leaves Will, taking their young son and living for two years in Washington, D.C. At story's end, however, Carol returns and makes her peace with Gopher Prairie. She still clings to her old beliefs but now accepts Gopher Prairie on its own terms, conceding to the need to work for incremental change.

It is very interesting, and important, that Sinclair Lewis portrays Carol in nearly as bad a light as the narrow-minded provincials she (and Lewis) castigate. Carol has high ideals, but she is also scatterbrained, with a penchant for half-baked schemes, elitism, and shallow commitment to her supposed radicalism. If *Main Street* does have a hero, it is Doc Kennicott,

134. Sinclair Lewis, *Main Street* (1920; repr. New York, 1961). For Lewis, see Mark Schorer, afterword to ibid., 433–39; Max Geismar, *The Last of the Provincials: The American Novel, 1915–1925* (London, 1947), 69–152; Kazin, *On Native Grounds,* 205–26.

135. Lewis, *Main Street,* 322.

whose good-natured perseverance more than makes up for his provincialism. Doc is a consummate midwesterner, and he shows Carol the beauties of the Minnesota prairie on a fall bird-hunting trip in a horse-drawn carriage; he takes Carol on another trip to the country when he makes a house call on an appreciative Swedish farm family. Doc Kennicott brings a voice of reason to bear on Carol's erratic behavior. His berating of Carol after having intervened and terminated her "love affair" is pragmatic and final:

> I bring babies into the world, and save lives, and make cranky husbands quit being mean to their wives. And then you go and moon over a Swede tailor because he can talk about how to put ruchings on a skirt! Hell of a thing for a man to fuss over![136]

Doc Will Kennicott may lack artistic sensibility, but he is a scientist, with a good mind and a stout heart. Lewis actually places Will in equipoise—standing between Gopher Prairie's most bigoted townspeople and Carol's high-flown ideals. Indeed, Will's pragmatic ways are as much a part of Sinclair Lewis's Midwest as the prairies and wheat fields he lovingly describes. *Main Street* ends with Carol, back home in Gopher Prairie, insisting to Will, "I do not admit that Gopher Prairie is greater or more generous than Europe! I do not admit that dishwashing is enough to satisfy all women! I may not have fought the good fight, but I have kept the faith." To which Will responds,

> Sure. You bet you have. Well, good night. Sort of feels like it might snow tomorrow. Have to be thinking about putting up the storm windows pretty soon. Say, did you notice whether the girl put that screwdriver back?

The reader is left to reflect on the degree to which Sinclair Lewis is drawn to Doc Kennicott's world view.[137]

Rural realism continued into the 1920s and '30s, but with

136. Ibid., 381.

137. Geismar, *Last of the Provincials,* 72; Kazin, *On Native Grounds,* 221, 225–26; Lewis, *Main Street,* 381, 432. See Schorer, afterword to Lewis, *Main Street,* 439.

publication of *Spoon River Anthology, Winesburg, Ohio,* and *Main Street,* the rural realists had said just about everything they had to say. It was a great deal. They had exposed the illusion of rural innocence and small town virtue. They had portrayed the hard lot of midwestern women and the pragmatism of their marriages. They had pointed to economic and social injustice and called for populist and progressive reforms. They had, in a phrase, called into question the dream of an agrarianism. Yet (there is always a "yet" when talking of rural realism) these literary artists were "Jeffersonian hearts plagued by a strangely cold and despotic America."[138] Like their populist political allies, they were simultaneously drawn to historic and modern America. Richard Hofstadter has written,

> The utopia of the Populists was in the past, not the future… The Populists looked backward with longing to the lost agrarian Eden .… they would have liked to restore conditions prevailing before the development of industrialism and the commercialization of agriculture.

Hofstadter shows the populists were not true political realists because, paradoxically, they both rejected and embraced the romantic ideal of a farmers' utopia. For the same reason, the populists' literary counterparts—Howe, Garland, Cather, Masters, Anderson, Lewis—were not true literary realists. Their vision was too agrarian, and this Jeffersonian agrarianism makes their literature poignant. They were writers in search of a lost world.[139]

Just as upper Mississippi Valley writers seemed to have exhausted their creative well, lower Mississippi Valley artists stepped up. The Fugitive Poets and Agrarians of Vanderbilt University needed no lessons from upper midwesterners in populist agrarianism. Allen Tate, John Crowe Ransom, Donald Davidson, Robert Penn Warren, and other kindred spirits were Vanderbilt professors and students who met at Sidney Hirsch's

138. Kazin, *On Native Grounds,* 17.
139. Hofstadter, *Age of Reform,* 59, 62; Lauck, "The Myth of the 'Revolt of the Village.'"

and James Frank's Nashville, Tennessee, homes for poetry readings and criticism during the years 1910 to 1930. Hearing a poem read while they held a printed version in their hands, the group strove to focus discussion on the poet's written words, shunning authors' biographies and other nonprinted context. This rigor catalyzed into a collegial school of southern poets and novelists whose work was somehow both conservative and avant-garde.[140]

What the Fugitives and Agrarians shared was their method and their southernness. Their poetry and prose often (not always) focused on *place,* and that place was the American South. Their poems were highly experimental, known for use of free verse (abandoning conventional [e.g., iambic pentameter] forms), and unique punctuation (or lack thereof) and spacing to give their poems an important *visual* element. Labeling themselves "Fugitives" because of their urge "to flee from the extreme of conventionalism whether old or new," they founded *The Fugitive,* a literary magazine that ran for nineteen issues from 1922 to 1925. Many of them went on to successful careers as writers, critics, and professors who taught a generation of English graduate students what was ultimately called the New Criticism, their method of focusing solely on the printed words of a text.[141]

Allen Tate's poem "Ode to the Confederate Dead" (1928) is a good example of the Fugitives' blending of old and new. Tate (1899–1963) was born more than three decades after the end of the Civil War, in Clark County, Kentucky, and earned a BA in English from Vanderbilt in 1922. He later taught at Southwestern College (Memphis) and other colleges and authored biographies of Stonewall Jackson and Jefferson Davis. Although his poem is not sentimental or adulatory, it is respectful of those who fought for the Confederacy. Moreover, its cadence and appearance are unique. The author's somber voice begins by describing a Confederate graveyard in the late fall: "Row after row with strict

140. Paul Conkin, *The Southern Agrarians* (Knoxville, Tenn., 1988), 1–31.

141. Ibid.; Thomas Daniel Young et al., *The Literature of the South,* rev. ed. (Glenview, Ill., 1968), 604–10 (qtn., 606). See also William C. Havard and Walter Sullivan, eds., *A Band of Prophets: The Vanderbilt Agrarians after Fifty Years* (Baton Rouge, La., 1982), 3.

impunity / The headstones yield their names to the element," Tate intones. "The wind whirrs without recollection; / In the riven troughs the splayed leaves… Seeing, seeing only the leaves / Flying, plunge and expire." He continues, painting a picture of the horrible battles these men had fought, and alluding to their ultimate defeat. Throughout, Tate weaves the reactions of a modern southerner to his region's tragic past into a poem that has a unique rhyme pattern, shape, and appearance.

Turn your eyes to the immoderate past,
Turn to the inscrutable infantry rising
Demons out of the earth—they will not last.
Stonewall, Stonewall, and the sunken fields of hemp,
Shiloh, Antietam, Malvern Hill, Bull Run.
Lost in that orient of the thick and fast
You will curse the setting sun.

Cursing only the leaves crying
Like an old man in a storm
You hear the shout, the crazy hemlocks point
With troubled fingers to the silence which
Smothers you, a mummy, in time.

…

Leave now
The shut gate and the decomposing wall:
The gentle serpent, green in the mulberry bush,
Riots with his tongue through the hush—
Sentinel of the grave who counts us all![142]

Robert Penn Warren (1905–89), the best known of the Fugitive and Agrarian writers, took a poet's method and sensibilities into the realm of short stories and novels. Warren was a Kentuckian (Guthrie County) who earned his Vanderbilt English degree in 1925, going on to a highly successful career as a professor, critic, poet, and novelist. Along the way, he became the only American writer to earn a Pulitzer Prize in both fiction

142. Allen Tate, "Ode to the Confederate Dead," *Poems* (1947; rev., New York, 1967), 19–23.

(*All the King's Men* [1946]) and poetry (*Promises* [1957]). In 1986, Daniel Boorstin, Librarian of Congress, designated Warren Poet Laureate of the United States. Known as "Red" to his friends, Robert Penn Warren was no romantic or apologist for the South, yet he could not follow the popular intellectual path of dismissing southerners and southernness as failed, backward, and racist. His art reflects a deep respect for the delicate balance of southern contradictions. For example, he begins his short story "The Patented Gate and the Mean Hamburger" with this poetic description of a southern redneck:

> You have seen him a thousand times. You have seen him standing on the street corner on Saturday afternoon, in the little county-seat towns… His face is long and bony, the jawbone long under the drawn-in cheeks. The flesh along the jawbone is nicked in a couple of places where the unaccustomed razor has been drawn over the leather-coarse skin. A tiny bit of blood crusts brown where the nick is. The color of the face is red, a dull red like the red clay mud or clay dust which clings to the bottom of his pants and to the cast-iron brogans on his feet, or a red like the color of a piece of hewed cedar which has been left in the weather. The face does not look alive… But you see the eyes. You see that the eyes are alive. They are pale blue or gray, set back under the deep brows and thorny eyebrows. They are not wide, but are squinched up like eyes accustomed to wind or sun or to measuring the stroke of the ax or to fixing the object over the rifle sights. When you pass, you see that the eyes are alive and are warily and dispassionately estimating you from the ambush of the thorny brows. Then you pass on, and he stands there in that stillness that is his gift.[143]

In *All the King's Men,* Robert Penn Warren combines poetic descriptions of place, vernacular southern English, and a riveting plot based on the life of Louisiana's controversial New Deal–era Governor Huey Long. Warren was perhaps drawn to Long's story because, like most of the Fugitives and Agrarians, he was sympathetic to populism and the Democratic Party. However, unlike rural realist writings that touted populist solutions to

143. Robert Penn Warren, "The Patented Gate and the Mean Hamburger," *The Circus in the Attic* (1931; rev. New York, 1947), 120–21.

America's problems, *All the King's Men* portrays that dream run amok. Warren's protagonist, a lower Mississippi Valley governor named Willie Stark, begins his career as a sincere reformer seeking justice for the common folk. In the end, like Huey Long, he becomes a corrupt authoritarian and victim of an assassin's bullet. Along the way, readers meet supporting characters whose stories add heft to the core plot. Willie's tale is interwoven with that of his loyal wife Lucy and their spoiled son Tom; his hard-boiled secretary (and sometimes lover) Sadie Burke; his loyal driver and bodyguard Sugar Boy; the corrupt political boss Tiny Duffy; the (seemingly) upright Judge Montegue Irwin; Anne and Adam Stanton of Burden's Landing; and, most important, their lifelong friend, and Willie's right-hand man, Jack Burden.[144]

"This has been the story of Willie Stark, but it's my story, too. For I have a story." So states the narrator Jack Burden near the end of *All the King's Men.* Jack is a hard-drinking, cynical journalist and native of Burden's Landing, a well-to-do Gulf Coast town named after his troubled family. Rejected in love by Anne Stanton, Jack leaves home to lead a dissolute life. He begins to write a history doctoral thesis about Cass Mastern, a gripping story of upper-class sin, adultery, and cruel chattel slavery as practiced in antebellum Kentucky, but fails to complete the manuscript. Jack next marries and works as a newspaperman, but his marriage fails and he lives in hotels. Then, he finds hope in Willie Stark's campaign reforms and becomes the new governor's chief researcher. Willie, however, often puts Jack's skills to use abetting blackmail by uncovering the scandals of political enemies, including Jack's childhood mentor (and, unbeknownst to Jack, his real father) Judge Irwin. Thus, Jack Burden's story is ultimately one of his discovery of human sin and corruption, and loss of hope. Jack has been ruined—by his family, his failed loves, and his career. So he drinks, and he sleeps, and he writes. "I'm the joker in the deck. My name is Jack, and I'm the wild Jack and I'm not one-eyed."[145]

144. Robert Penn Warren, *All the King's Men* (1946; repr. New York, 1974). I have consulted, but not quoted from, the "restored edition" of *All the King's Men* (New York, 2001).

145. Ibid., 435, 414, passim.

Willie Stark begins his political career as a faithful family man, teetotaler, and liberal idealist, but the reader watches 1930s southern politics turn him into a philandering, alcoholic demagogue. Willie wants to do what he sees as fair—soak the rich via heavy oil, mineral extraction, and income taxes, and use their money to give the common folk "free" medical care, schools and colleges, retirement pensions, and roads and bridges. Even after Jack begins to see Willie's failings, he defends him to his wealthy mother and stepfather and Judge Irwin, stating that if the state's former power brokers had not left the poor in such desperate straits, Willie could have never risen to the governorship.[146]

Meanwhile, Willie spins out of control, winning elections and pushing through legislation by crushing anyone who stands in his way. After his upright populist attorney general Hugh Miller resigns in protest, Willie remarks dismissively, "He wanted to make bricks but he just didn't know somebody has to paddle in the mud to make 'em." "Sure, there's some graft," Willie explains later, "but there's just enough to make the wheels turn without squeaking… Sure I got a bunch of crooks around here … I got my eye on 'em. And do I deliver the state something? I damned well do." Jack sums up Willie's method cynically, as "moral neutrality… The morally bad agent may perform the deed which is good."[147]

Willie Stark's power reaches a crescendo when he successfully uses blackmail to squash an impeachment attempt. As Willie's enemies admit defeat, tens of thousands of common folk gather on the state capitol grounds to hear him speak. "They tried to ruin me but they are ruined," Willie begins his speech, to the roar of the crowd.

> They tried to ruin me because they did not like what I have done. Do you like what I have done? [The crowd roars its approval] I tell you what I am going to do. I am going to build a hospital. The biggest and the finest money can buy. It will belong to you. Any man or woman or child who is sick or in pain can go in those doors…

146. Ibid., passim.
147. Ibid., 256, 393.

> Free. Not as charity. But as a right. It is your right. Do you hear? It is your right! [Crowd roars]… That the rich man and the great companies that draw wealth from this state shall pay this state a fair share. That you shall not be deprived of hope! [Crowd roars] I will do those things. So help me God. I shall live in your will and your right. And if any man tries to stop me in this fulfilling of that right and that will I will break him. I'll break him like that! … I'll smite him. Hip and thigh, shinbone and neckbone, kidney punch, rabbit punch, upper cut and solar plexus. And I don't care what I hit him with. Or how! [Crowd roars] … I'll hit him with that meat ax! … Gimme that meat ax![148]

Warren ends *All the King's Men* twice. In the first ending, Willie's hubris causes catastrophe. Tom Stark is paralyzed in a college football game and dies, leaving behind a pregnant girl he met on a one-night stand. Lucy, distraught over her only son's death and disgusted with Willie's drinking and philandering, moves out of the governor's mansion. After Jack tells Judge Irwin he has uncovered his past crimes and unethical behavior, the judge commits suicide, and only then does Jack learn he is his true father. Meanwhile, Anne has become involved in a love affair with Willie, sending Jack into despair. When Anne's brother Adam finds out about the love affair, he assassinates Willie in the state capitol building.[149]

Robert Penn Warren then counters this tragic ending with a more hopeful one, an epilog as it were. As Warren briefly yet evocatively tells the stories of *All the King's Men*'s surviving characters, the reader learns that life will go on. Willie's hospital is built and named after Tom Stark; Lucy begins to build a new life by adopting and raising Tom's love child; Sadie moves away from the capitol; and Sugar Boy spends his days in the reading room of the public library. Jack goes back to work on his Cass Mastern manuscript, marries Anne, and they leave Burden's Landing. Moreover, Jack tells off Tiny Duffy (now governor) and renews his friendship with Hugh Miller. "It looks as though

148. Ibid., 261–62. Willie's speech is quoted here without Jack's and Ann's interspersed comments.

149. Ibid., 267–401, passim. Huey Long was assassinated in similar fashion.

Hugh will get back into politics," Jack remarks, "and when he does I'll be along to hold his coat. I've had some valuable experience in that line." Thus the promise of populist reform somehow survives.[150]

Only a few years after *The Fugitive* ceased publication, and a decade and a half before publication of *All the King's Men,* Robert Penn Warren and three other members of the Fugitive group moved on to an endeavor that would change the landscape of twentieth-century American thought. Although connections between the Fugitives and Agrarians have been overstated, there are important ties. There were differences of opinion among Agrarians themselves, yet they shared fundamental beliefs. The Agrarians were a group of 1930s interdisciplinary scholars who moved beyond Fugitive literature and poetry to include philosophy, history, economics, and sociology within their creative scope. The Fugitives John Crowe Ransom, Donald Davidson, Alan Tate, and Robert Penn Warren were joined by Frank L. Owsley, Herman Nixon, Lyle Lanier, John Gould Fletcher, Stark Young, and others to sound their battle cry in *I'll Take My Stand: The South and the Agrarian Tradition, by Twelve Southerners* (1930).[151]

The Agrarian agenda was ambitious. They opposed and countered what they considered to be the major trends of post–Civil War American society. The "Statement of Principles" of *I'll Take My Stand* begins,

> The authors contributing to this book are Southerners… they entertain many convictions in common … all tend to support a Southern way of life against what may be called the American or prevailing way; and all of us as much as agree the best terms in which to represent the distinction are contained in the phrase Agrarian vs. Industrial.

Union victory, the Agrarians argued, imposed northern social and economic systems of urbanism, capitalist industrialism, consumption, and applied science on the South and the nation as

150. Ibid., 402–438, especially 435–38 (qtn., 436).
151. Conkin, *Southern Agrarians,* 1–69; Havard and Sullivan, *A Band of Prophets,* 3–6.

a whole. A values system composed of materialism, conformity, and positivism (an uncritical belief in progress) accompanied this imposition. Agrarians warned that Yankees, in their triumph over the South, had thrown out the baby with the bathwater, as it were. Agrarians pointed to important southern beliefs in individualism over conformity, spirituality over materialism, and localism over a centralized state. They harked back to the ideas of Thomas Jefferson (and Jeffersonian and Jacksonian Democrats) who believed agriculture must remain strong to preserve republican virtue; farmsteads and small towns must counter urban manufacturing centers and their slums. The Agrarians' non-Marxist critique of modern capitalism called for a return to agriculture, the nuclear family and marriage, religion, the arts, and what these southerners saw as "gentility"—manners, good conversation, and hospitality.[152]

Critics were quick to pounce, labeling the Agrarians romantics, "sufferers from nostalgic vapors," and "Neo-Confederates." They pointed to southern backwardness (e.g., no antebellum public schools, poor diet and low standard of living, and racism) and sarcastically noted the hypocrisy of professors and intellectuals calling for a 'return to the land.' It is true that, because of their upbringing, men like Owsley and Ransom entertained racist, or at best, apologetic views of slavery and postbellum Jim Crow laws. As southern Democrats, some Agrarians supported and defended racial segregation as the basis of Democrat dominance. Other members of the group held progressive views on race. The Cass Mastern story in *All the King's Men* is a scathing indictment of slavery, and Warren became an outspoken advocate of desegregation. Despite failings, there is great value in aspects of the Agrarian philosophy, and Agrarians did important work. For example, Frank L. Owsley's book *Plain Folk of the Old South* (1949) is a pioneering social history of inarticulate white freeholders, and novelists and poets like Tate, Ransom, Donald, and Warren have undoubtedly enriched our national literature. The Agrarians were not naïve;

152. John Crowe Ransom et al., *I'll Take My Stand: The South and the Agrarian Tradition* (New York, 1930), ix–xx (qtn., ix); Conkin, *Southern Agrarians*, 75–76.

they produced *All the King's Men* and *Plain Folk of the Old South*, not *Gone with the Wind.* As Stark Young wrote,

> If anything is clear it is that we can never go back, and neither this essay nor any intelligent person that I know in the South desires a literal restoration of the old Southern life, even if that were possible; dead days are gone, and if by some chance they should return, we should find them intolerable. But out of any epoch in civilization there may arise things worth while, that are the flowers of it. To abandon these, when another epoch arrives, is only stupid, so long as there is still in them the breath and flux of life.[153]

Like rural realists who preceded them, Agrarians saw that industrial progress had brought America problems alongside blessings. They yearned for an agrarian utopia while simultaneously working for modern cultural, economic, and political causes. There was indeed a big, healthy baby in the bathwater. Today's intellectuals who characterize Agrarian views as anachronistic or, more likely, have never even read or heard of the Agrarians, should take a good look around the country in which they reside. Agrarianism is alive and well in America, at seemingly incompatible ends of the republic's socio-political fabric. On the one hand, there are so-called conservatives who listen to country music, watch *Outdoor Life Network,* stock their garages with drums of water and flour, cultivate their own gardens (with advice from the *Farmer's Almanac*), preserve fruit and vegetables, keep firearms and ample ammunition to hunt, and dry (or freeze) their meat. Then there are so-called liberals who listen to folk music, watch *Nature* on PBS, buy organic fruit and vegetables at farmer's markets or food co-ops, and tend their own urban and suburban backyard gardens (where they also gather eggs from free range chickens), all the while reading modern versions of *Small Is Beautiful* and the Foxfire books. On weekends, the latter folks load their kayaks onto custom racks atop Suburu Outbacks and head for the wilderness (and state

153. Young et al., *The Literature of the South,* 600–607; Frank Lawrence Owsley, *Plain Folk of the Old South* (1949; repr. Baton Rouge, La., 1982); Stark Young, "Not in Memoriam, but in Defense," in Ransom et al., *I'll Take My Stand,* 328.

and national parks), where they encounter the former folks in Chevrolet Silverados and Jeep Cherokees, four-wheeling up the same dirt roads. These folks may not always get along, but they are cut from the same cloth. We are still Agrarians.[154]

In 1985, following a midwestern drought and agricultural recession, a group of country rock musicians started a fund-raising concert series called Farm Aid. Willy Nelson, John Mellencamp, Neil Young, and several others allied to "save the family farm" from extinction. Nelson, a Texas songwriter and cofounder of the Outlaw movement in country music, joined Young, a Canadian rocker and 1960s Buffalo Springfield veteran who had fronted the country rock bands Crazy Horse and the International Harvesters. Mellencamp was an upper Mississippi Valley folk rocker who, throughout a long career, has written and sung about the small towns and farms of his southern Indiana youth. Like Nelson and Young, Mellencamp was a modern liberal captivated by images of rural lifestyle and the myth of an agrarian Eden. In "Rain on the Scarecrow," for example, he sings of bank foreclosures in true populist style: "The crops we grew last summer / weren't enough to pay the loans / … When you take away a man's dignity he can't work his field and cows." Yet this lament is balanced by Mellencamp's paen to rural life, his smash hit "Small Town":

> No, I cannot forget where it is that I come from.
> I cannot forget the people who love me.
> Yeah, I can be myself in this small town,
> and people let me be just what I want to be.
> Well, I was born in a small town,
> and I can breathe in a small town.
>
> Gonna die in this small town,
> and that's prob'ly where they'll bury me.[155]

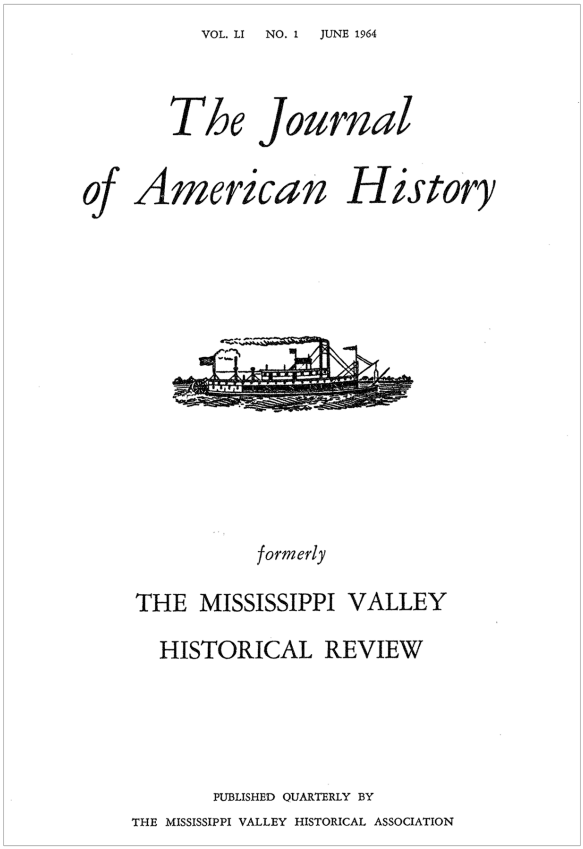
154. Elliot Wigginton, ed., *The Foxfire Book: Hog Dressing, Log Cabin Building, Mountain Crafts and Foods, Planting by the Signs, Snake Lore, Hunting Tales, Faith Healing, Moonshining, and Other Affairs of Plain Living* (Garden City, N.Y., 1972); E. F. Schumacher, *Small Is Beautiful: A Study of Economics as if People Mattered* (London, 1973). For contemporary ancestors, see chapters 6 and 7, this work, and Michael Allen, *Rodeo Cowboys in the North American Imagination* (Reno, Nev., 1998), 7–8, 209–10.

One century before Farm Aid musicians celebrated small midwestern towns and farming, the populists had already fought, and failed, to save the American family farm. Rural realists and Agrarians followed in their wake, but today about one percent of all Americans are farmers or, more accurately, "agri-businessmen." Since the 1890s, the family farm has gradually become an imaginative construction. Yet this fact is no hindrance to Farm Aid activists and countless Americans today who, like the populists, rural realists, and Agrarians before them, imagine the family farm still exists and are fighting hard to "save" it from destruction.

The agrarian dream dies hard. And it is a blessing that is so, for much that is good can yet be salvaged from American agrarianism. Frederick Jackson Turner once wrote that even though the pre-modern era has passed, modern Americans retain some of the traits and characteristics that helped shape the early frontier folk. Turner was right, and so too was Stark Young, who wrote that out of the agrarian Mississippi Valley arose "things worth while, that are the flowers of it." Localism, individualism within the context of communities and neighborhoods, spirituality and religion, the nuclear family, folk-based arts, manners, good conversation, and hospitality are essential to sustain any epoch of American civilization.

155. Holly George-Warren, *Farm Aid: A Song for America* (Emmaus, Pa., 2005) is a celebratory retrospective with photography and sound accoutrement, but the above analysis is my own. Quotes from John Mellencamp, "Rain on the Scarecrow" and "Small Town," *Scarecrow,* 1985, Mercury Records, LP. Mellencamp is briefly discussed in chapter 8, this work.

ILLUSTRATIONS



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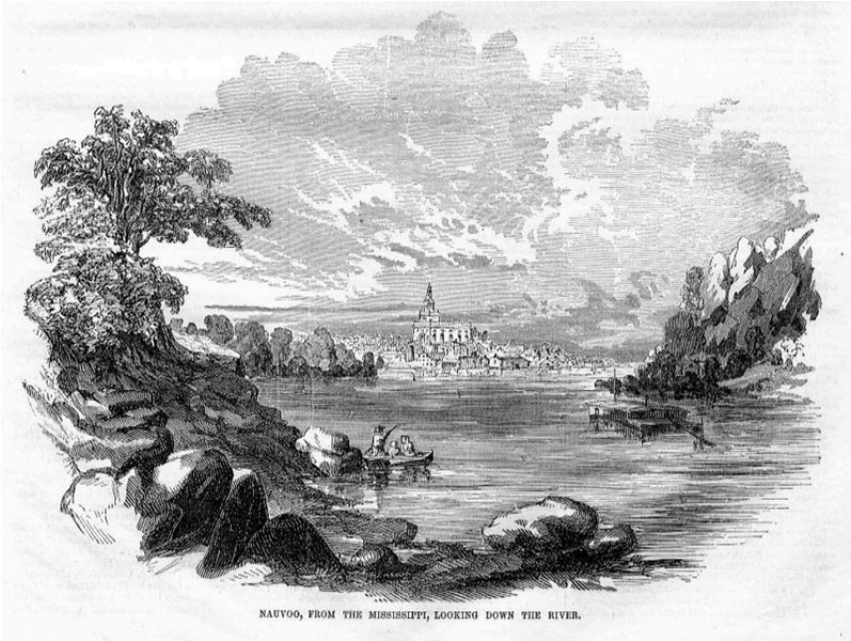
Transitional *Journal of American History* cover. In 1964, the Mississippi Valley Historical Association changed its name to the Organization of American Historians and changed the name of the *Mississippi Valley Historical Review* to the *Journal of American History*.

Contemporary photograph of Cahokia—the Mississippian Mound Builders city—featuring Monk's Mound, near present-day East St. Louis, Illinois. Historic Route 66 photo, Public Domain.

Henry Lewis, "The Indian Camp [Upper Mississippi]," c.1854. Public Domain.

Davy Crockett's *Almanac of Wild Sports in the West* (1837). Author's collection.

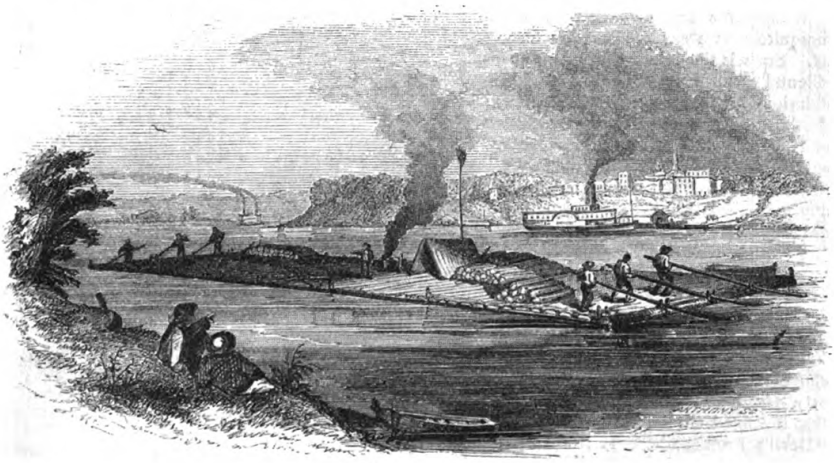
Frances (Fanny) Wright (1795–1852), author, abolitionist, and feminist, c. 1820s. Public Domain.



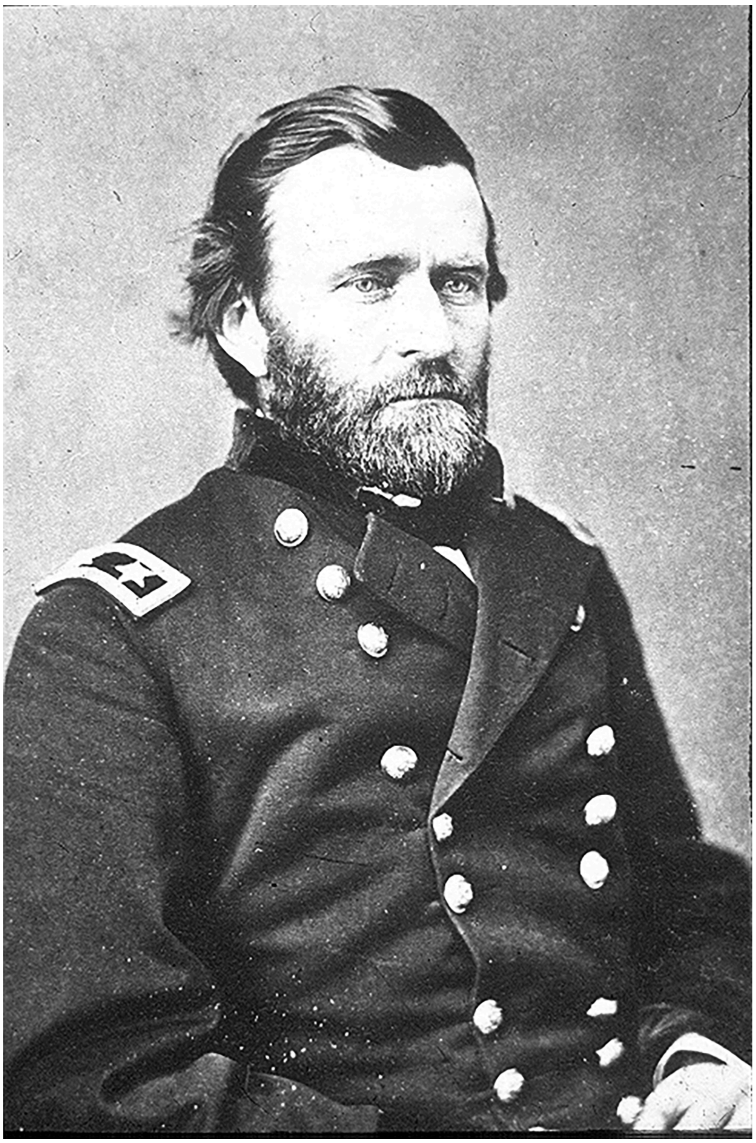
Nauvoo, from the Mississippi, Looking Down River, by unknown artist, 1853, woodcut engraving, *Gleason's Pictorial Drawing-Room Companion*. Courtesy Community of Christ's Joseph Smith Historic Site, Nauvoo, Illinois. Note flatboat at right (along the Iowa shore) and the Latter-day Saints temple at center (on the Illinois shore).

Bend in the River (orig. untitled), by David Hyrum Smith, c. 1865, oil on canvas, courtesy Community of Christ's Joseph Smith Historic Site, Nauvoo, Illinois, and the Lynn and Lorene Smith Family. Note lumber raft in foreground, keelboat with sail, and the riverfront of Old Nauvoo.

New Orleans in 1851. Note steamboats, flatboats, and deep-sea clippers. Public Domain.



Lumber raft. *Harper's New Monthly Magazine*, 12 (December 1855), 39. Public Domain.



General Ulysses S. Grant (1822–85), c. 1860s. Public Domain.

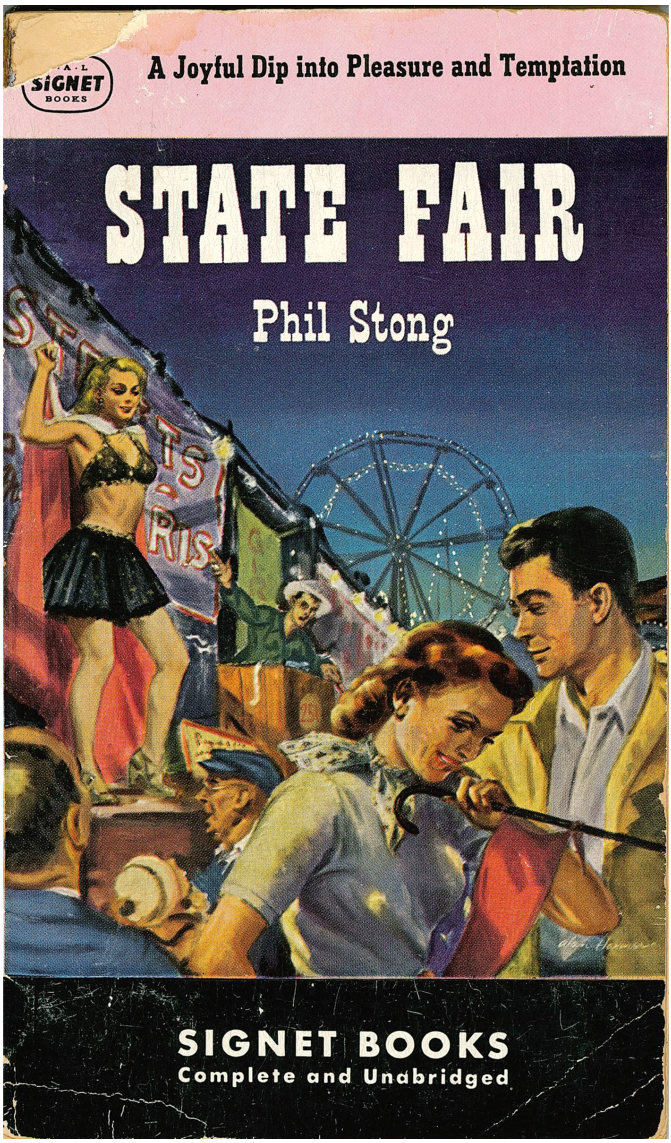
Civil War on the lower Mississippi. Destruction of the Confederate ram *Arkansas* (by its own crew) after unsuccessfully engaging the Union gunboat *Essex*, near Baton Rouge, August 6, 1862. Currier and Ives. Public Domain.

Congressman John Roy Lynch (1847–1939), Republican, Mississippi, 1873–77, 1881–83. Public Domain.

The Great 1927 Mississippi Valley Flood. Public Domain.

Zora Neale Hurston (1891–1960). 20th-century American author and folklorist. Public Domain.

1948 President Harry S. Truman political button. Truman's vice-presidential running mate was Senator Alben Barkley of Kentucky (left). Author's Collection.



State Fair book cover. A 1932 novel by the Iowan Phil Stong, set at the Iowa State Fair, was the basis for four different movie adaptations.

Map of rock-and-roll music sites, by Tom Carlson.

Elvis Presley, c. 1957. Author's collection.

Upper Mississippi River. Note towboat pushing barges and the Great River Road. Public Domain.

The Mighty Mississippi (lower river). Public Domain.

Chapter 5

CIVIL WAR, EMANCIPATION, FEDERALISM, AND THE TWENTIETH CENTURY LEGACY

> There are those who say to you—we are rushing the issue of civil rights. I say we are 172 years late.
>
> Hubert Humphrey to Democrat National Convention (1948)[1]

In the summer of 1948, two Mississippi Valley men, Hubert Horatio Humphrey, mayor of Minneapolis, Minnesota, and U.S. President Harry S. Truman of Independence, Missouri, challenged the segregationist wing of their own Democratic Party. Humphrey and Truman did not act alone or in a historic vacuum. For decades, Black freedom activists, most notably members of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), had labored alongside Black clergymen, professionals, and other community members to advance civil rights. The nation's white private business sector joined in, most notably with the Brooklyn Dodgers' 1947 signing of Jackie Robinson to desegregate major league baseball. And the Republican Party's 1948 platform boasted a strong civil rights plank supported by their presidential candidate Thomas Dewey and his running mate Earl Warren, who was destined to soon make a huge contribution to the civil rights movement. The late President Franklin D. Roosevelt had promised Blacks he would advance their cause, but Roosevelt had prioritized civil rights

1. Hubert H. Humphrey, *The Education of a Public Man* (New York, 1976), 459.

below ending Depression-era economic collapse and winning World War II. Hubert Humphrey and Harry Truman believed 1948 was the time for the party of Jefferson and Jackson to change its course.[2]

Truman got the ball rolling in 1947 by appointing a bipartisan Civil Rights Commission to issue recommendations regarding anti-lynching action, equal employment opportunity, voting rights, and desegregation of federal government jobs, including the military. When Democrats met in July of 1948, an alliance of northern moderates, the Americans for Democratic Action (ADA), and Black political leaders like Congressman William L. Dawson had formed. They supported the thirty-seven-year-old Humphrey in a floor fight over the civil rights plank in the party platform. Facing sharp opposition from southern segregationists led by Georgia Senator Richard Russell and South Carolina Governor Strom Thurmond, Humphrey took the floor and offered his amendment. In one of the most electrifying speeches in American political history, he denounced those southern Democrats who believed "the issue of civil rights is an infringement on states' rights." Humphrey proclaimed, "The time has arrived for the Democratic party to get out of the shadow of states' rights and walk forthrightly into the bright sunshine of human rights."[3]

The ayes won closely, by 70 votes out of 1,234 cast. Mississippi and Alabama delegates walked out, Truman handily defeated Russell for the Democrat presidential nomination and, on July 26, Truman issued Executive Order 8981 desegregating the U.S. Army, Navy, and Marine Corps. Although Strom Thurmond ran as a third-party presidential candidate, he and most "Dixiecrats" returned to the party fold under the re-elected Truman and kept fighting for their "states' rights" to segregate Black men and women from white.

Thus in 1948, the nation at last stood poised to face huge

2. Alonzo L. Hamby, *Man of the People: A Life of Harry S Truman* (New York, 1995), 433–35, 448–49; Humphrey, *Education of a Public Man*, 110–17.
3. Robert H. Ferrell, *Harry S. Truman: A Life* (Columbia, Mo., 1994), 295; Humphrey, *Education of a Common Man,* 459.

unresolved problems stemming from debates over race intertwined with federalism. To fully understand this, we must first look back in American history eight decades earlier, to the era of the Civil War and Reconstruction. The entire United States endured this turbulent time, and the Mississippi Valley played a pivotal role in events as they unfolded.

CAIRO TO CHATTANOOGA

"My family is American, and has been for generations, in all its branches, direct and collateral," stated General and President Ulysses S. Grant in his *Personal Memoirs,* one of the best written of all presidential autobiographies. Descended from New Englanders and Pennsylvanians, Grant's family was further tempered and reshaped by the rigors of life in the Mississippi River Valley.[4]

The western rivers wind through Ulysses S. Grant's life story. He was born to Jesse R. and Hannah Simpson Grant on April 27, 1822, at Point Pleasant, Ohio, on the upper Ohio River, near Cincinnati. He spent his early life in nearby Georgetown, Ohio, and as a youth visited Chillicothe, Ohio, and Covington, Maysville, and Louisville in Kentucky. Much later, after his first army career in the Far West, Grant resided with his wife Julia near her family in Saint Louis, Missouri. Immediately prior to his Civil War service, Grant and Julia moved north to live alongside Jesse, Hannah, and Grant's siblings in Galena, Illinois, on the upper Mississippi River. Much of Ulysses S. Grant's most consequential Civil War service took place along the Ohio, Cumberland, Tennessee, and Mississippi Rivers, where he led a brilliant 1861–63 campaign cutting the Confederacy in two. Then, after the war, Grant and Julia returned to Galena, where Grant learned of his 1868 election to the presidency of the United States.[5]

4. Ulysses S. Grant, *Personal Memoirs of U. S. Grant,* 2 vols. (1885–86; repr. New York, 1990), 1:17, 21.
5. Joan Waugh, *U. S. Grant: American Hero, American Myth* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 2009), 102; William S. McFeely, *Grant: A Biography* (New York, 1982), 5–12.

Grant was a brown-haired, freckled child whose temperament more closely resembled his quiet, reticent mother than his brash, argumentative father. Jesse Grant was a successful hide tanner who was drawn to politics. Following Andrew Jackson's final term as president, Jesse disavowed the Democrats and became an anti-slavery Whig and, eventually, an abolitionist Republican. Young Ulysses' calm, firm demeanor made him an excellent horseman, and all his life he loved to train and ride horses. But the freedom of his Ohio Valley youth ended suddenly in 1839 when Jesse informed his son he had secured him an appointment to the U.S. Military Academy at West Point. The 17-year-old, five-foot-one-inch, 117-lb. boy from Georgetown, Ohio, did not make waves at West Point. Grant excelled in math and struggled in French; he enjoyed reading novels and took up drawing and painting. A growth spurt brought him a muscled frame and height of five feet, eight inches. In his study of military tactics, Grant was drawn to some (not all) European practices, which he was to combine with the more coarse warfare techniques of Mississippi Valley frontiersmen.[6]

Grant graduated in the middle of his class and returned to the Midwest when he and his academy roommate Fred Dent were posted at Jefferson Barracks in Saint Louis. Ulysses often visited the nearby Dent plantation, White Haven, where he met and fell in love with Fred's sister Julia. Jesse Grant was furious to learn Ulysses had taken up with slaveholders, but that is not the reason Julia and Ulysses remained unwed until 1848. Grant's regiment first moved to Louisiana, and then to Texas. Grant had achieved the rank of first lieutenant on the eve of the Mexican-American War.[7]

Grant was one of dozens of Civil War generals who earned their spurs in the Mexican-American War of 1846–47. A perusal of Mexican war lieutenants, captains, and majors reveals that Robert E. Lee, George McClellan, Stonewall Jackson, P. G. T. Beauregard, Richard Ewell, Joe Johnston, Albert Sidney

6. McFeely, *Grant,* 5–12; Adriana Bosch, dir., *Ulysses S. Grant: Warrior President,* part 1, *American Experience,* season 14 (Boston, 2002), DVD.
7. McFeeley, *Grant,* 20–27.

Johnston, George Pickett, A. P. Hill, Benjamin Meade, John B. Gordon, George Thomas, Braxton Bragg, Joe Hooker, and many more served in Mexico under Generals Zachary Taylor and Winfield Scott. Although assigned behind the lines to Taylor's Quartermaster (supply) Corps, Grant soon found his way to the front and fought bravely at Monterrey. Here, Grant's horsemanship served him well as he "charged with the regiment" and, once inside the city, risked his life to fetch more ammunition. His biographer William McFeeley writes: "With his arm around the neck of the horse, his left foot up behind the saddle, his right in the stirrup, and his body protected by the right side of the horse, he rode at full run past the Mexicans shooting at him." Grant later recalled, "I got out safely without a scratch."[8]

In August of 1848, at war's end, Grant at last married Julia in Saint Louis; Jesse and Hannah so opposed his marriage into a slaveholding family they refused to attend the wedding. Captain Grant resumed his military career, but during his 1852–54 service at Fort Humboldt, an isolated post on the California coast, he grew weary of military life. The difficulties of separation from Julia and his new family (their first son, Frederick, was born in 1850) led Grant to heavy drinking. After fifteen years in the army, he resigned and returned to farm some Missouri land he dubbed Hardscrabble. When this and other business ventures failed, he turned to his parents for help. Jesse initially refused, writing, "So long as you make your home among a tribe of slaveholders I will do nothing." With three children to support and Julia pregnant with their fourth, Grant submitted to his father's will. In 1860, the Grant family rode a Mississippi steamboat to Galena, Illinois, where Ulysses went to work as a clerk in his father's leather and harness shop. In less than a year, however, the nation was embroiled in civil war.[9]

The Civil War made Ulysses S. Grant. Although he had failed in farming and business, Grant possessed the intellect and courage necessary to help lead the Union to victory. Upon

8. Ibid., 28–34; Grant, *Personal Memoirs,* 1:78–81.
9. Bosch, *Ulysses S. Grant.*

hearing of the Confederate secession, Grant re-enlisted in the U.S. Army, declaring, "There are but two parties now, traitors and patriots." Promoted to brigadier general in July 1861, he was selected to command the 21st Illinois Infantry Regiment. Grant assumed command at Cairo, Illinois, at the juncture of the Ohio and Mississippi, on September 4 and moved to occupy Paducah, Kentucky, on September 6, 1861.[10]

During this time, and before his promotion to general, Grant had been called briefly to Missouri to assist in keeping that rebellious state in the Union. Near Florida, Missouri (in the northeastern part of the state), he nearly crossed paths with young Sam Clemens, who had joined Marion's Rangers, a ragtag Confederate militia unit. Clemens served without distinction and soon deserted to trek to Nevada Territory. Under his pen name Mark Twain, he later wrote, "In time I came to know that Union colonel whose coming frightened me out of the war, and crippled the Southern cause to that extent—General Grant. I came within a few hours of seeing him when he was as unknown as myself." Twenty-four years after their Missouri wartime experience, Twain assisted an ailing and impoverished Grant in the expeditious publication of his *Memoirs.* The book's success ensured widowed Julia a source of income.[11]

The idea to cut the Confederacy in half through control of the Mississippi River can be traced back to General Winfield Scott's Anaconda Plan, but Grant, William Tecumseh Sherman, David Farragut, David Porter, and other Union commanders greatly refined Scott's overly simplistic strategy. Like many northerners in 1861, Scott mistakenly believed the Civil War would be short and the Union would easily prevail without major battles and bloodshed. He reasoned that if Union sailors and soldiers simply surrounded the Confederate states and applied steady pressure (like an anaconda snake), the unsupplied Rebels would succumb with no need for a direct Union invasion and accompanying

10. Ibid.; James McPherson, *Ordeal by Fire: The Civil War and Reconstruction* (New York, 1982), 154; William C. Davis, *Battlefields of the Civil War* (London 1990), 34.
11. Mark Twain, "The Private History of a Campaign That Failed," in *Great Short Works of Mark Twain,* ed. Justin Kaplan (New York, 1967), 161.

casualties. Yet the Confederates fought fiercely from the start. Along the Mississippi, they immediately moved to counter Grant by seizing New Madrid, Missouri, and sharp engagements followed at Columbus, Kentucky, and Belmont, Missouri. Early on, Grant and Sherman saw the Civil War was going to be a much more difficult affair. While control of the Mississippi River was crucial, the Union would also need to capture the Cumberland and Tennessee Rivers and take the battle into the heart of the Confederacy.[12]

In his *Memoirs,* Grant describes his two-year campaign on the western rivers. Confederate Forts Henry and Donelson, near the mouths of the Tennessee and Cumberland respectively, were "strongly fortified" and of "immense importance," he wrote. Grant's troops advanced as navy gunboats under Flag Officer Andrew Foote bombarded Fort Henry on February 6, 1862. "With Fort Henry in our hands," Grant recalled, "we had a navigable stream [the Tennessee River] open to us up to Muscle Shoals, in Alabama." Yet most of Fort Henry's Rebel garrison managed to escape to nearby Fort Donelson; Grant pursued them, marching a 27,000-man army overland while Foote's ironclad Yankee gunboats ascended the Cumberland to lay siege.[13]

Fort Donelson's defenders, led by Generals Nathan Bedford Forrest and Grant's old army friend Simon Bolivar Buckner, proved much tougher than those at Fort Henry. Yankee and Rebel soldiers and sailors battled fiercely in bitter winter cold February 13–16. As Grant began to gain traction, Buckner tried to negotiate favorable surrender terms for his 13,000 men. Grant refused. Outside Donelson, he wrote Buckner two of the most famous sentences in the history of the American Civil War: "No terms except an unconditional and immediate surrender can be accepted. I propose to move immediately upon your works." On February 16, 1862, Buckner reluctantly surrendered to the man who would now be known as U. S. "Unconditional Surrender"

12. McPherson, *Ordeal by Fire,* 154–56; Grant, *Personal Memoirs,* 1:174–86.
13. McPherson, *Ordeal by Fire,* 222; Grant, *Personal Memoirs,* 1:188; Davis, *Battlefields of the Civil War,* 34.

Grant. Promoted to major general for his feat, Grant later reflected, "Fort Donelson was the gate to Nashville, a place of great military and political importance."[14]

As winter turned to spring, Confederates evacuated Nashville on the Cumberland while Grant used the newly won Tennessee River to sail supplies and soldiers into the southwestern corner of Tennessee. His ultimate aim was to fight Confederate General Albert Sidney Johnston's army near Corinth, a northwestern Mississippi town near the Tennessee state line. With its vital railroad links, Corinth was the Confederacy's western hub. Grant remembered, "The enemy was in strength at Corinth … the great strategic position at the West between the Tennessee and the Mississippi rivers and between Nashville and Vicksburg."[15]

In March, Grant led 40,000 men to Pittsburg Landing, on the Tennessee River, a mere twenty miles from Corinth. There he was joined by General William Tecumseh Sherman, who positioned his men at a nearby log church named Shiloh. They awaited gunboats and infantry reinforcements under General Don Carlos Buell. But Albert Sidney Johnston was not going to sit idly while the Yankees prepared to march into Mississippi; he and Louisiana General Pierre Gustave Touissant Beauregard shrewdly elected to march north and deliver the first blow. On April 6, 1862, Johnston's 40,000-man army slammed against Grant's and Sherman's men, and the two-day Battle of Shiloh began.[16]

"Shiloh was the severest battle fought at the West during the war, and but few in the East equaled it for hard, determined fighting," Grant recalled. The combination of the number of men involved (more than 100,000), their lack of combat experience, and the closeness of battle all contributed to Shiloh's terrible carnage. Johnston caught Sherman off-guard, and before Grant could move reinforcements up to Shiloh church the Union line

14. Grant *Personal Memoirs,* 1:188, 208; McPherson, *Ordeal by Fire,* 222–25; Davis, *Battlefields of the Civil War,* 34.
15. Grant, *Personal Memoirs,*1:221.
16. McPherson, *Ordeal by Fire,* 225–26; Davis, *Battlefields of the Civil War,* 33–49.

was badly beaten back on both its ends. But in the Hornet's Nest, a sunken road at the center of the Yankee line, Benjamin Prentiss's riflemen and artillerymen held off the Rebels in a horrific firefight that lasted until late afternoon April 6. This gave Grant time to build a defensive position along the Tennessee River, where he and Sherman spent a tense night awaiting Buell's arrival. In his demeanor this night we see U. S. Grant's remarkable clarity of mind and steadiness. Unlike some men who panic or stall in life-threatening situations, Grant always remained calm and decisive; he was unshakable in crisis. So too was Sherman, who that evening famously remarked to Grant they had suffered the "Devil's own day." Grant nodded, but added, "Lick 'em tomorrow though."[17]

What Grant and Sherman did not know in those early morning hours was that Albert Sidney Johnston lay dead and the Rebel attack was expended. With Buell's 25,000 troops ferried across the Tennessee, the April 7 Yankee counter-attack forced Beauregard to lead a Rebel retreat back into Mississippi. Those who criticize Grant for his lack of pursuit that day should consider the greenness of his troops and the carnage they beheld. Nearly 4,000 men lay dead or dying on the Shiloh battlefield, with 16,000 wounded. Amazingly, Grant would see even worse carnage in Virginia in 1864. At Shiloh, he remarked that there were so many dead bodies one could walk on them without touching the ground.[18]

Today, a visit to the Shiloh National Military Park, near Savannah, Tennessee, is a profoundly moving—some might say haunting—experience. Because the battle was fought during the warm west Tennessee spring, Union officers thought it imperative to immediately bury the dead. While according their own troops full burial honors, they buried their defeated enemies in unmarked mass graves. Those huge graves stand today as testament to the extent of the bloodletting at Shiloh. One can only imagine the psychological impact that battle had on the men

17. Davis, *Battlefields of the Civil War,* 39–49; Grant, *Personal Memoirs,*1:238; McPherson, *Ordeal by Fire,* 225–27.
18. McPherson, *Ordeal by Fire,* 228–29.

who fought it. Grant had always been a realist, yet in the spring of 1862 he was struck by both the Confederates' grit, and the bare fact that Shiloh was no turning point—that this kind of fighting would continue on with no end in sight.[19]

During and after Shiloh, Ulysses S. Grant, who had never been as enamored with West Point training and European military style as, say, George B. McClellan, began to further Americanize his ideas about warfare. Grant was born in the Mississippi Valley only a few years after the white/Indian guerilla warfare of Tippecanoe, the Thames, Horseshoe Bend, and the first Seminole War. He matured during Black Hawk's War, the second Seminole War, and the army's forceful removal of the Cherokee Indians to land west of the Mississippi. While the European formalism taught at West Point directed officers to stress organizational hierarchies and organize seasonal campaigns, carry huge baggage trains, and leave civilians alone whenever possible, Grant began to think more broadly and aggressively. He joined others in devising a hybrid strategy utilizing both European formal and American guerilla warfare tactics, and he readied his forces to respond to Confederate guerilla attacks. Grant's style of dress and egalitarian demeanor symbolized his frontier influences. He rarely wore a full dress uniform (historians always note the differences between his rough apparel and that of Robert E. Lee at Appomattox Courthouse). Even when called to command back east in 1864, he declined to wear a forage hat (like McClellan) and instead continued to sport the broad-brimmed field hat (a cowboy hat of sorts) worn by western Union soldiers. Grant's down-to-earth demeanor was also reflected in his command style and the informal ways he treated fellow officers and enlisted men.[20]

While Ulysses S. Grant's year on the Mississippi, Cumberland, and Tennessee Rivers reconfirmed his belief in cutting the

19. McFeeley, *Grant,* 115. See "Shiloh," National Park Service, https://www.nps.gov/shil/index.htm, accessed Dec. 14, 2017.

20. Waugh, *U. S. Grant,* 88; Larry Schweikart, *America's Victories: Why the U.S. Wins Wars and Will Win the War on Terror* (New York, 2006), 250, 110–11. For guerilla tactics, see Donald E. Sutherland, *A Savage Conflict: The Decisive Role of Guerillas in the American Civil War* (Charlotte, N.C., 2010).

Confederacy in two, he now began to enlarge and add nuance to that plan. He became an advocate of two equal and simultaneous fronts (east and west) and a more aggressive and, at times, ruthless style of fighting. In this he joined intellectual company with another Mississippi Valley man, the Ohioan William Tecumseh Sherman. A namesake of William Henry Harrison's Tippecanoe foe, the Shawnee chief Tecumseh, Sherman believed in making war as terrible as possible in order for it to end as soon as possible. Sherman called this kind of fighting "Hard War." Later reflecting on his infamous march across Georgia, Sherman wrote that he always aimed to "whip the rebels, to humble their pride, to follow them to their inmost recesses, and make them fear and dread us." The final member of this Union Hard War triumvirate was also a down-to-earth Mississippi Valley man, President Abraham Lincoln. In Grant and Sherman, Lincoln at last found generals who would wield the "terrible swift sword."[21]

Grant wrote, "Up to the battle of Shiloh I, as well as thousands of other citizens, believed the rebellion, against the Government would collapse suddenly and soon, if a decisive victory could be gained over any of its armies." But after Shiloh, and despite the fact the "Tennessee and Cumberland rivers, from their mouths to the head of navigation, were secured," the Rebels continued their "gallant effort." It was then, Grant continued, that "I gave up the idea of saving the Union except by complete conquest." Up to that time, Grant had protected private property of southern noncombatants, but now "I regarded it as humane to both sides" to seize any property "that could be used to support or supply armies."[22]

Grant's critics assailed his alleged callousness and condemned the huge Union losses at Shiloh. Some critics called him "the butcher" or "Butcher Grant," a charge that escalated as the war ground on. Even today, some historians still embrace the view that Grant was a brutal general compared to supposedly more chivalrous southern commanders. This viewpoint originates in

21. Grant, *Personal Memoirs,* 1:246–47; McPherson, *Ordeal by Fire,* 410–12; McFeeley, *Grant,* 77–78, 157, 181.
22. Grant, *Personal Memoirs,* 1:246–47.

part from the Lost Cause myth embraced by some postbellum southerners who romanticized the Confederacy and berated alleged Yankee brutality. Immediately following Shiloh, General Henry W. Halleck actually re-assigned Grant to desk work, but much of Halleck's and others' criticisms of Grant were based on professional jealousy. Also debatable are their frequent accusations regarding Grant's alleged drinking problem, though historians today continue to repeat them. Abraham Lincoln saw in Grant the answer to his long search for a general with enough intellect and grit to endure the bloodshed necessary to subdue the Rebels. After a thorough investigation, Lincoln countermanded Halleck's order and ordered Grant to continue his campaign to capture control of the Mississippi River.[23]

Meanwhile, more pieces in the puzzle of securing the Mississippi for the Union were falling into place. The Rebels had fortified Island Number Ten at the base of an S-shaped curve near the Kentucky-Tennessee border, and no Union vessel could pass downstream. In early spring, General John Pope surrounded the Rebels by securing the Missouri shore, running two ironclads past Rebel artillery, and digging a canal bypassing Number Ten. The canal enabled navy troop transports to slip downstream and ferry men across to the northwest Tennessee shore. Outmaneuvered, Island Number Ten's 7,000 Rebels surrendered to Pope's 20,000-man force on April 8, just as Beauregard's men were retreating from Shiloh back into Corinth, Mississippi.[24]

Far to the south, and also in the month of April, Admiral David Farragut and Commodore David Porter were steadily advancing up the Mississippi toward the city of New Orleans. Farragut's seventeen-ship fleet steamed from the Gulf of Mexico upriver to a series of Confederate forts defending the Crescent City. While Commodore David Porter (another Hard War practitioner) mortared the Rebels, Farragut sailed his steamers single file through enemy fire so heavy that one Union officer compared

23. Bosch, *Ulysses S. Grant;* Waugh, *U. S. Grant,* 38–39, 57. "Lost Causism" is discussed below and in this chapter's final section discussion of the United Daughters of the Confederacy. See Rollin G. Osterweis, *The Myth of the Lost Cause, 1865–1900* (Hamden, Conn., 1973).
24. McPherson, *Ordeal by Fire,* 229–30.

it to "all the earthquakes in the world and all the thunder and lightning storms together, in a space of two miles, all going off at once." New Orleans surrendered on April 25, but Admiral Farragut did not stop there. He sailed seven steamers upstream, captured the Louisiana capital of Baton Rouge, and then moved north to Natchez, Mississippi, which surrendered in late May. Meanwhile, the Union ironclads that had supported Pope at Island Number Ten continued their descent of the Mississippi and, on June 6, 1862, Memphis, Tennessee, surrendered to the Union. Now Vicksburg, Mississippi, remained the last major obstacle to linking the two fleets and armies and bringing complete Union dominance of the Mississippi River.[25]

In his *Memoirs,* Grant wrote, "Vicksburg was important to the enemy because it occupied the high ground coming close to the river below Memphis. From there a railroad runs east [to Jackson, Mississippi], connecting with other roads leading to all points of the Southern States… Vicksburg was the only channel … connecting the parts of the Confederacy divided by the Mississippi… So long as it was held by the enemy, the free navigation of the river was prevented."[26]

Situated atop a high bluff overlooking a hairpin turn in the Mississippi River, and defended by a 30,000-man Confederate Army under General John C. Pemberton, Vicksburg proved to be a tough nut to crack. The city was unassailable from its immediate (western) front; to the east lay strong Rebel defenses along the railroad line to Jackson, the Mississippi state capital. To the north and south, the Mississippi Delta's swamps and bayous prevented troop and supply movement during the wet winter and early spring. The same was true farther west, across the river on the Louisiana side. Grant rightly concluded the best plan was to somehow use the Louisiana shore to move troops and some supply boats below Vicksburg, then ferry the men and supplies across the river to Port Gibson, on the Mississippi shore. He would then march to Jackson and use the railroad to move men

25. McPherson, *Ordeal by Fire,* 230–31. Thanks to Paul Moldt for his notes on Island Number Ten. Port Hudson, below Vicksburg, also remained in Rebel hands.
26. Grant, *Personal Memoirs,* 1:283.

and supplies west and assault Pemberton at Vicksburg. In a sense, he was attempting a version of Pope's successful canaling around Island Number Ten, but the task was much, much larger and more difficult. To that end, Grant's and Sherman's men spent November through April of 1862–63 attempting to dig three separate canals through the bayous along the Louisiana shore. All three efforts failed.[27]

As April approached, the delta's waters receded and Grant began to see a way to send men and a few supplies south. On the Louisiana side, Grant recalled, "There was a good road back of the levees, along these bayous, to carry troops, artillery, and wagon trains over whenever the water receded a little, and after a few days of dry weather." Grant could, with difficulty, move his army and some supplies via that route. But Grant still needed gunboats and supply boats. They would have to run the gauntlet, a huge risk Grant ordered the navy to take. On the one-year anniversary of Shiloh, he set his men in motion. Two corps of infantry crossed above Vicksburg on April 5 and began to slog southward. Then, on the moonless night of April 16–17, Commodore David Porter sailed twelve Yankee boats south through four miles of blistering Rebel fire, losing only one vessel. Five transports and six barges broke through a few days later, and a combined fleet ferried men and supplies from Louisiana to Mississippi. By early May, Grant and Sherman had assembled 44,000 men south of Vicksburg at Port Gibson.[28]

Because he possessed only the food and supplies ferried to Port Gibson, Grant determined to take another huge risk. He would live off the country—another Hard War tactic—while he and Sherman marched to Jackson. For two weeks, from May 1 to 14, Grant conducted one of the most successful campaigns in American military history. With Yankee cavalrymen protecting their flanks, Grant, Sherman, and General James McPherson marched their army 180 miles, fought and won four major battles, and forced General Joseph Johnston's Confederates into retreat. The Yankees captured Jackson, its railroads, and all the

27. McPherson, *Ordeal by Fire,* 307–312; Davis, *Battlefields of the Civil War,* 140–46.
28. Ibid., 146; Grant, *Personal Memoirs,* 1:303; McPherson, *Ordeal by Fire,* 312–14.

supplies they needed to advance toward Vicksburg. On May 16, at Champion's Hill, halfway between Jackson and Vicksburg, Pemberton came out to fight. Grant sent the Rebels limping back into Vicksburg, but then he grew overconfident. Falsely sensing imminent victory, he ordered two direct assaults on Pemberton's well-entrenched troops. On May 19 and 22, the Confederates held Vicksburg, killing and wounding 4,200 Union soldiers. Though completely surrounded, Pemberton announced his intention to dig in and defend "the most important point in the Confederacy."[29]

After his two failed frontal attacks, Grant recalled,

> I now determined upon a regular siege—to "out camp the enemy," as it were, and to incur no more losses… We went to work on the defenses and approaches with a will. With the navy holding the river, the investment of Vicksburg was complete. As long as we could hold our position the enemy was limited in supplies of food, men, and munitions of war to what they had on hand. These could not last always.

The siege lasted seven weeks. Throughout this time, Grant's Union rivals criticized the Butcher and his two costly failed assaults, and gossiped that he had begun drinking heavily. Lincoln had earlier responded to such accusations of alcoholism: "I can't spare this man; he fights."[30] One tale describes the dry-witted president telling an annoying gossip that, given Grant's many military successes to date, perhaps it would be a good idea if all of the Union generals drank more heavily.

Vicksburg's civilians suffered greatly during the daily bombardment. As supplies ran out, they printed daily newspapers on wallpaper. As food grew scarce, mule and horse meat appeared on dinner tables (one way to postpone slaughtering animals was to first make soup from their boiled ears and tails). While a few folks actually grew accustomed to the shelling, most retreated daily to cave bunkers ("Rats to your holes!" Rebel troops reportedly chided them). There, as many as

29. Ibid., 313–17.
30. Grant, *Personal Memoirs,* 1:357; McPherson, *Ordeal by Fire,* 232–33.

two dozen people huddled together in a single cave for hours on end. The streets were littered with iron shrapnel fragments. "No glass [was] left," one survivor recalled. "Glass couldn't stand such a bombardment; it was all shivered out. Windows of the houses vacant—looked like eyeholes in a skull." Homes were destroyed, and civilians as well soldiers died at Vicksburg.[31]

Pemberton surrendered the city and his 30,000-man army to Grant on Independence Day, July 4, 1863. He chose this day because he reasoned the Yankees would be in a festive mood and would grant more generous terms. Sherman marched east towards Jackson and Joe Johnston retreated, leaving central Mississippi to the Union. When Grant received word that Union General George Meade had defeated Robert E. Lee at Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, on July 3, he could see the Civil War had at last reached a tipping point. The South was now cut in two by the Mississippi and, although Lee did not realize it at the time, his army was too weakened to ever again invade the North. With every Union advance, the institution of slavery continued to crumble, and Blacks welcomed the conquering army. Grant could not have known in early July that Abraham Lincoln would soon decide to appoint him commanding general of all Union forces, and besides, he had other things on his mind. In the late summer of 1863, Grant turned his gaze once again on the Tennessee River, this time on the city of Chattanooga.[32]

The Union Army faced a grim situation in the upper Tennessee River Valley. Though General William S. Rosecrans had pushed the Rebels out of Tennessee and captured the Chattanooga railhead and steamboat port, his men subsequently suffered a terrible beating in north Georgia. At Chickamauga Creek, on September 19, 1863, Rosecrans's troops faced off against those of Confederate Generals Braxton Bragg and James Longstreet. During a battle bloodier than even Shiloh, the Rebels sent Rosecrans scurrying back to Chattanooga. Only a heroic stand

31. Mark Twain, *Life on the Mississippi* (1883; repr. New York, 2001), 198–203; McPherson, *Ordeal by Fire,* 332–33.
32. McPherson, *Ordeal by Fire,* 332–33; McFeeley, *Grant,* 137–38; Davis, *Battlefields of the Civil War,* 153.

by Union General George Thomas—the "Rock of Chickamauga"—prevented a total rout. As some 35,000 Yankees huddled in Chattanooga with no supplies, Bragg prepared to bombard and starve them into submission. Thus Rosecrans faced a situation direly similar to that of Pemberton in Vicksburg.[33]

However, Lincoln and his commanders quickly moved to salvage the campaign. The Yankees used captured Rebel railroads to rush General Joe Hooker and 20,000 Union reinforcements to help defend Chattanooga. Next, Lincoln ordered Ulysses S. Grant east from Mississippi to take command and, while en route, Grant decisively replaced Rosecrans with George Thomas. The Confederates, Grant remembered, hungrily eyed the city of Chattanooga from the high ground and, because of their recent triumph at Chickamauga, "looked upon the [Union] garrison at Chattanooga, as *prisoners* of war." The stunned and unsupplied Yankees had remained dispirited even after Hooker's arrival. But when Grant rode in on October 23, 1863, he immediately took charge, issuing verbal and written directives. One officer remembered that after Grant appeared, "We began to see things move. We felt that everything came from a plan."[34]

As noted, Chattanooga sat with its back to the Tennessee River. Missionary Ridge and Lookout Mountain, both controlled by Confederate forces, lay to its immediate south and west. Within a week after Grant took command, Union troops managed to open a supply line to the west and foodstuffs began to flow over what the Yanks dubbed the "Cracker Line." When Sherman arrived with an additional 17,000 troops in mid-November, the Union was ready to move against Bragg's army atop Missionary Ridge. "The plan of battle," Grant wrote, "was for Sherman to attack the enemy's right flank… Hooker was to perform like service on our right… Thomas, with the Army of the Cumberland, occupied the centre, and was to assault while the enemy engaged most of his forces on his two flanks."[35]

33. James McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom: The Civil War Era* (New York, 1988), 674–76; Davis, *Battlefields of the Civil War,* 177–88.
34. Davis, *Battlefields of the Civil War,* 177–88; Grant, *Personal Memoirs,* 2:413; McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom*, 670-75.

Grant was pleasantly surprised by what happened next. Bragg's "centre" sat atop the seemingly unassailable Missionary Ridge. Moreover, Thomas's weary force had vivid memories of the terrible beating the Rebels had given them two months prior. Thus Grant pinned his fortunes on Hooker's and Sherman's fresh troops assaulting Bragg's flanks. Hooker did drive the Confederates from Lookout Mountain on November 24, but then both he and Sherman stalled. Fortunately, Thomas and his 23,000 men in the Union "centre" had something to prove. On the afternoon of November 25, they marched tentatively towards Missionary Ridge; overwhelming the first line of Rebel defenders, they continued on (without orders from either Grant or Thomas) and kept fighting, sending two more lines of Rebels running back up the hill in retreat. Chanting "Chickamauga! Chickamauga!" the revengeful Yankees took the ridge before sundown and used their perch to watch Bragg's men retreating back into Georgia.[36]

"The victory at Chattanooga was won against great odds, considering the advantage the enemy had of position," Grant wrote in understatement in his *Memoirs.* When a student of the battle later remarked to Grant that the Rebel generals considered their position impregnable, Grant responded with a dose of Midwestern irony, "Well, it *was* impregnable." Grant always gave great praise and credit to Thomas's men for the Chattanooga victory, yet he knew that he also had Braxton Bragg to thank. Bragg was "naturally disputatious," he wrote; infighting with fellow officers led him to foolishly order Longstreet and Leonidas Polk away exactly when he needed them most (the fiery Nathan Bedford Forrest rode away from Bragg *without* orders). Bragg's other mistake, Grant recalled, was placing too large and exposed a force at the base of the Ridge "on the plain in front of his impregnable position" that turned out to pregnable.[37]

Chattanooga was to be Grant's last battle in the western theater of the Civil War. Abraham Lincoln had at long last found

35. Grant, *Personal Memoirs,* 2:2:413, 427–28.
36. McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom,* 678–80.
37. Ibid., 680; Grant, *Personal Memoirs,* 2:2:449–50.

his general. "The bill restoring the grade of lieutenant-general of the army," Grant wrote, led to his appointment March 2, 1864, and he became the first officer to hold that rank after George Washington. "It had been my intention before this to remain in the West, even if I was made lieutenant-general; but when I got to Washington and saw the situation it was plain that here was the point for the commanding general to be." Grant "determined therefore to have Sherman advanced to my late position" and to take his commanding generalship into the Virginia theater, headquartering alongside General Meade, "commanding the Army of the Potomac."[38]

As Lincoln had deduced, Ulysses S. Grant was well prepared to face Robert E. Lee in Virginia in 1864–65. He brought with him knowledge from difficult lessons he learned in the 1862–63 Mississippi Valley campaign. At Forts Henry and Donelson, Shiloh, Vicksburg, and Chattanooga, Grant learned to combine formal military tactics with a guerilla warfare style to achieve success. Some called Grant a butcher and criticized him for ordering his men to make bloody assaults, seizing civilians' property, and bombarding civilians at Vicksburg, yet he had cut the South in two, and Sherman was proceeding to cut it into quarters. Although Grant now faced east, he did so as a westerner wearing a broad-brimmed western campaign hat. Grant remained a Mississippi Valley man who knew that only through complete conquest and Hard War could he help to end slavery and save the Union.

THE FIRST REPUBLICAN SOUTH

Writing in his 1913 memoir *The Facts of Reconstruction,* the former three-term Mississippi Congressman John Roy Lynch staunchly defended the record of the Republican Party in the postbellum South. He attacked revisionist historians who characterized Reconstruction governments as corrupt and ineffective. Lynch aimed to present the "other side" of the story, a

38. Grant, *Personal Memoirs,* 1:469–70.

"true, candid, and impartial statement based upon materials and important facts." Throughout *The Facts of Reconstruction,* Lynch pointed to "commendable and meritorious" Republican accomplishments in public education, tax and prison reform, and the granting of political rights to the former slaves, the freedmen. This "accurate and trustworthy information relative to Reconstruction" was necessary, Lynch argued, to counter negative southern Democrat-influenced accounts of the period.[39]

Congressman Lynch was in a good position to comment on the status of freedmen during Reconstruction, because he had been born into slavery in Vidalia, Louisiana. Freed by the Emancipation Proclamation and 13th Amendment to the Constitution, Lynch became one of twenty-three African American Republican Congressmen and Senators who served their southern homes between 1870 and 1901. In addition, more than 1,500 Blacks served in lesser offices, from county sheriffs to city councilmen and state representatives. Like Lynch, many of them were Mississippi Valley men. Although defeated by resurgent Democrat "Redeemers" following his third term, Lynch lived a full life as a Republican activist, lawyer, scholar and author, and major in the U.S. Army. The fascinating story of Lynch and his fellow African American Republicans reflects the complexity and contradictory nature of the story of Reconstruction.[40]

Reconstruction—the postbellum period when victorious northerners brought the defeated South back into the Union—is best viewed as a sweeping clock pendulum of action and reaction. Historians have long been drawn to the physicists' truth that for every action, there is an equal but opposite reaction. The applicability of this to social science is reflected, for example, in historical scenarios like the French and Russian revolutions. In both, absolutist regimes were overthrown, a period of hopeful

39. John Roy Lynch, *The Facts of Reconstruction* (1913; repr. New York, 1968), 10–12.
40. John Hope Franklin, "John Roy Lynch: Republican Stalwart from Mississippi," in *Southern Black Leaders,* ed. Howard Rabinowitz (Urbana, Ill., 1982), 39–58; "Black-American Members by Congress," History, Art and Archives, U.S. House of Representatives, https://history.house.gov/Exhibitions-and-Publications/BAIC/Historical-Data/Black-American-Representatives-and-Senators-by-Congress/, accessed Dec. 14, 2017.

and unrestrained liberty followed, which in turn ushered in more absolutism. Thus King Louis XVI's tyranny produced the French Republicans, who in turn begat the despotism of the Emperor Napoleon. Similarly, Czar Nicholas's cruelty brought the white Russians who begat the Reds who, within a generation produced Stalinist tyranny. These dramatic historical shifts—actions and reactions—are often generational.[41]

Fortunately, Americans have, for most (not all) of our history, proved to be remarkably moderate revolutionaries. We have produced actions and reactions to be sure, but they were not equally strong. Thus King George III's monarchy was countered by the revolutionary Articles of Confederation. This in turn brought the Federal Constitution and two sparring ideological groups, the nationalists and sectionalists. Before and after the Civil War, nationalists and sectionalists used ballots instead of bullets to shift political power back and forth and debate the issues of federalism and slavery.[42] During the Civil War, however, more than 650,000 of them died for their beliefs.

Viewed through the symbol of a clock's pendulum, the South started the Civil War as a pro-slavery reaction to the Free Soil movement and Abraham Lincoln's 1860 presidential victory. The North reacted to the South's secession by waging a war to save the Union, and the pendulum continued its radical swing when Lincoln added emancipation of the Black slaves (the 13th Amendment to the Constitution) to northern war aims. Upon Lincoln's assassination, Radical Republicans continued this sweeping pendulum reaction, instituting equality and citizenship among the freedmen (the former slaves) via the 14th and 15th Amendments. Yet by 1877, white northern and southern leaders began to react to this radicalism, slowly moving away from the goal of Black equality. The infamous 1896 Supreme Court decision of *Plessy v. Ferguson* constitutionalized segregation and marked the final end of Reconstruction. Thus, the North's

41. Crane Brinton, *The Anatomy of Revolution* (New York, 1952).
42. Arthur M Schlesinger Jr., *The Cycles of American History* (Boston, Mass., 1986); Larry Schweikart and Michael Allen, *A Patriot's History of the United States: From Columbus's Great Discovery to the War on Terror* (New York, 2004), 110–11, 177–78.

reaction to secession had not been equally strong. Although slavery was purged and the Union restored, by 1896 there was no longer equality for the freedmen. The road back to Black political equality awaited another reactive pendulum swing by future generations of Americans in the twentieth century.[43]

President Abraham Lincoln had become radicalized well before the Civil War's end. His 1860 Free Soil platform called for saving the Union while allowing slavery's continued existence but halting its geographic growth. Yet he continued the radical swing when he issued the Emancipation Proclamation on January 1, 1863. Some have ascribed Lincoln's change solely to a selfish desire to gain Black troops and British aid, but Lincoln had in fact become an abolitionist. He believed, as he had scolded Stephen Douglas in 1858, that "in the right to eat the bread, without leave of anybody else, which his own hand earns [the Black man] is my equal, and the equal of Judge Douglas, and the equal of every living man." By 1864, one year after the Emancipation Proclamation, Lincoln had progressed even further. He wrote Union-occupied Louisiana's new Governor Michael Hahn, suggesting that in the proposed state constitution, "some of the colored people" ought to gain the right to vote. Because an assassin's bullet intervened, we do not know if Lincoln would have followed this radical swing to its natural end: citizenship and the right to vote for all of the freedmen. What we do know is that Lincoln started the swing to radicalism within the Republican Party, and Radical Republicans, including newly freed African American slaves, carried the torch for over a generation after his death.[44]

We also know Lincoln aimed to treat white southern Rebels more generously than any other group of defeated traitors in the history of western civilization. This is another noteworthy example of American moderation; most civil wars end with the victors slaughtering their foes and burying them in trenches. Lincoln's Ten Percent Plan called for disenfranchising only a few

43. Schweikart and Allen, *Patriot's History,* 354–55.
44. Richard Carwardine, "Lincoln and Emancipation: Black Enfranchisement in 1863 Louisiana," *OAH Magazine* (January 2007), 45–46.

thousand high-ranking Confederate officials while welcoming all other white southerners back into the Union as soon as 10 percent of eligible voters of each southern state swore loyalty and ratified the 13th Amendment. Lincoln's vice president, the Tennessee Unionist Andrew Johnson, agreed. After he became President following Lincoln's April 1865 assassination, Johnson used executive orders and his power as commander in chief to immediately and unilaterally bring the former Confederates back into the Union. But Johnson, a Union Democrat who opposed Black equality, miscalculated; the sweep of the pendulum had not run its course. Radical Republicans in Congress moved immediately to impeach Johnson and grant Constitutional rights to the freedmen.[45]

The Radical Republicans were a powerful bloc within a diverse Republican Party. In Republican ranks stood former Whigs and Free Soilers, abolitionists, freedmen, and some former Democrats. Senators Charles Sumner and Thaddeus Stevens, Supreme Court Justice Salmon P. Chase, and the abolitionist Fredrick Douglass all favored the Radical cause. Though Radicals controlled the Republican Party for a relatively brief time and failed by one vote to remove President Johnson from office, they produced the most dramatic changes in American politics and culture since the American Revolution.[46] They created the Freedmen's Bureau (1865) to begin the work of aiding and educating former slaves. Their Civil Rights Act (1866) granted citizenship and the right to vote to the freedmen and was to become enshrined in the 14th (1868) and 15th (1870) Amendments to the Constitution. The Radicals' Military Reconstruction Act (1867) divided the Confederacy into five military districts to be ruled by a Union general until southerners swore loyalty and ratified the 13th, 14th, and 15th Amendments.

Radicals no doubt possessed some selfish motivations. They

45. Eric Foner, *Reconstruction: America's Unfinished Revolution, 1863–1887* (New York, 1988), 35–36, 183–84, 333–36; David Herbert Donald, "Reconstruction, 1865–77," Bernard Bailyn et al., *The Great Republic: A History of the American People* (Lexington, Mass., 1985), 488–90.
46. Foner, *Reconstruction,* 228–39. See also Douglas R. Egerton, *The Wars of Reconstruction: The Brief, Violent History of America's Most Progressive Era* (New York, 2014).

sought revenge against former Rebels, and they desired Republican political supremacy over southern and northern Democrats. Why, they reasoned, should the deaths of 350,000 Union soldiers be in vain? Why should peace lead to the return to power of the Democrats, some of whom had led the nation into war in 1861? Yet the vast majority of Radicals also embraced idealistic goals. Like antebellum abolitionists, they were devout Christians, still steeped in the enthusiasm of the Second Great Awakening. To them, slavery was a sin and slaveholders were sinners. God had seen fit to punish the South through northern (and Republican) victory, the "terrible swift sword." Thus God's will was to punish evil southerners while fostering justice and equality among the former slaves. To accomplish this it was imperative that only Republicans, including Black Republicans, possess the power to govern the states of the former Confederacy, including the lower Mississippi Valley.[47]

From Reconstruction through the early years of the twentieth century, Black Republicans composed an important part of the Republican coalition. The term "Black Republican," which came into use shortly before and after the Civil War, is difficult for modern readers to fully understand. In those days, Democrat detractors used "Black Republican" as a racist epithet to hurl against white Republicans. Lincoln was called a "Black Republican" by his enemies (some of whom even claimed Lincoln had African American ancestry). Later, "carpetbaggers" and "scalawags" (like the former Confederate generals James Longstreet and P. G. T. Beauregard) were branded "Black Republicans" by their enemies. White Republicans at the time respectfully referred to African American Republicans using the terms "colored" and "Negro," words the Blacks themselves used. Modern Americans now believe the noun "Negro" to be disrespectful; they have reconstructed "colored" into "people of color" (they believe the former term offensive but the latter acceptable). Contemporary Americans much prefer the noun "African American" (never used in the nineteenth century) and

47. James Stewart Brewer, *Holy Warriors: The Abolitionists and American Slavery* (New York, 1976), 45–46, 198. For Radical Republican idealism, see Foner, *Reconstruction,* 230–34.

the noun "Black," though the latter is the English equivalent of the Spanish noun "negro," which they consider to be disrespectful.[48]

Of the twenty-three African Americans elected to the United States Senate and House of Representatives following passage of the 14th and 15th Amendments, fifteen came from the southeastern seaboard states, while the lower Mississippi Valley elected two Black Senators and five Congressmen. A residue of fear and racism led to the House of Representatives' refusal to seat the Black Louisiana Congressman John Willis Menard in 1868, but Menard was soon followed in 1870–71 by six Black Congressmen and one Senator, who were all sworn in and served. More followed over the next three decades until the last Black Republican Congressman, George Henry White of North Carolina, was defeated and left office in 1901. Meanwhile, more than 1,500 Black men also served during this time at the city, county, and state levels as councilmen, commissioners, constitutional convention delegates, legislators, cabinet members, and elected executives, including two interim governors.[49]

The Mississippi Congressman John Roy Lynch (1847–1939) was born the son of a Louisiana slave mother and an Irish plantation overseer. As the Civil War ended, Lynch served the Union Army's 49th Illinois Volunteers as a cook and camp worker, before launching a successful career as a photographer and real estate speculator. He moved to Natchez, Mississippi, joined the Republican Party in 1868, and advanced from justice of the peace to serve in the Mississippi state legislature at age twenty-two. In 1872 his colleagues chose him Speaker of the House. In three hard-fought Congressional elections, Lynch overcame fraud and violent threats to serve southern Mississippi in Washington, D.C., 1873–77 and 1882–83. Lynch was

48. Rabinowitz, *Southern Black Leaders of the Reconstruction Era,* xx. See National Black Republican Association, www.nbra.info/, accessed Oct. 26, 2011.
49. Eric Foner, *Freedom's Lawmakers: A Biographical Directory of Black Officeholders during Reconstruction* (New York, 1993); Rabinowitz, *Southern Black Leaders of the Reconstruction Era.*

important in advancing several pieces of Congressional legislation, including the Civil Rights Act of 1875.[50]

Preceding Lynch as a Black Mississippi Valley legislator was Hiram Rhodes Revels, who won Jefferson Davis's old Senate seat in 1870. Although Revels served only one year in the Senate, he became the first president of Alcorn State College, Mississippi's first Black college. Blanche Bruce, an escaped Virginia slave who had attended Oberlin College, served as Mississippi's second African American Senator, from 1875 to 1881. He defended Indian land rights and opposed the Chinese Exclusion Act. At the 1880 National Republican Convention, Bruce received a handful of votes for the vice presidential slot (at the 1888 Republican Convention, Frederick Douglass was nominated for the presidency, though the convention chose Benjamin Harrison).[51]

The Louisianan Charles Edmund Nash's military record helped gain him one term in the U.S. Congress, 1875–77. Born a free Black in 1844, Nash attended public schools and worked as a bricklayer before the Civil War. In 1863, he joined Company A of the 82nd Regiment, United States Army Volunteers, as a private. Nash had attained the rank of sergeant major when he lost part of his leg in the Battle of Fort Blakely (Alabama), only a few days before Lee's surrender to Grant. With New Orleans' free mulatto populace as his political base, Nash was elected to Congress amid violence and turmoil. He arrived in Washington, D.C., in 1875 only to learn he would have to thwart the will of the new Democrat House majority to be allowed to speak before his colleagues on the floor of the House. After his brief Congressional service, Nash lived out his life in New Orleans.[52]

Meanwhile, Alabama Republicans sent three different Black representatives to Washington, D.C., between 1870 and 1878. Jeremiah Haralson was a self-educated slave known as a powerful orator, but he was contentious within the Republican

50. Franklin, "John Roy Lynch," 39–58.
51. William C. Harris, "Blanche K. Bruce of Mississippi: Conservative Assimilationist," in Rabinowitz, *Southern Black Leaders of the Reconstruction Era,* 3–38.
52. "Charles Edmund Nash," Biographical Directory of the United States Congress, https://bioguide.congress.gov, accessed Dec. 14, 2007.

Party and lost his seat after one term. Benjamin S. Turner was born into slavery and saw his wife sold away as a white man's mistress (he never remarried). During the war, Turner accumulated modest savings managing his master's Selma hotel and livery stable. Turner also farmed, and when he announced for Congress in 1870, he sold his horse to finance the campaign. Always a moderate (he simultaneously advocated "Universal Suffrage" for freedmen and "Universal Amnesty" for Confederate officials), Turner was defeated in 1874. James T. Rapier was born on the Tennessee River to well-to-do free Black parents in Florence, Alabama; he worked as a teacher, journalist, and cotton farmer before his 1872 election as north Alabama's Congressman. During his term, Rapier worked alongside John Lynch to secure passage of the Civil Rights Act in the lame duck Republican session of 1875. "Nothing short of complete acknowledgement of my manhood will satisfy me," he proclaimed on the House floor. Interestingly, though Rapier and Haralson suffered election defeats, they were both subsequently awarded government posts by white Republican patrons in the Customs Bureau, Department of the Interior, Pension Bureau, and Internal Revenue Service.[53]

President Ulysses S. Grant, who succeeded Andrew Johnson in 1869, was supportive of Black Republicans and the Radical program. Like many (not all) professional soldiers, Grant avoided politics while serving in the army. Yet, as we have seen, he was raised in an abolitionist household with a father who heartily disapproved his marrying into a "tribe of slaveholders." In the late 1850s, when Grant's failed Missouri farm and other business ventures forced him to liquidate all of his assets to pay his debts, he nevertheless freed his only slave, a "gift" from his father-in-law. Grant then had to pawn his gold watch to pay for Christmas presents for his children.[54]

While Grant entertained some of the racist assumptions

53. "Black American Congressmen and Senators by Congress, 1870–Present"; Loren Schweninger, "James T. Rapier of Alabama and the Noble Cause of Reconstruction," in Rabinowitz, *Black Leaders of the Reconstruction Era,* 79–99.

54. Bosch, *Ulysses S. Grant.*

characterizing most nineteenth-century white Americans, his anti-slavery views are delineated in detail in his *Memoirs.* "Slavery was [t]he cause of the great Rebellion against the United States" because it "required unusual guarantees for its security wherever it existed; and in a country like ours where the larger portion of it was free territory inhabited by an intelligent and well-to-do population, the people would naturally have little sympathy with demands upon them for its protection." The desire to annex Texas and the Southwest, Grant reflected, was "from the inception of the movement to its final consummation, a conspiracy to acquire territory out of which slave states might be formed for the American Union." Moreover, the Fugitive Slave Law "was a degradation which the North would not permit any longer than until they could get the power to expunge such laws from the statute books."[55]

As noted, in 1861 Grant immediately labeled secessionists "traitors" and, like Lincoln, methodically moved from a Free Soil to an abolitionist stance. During the winter of 1862–63, as Grant was moving his army south into Mississippi in his Vicksburg campaign, he fed and employed escaped slaves throughout the region. He even established farms for some of them and wrote Lincoln, "They will make good soldiers." In an 1863 letter, Grant wrote that he tried "to judge fa[ir]ly & honestly and it became patent in my mind early in the rebellion that the North and South could never live at peace with each other except as one nation, and that without Slavery. As anxious as I am to see peace reestablished I would not therefore be willing to see any settlement until this question is forever settled."[56]

Thus, by war's end Ulysses S. Grant had already adopted two fundamental Republican beliefs—union and emancipation—and as his presidency commenced he would swing with the pendulum to become an advocate of the third and more radical goal: equality for the freedmen. Grant assumed the presidency in 1869 while Radicalism was at its peak, and he sustained the radical cause through 1873. Yet by the mid-1870s, during his

55. Grant, *Personal Memoirs,* 1:41, 2:2:773.
56. Grant, *Personal Memoirs,* 2:1033–34; Bosch, *Ulysses S. Grant.*

second term, Grant would play a significant role in the slow shift away from radicalism and the beginning of the end of Radical Reconstruction in the lower Mississippi Valley and the rest of the former Confederacy.[57]

Upon taking the oath of office, Grant was appalled at white southern intransigence. The Radicals were generous to former Rebels. No one was tried for treason; indeed, Robert E. Lee soon became a college president, while Jefferson Davis retired to the Gulf Coast to write his memoirs. All Confederates except a few military officers and high government officials could regain their rights and clout in their state governments—they simply had to swear an oath of loyalty to defend the Constitution, including the 13th, 14th, and 15th Amendments. Yet in 1866, white southerners had elected forty-seven former Confederate Army officers and officeholders to the federal Congress! After Republicans refused to seat them, many of these white southerners turned their backs on the system and refused to participate. In some states this boycott lasted nearly a decade. Into this power vacuum stepped southern Republicans—the so-called carpetbaggers and scalawags—and Black Republicans.[58]

President Grant's contempt for former Rebels boycotting the system invites two conflicting metaphors. One might say Grant thought the Rebels were thumbing their noses at the North; yet it is just as apt to say these same Rebels were cutting off their noses to spite their faces. Grant's attitude was that until the former Confederates admitted defeat and rejoined civil society under the terms offered, he would keep federal troops in the South to enforce the law and sustain the new Republican governments.[59]

Grant's first target was the Ku Klux Klan (KKK). Formed as a secret society in 1866, the Klan committed violent acts against freedmen and state Republican leaders; hooded Klansmen harassed governmental officials and bullied and lynched Blacks who dared to register to vote and hold office. Republicans in Congress responded with a series of Enforcement Acts

57. Foner, *Reconstruction,* 445–46, 528.
58. Ibid., 239; Donald, "Reconstruction, 1865–77," 498–500, 509–10.
59. Donald, "Reconstruction, 1865–77," 498–500, 509–10.

(1870–71) making the Klan's violence a federal crime. As commander in chief, Grant ordered federal troops into southern counties to enforce the freedmen's 14th and 15th Amendment rights. Of course, it cannot have escaped Grant's attention that the Klan's outrages also had political consequences that could lose the newly Republican South to Democrat "Redeemers." While it is true that recalcitrant southern whites continued to form other secret non-Klan societies and committed acts of violence, most historians agree that Grant's tough stand put the KKK out of business for nearly forty years.[60]

As Grant's anti-slavery philosophy had matured into abolitionism, he had also become a Republican partisan who saw the freedmen as a key to postbellum Republican dominance. Grant was willing to do anything necessary, within the law, to ensure that Black men voted. Grant also developed an unrealized plan to provide a haven for persecuted freedmen by annexing the Caribbean isle of the Dominican Republic (Santo Domingo). Like Booker T. Washington, Grant believed the free market would play a role in integration; he believed white southerners would curb their abuses if they actually faced the loss of Black laborers and consumers. Grant proposed a new African American state in the Dominican Republic as a sort of safety valve, a place where freedmen could escape danger yet remain in the Union. Viewed today, the plan seems eccentric; Radical Republican contemporaries like Sumner and Garrison were quick to point out its imperialistic and racist basis. But in the context of the late nineteenth century, Grant's Dominican Republic proposal reflects a genuine desire to help the freedmen. Obviously, the plan never gained traction.[61]

Having surveyed all of Grant's admirable motives and actions to protect the freedmen, we also know that the end to this story is not a happy one. One historian puts it bluntly, saying, "Grant

60. Foner, *Reconstruction,* 458–59; Elizabeth Deane, dir., *Ulysses S. Grant,* part 2 (Boston, 2002), DVD. The most recent scholar to document Grant's strong belief in and enforcement of equality for freedmen is Ronald C. White, *American Ulysses* (New York, 2016).
61. Foner, *Reconstruction,* 494–97; Deane, *Ulysses S. Grant;* Washington, *Up from Slavery,* 155, 223. See also White, *American Ulysses.*

blinked." As his first term was ending, Redeemers began to swallow their pride and once again became active southern Democrats. In most instances they did so legally, putting violence aside and, at least for the time being, professing to be the Republicans' law-abiding and loyal opposition. Meanwhile many former Confederate officeholders filed appeals to Congress and once again became citizens (Lee and Davis did not). In most, not all, former Confederate states, the math was on their side; organized white Democrats could muster majorities and win elections. Between 1869 and 1875, eight of eleven of the old Confederate states saw Redeemers take back the reins of state government. Moreover, in the 1874 national off-year elections, Democrats won the majority in the House of Representatives for the first time since 1860. Thus they were poised to again become the majority party if they could "redeem" the three remaining Republican southern states—Louisiana, South Carolina, and Florida.[62]

In the lower Mississippi Valley, the situation had gotten ugly. Some Louisianans had organized as the White League and instigated racial warfare in New Orleans and rural Louisiana parishes. Fifty freedmen lost their lives in the infamous 1874 Colfax, Louisiana, shootout. Grant deployed federal troops to quell the Louisiana bloodshed, but they were too little and too late. And one year later, when Mississippi Democrats used similar acts of violence while redeeming that state, Grant did nothing. After seven years as president, his stance towards the freedmen had begun a slow pendulum-like shift. By 1875 Grant had returned to the ideological position of advocating restoration of the Union and emancipation of the freedmen but abandoning his commitment to their equality.[63]

Why did Grant blink? The answer is found in three crises that beset the Grant administration and nation and turned America's gaze away from civil rights. First were the Plains Indian wars. Fought between 1864 and 1876 against the Comanche,

62. Donald, "Reconstruction, 1865–77," 510; Deane, *Ulysses S. Grant;* Foner, *Reconstruction,* 549–50.

63. Foner, *Reconstruction,* 554–55; Deane, *Ulysses S. Grant.*

Cheyenne, Sioux (Lakota), and other fierce Great Plains Indian warriors, these wars consumed lives and money, and shifted the nation's attention away from southern race relations. Next came a series of scandals. Historians agree Ulysses S. Grant was an honest man who foolishly relied upon dishonest friends in the legislative and executive branches. The Credit Mobilier scandal actually germinated before Grant took office, but the 1872 disclosure of graft in construction of the government-subsidized Union Pacific Railroad implicated Republican Congressmen and Grant's own vice president. The Whisky Ring scandal of 1875 disclosed scores of Treasury Department officials taking bribes from liquor distillers who paid no federal taxes. Grant's secretary of war, William Belknap, was also on the take, this time from government subcontractors on the Indian reservations. And early in the administration, the speculators Jay Gould and Jim Fisk enlisted the aid of Grant's brother-in-law to help them corner and temporarily profit from the market in gold.[64]

The latter incident combined with over-speculation, indebtedness, and a weak economy to lead to the Panic of 1873. The failure of Jay Cooke's financial firm started a domino effect resulting in the bankruptcy of dozens of the nation's railroads and, eventually, more than 18,000 other businesses. Double-digit unemployment swept the nation. The only ones to profit from this chaos were Democrats who, as noted, were swept back into their Congressional majority in 1874. Grant's response was to circle the wagons, as it were. Although he never articulated it as such, he chose to reprioritize his government's goals at the expense of African American men and women. Although Grant signed the 1875 Civil Rights Act, he spent most of the year working to win the Indian wars, cleanse government of corruption, and stabilize the economy. Certainly the racism that characterized both northern and southern whites played a role in Grant's turning away from the freedmen. In 1868, Grant had run on a platform that declared, "Let Us Have Peace." By 1876 it was

64. Deane, *Ulysses S. Grant;* Schweikart and Allen, *Patriot's History,* 380–84, 408–11.

clear he believed the nation could not continue to use occupation troops to keep fighting the Civil War for another generation.[65]

Two years after he left office, Grant reflected at some length about the fate of the freedmen. Denying the Rebel leaders suffrage "was a mild penalty for the stupendous crime of treason," he wrote. He personally favored army occupation of the South for another decade to enforce Black suffrage. But that was a political impossibility. The white public, north and south, strongly opposed continuing martial law because "it was not in accordance with our [republican] institutions." Grant is often quoted as saying he regretted granting the vote to Blacks in the first place, but that remark was made in the context of his fear of how white southerners might exploit the 14th Amendment. What particularly galled Grant was that white Southerners had actually *gained* electoral votes through the 14th Amendment (ending the Three-Fifths Compromise); he feared Redeemers were preparing to disenfranchise Blacks to use those votes to become the majority party again. "[Black] Suffrage once given can never be taken away," Grant stated (erroneously) in 1879, "and all that remains for us now is to make good that gift by protecting those who have received it."[66]

Today, Americans often hear a distorted history of the military career and presidency of Ulysses S. Grant. It is said that Grant was a hopeless alcoholic who disregarded human life, and an inept, corrupt politician who betrayed the freedmen and abided the Ku Klux Klan. Grant had flaws, but he was in fact a shrewd and heroic commander, and an important president who fought to end slavery and make citizens of the freedmen. We know for a fact he was regarded as such by his contemporaries. Late nineteenth-century Americans ranked Grant alongside George Washington and Abraham Lincoln. What happened? The historian Joan Waugh has shown that early twentieth-century revisionist historians succeeded in portraying Grant from the Rebel perspective. The Lost Cause view of the Civil War

65. Deane, *Ulysses S. Grant.*
66. Waugh, *U. S. Grant,* 150–51.

prevailed, and U. S. Grant unfairly goes down in history as a failure.[67]

Grant's 1876 decision to not seek re-election ushered in a presidential contest that would mark the beginning of the end of Reconstruction. The election of 1876 is one of seven American presidential elections (the others are 1800, 1824, 1888, 1960, 2000, and 2016) in which the Electoral College did not directly reflect the popular vote. American voters always seem surprised to learn they live in a republic and not a democracy, and 1876 certainly delivered such a surprise. To succeed Grant, the Republicans ran a staunch supporter of the freedmen, the former Union general and Ohio governor Rutherford B. Hayes. The Democrats, poised to elect their first president since 1856, ran a northerner, New York Governor Samuel J. Tilden. When the votes were tallied, Tilden narrowly won the popular vote 4,288,546 to 4,034,311; he was also ahead in the Electoral College, 184 to 165. But Tilden was one electoral vote short, needing 185 to win. Obviously, something was missing, and it should not come as a surprise to learn the electoral votes of Louisiana, Florida, and South Carolina, the last Republican states in the old Confederacy, were in dispute. To win the residency for the GOP, Hayes needed to take all three.[68]

There is to this day strident argument over who rightly won Louisiana, Florida, and South Carolina. Most historians agree the voting in all three was tainted with corruption, but that the Republicans probably won Louisiana and South Carolina, while Tilden carried Florida. Since Tilden needed only one electoral vote, this scenario should have made him president. But some Republicans still considered Democrats traitors, and both parties naturally dug in for a terrific fight during the winter of 1876–77. In Washington, D.C., each party controlled one chamber of Congress. The Constitution states that when there is no electoral majority, the House is to select the president and the Senate the

67. Ibid., 2–3, 185–88. The Lost Cause myth is discussed again below.
68. Foner, *Reconstruction,* 564–75; One of the disputed electoral votes came from Oregon, where the Republican elector was a government employee, a violation of state law.

vice president. The Constitution, however, is silent on the subject of *contested* electoral votes.[69]

In 1876 leaders had to improvise. Congress created a special Electoral Commission made up of five Supreme Court Justices, five Congressmen, and five Senators. Divided by party, this added up to eight Republicans and seven Democrats. These men faced two unsavory outcomes: They could return the political party stained by secession and slavery to power after sixteen years; or they could choose the Republicans by engaging in a travesty of justice. The eight Republicans opted for the travesty of justice, and the commission awarded all of the contested electoral votes to Hayes, who won the presidency 185–184. Then, as in all but one of the many bitter elections in our country's history, the losers did not start shooting; they grumbled and accepted their fate. This is a nation of laws, and Congress and the Supreme Court had acted. And, as it turned out, the Democrats had not fared so badly after all.[70]

The so-called Compromise of 1877 was not one written agreement; it was a collection of deals brokered during the tumultuous winter of 1876–77. The actions of Rutherford B. Hayes and Congress upon commencement of the new administration made it clear that such a compromise had been forged. Hayes immediately appointed a southern Democrat, Tennessee Senator David Key, to the Postmaster Generalship, the most lucrative patronage job in existence prior to Civil Service reform. Congress subsequently passed some federal subsidies to aid southern railroads and build infrastructure (e.g., levees and flood control projects) and otherwise help rebuild the South's crippled economy. Most important, President Hayes used his authority as commander in chief to remove nearly all remaining federal occupation troops from Louisiana, Florida, and South Carolina. Within a year, all three states were back in the Democrat column. It is easy to read between the lines here. The Compromise of 1877 meant northern Republicans were in fact

69. McPherson, *Ordeal by Fire,* 600; Foner, *Reconstruction,* 575–76.
70. Foner, *Reconstruction,* 579–80.

going to turn race relations and the fate of the freedmen over to the Redeemers.[71]

Countless history teachers mistakenly label the Compromise of 1877 as the "end of Reconstruction" when in fact it was the *beginning of the end* of Reconstruction. The Radical Republicans and their African American colleagues did not just fold up their tents and immediately concede defeat. The battles of the late 1860s and '70s continued into the 1880s and '90s, but with diminishing results for the Radicals. Black men continued to vote in pockets of the upper and lower South. Virginia and the Carolinas returned Black Republicans to Congress until 1901. At the state and local levels, African American men continued to serve. In Wilmington, North Carolina, Black Republican city councilmen famously clung to their posts amid racial violence until Redeemers at last overthrew them in 1898. Seventeen years earlier, however, Mississippi Senator Blanche Bruce had returned home, the last of the Mississippi Valley's Black men to serve in the federal Congress.[72]

It is true that some of the governments these Black Republicans served made mistakes and even broke the law; the Gilded Age was a corrupt time, and the Reconstruction governments saw their share of graft and inefficiencies. Yet the *Gone with the Wind* portrayal of these men as fools and thieves is grossly inaccurate. Many historians support John Roy Lynch's defense of the Black Republicans and show their governments' many successes. They instituted tax reform, at last requiring the old planter elite to share the same tax burden as the rest of the populace. They reformed the judicial system and made improvements to state prisons, mental institutions, orphanages, and hospitals. They introduced universal elementary and secondary public schools for the first time in the history of the

71. Foner, *Reconstruction,* 577–78, 580–82; Donald, "Reconstruction, 1865–77," 511. Southern Democrats never gained the level of infrastructure money Republicans promised and reciprocated by breaking their promise to support James Garfield for Speaker of the House.

72. Donald, "Reconstruction, 1865–77," 513; see "Collective Biography of State and Local Leaders" and "Individual State and Local Leaders," Rabinowitz, *Black Leaders of the Reconstruction Era,* 127–392; Mike Baker "White Supremacists Overthrew [Wilmington] Government," *News Tribune* (Tacoma, Wash.), June 1, 2006, A6.

American South. And most important, the Republican Reconstruction governments enforced the 13th, 14th, and 15th Amendments, ending slavery and bringing equal protection under law and the vote to freedmen and all law-abiding citizens.[73]

White Republicans slowly abandoned the freedmen. Grant had signed the 1875 Civil Rights Act, and his successor Rutherford B. Hayes boasted a strong Congressional record of support for Black voting rights. As President, however, Hayes withdrew federal troops, pinning his hopes for Black progress on economic integration and markets (Booker T. Washington soon developed a similar strategy). President James Garfield's vow to protect the freedmen ended with his assassination. Massachusetts Republican Senator Henry Cabot Lodge introduced a new Force Bill to guarantee the federal government would police southern elections and ensure Black suffrage, but it failed to pass. While the rise of populism initially promised an alliance between poor whites and Black folk in opposition to Redeemer control, Redeemers shrewdly played the race card to defeat the populists and unite white Southerners under the Democrat ticket. Meanwhile, the Supreme Court had weighed in on the 1875 Civil Rights Act, interpreting the 14th Amendment to the freedmen's detriment in the *Civil Rights Cases* (1883).[74]

The denouement to this sordid business was the 1896 Supreme Court decision in *Plessy v. Ferguson,* a case emanating from the lower Mississippi Valley. New Orleans had been a relatively open city until Redeemers passed Jim Crow laws requiring separate Black and white facilities. Homer Plessy, a biracial New Orleans citizen, purposely challenged the new order by attempting to board a whites-only rail car. Refused passage, Plessy took his case to court, and his appeal made it all the way to Washington, D.C. The Supreme Court's *Plessy* 1896 verdict joins *Dred Scott*

73. Lynch, *Facts of Reconstruction;* Foner, *Reconstruction,* xvii–xxv.

74. Melvin I. Urofsky and Paul Finkelman, *March of Liberty: A Constitutional History of the United States,* 3d ed. (New York, 2011), 545–46; Donald, "Reconstruction, 1865–77," 513; Foner, *Reconstruction,* 587; "*Civil Rights Cases* (1883)," in *Documents of American Constitutional and Legal History,* ed. Melvin I. Urofsky, 2 vols. (Philadelphia, 1989), 1:237–40.

as one of the most infamous in American legal history. In a tortured reading of the 14th Amendment, a majority of justices distinguished between political and social equality, and declared the 14th guaranteed only the former. The court declared social institutions (e.g., public and private transportation and schools) could be separate (segregated) so long as they were "equal"; Plessy could ride the train, but he had to ride in a separate railroad car of equal quality. This decision is based on two factual errors. First, the Black political equality (right to vote) the Court affirmed in *Plessy* was disappearing in most southern states, and the justices knew it. Moreover, the separate but equal social facilities the Court constitutionalized in *Plessy* were not then, nor ever, truly *equal* facilities; railroad cars, schools, and theater seats reserved for whites were always of better quality than those relegated to Blacks. This unjust decision would stand until the sweep of the pendulum reversed it in *Brown vs. Board of Education* (1954), where the Court declared separate facilities to be "inherently unequal."[75]

Slavery would never return, but African Americans in 1900 had much less freedom than they had enjoyed in the 1870s. Abandoned by their white allies and left to fend for themselves in the newly segregated South, Black men and women showed their mettle. Some of them migrated to the upper South or Northern cities in search of jobs and more freedom; others stayed home and turned to sharecropping as a means of survival in an economy without capital. Some attended segregated schools and colleges and built a small, sturdy Black middle class of teachers, doctors, nurses, and lawyers in the South. Blacks turned to their families, churches, and communities for support. As new state statutes and constitutional amendments took away the voting rights *Plessy* falsely guaranteed, Black Americans developed two disparate, competing survival strategies.[76]

75. "*Plessy v. Feguson* (1896)," in *A Patriot's History Reader: Essential Documents for Every American,* ed. Larry Schweikart, Dave Dougherty, and Michael Allen (New York, 2011), 219–228; "Brown v. Board of Education (1954)," in ibid., 334–38; Urofsky and Finkelman, *March of Liberty,* 546–47.

76. Luther Adams, *Way Up North in Louisville: African American Migration in the Urban South*

The less practicable of the two strategies, for immediate purposes, was that of W. E. B. DuBois. DuBois was a Black Massachusetts intellectual who traveled south after the Civil War to attend Fisk College in Nashville. He studied and worked in Reconstruction-era Tennessee and Georgia while his teaching advanced from one-room schoolhouses to Morehouse College in Atlanta. DuBois became the first Black person to earn a Ph.D. at Harvard University. A founder of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, DuBois was an activist who became a Marxist. He called for a small cadre of forceful African American intellectuals (a "Talented Tenth" [percent]) to lead Blacks and fight for full return to 14th and 15th Amendment rights. DuBois spent most of his life fighting for equal rights, and he is rightly regarded as a founder of the modern Black freedom movement. When DuBois was not occupied fighting against white racism, however, he devoted his energies to disparaging Blacks with whom he disagreed, most notably his nemesis, Booker T. Washington.[77]

Booker T. Washington proposed another course of action for the freedmen, one grounded in his experience in the increasingly dangerous Jim Crow South. Washington was born in 1856 to a Virginia slave mother and a white father whom he never met. He remembered that as a child he never slept in clean bedding or brushed his teeth; he never ate a family meal, or played at any children's games. At war's end, his mother moved the family to the upper Ohio River Valley in the new state of West Virginia. There Washington worked diligently to attain enough secondary education to gain admission to Hampton Institute (Virginia), where he earned bachelor and master of arts degrees and became an instructor. In 1881, Booker T. Washington founded his own college, Tuskegee Institute of Alabama, and labored to build it into one of the foremost Black colleges in the United States. A capitalist, pragmatist, and firm believer in applied education, Washington advocated professional and vocational training so

(Chapel Hill, N.C., 2011); Joseph Reid, "Sharecropping as an Understandable Market Response: The Postbellum South," *Journal of Economic History* 33 (1973), 106–30.

77. Ishmael Reed, introduction to Washington, *Up from Slavery,* vii–xi.

that freedmen might pursue careers as teachers, health and legal professionals, farmers, and mechanics. As one of the nation's premier educators, Washington arguably succeeded Frederick Douglass as the late-nineteenth-century leader of the Black freedom movement. Although he was careful not to burn any political bridges with Redeemers, Washington naturally gravitated to the Republican Party and was a White House dinner guest of President Theodore Roosevelt.[78]

Booker T. Washington's 1901 memoir *Up from Slavery* provides an excellent window to view the swing of the Reconstruction pendulum away from radicalism. Tuskegee was located in the heart of the Deep South and surrounded by white Redeemers; Washington knew well that if he overstepped he could easily lose everything he had spent his career building at Tuskegee. *Up from Slavery* is thus built on two narratives, one radical and the other pragmatic. On the one hand, Washington emphatically condemns slavery, emergent segregation, and "the evil habit of lynching." He protests disenfranchisement via literacy tests and he states unequivocally his belief in "universal, free suffrage." "I do not believe that the Negro should cease voting," Washington declares. Yet in the same passage, Washington urges Black men to turn their gaze away from politics and concentrate on education, capitalism, and building inner moral strength. "No race that has anything to contribute to the markets of the world is long in any degree ostracized… the time will come when the Negro in the South will be accorded all the political rights which his ability, character, and material possessions entitle him to." Booker T. Washington thus dedicated his life to educating African American men and women to acquire professional "ability, character, and material possessions."[79]

It is hard to keep from reading between the lines here. Booker T. Washington obviously knew that northerners had abandoned the freedmen to fend for themselves. He chose to stay in the Deep South and continue to work for the improvement of his race. He knew that "agitation of questions of social equality is the

78. Booker T. Washington, *Up from Slavery,* passim. See chapter 3, this work.
79. Washington, *Up from Slavery,* 153, 155, 162–65.

extremest folly," which could in the worst case lead to violence and lynching. He thus came to believe the wisest course was for African Americans to work to improve themselves morally and economically as they waited for the pendulum to swing back in the direction of radicalism. While Booker T. Washington was mistaken in important ways (it ultimately *did* in part take "agitation" to achieve civil rights), he is absolutely correct in the context of his time and place, and he deserves at least as much acclaim as that accorded to DuBois. The contemporary writer and critic Ishmael Reed states,

> Booker T. Washington deserves a reassessment unfettered by the biases of Northern elitist African-American intellectuals and comfortable white radicals who would only have been satisfied if Washington had engaged in a wild suicidal shootout with whites—who outnumbered the black population three to one—so that they might use his martyr's photo to further their causes.

For over a decade after publication of *Up from Slavery,* Booker T. Washington continued to advance his beliefs, traveling and speaking widely. He died at his beloved Tuskegee Institute in Alabama in 1915.[80]

In the meantime, Congressman John Roy Lynch also continued to fight on. After Redeemers finally redrew the boundaries of his House district to defeat him in 1882, he twice ran unsuccessfully to regain his seat. He remained active in Republican politics, serving on the National Committee and as a convention delegate and staunch supporter of his Congressional colleague and friend James G. Blaine's presidential bid. In 1884, Lynch became the first African American to deliver the keynote address at a national political convention. Married twice with one daughter, he practiced law in both Mississippi and Washington, D.C., until President William McKinley commissioned him an army major and paymaster during the

80. Booker T. Washington, "The Atlanta Exposition Address," National Park Service, https://www.nps.gov/bowa/learn/historyculture/atlanta1-1.htm, accessed Dec. 14, 2017 (qtn.); Washington, *Up from Slavery,* 153, 155, 162–65; Reed, introduction to Washington, *Up from Slavery,* ibid., xxi.

Spanish-American War; he subsequently served fourteen years in Cuba, the Philippines, Hawaii, and San Francisco before retiring from the army in 1911. Lynch then moved to Chicago, where he practiced law and began to write the history of his Reconstruction experiences.[81]

Lynch had become alarmed by what he correctly saw as a pro-Redeemer bent in the writing of the history of Reconstruction. One generation removed from the end of the Civil War, the revisionist historians William Dunning, James W. Garner, James T. Rhodes, Claude Bowers, and others portrayed Reconstruction as a "Tragic Era" (Bowers' words), a troubled time during which vengeful Radical Republicans and their inept Black allies ran roughshod over suffering white southerners, who at last redeemed the South from corruption and malice. This flawed interpretation, part and parcel of Lost Cause mythology, was reflected in the political science works of Woodrow Wilson, then a professor at Princeton, and, at the popular level, in D. W. Griffith's movie *Birth of a Nation* (1915) and, later, *Gone With the Wind* (1939). John Roy Lynch, upon reading the historian James T. Rhodes's rendering of Reconstruction in his *History of the United States* (1906), declared it "not only inaccurate and unreliable, but … the most one-sided, biased, partisan, and prejudiced historical work I have ever read."[82]

Lynch spent the last twenty-five years of his life refuting the Redeemer interpretation of Reconstruction. In *The Facts of Reconstruction,* subsequent articles in the *Journal of Negro History,* and *Some Historical Errors of James Ford Rhodes* (1922), Lynch aimed to show the "commendable and meritorious" accomplishments of Radical Republicans and his Black colleagues within the movement. Evenhandedly, he aimed to not "conceal, excuse, or justify any act that was questionable or wrong," yet he meticulously documented Black achievements in the fields of constitution-making, budgeting, public education,

81. John Roy Lynch, *Reminiscences of an Active Life: The Autobiography of John Roy Lynch,* ed. John Hope Franklin (Chicago, 1970), 261–502.
82. John Hope Franklin, introduction to Lynch, *Reminiscences,* xxxi–xxxiii.

taxation and social reforms, and defense and enforcement of the freedmen's constitutional rights.[83]

In 1939, on the eve of the next swing of the pendulum in the advance of the Black freedom movement, ninety-two-year-old John Roy Lynch died in Chicago. He had spent three decades of his life in the upper Midwest, far removed from the lower Mississippi Valley scenes of his youth and early political career. Frail but still mentally alert, Lynch had been editing the manuscript version of *Reminiscences of an Active Life* the day prior to his death. In 1970, six years after passage of the most recent Civil Rights Act, the historian John Hope Franklin shepherded Congressman Lynch's manuscript through publication.[84]

FDR AND THE RIVER

When the federal government did aggressively reinsert itself into the lives of southerners, it was first in the areas of flood control and electrical power, not race relations. In his 1938 black-and-white documentary film *The River,* Pare Lorentz combines art with propaganda to tell the story of the origins and mission of the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA).[85] Lorentz accomplishes this with striking visuals, an original musical score, and a compelling narration that somehow blends historical narrative, polemic, and free-verse poetry. The resulting movie tells about an important aspect of the environmental history of the Mississippi Valley from the perspective of President Franklin D. Roosevelt's Progressive New Deal bureaucracy.

As Roosevelt made work for Americans during the Great Depression, he did not overlook unemployed artists. Painters, writers, musical composers, folklorists, and moviemakers found commissions at the many alphabet soup agencies of Roosevelt's New Deal. The journalist and film critic Pare Lorentz got his chance to make movies for the Department of Agriculture, which released his Dust Bowl documentary, *The Plow That Broke the*

83. Ibid.
84. Ibid., xxxviii–xxxix.
85. Pare Lorentz, dir., *The River* (Farm Security Administration, 1938), film.

Plains, in 1936. While this movie told the story of aridity and soil exhaustion, *The River* told of the effects of too much water and the great Mississippi River flooding of 1927. Lorentz used actual news reel footage from the '27 floods to show the need for the TVA in effecting flood control, agricultural reform, and rural electrification, all the while putting Americans back to work. In Lorentz's hands, *The River* became a high-powered morality play.[86]

The movie begins with an evocative environmental overview of the Mississippi River Valley, then transitions into a sobering telling of the valley's dire problems, and ends on an upbeat note as the TVA comes to the rescue. Visually, Lorentz opens with gorgeous, billowing clouds (in a style influenced by the German moviemaker Leni Riefenstahl), then moves quickly to scenes of rushing rivers, a recurrent motif under which the narrator urgently intones, "*Down* the Monongahela, *down* the Yellowstone, *down* the Milk, the White, and the Cheyenne," et cetera, noting all of the Mississippi's major tributaries. Human civilization is dramatically described in a similar poetic style: "From New Orleans to Baton Rouge, Baton Rouge to Natchez, Natchez to Vicksburg, Vicksburg to Memphis, Memphis to Cairo." Underneath, Virgil Thomson's musical score combines American folk idiom with modernist dissonance that rises and falls with the narrator's voice and the filmed images and their messages. Human poverty and dire circumstances are juxtaposed with stark, barren landscapes evidencing soil erosion. The final arrival of the Tennessee Valley Authority comes as a triumph, accented by upbeat music underneath images of hydroelectric dams, electric power lines, and common American folk working at their newly created TVA jobs.[87]

Like all good propaganda, *The River* makes selective use of evidence. Although many historians agree with Lorentz's

86. William E. Leuchtenburg, *Franklin D. Roosevelt and the New Deal, 1932–40* (New York, 1963), 329, 126–27; Pare Lorentz, *The Plow That Broke the Plains* (U.S. Resettlement Administration, 1936), film; Lorentz, *River.* Lorentz's work has recently been complemented by the documentary filmmaker Bill Morrison's *Great Flood* (2014).

87. Lorentz, *River.*

positive portrayal of the New Deal and TVA, some do not.[88] And, as we shall see, another moviemaker would eventually portray the TVA in a more complex and critical light than Lorentz's Depression-era classic.

Efforts to manage the Mississippi Valley's rivers to avert natural disasters and improve navigation began with nineteenth-century Whig and Republican calls for "internal improvements" via the Army Engineers, known today as the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. By mid-nineteenth century, the corps was attempting to manage the river's current via wing dams and dikes; to prevent erosion they "shav[ed] the bank down to low-water mark … and ballast[ed] it with stones" and pilings. The latter quotation appears in a passage from *Life on the Mississippi* in which Mark Twain expresses skepticism about man's ability to tame the forces of nature. The "military engineers," he notes, "have taken upon their shoulders the job of making the Mississippi over again—a job transcended in size by only the original job of creating it."

> One who knows the Mississippi will promptly aver—not aloud, but to himself—that ten thousand River commissions … cannot tame that lawless stream, cannot curb it or confine it, cannot say to it, Go here, or Go there, and make it obey; cannot save a shore which it has sentenced; cannot bar its path with destruction which it will not tear down, dance over, and laugh at. But a discreet man will not put these things into spoken words; for the West Point engineers have not their superiors anywhere. They know all that can be known of their abstruse science; and so, since they conceive they can fetter and handcuff that river and boss him, it is but wisdom for the unscientific man to keep still, lie low, and wait till they do it.[89]

88. Leuchtenburg, *Franklin D. Roosevelt and the New Deal,* and Frank Freidel, *A Rendezvous with Destiny: Franklin D. Roosevelt* (Boston, 1990) are positive portrayals. A supportive contemporary account is "TVA," *Fortune* (May 1938), repr. in Frank Freidel, ed., *The New Deal and the American People* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J., 1964), 62–90. Alternative views are Amity Shlaes, *The Forgotten Man: A New History of the Great Depression* (New York, 2007); Robert E. Higgs, *Crisis and Leviathan: Critical Episodes in the Growth of American Government* (New York, 1987); and Burton W. Folsom, Jr., *New Deal or Raw Deal? How FDR's Economic Legacy Has Damaged America* (New York, 2008).
89. Mark Twain, *Life on the Mississippi* (1881; repr. New York, 2001), 157.

Catastrophic flooding has been recurrent in the Mississippi River Valley since prehistoric times. Only areas surrounding the upper Mississippi bluffs, high ground on the upper Ohio, and the lower Mississippi bluff cities of Memphis, Vicksburg, Natchez, and Baton Rouge have for the most part been spared the worst of the floods. The torrents of 1719, 1734–35, 1779, 1795, 1802, 1813, 1849, 1858, 1874, 1917, 1927, 1927, 1937, 1944–45, 1973, 1993, and 2011 swept across the Mississippi floodplain causing extensive damage. The famous recent Mississippi Valley flooding catastrophe—caused by Hurricane Katrina in 2005—was not exceptional; it was part of a historic pattern.[90]

Supervising disaster relief during the 1927 flood was Herbert Hoover, President Calvin Coolidge's secretary of commerce. Hoover was no stranger to the Mississippi Valley. He was born and spent the first nine years of his life in West Branch, Iowa, ten miles from the Iowa River and forty miles from the upper Mississippi at Davenport. A humanitarian who assisted President Woodrow Wilson in managing food relief to Belgium refugees during and after World War I, Hoover went right to work in 1927. The historian Jim Sam writes that Hoover coordinated hundreds of ships and steamboats to carry food and supplies and supervised building tent cities for refugees. He became the voice of the relief effort on radio and in press releases that helped raise money for the Red Cross and other private sector health and relief agencies. "I suppose I could have called in the whole of the army, but what was the use?" Hoover later recalled. "All I had to do was to call in Main Street itself." Hoover melded the private and public sectors to aid flood victims.[91]

The severe 1927 flooding coincided with two pivotal political

90. Christopher Morris, *The Big Muddy: An Environmental History of the Mississippi and Its Peoples from de Soto to Katrina* (New York, 2012), 68–69, 106–107, 140, 154, 164–65, 179, 2011; Richard Campanella, *Bienville's Dilemma: A Historical Geography of New Orleans* (Lafayette, La., 2008), 303–28. See also, Nona Martin Storr, Emily Chamlee-Wright, and Virgil Storr, *How We Came Back: Voices from Post-Katrina New Orleans* (Arlington, Va., 2016).

91. Jim Sam, "Herbert Hoover and the Great Mississippi Flood," https://www.hoover.org/research/herbert-hoover-and-great-mississippi-flood, accessed Dec. 11, 2021. An excellent firsthand account of Hoover's work during both World War I and the 1927 flood is William Alexander Percy, *Lanterns on the Levee: Recollections of a Planter's Son* (1941; repr. Baton Rouge, 1973), 159–60, 242–69.

developments—evolving progressivism and the Great Depression—to restart and greatly expand the federal government's internal improvements projects. Progressivism was a late-nineteenth- and twentieth-century reform movement emanating from the activist wings of both political parties. Progressives were critics of capitalism who advocated, among other issues, large expansion of the federal government's role in economic regulation and social welfare.[92] Although Herbert Hoover belonged to the Republicans' progressive (Bullmoose) wing, as president he advocated government partnership with capital instead of an adversarial relationship. In the 1930s, following Hoover's defeat, Democrat Progressives under Franklin D. Roosevelt added electric power generation, job creation, agricultural improvements, conservation, and recreation to existing federal roles in river navigation improvement and flood control.

Immediately following his inauguration, Franklin D. Roosevelt (FDR) asked Congress to create the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA) as "a corporation clothed with the power of government but possessed of the flexibility and initiative of a private enterprise." Congress responded immediately, passing the TVA statute on May 18, 1933. Roosevelt's vision for the TVA was both awe-inspiring and frightening. He aimed for the federal government to build nine hydroelectric dams along the Tennessee River, from its Appalachian headwaters to its mouth on the Ohio. To sidestep constitutional objections to an unprecedented creation of a federal utility corporation, he declared the TVA to be a "regional" public "corporation." This language added the rhetorical weight of capitalism and states' rights to what was in fact a federally owned electric power monopoly. While orders would come from Washington, D.C., nominal control of the TVA rested in state-located federal agencies. These spanned 80,000 square miles in states drained by the Tennessee River—Tennessee, Virginia, North Carolina, Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi, and Kentucky.[93]

92. Richard Hofstadter defines and surveys progressivism, but qualifies its connections to the New Deal in *The Age of Reform* (New York, 1955), 3–6, 302–304.

The institutional history of the TVA was punctuated by political jockeying among its founding bureaucrats (Arthur Morgan, Harcourt Morgan, and David Lilienthal) and a running battle with its myriad conservative and libertarian opponents.[94] Amid this political strife the TVA achieved a great deal. The agency brought electric power into tens of thousands of southern homes previously fueled by only wood stoves and kerosene lamps. The TVA also began to directly sell discounted electrical appliances to these folks, eliminating capitalist middlemen. The TVA's electrical power brought industries and jobs to the Tennessee River Valley, and the new fertilizer manufacturing industry helped to restore depleted southern soil. The TVA replanted forests (in conjunction with the New Deal's Civilian Conservation Corps) and claimed to have lessened the spread of malaria in its wetlands. Moreover, the new Tennessee River dams created year-round navigation depth and were outfitted with locks to bring diesel towboat commerce all the way to Knoxville, Tennessee. Much later, tourism jobs arose as sportsmen flocked to TVA lakes and parks to fish and camp.[95]

Yet opponents insisted the Tennessee Valley Authority wielded a double-edged sword. Opposition emerged early on, as fiscal conservatives decried the unprecedented deficit spending necessary to fund the TVA and other New Deal initiatives.[96] Most debate over the TVA focused on constitutionality. Was building electric power dams and dispensing electricity a government job, or did it belong in the private sector? Progressives contended the Constitution's interstate commerce and public defense clauses had long put the federal government into the business of river navigation improvements, including locks and dams. And because such dams could also be built to produce electricity, progressives took the argument a step further. They believed electric power was a "public good," one that (like the

93. Leuchtenburg, *Franklin D. Roosevelt and the New Deal,* 54–55; Freidel, *Rendezvous with Destiny,* 87; "Our History," Tennessee Valley Authority, https://www.tva.com/about-tva/our-history, accessed June 15, 2013; Shlaes, *Forgotten Man,* 173–88.
94. Shlaes, *Forgotten Man,* 173–88.
95. "TVA," in Freidel, *The New Deal and the American People*, 62–90.
96. Higgs, *Crisis and Leviathan*, 20–21, 24, 226–27.

transcontinental railroad and highway systems) could best be produced by the central government. "I'm a gas and water socialist," declared the Roosevelt advisor Rexford Guy Tugwell.[97]

From the days of Thomas Edison, private corporations had met much of the nation's electricity demands. America in the 1930s, including the South, boasted scores of private electricity companies, including Commonwealth and Southern Electric, headed by the Indianan Wendell Willkie. These private interests were outraged that a federally subsidized, untaxed public corporation was undercutting them and monopolizing the electricity marketplace (and retailing electrical appliances to boot). Willkie was a former Democrat who supported some New Deal measures, but his opposition to TVA would catapult him to the 1940 GOP presidential nomination. Wilkie declared, "The true liberal is as much opposed to excessive concentration of power in the hands of government as … in the hands of business." Progressives countered, pointing to swaths of unlit homes as evidence of the private sector's failure to provide electric power to all of the American people.[98]

Both sides looked to the Supreme Court to settle the matter, and initially it appeared as though Willkie and the private sector would prevail. In 1935-36, the Court declared two lynchpin New Deal's economic regulatory agencies—the National Industrial Recovery Administration (NRA) and the Agricultural Adjustment Administration (AAA)—unconstitutional. In its rulings, the Court declared the NRA's and AAA's management of intrastate commerce violated states' rights. Moreover, the Court ruled that these bureaucrats' production of extensive regulations supplanted Congress's constitutional lawmaking duties. Initially stunned by these court decisions, FDR struck back. Despite a sixty-eight-year precedent for a nine-member Supreme Court, he called on Congressional Democrats to add six new justices to

97. Shlaes, *Forgotten Man,* 174–76. (qtn., 174). For a counter to the public goods argument (that only government can provide certain essential services), see Ronald Coase, "The Lighthouse in Economics," *Journal of Law and Economics* 17 (October 1974), 357–76.

98. Shlaes, *Forgotten Man,* 8, 237–38; Willkie quote in Susan Dunn, *1940: FDR, Willkie, Lindbergh, Hitler—the Election amid the Storm* (New Haven, Conn., 2013), 89.

the court to put Progressives in the majority. But members of Roosevelt's own party joined Republicans to squash his court-packing plan. In the end, however, FDR did not need new judges. As several lawsuits over TVA's constitutionality wound their way to the Supreme Court, the court began to take a more progressive turn, serving up five-to-four decisions favoring the administration's economic regulatory agencies. Unlike the NRA and AAA, TVA was never declared unconstitutional (though it did stop selling electrical appliances).[99]

It was folks evicted by the TVA who mounted the most emotional opposition. To clear valleys that would be flooded by the nine hydroelectric dams' backwaters, the agency had to dislocate tens of thousands of southern farm families. The evictions began at Norris Dam (named for the TVA supporter Senator George Norris), near Knoxville, Tennessee. There, the TVA used the federal government's power of eminent domain to buy 153,000 acres and remove 3,000 families residing in the basin the dam would soon turn into a lake. As part of the evacuation, the TVA disinterred and reburied the remains of 2,500 locals, some of whose graves dated back to the early nineteenth century. Although the evictees received cash compensation and welfare relief, Americans of all political stripes were taken aback by this raw demonstration of government authority. "TVA Evicts Family as Water Laps Cabin," proclaimed a *New York Times* headline upon the eviction of the nine-member James Randolph family. The evictors also gathered up sixty chickens and a pig.[100]

Over two decades later, the Hollywood producer and director Elia Kazan made *Wild River,* a movie based on the TVA evictions that countered Pare Lorentz's 1937 paean to the New Deal. Kazan had worked on the New York stage before making a series of motion pictures, many with lower Mississippi Valley settings

99. Shlaes, *Forgotten Man,* 239–45, 270–73, 304–309; Freidel, *Rendezvous with Destiny,* 221–39; Richard L. Neuberger, "America Talks Court," in Freidel, *New Deal and the American People,* 106–13.

100. Shlaes, *Forgotten Man*, 177, 260, 268–9 (*New York Times* quote). See also Freidel, *Rendezvous with Destiny,* 269–83. Thanks to Joe Seaborn.

and stories. Like Lorentz, Kazan had traveled in 1930s leftist circles; as a young man, Kazan was a member of the Communist Party. Naturally drawn to the New Dealers' critique of capitalism, he originally conceived *Wild River* as a nuanced, dramatic acclamation of the TVA and progressivism. Busy with other projects, he put the movie on the back burner until the late 1950s, when he teamed up with the screenwriter Paul Osborn. Kazan recalled that when Osborn "finally agreed to write the screenplay for my Tennessee Valley Authority story, *Wild River* ... in talking to him, I discovered an astonishing thing; I'd switched sides."

> I'd conceived of this film years before as a homage to the spirit of FDR; my hero was to be a resolute New Dealer engaged in the difficult task of convincing "reactionary" country people that it was necessary, in the name of the public good, for them to move off their land and allow themselves to be relocated. Now I found my sympathies were with the obdurate old lady who lived on the land that was to be inundated and who refused to be patriotic, or whatever it took to allow herself to be moved. I was all for her… I simply didn't like the reformers I'd been with since 1933, whether they were Communists or progressives or whoever else was out to change the world.[101]

Filmed in and around Cleveland, Tennessee, near the juncture of the Tennessee and Ocoee rivers, *Wild River* is an authentically southern movie. Kazan uses local citizens as movie extras (some had small speaking parts), and vocal and instrumental renditions of the gospel tunes "He Walks with Me" and "Jesus Loves Me" play beneath the visuals. Like Lorentz, Kazan begins *Wild River* with gripping black-and-white news footage of the 1927 flooding, and he also includes a sound-tracked newsreel interview of flood victims. Then he switches to color film as moviegoers meet the proud widowed matriarch Ella Garth (Jo Van Fleet) and her extended family on their Tennessee River

101. Elia Kazan, *A Life* (New York, 1988), 596–601 (qtn., 596–97). Osborn's screenplay adapts related novels by William Bradford Huie and Borden Deal. Kazan's Mississippi Valley movies are discussed in chapter 6, this work.

island farmstead. Ella has defiantly ignored evacuation orders and, with the new dam almost finished, the TVA administrator Chuck Glover (Montgomery Clift) is dispatched to either persuade her to move or force her out. Glover immediately learns that he has met his match in Ella Garth and soon falls in love with her widowed daughter-in-law Carol (Lee Remick). In the first of several verbal jousts with Ella, Glover proudly informs her, "We aim to tame this whole river," but she snaps back, "You do. Well I like things runnin' wild, like Nature made 'em.There's already enough dams lockin' things up, tamin' em, makin' 'em go against their natural wants and needs. I'm agin' dams of any kind… I ain't goin' against nature, and I ain't crawlin for no damn government."[102]

Wild River is thus built on the authoritarian versus libertarian clash between Chuck and Ella, interwoven with romantic interludes between Chuck and Carol and with Chuck's growing relationship with Carol's two children. Kazan also places racism and segregation in the mix by portraying the Garths' exploitation of Black sharecroppers alongside the anger of white townspeople (one played by a young Bruce Dern) who balk when the TVA hires Black workers. In his first assessment of the eviction conflict, Chuck Glover waxes ironic. Anti-authoritarianism and "rugged individualism" are the "American way of life," he states. "We applaud that spirit. We admire it. We believe in it… But we've gotta get her the hell out of there." Yet as he learns about the Garths and the culture of Tennessee River Valley folk (and as he falls in love with Carol), Glover grows much more ambivalent about his assignment. After the county sheriff sums up the evictions with the observation, "I guess it all goes under the general heading of progress," Chuck responds, "Yeah, that's what they say." Of course, Ella Garth feels no ambivalence whatsoever about her eviction. Informed that the federal government will offer financial compensation and welfare "relief" to all evacuees, she bitterly says, "Just go and get yourselves relieved. Anytime you wanna. Me, I ain't goin."[103]

102. Elia Kazan, dir., *Wild River* (20th Century Fox, 1960) film.
103. Ibid. The TVA did employ Blacks on its projects in segregated work parties.

In the end, however, Ella must go. In preparation for the flooding, TVA workers chop down all the trees on her island as she is led onto a river ferry flying an American flag. Ella has dressed in her Sunday best, complete with brooch and hat, and carries only a small box and a handbag. Relocated to a tiny federal tract house, she immediately arranges to pay the storekeeper a sixteen-cent debt for sugar. "That's all I owe. To anybody." Then Ella Garth dies. The TVA workers subsequently douse her old home with kerosene and set it ablaze. The moviegoer's final view of the Garths' island is the family graveyard being lapped by the new TVA lake. A hymn, "In the Pines," plays underneath, but Elia Kazan is not quite finished. To underscore Glover's (and his own, and his viewers') ambivalence about the good and evil wrought by the New Deal, Kazan ends *Wild River* with a scene of Chuck and Carol and their two children in an airplane soaring above the new hydroelectric dam and the valley to which the Tennessee Valley Authority has brought jobs and electricity. The new family's destination is unknown, but they will live in an America forever changed by the helping hand of a powerful central government.[104]

FROM THE LOWER MISSOURI TO ROCK RIVER

Discussion of the Civil War, emancipation, Reconstruction, race, federalism, and the New Deal naturally overlaps the history of the American presidency. The Mississippi Valley has produced twenty American presidents, including Andrew Jackson, Abraham Lincoln, Harry S. Truman, and Ronald Reagan. These four were certainly pivotal men who altered America in major ways and changed the course of American history. Discussing antebellum politics in general, the historian Frederick Jackson Turner stressed the uniqueness of two of these Mississippi Valley presidents. Turner sharply contrasted the humble socioeconomic backgrounds, educations, early lifestyles, and earthy demeanors of the Tennessean Jackson and the Illinoisan

104. Ibid. Kazan reflects on *Wild River* in *Elia Kazan: A Life,* 596–601.

Lincoln with the more genteel George Washington, John Adams, and Thomas Jefferson. Turner argued these differences reflect the fact that, after struggling to throw off European monarchy, Americans made more room in their system for self-made men to rise in economic and civic life. A similar contrast is also evident in the twentieth century. Woodrow Wilson was a Johns Hopkins Ph.D. and president of Princeton College, and both Roosevelt cousins were well-born New Yorkers and Harvard graduates (though T.R. cultivated a wild, frontier image in reaction to his elite upbringing). By any measure, there is a world of difference in the social and cultural roots of Harry S. Truman and Ronald Reagan compared to Wilson and the Roosevelts.[105]

When Franklin D. Roosevelt informed his aide Admiral William Leahy in 1944 that he had chosen Harry Truman as his vice presidential running mate, Leahy reportedly asked, "Who the hell is Truman?" This rude response was only partly inappropriate, for Harry Truman was in 1944 a relatively obscure character. However, he would soon prove Leahy's (and most others') first impressions completely wrong.[106]

"Who the hell is Truman?" Harry S Truman was born May 8, 1884, in Lamar, Missouri, near Independence and the lower reaches of the Missouri River. The oldest child of Martha Ellen Young Truman and John Anderson Truman, Harry was soon joined by brother Vivian and sister Mary Jane. Interestingly, the S in Harry S Truman's name is only an initial; it does not represent a specific middle name and is not followed by a period on the birth certificate. Evidently Harry's parents were trying to give both grandfathers, Solomon Young and John Shipp Truman, the impression that Harry was their namesake. Although Harry Truman's family moved to Independence in 1890 and he lived

105. Frederick Jackson Turner, "The Significance of the Mississippi Valley in American History," *The Frontier in American History,* ed. Wilbur Jacobs (1920; repr. Tucson, Ariz., 1986), 192, 201, 202–204. The Mississippi Valley presidents are Jackson (Tenn.), William Harrison (Ohio), Polk (Tenn.), Taylor (La.), Lincoln (Ill.), Johnson (Tenn.), Grant (Ill.), Hayes (Ohio), Garfield (Ohio), Benjamin Harrison (Ohio), McKinley (Ohio), Taft (Ohio), Harding (Ohio), Truman (Mo.), Hoover (Iowa), Eisenhower (Kans.), Ford (Mich.), Reagan (Ill.), Clinton (Ark.), and Obama (Ill.).

106. Ferrell, *Harry S Truman: A Life,* 171.

in Kansas City during part of his young adulthood, he spent much of his youth and young adulthood on the 600-acre Truman family farm near Grandview, Missouri. The Trumans grew wheat, corn, oats, clover hay, and corn, and they raised horses, cattle, and hogs. Young Harry Truman daily crossed his family's plowed fields to roam the surrounding woods and meadows. He recalled living "the happiest childhood imaginable."[107]

Despite his poor eyesight (he wore glasses by age six), Harry learned to read before he was five; a family tale has him reading "all the books in the Independence Public Library" by age fourteen. Truman himself recalled, "I read the Bible clear through twice before I went to school." He also played the piano and early on dreamed of being a concert pianist. So, there were contrasting values of high and low culture—urban artist and intellectual and rural agrarian—in the life of the young west Missourian. Truman attended public schools near Grandview and, later, Independence, and graduated high school in 1901. He never went on to college, but moved to Kansas City and worked at odd jobs, in a drugstore and as a timekeeper (paymaster) on a railroad construction crew, before securing a position (and a seeming career path) as a bank clerk. In 1903, he was baptized in the Little Blue River, a tributary of the Missouri, and regularly attended the Baptist Church. Although smitten with Bess Virginia Wallace, he postponed marriage until he achieved solvency, which turned out to be a long wait.[108]

By 1901, John Truman had lost all of his savings in bad investments but managed to keep the family farm. To pay off his debts, John eventually had to go to work on the Santa Fe Railroad. In 1906, some bad flooding destroyed the Trumans' crops and twenty-two-year-old Harry was forced to leave his Kansas City bank job to return home and run the family farm. He worked at farming for the next eleven years, until the outbreak

107. Hamby, *Man of the People*, 3–24; quote in Harry S. Truman and Merle Miller, *Plain Speaking: An Oral Biography of Harry S. Truman* (New York, 1973), 46.

108. Harry S Truman, *The Autobiography of Harry S Truman,* ed. Robert H. Ferrell (Boulder, Colo., 1980), 8–23; Truman and Miller, *Plain Speaking,* 52; Ferrell, *Harry S. Truman,* 49; National Parks Service, Department of the Interior, "Harry S Truman," pamphlet (n.d.), President Harry S Truman National Historic Site, Independence, Mo.

of World War I. "There was some talk that I wouldn't stay [on the farm], but I did," Truman recalled. "I don't give up on what I start. I'm a stubborn cuss. They all found that out when I was President. I was stubborn."[109]

Harry Truman flourished over the decade 1910–19. He joined the National Guard and Freemasons, and he took an interest in local politics (in 1900, the seventeen-year-old had accompanied his father to the Kansas City National Democratic Convention that nominated the agrarian populist William Jennings Bryan for president). He read everything he could about agriculture and made plans to improve farm yields in oats, corn, and clover. Later, he fondly recalled his farming career, boasting theirs was the "finest land you'd ever find anywhere." He said, "I was very much interested in the creation of things that come from the ground."

> The land had to be harrowed, and I enjoyed that. It gave me plenty of time to think. Farmers really all have time to think, and some of them do it, and those are the ones who have made it possible for us to have free government. That's what Jefferson was writing about. Farmers really have more time to think than city people do.

Obviously, Truman matured in an era when his family (and the Democratic Party to which the Trumans were staunchly loyal) still retained strong historic and mythic ties to Jeffersonian agrarian roots. "I stayed on the farm until the war came and I had to go," he remembered. "I could have got an exemption of course, being a farmer, but I never even thought of it."[110]

A veteran lieutenant in the Missouri National Guard (1905–11), Harry Truman joined the U.S. Army with America's 1917 entry into World War I. Captain Truman commanded Battery D of the 2nd Battalion, 129th Field Artillery, 35th Division, U.S. Army. In France in 1918–19, Truman fought in the St. Mihiel and Meuse-Argonne offensives and almost lost his life in a Vosges (France) artillery skirmish that he and his men

109. Hamby, *Man of the People,* 25–42; Truman and Miller, *Plain Speaking,* 89 (qtns).
110. Truman, *Autobiography,* 25–37; Truman and Miller, *Plain Speaking,* 89–90. Bryan was also the Democrats' 1896 and 1908 nominee.

sarcastically dubbed the "Battle of Who Run." By war's end he was serving at Verdun. Returning home, he rejoined the guard reserves and ultimately attained the rank of colonel while continuing his civilian career.[111]

Harry Truman never returned to farming. He married Bess as soon as he came home and started what turned out to be an unsuccessful clothing and hat business. Politics had always been a Truman family interest, and Harry sought a judgeship (county commissioner post) on the Jackson County Court. In the tradition of his hero Andrew Jackson, Truman entered public life without a college degree. Elected in 1922, he was defeated in 1924. In the meantime, he used his high school and military résumé to attain entrance to the Kansas City School of Law Night School, where he studied (without earning a degree) from 1923 to 1925. Elected presiding judge of Jackson County in 1926, he served until 1934 when, with the backing of the Democratic Party boss Tom Pendergast, he was elected Missouri's United States Senator.[112]

Truman came up in Jackson County politics in the heady days of the 1920s and early '30s. Kansas City was a wide open town and home to a booming economy, burgeoning jazz and club scene, and the Negro Baseball League (NBL) famed Kansas City Monarchs. Presiding over all of this was Tom Pendergast, the boss who kept his Kansas City political machine oiled with welfare benefits, jobs for supporters, graft, and kickbacks from illegal alcohol, gambling, and prostitution operations. Truman quickly moved in and out of Pendergast's system and was never implicated in any wrongdoing. Their partnership was symbiotic—Harry delivered the rural vote and Pendergast delivered Kansas City—and working with Pendergast was the unavoidable price of a political career in western Missouri. Years later, when old Tom Pendergast lay alone and dying in the federal prison at Leavenworth, Kansas, Vice President Harry Truman weathered blistering criticism and paid his former patron a final visit.[113]

111. Hamby, *Man of the People,* ix, 57–82, Truman, *Autobiography,* 39–h51.
112. Hamby, *Man of the People,* 83–100.

In Washington, D.C., Senator Harry Truman worked diligently and, with exceptions, out of the limelight. This all changed when, in 1944, Franklin D. Roosevelt grew weary of his leftist vice president, Henry Wallace, and tapped Truman for the number-two spot.[114] It seems unlikely, as some historians have implied, that no one in power believed Truman would ever serve as president. One need only look at 1944 film and photographs of the pale, haggard, chain-smoking Franklin Roosevelt to see what people at the time could see—a beloved and accomplished man in ill health. It is true that Roosevelt and his advisors did not properly brief Truman to prepare him for the presidency. Lasting only a few months after his inauguration, FDR succumbed on April 12, 1945. With America still embroiled in World War II, the farm boy from Missouri became President of the United States. In his first appearance as President, Harry Truman told a mourning and anxious nation: "I don't know whether any of you … ever had a bull, or a load of hay fall on you, but last night the whole weight of the moon and stars fell on me. If you fellows pray, please pray for me."[115]

President Harry Truman had, and still has, many political enemies and critics. Yet he is remembered for domestic and foreign policy accomplishments that make his place as a pivotal U.S. president indisputable. Taking the reins after FDR's death, Truman led the nation to final victory over Germany (May 8, 1945) and soon made the decision to drop the atom bomb on Japan, saving the staggering number of American and Japanese lives a prolonged invasion would have cost. When fascist defeat immediately produced a permanent Soviet Communist occupation of Eastern Europe, Truman took a stand with the Truman Doctrine (1947), commencing the Cold War and fighting Communists abroad and at home via the Marshall Plan,

113. Truman, *Autobiography,* 81–84; Ferrell, *Harry S. Truman,* 173–74.

114. For Wallace, Truman, and mainstream Democrat discomfort with Wallace's ties to the Communist Party, see John Earl Haynes and Harvey Klehr, *In Denial: Historians, Communism, and Espionage* (San Francisco, Calif., 2003), 85, passim.

115. National Parks Service, "Harry S Truman," exhibit narrative, Harry S Truman National Historic Site, Independence, Mo.; quote in *Life Magazine* 18 (April 23, 1945), 29.

NATO, the National Security Act, and the Central Intelligence Agency.[116]

Of course there were problems and blemishes. Even as entrepreneurs and laborers arose from the ashes of depression and war, Truman and Congress ran up debt plowing money into his own Fair Deal version of FDR's programs, adding subsidized government housing projects to the welfare state menu. Under Truman, Soviet agents stole classified U.S. data about the atom bomb (enabling them to expedite creation of their own nuclear arsenal) and all of mainland China fell under Communist domination. Truman's foray into Korea proved very unpopular, as did his firing of General Douglas MacArthur, though in retrospect both decisions appear well-founded. Combined with a 1952 economic downturn, Harry Truman left office one of the most unpopular leaders in American history; his 1953 approval ratings registered in the low 20 percent range.[117]

Yet Harry S Truman's overall record indicates that he was clearly a pivotal president. Indeed, one year in Truman's presidency—1948—proved to be one of the most significant years in the history of the American presidency. On May 14, 1948, Truman became the first world leader to recognize the new Jewish state of Israel, an action that reverberates to this day. On June 24 he ordered the Berlin Airlift to support the Communist-encircled city against a takeover. Although a southerner, he sided with advocates for Black civil rights at the 1948 Democratic Convention. Hubert Humphrey led the convention charge, while Truman on July 26 used his powers as commander in chief to unilaterally desegregate the U.S. Armed Forces. He appointed Blacks to federal posts and ordered Department of Justice efforts to aid the Black freedom movement. "Dixiecrats" got their wake-up call, and the fight for the heart and soul of the Democratic Party began. Harry Truman ended the year 1948 by clawing his way to victory in one of the most remarkable comebacks

116. Truman, *Autobiography,* 99-105; Hamby, *Man of the People,* 324–5, 331–35, 391–94. For the decision to drop the atom bomb on Japan, see Richard B. Frank, *Downfall: The End of the Japanese Imperial Empire* (New York, 1999).

117. Hamby, *Man of the People,* 534–38, 644, 649.

in American political history. He faced off against the surging Republican New York Governor Tom Dewey and two Democrat third-party splinter groups—Henry Wallace's Progressives on the left and Strom Thurmond's States' Rights Democrats (Dixiecrats) on the right. Truman crisscrossed America by railroad on a whirlwind whistle-stop campaign and, as he began to gain momentum, an admirer yelled out, "Give 'em Hell, Harry!" The saying caught on. His November 2, 1948, upset victory ended the year in spectacular fashion.[118]

"On January 20, 1953, I shall transfer the burden of the presidency and return to Independence, Missouri, a free and independent citizen of the greatest republic in the history of the world," Truman wrote late in his second term. Harry and Bess Truman longed to live out their days in their 219 North Delaware Avenue family home. "I have had all of Washington I want," Truman bluntly noted. "I prefer my life in Missouri." Harry Truman is remembered today for his many accomplishments, but he is also remembered for his down-to-earth temperament, his no-nonsense speech and slang (and swear words), and his common sense. Many of these characteristics can be ascribed to his Mississippi Valley upbringing. Truman's background was starkly different than that of the Ivy League educated president he succeeded; other than being proud Democrats, Franklin Roosevelt and Truman shared little in common. Indeed, Truman's upbringing and demeanor is more similar to one of his Republican successors—a former Democrat who campaigned for him in 1948—Ronald Reagan of Dixon, Illinois.[119]

Ronald Wilson Reagan's aide and biographer Peter Hannaford once explained:

> Reagan is thought of as a Californian, a Westerner, but the values

118. Hamby, *Man of the People,* 272, 407–408, 433–35, 444–45, 448–51, 452; Humphrey, *Education of a Public Man,* 110–17; Robert Shogan, *Courting Racial Justice: Harry Truman Outflanks the Southern Barons of Capitol Hill* (N.p., 2013). The only historic rivals to Truman's 1948 accomplishments are George Washington in 1789, Jackson in 1832, and Lincoln in 1865.

119. Truman, *Autobiography,* 99, 105; National Park Service, "Harry S Truman."

> that guided him all his life are straight out of the land where he spent the first 21 years of his life: northwestern Illinois. The characteristics associated with him—self-reliance, self-confidence, modesty, optimism, loyalty, tolerance, determination, good humor, and reverence for God—all came from his teachers, clergy, role models, the circumstances of his youth, and, especially his parents.[120]

Ronald Reagan was born February 6, 1911, in Tampico, Illinois, in the American heartland. His parents, John "Jack" Edward Reagan and Nelle Clyde Wilson Reagan, were of Irish, English, and Scottish ancestry, and he had one brother, Neil. Like Harry Truman, Reagan spent his formative upper Mississippi Valley years during that region's transformation from agrarianism to modernity. As Hannaford states, Reagan was imbued with midwestern culture and values, and during his life he carried these traits with him to California, to Washington, D.C., and back to California again.[121]

The small towns of Ronald Reagan's youth lay amid green cornfields and pork and cattle farms. Like Truman, Reagan romantically recalled his Illinois childhood as "the happiest time of my life," "one of those rare Huck Finn Tom Sawyer idylls" spent in wandering, hunting, and fishing in the surrounding woods. But there were hard times too. Truman's family had faced serious economic setbacks, and the Reagan family's life was even more troubled. Jack Reagan, a well-liked shoe salesman, was an alcoholic. Ronald Reagan recalled an evening in his youth when he found his father passed out in the snow in front of their

120. "Author Peter Hannaford Reflects on Reagan's Early Years," *Libertas* 33 (Summer 2012), 5. See also Peter Hannaford, *Reagan's Roots: The Peoples and Places That Shaped His Character* (Bennington, Vt., 2011).

121. "Author Peter Hannaford Reflects on Reagan's Early Years," 5; Dinesh D'Souza, *Ronald Reagan: How an Ordinary Man Became an Extraordinary Leader* (New York, 1997), 37–40. Lou Cannon offers a different interpretation in *President Reagan: The Role of a Lifetime* (New York 1991), 172–82. See also Edmund Morris, *Dutch: A Memoir of Ronald Reagan* (New York, 1999); Michael Allen, "Ronald Reagan," in *The Chronology of the U.S. Presidency,* ed. Mathew Manweller (Santa Barbara, Calif., 2012), 1285–1319; Ronald Reagan, *Ronald Reagan: An American Life* (New York, 1990); Adriana Bosch, dir., *Reagan,* 2 parts, *The American Experience,* season 10 (Boston, 1998), DVD; James H. Broussard, *Ronald Reagan: Champion of American Conservatism* (New York, 2014).

home. Jack was so drunk that to save him from exposure and sober him up Ronald had to drag his heavy body across the porch and into the house. Yet Jack Reagan also had good qualities that Ronald inherited—a compelling personality and talent for storytelling. And Reagan's pious mother Nelle was a rock to which the struggling family could cling.[122]

Ronald Reagan's family moved often during his early childhood, following Jack through a series of small northwestern Illinois towns. However, when Ronald turned nine the family's fortunes took a turn for the better. Jack started a shoe store in Dixon, Illinois, where the Reagans at last found a home. Dixon sat alongside the Rock River, a tributary of the upper Mississippi, and it was in Dixon that Ronald Reagan matured and learned what he termed the "standards and values that would guide me for the rest of my life." Good-looking "Dutch" Reagan (a nickname Jack gave him) flourished, making friends, joining clubs, acting in school plays, and playing on Dixon's Northside High School football team. He also found a spiritual life and told his mother he wanted to be baptized. Nelle had brought Reagan up believing "the Lord will [p]rovide," and he later wrote, "I've always believed … there is a plan, a divine plan for all of us."[123]

Nelle Reagan was a member of the First Christian Church (also known as Disciples of Christ), located on the banks of the Rock River at 123 South Hennepin Street. Here Reagan gained his religious education and, in his late teens, taught Sunday school. The *Dixon Telegraph* reported on Reagan's skills as an inspirational speaker and his Christian outreach to hospitals and nursing homes. At age seventeen, he wrote a poem entitled "Life" for his high school yearbook, *The Dixonian,* reflecting his faith. The poem suggests that life's many problems pale in the light of Christianity's promise of eternal life: "But why does sorrow drench us / When our fellow passes on? / He's just exchanged life's dreary dirge / For an eternal life of song." Reagan wrote that folks should not "weep at journey's end," for there will be a "door

122. Bosch, *Reagan,* part 1; D'Souza, *Ronald Reagan,* 37–39.
123. D'Souza, *Ronald Reagan,* 37–39; Bosch, *Reagan,* part 1.

/ that opens to let us in / and brings us to eternal peace / as it closes again on sin."[124]

Thus, teenaged Ronald Reagan overcame difficult circumstances to flourish in Dixon, Illinois. An important part of his happiness was connected to his job as a Rock River lifeguard. For six summers (1927–32), Dutch Reagan worked at Lowell Park, located on the Rock River two miles upstream from Dixon. At sunup each summer day he arrived to ice down cold drinks, stock the snack bar, prepare the beach recreation area, and man his lifeguard post when the first young swimmers arrived. He worked until early evening. It was a twelve-hour-a-day, seven-day-a-week summer job that gained him great respect in the community. "We just all remember him as Lifeguard," one Dixon woman remembered sixty years later. Although Reagan was said to have saved seventy-seven Rock River swimmers during his six summers, an old admirer recalled, "They weren't all going to drown." Yet some swimmers were endangered by the Rock's swift current and undertow. Beneath a headline reading, "James Raider Pulled from the Jaws of Death," the *Dixon Evening Telegraph* of August 3, 1928, praised "Life Guard Ronald 'Dutch' Reagan." Local tales recount how after each rescue Reagan cut a notch on a log (much like Daniel Boone supposedly recorded his bear hunting exploits with tree carvings). After Reagan left Dixon and became famous, a commemorative plaque was attached to the log. The log has long since disappeared, but the plaque remains a museum piece.[125]

There is a striking photograph of Dutch Reagan at Lowell Park in his lifeguard uniform. Years later, as an aged man beset by Alzheimer's disease, Reagan lost his short- and medium-term memory. Yet like many Alzheimer's sufferers, he retained distinct memories of the distant past. Family and visitors to the infirm Reagan's home recall him showing them his old lifeguard picture as his mind happily wandered back to summer days alongside the

124. Bosch, *Reagan,* part 1; Paul Kengor, "A River and a Church: The Making of a Leader," *Libertas* 32 (Spring 2011), 16–4, 16–5; Ronald Reagan, "Life," in *Reagan in His Own Hand,* ed. Kiron K. Skinner et al. (New York, 2001), 426–27 (qtn.).

125. Kengor, "A River and a Church," 16–3; Cannon, *Reagan,* 180–82.

Rock River. "I think the Rock River was the central symbol of his youth," states Reagan's biographer, Edmund Morris.[126]

Following his 1928 Northside High School graduation, Reagan left Dixon to attend Eureka College in Eureka, Illinois. He chose Eureka because of its Disciples of Christ affiliation, affordability, and close proximity to his hometown. Eureka was a conservative college offering a liberal arts education, and Reagan studied history, philosophy, literature, and theater while majoring in economics. "My favorite subject was football," he later joked, and his middling grades accompanied an active campus social life. Reagan earned letters in both varsity football and swimming, and he served as yearbook editor and chair of the student council. Of course, he was active in Drama Club and school plays. Nearing graduation at the height of the Great Depression, he made an uncanny pronouncement: "If I'm not making five thousand a year when I'm five years out of college, I'll consider these four years here were wasted." Reagan graduated from Eureka in 1932, the same year Franklin D. Roosevelt was elected president and two years before the Missourian Harry Truman was elected to the United States Senate.[127]

Ronald Reagan immediately moved on to a radio broadcasting job at station WOC in Davenport, Iowa, where his talent for sports broadcasting soon got him promoted to the Des Moines station WHO. The handsome sportscaster became a regional celebrity calling Chicago Cubs games, and he attracted the attention of a Hollywood talent scout. By 1936, Reagan was driving west to California for a screen test for Warner Brothers Pictures. "I left Des Moines in a cloud of dust," he wrote in a June 13, 1937, *Des Moines Sunday Register* feature he ironically titled "The Making of a Movie Star," admitting that he felt just "a little bit scared."[128]

During the next two and a half decades, Ronald Reagan

126. Morris quoted in Bosch, *Reagan,* part 1.
127. Bosch, *Reagan,* part 1; D'Souza, *Ronald Reagan,* 40–42; Reagan, "Return to the Primitive," in Skinner, *Reagan in His Own Hand,* 428–30.
128. D'Souza, *Ronald Reagan,* 42–43; Reagan, "The Making of a Movie Star," in Skinner, *Reagan in His Own Hand,* 433–36.

enjoyed a movie and television career that started out strong—with the acclaimed *Knute Rockne, All American* (1940) and *King's Row* (1942)—and ended in a whimper. As a U.S. Army Reservist, Captain Ronald Reagan made World War II military training movies but never served in a combat theater. He married the film star Jane Wyman, divorced, and married the actress Nancy Davis, and raised two families. Meanwhile, his film career was complemented by twenty years of service as a labor union representative, most notably as board member and president of the Screen Actors Guild (AFL-CIO). Reagan entered this work as a Roosevelt Democrat who belonged to organizations as liberal as Americans for Democratic Action (ADA). However, at exactly the same time President Harry Truman was battling European and Asian Communists and domestic Communist spies, Ronald Reagan found himself squaring off against Communist organizers in the Screen Actors Guild and affiliated unions. He wrote that he faced "force & violence including street riots and bombings" from leftist union agitators. He also endured overt and anonymous threats (one caller told Reagan he would maim his face so badly he would never again work as an actor) and charges of McCarthyism (because of his willingness to testify before the House Committee on Un-American Activities).[129]

From 1954 to 1962, Ronald Reagan worked as a celebrity spokesperson for the General Electric Company (GE), traversing the United States, appearing weekly on the *GE Theater* television series, and learning firsthand about the workings of the American business world. The GE experience combined with Reagan's anti-Communism to complete his evolution from liberal Democrat to conservative Republican. In 1964, he made an impassioned speech on behalf of the GOP presidential candidate Barry Goldwater that drew a huge national television audience. His message—the urgent need for Americans to "fight Communism abroad and big government at home"—proved compelling. Two years later, he defeated the incumbent Pat Brown to begin the first of two consecutive terms as governor

129. Bosch, *Reagan,* part 1; D'Souza, *Reagan ... Ordinary Man,* 43–51; Reagan, "Letter to the Editor of the *Catholic Reporter*" [1962], in Skinner, *Reagan in His Own Hand,* 436–38.

of California. Reagan ran, unsuccessfully, against Richard Nixon for the GOP presidential nomination in 1968 and Gerald Ford in 1976. In 1980, amid economic downturn, double digit unemployment, spiking gas prices, Americans held hostage in Iran, and overall dispiritedness, Ronald Reagan won the Republican presidential nomination. In November, he carried forty states and swept the incumbent Democrat President Jimmy Carter out of office; four years later, he was re-elected in an even greater landslide (over Carter's vice president, Walter Mondale), carrying forty-nine states. The boy from Dixon, Illinois, had earned the chance to fight Communism overseas and "big government" on the homefront.[130]

Ronald Reagan's foreign and domestic policy achievements guarantee his status as a pivotal American president. Reagan made two major foreign policy mistakes—the Iran-Contra arms deal and deployment of U.S. Marines in Lebanon—causing scandal and loss of American lives. And his foreign policy record does not match Harry Truman's perfect storm—helping to defeat German and Japanese fascists, challenging global Communists to begin the Cold War, and siding with Israel in the very beginning of another global war. Yet it was Ronald Reagan who ended a decade of American inaction against the Soviet Communists and helped set in motion events leading to Communism's final demise. He ordered the American military to squash pro-Castro Grenadian rebels and bomb Libyan Islamist targets. Using skills acquired as a labor union negotiator, Reagan threatened a Strategic Defense Initiative ("Star Wars"), which the Soviets attempted to counter at the cost of bankruptcy. As Ronald Reagan stood at the Brandenburg Gate in divided Berlin demanding, "Mr. Gorbachev, tear down this wall!" Poland had already overthrown its Communist overlords and Chinese Communists were introducing an economic reform they called (without blushing) "market socialism." The Cold War was about to end in capitalist victory, and Ronald Reagan deserves a portion of the credit.[131]

130. Cannon, *President Reagan,* 22–30; D'Souza, *Ronald Reagan,* 52–55, 63–84; Bosch, *Reagan,* part 1 (qtn.). Goldwater is discussed below.

Ronald Reagan's domestic accomplishments—the Reagan Revolution—launched the first successful conservative counter-offensive to FDR's (and Truman's and Lyndon Johnson's) New Deal progressivism in forty-eight years and ushered in nearly three decades of Republican ascendancy. As with foreign policy, Reagan made mistakes, the greatest of which was his running up the national debt. However, Reagan also instituted major tax reforms that had long-term positive results. He combined historically large tax cuts with tax code reforms that lowered the maximum taxable rate from 50 percent to 28 percent, eliminated deductions and other loopholes, and still left the richest 1 percent paying the highest share of taxes. While Reagan ran deficits, his tax measures would ultimately help restart the American economic engine and lead to nearly two decades of growth and prosperity. Meanwhile, the former labor union leader fired 13,000 striking federal air traffic controllers, signaling a decline in unionism that continues today. Reagan supported and won the granting of amnesty to illegal immigrants, mostly Mexicans. And he reshaped the liberal federal judiciary. Joining with a new GOP Senate (the first since 1954 and the most enduring since 1930), he appointed scores of conservative federal district and appellate court judges and named Sandra Day O'Connor, a Republican moderate, America's first female Supreme Court Justice.[132]

Following his presidency, Reagan returned to California, not the upper Mississippi Valley. He had become a Californian in the late 1930s, and in 1989 he aimed to spend the rest of his life in his beloved Rancho Cielo home. Yet, in a sense, Ronald Reagan had never left the Midwest. In his values and demeanor, he brought the upper Mississippi Valley with him to California, where he kept it, took it to Washington, D.C., for eight years, and then brought it home to California again.

Knute Rockne, All American (1940), Ronald Reagan's first major

131. D'Souza, *Ronald Reagan,* 129–97. The most evenhanded account of Reagan's presidency is Cannon, *President Reagan,* passim.
132. D'Souza, *Ronald Reagan,* 85–128. An opposing analysis is Haynes Johnson, *Sleepwalking through History: America in the Reagan Years* (New York, 1992).

motion picture, reflects those Mississippi Valley values. Reagan played the part of George Gipp and Pat O'Brien starred as Notre Dame College's storied football coach, Knute "Rock" Rockne. The movie is based on a true story set in America's midwestern heartland during the first quarter of the twentieth century. The Norwegian immigrant Rockne came up the hard way to become a great Notre Dame teacher and coach, leading his beloved alma mater to the peak of American collegiate football. The movie recounts Rockne's historic gridiron matches with the midwestern powerhouses Michigan and Illinois, and their annual Army (West Point) game. The legendary coaches Pop Warner and Alonzo Stagg make cameo appearances while actors portray Rockne's most famous players, dubbed by fans the Four Horsemen of Notre Dame.[133]

George Gipp played Notre Dame football under Rockne until 1920, when his promising career was cut short in a tragic death from pneumonia. Ronald Reagan ably portrays Gipp as a rakish north Indianan possessing great athletic talent but no self-discipline or manners. Rockne sees Gipp's potential, mentors him, and the two develop a father-son relationship. As the football season progresses, George—nicknamed "the Gipper"—helps lead Notre Dame to victory. But along the way the Gipper develops a ragged cough. Hospitalized and lying on his deathbed, he tells Rockne, "Someday, when things are tough, maybe you can ask the boys to go in there and win one for the Gipper." George Gipp's deathbed speech and its consequences are the most celebrated scenes in *Knute Rockne, All-American*. The movie's crescendo comes during the halftime of the historic 1928 Notre Dame versus Army game. Behind at the half, Rockne rallies "the boys" to go out and win. In a Hollywood recreation of the Rockne's actual speech, he tells the team:

> I'm going to tell you something I've kept to myself for years. None of you ever knew George Gipp. He was long before your time, but you all know what a tradition he is at Notre Dame. And the last

133. Lloyd Bacon, dir., *Knute Rockne, All-American* (Warner Brothers, 1940), film. Also see Allen, "Ronald Reagan."

> thing he said to me, "Rock," he said, "sometime when the team is up against it and the breaks are beating the boys, tell them to go out there with all they got and win just one for the Gipper. I don't know where I'll be then, Rock," he said, "but I'll know about it, and I'll be happy."

In the movie, as in the actual 1928 game, Notre Dame returns to the field and erases Army's lead to "win one for the Gipper."[134]

Throughout the remainder of Ronald Reagan's life, the popularity of *Knute Rockne, All American* was a source of great personal satisfaction. Yet Reagan had no idea of the ultimate significance of his portrayal of George Gipp. After he entered politics, Ronald Reagan's legions of supporters would often implore one another to "win one for the Gipper," and they continued to do so after Reagan's 2004 death from pneumonia. Playing the Indianan George Gipp turned out to be the perfect role for the Illinoisan Ronald Reagan.[135]

Dixon, Illinois, was, Ronald Reagan later remembered, "a small universe where I learned standards and values that would guide me for the rest of my life." At the First Christian Church alongside the Rock River, Reagan gained the "unshakable" faith that gave him "a peace beyond description." One of Ronald Reagan's biographies is subtitled *How an Ordinary Man Became an Extraordinary Leader,* and "ordinary man" is a good summation of the mystique of both Reagan and Harry Truman, one of whose biographies is titled *Man of the People.* Truman recalled, "I tried never to forget who I was and where I'd come from and where I was going back to… After nearly eight years in the White House and ten years in the Senate, I found myself right back where I started in Independence, Missouri." In Merle Miller's *Plain Speaking,* Truman certainly spoke on the subject of destiny and whether or not he had felt it as a young man growing up in Missouri. Noting that many great world leaders had shown signs of greatness in their youths, Miller asked Truman if he had ever believed he would be called to do great things. Truman replied,

134. Bacon, *Knute Rockne.*
135. D'Souza, *Ronald Reagan,* 44–45.

"No, no no. Those are the fellas that cause all the trouble. I just wanted to make a living and to do my job the best I could do it, and that's about the size of it."[136]

FANNY AND PHYLLIS

The Mississippian Fanny Lou Hamer gave a speech before the credentials committee of the 1964 Democratic National Convention in Atlantic City, New Jersey, that proved to be a coda to the Minnesotan Hubert Humphrey's 1948 speech in Philadelphia as related above. Together, these two leaders formed bookends on the modern Democratic Party's final, painful separation from the segregationist forces of the Jim Crow South. Hamer was one of the most important of Mississippi Valley women to participate in the American debate over race, slavery, segregation, and southern political party politics. These women add even more complexity to historians' study of American womanhood and southern women on and off the pedestal.[137]

As discussed in chapter 1, the Scottish immigrant Frances Wright helped to fuse feminism with abolitionism in America's antebellum South. She founded Nashoba in west Tennessee in 1825–26 with the goal of educating slaves whose freedom she had herself purchased. She and her friend and fellow immigrant Frances Trollope joined a small, vocal group of Mississippi Valley feminists in opposing slavery. Ohio's Oberlin College became a hotbed of both feminism and abolitionism (and a stop on the Underground Railroad), all the while producing America's first female college students and graduates. Yet women were divided over the issue of slavery, with some southern women defending the peculiar institution and working for Confederate victory in the Civil War.[138]

136. Quotes in Kengor, "A River and a Church," 16–17; National Parks Service, "Harry S Truman"; Miller, *Plain Speaking,* 91.

137. Judith Nies, "Fannie Lou Hamer," *Nine Women: Portraits from the American Radical Tradition* (Berkeley, Calif., 1977), 203–36; Ann Firor Scott, *The Southern Lady: From Pedestal to Politics, 1830–1930* (1970; repr. Charlotte, Va., 1995); Drew Gilpin Faust, *Mothers of Invention: Women of the Slaveholding South in the American Civil War* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1996); Jane Turner Censer, *The Reconstruction of White Southern Womanhood, 1865–1895* (Baton Rouge, La., 2003).

In 1894, following Reconstruction, the United Daughters of the Confederacy formed in Nashville, Tennessee, and did much good work. The Daughters assisted disabled veterans, widows, and orphans in getting economic aid, medical care, and education, and they erected monuments and museums "to collect and preserve the material" necessary for what they deemed a "truthful history of the War Between the States." The Daughters also worked to "record the part played during the War by southern women, including their patient endurance of hardship, their patriotic devotion during the struggle, and their untiring efforts during the post-war reconstruction of the South." However, the Daughters' roles as self-appointed guardians of the southern heritage also drew them towards the Lost Cause mythology that advanced a false view of a Confederate unity. The Daughters often defended aspects of the institution of slavery and the segregation that had emerged by 1900. As the twentieth century advanced, the United Daughters of the Confederacy served as de facto defenders of the segregationist status quo.[139]

The Black freedom movement gained strength before and after World War II, and southern women both defended and fought against Jim Crow laws. Rosa Parks, the diminutive Alabaman who refused to give up her city bus seat to a white passenger, became an icon to desegregationists. Parks was both preceded and followed by brave Black women—Aurelia Browder, Claudette Colvin, Sue McDonald, Jo Ann Gibson Robinson, and Mary Louise Smith-Ware—who also refused to abide segregated transport. On the cultural front, the white Alabaman Harper Lee's 1960 Pulitzer Prize–winning novel *To Kill A Mockingbird* brought national attention to the tragic consequences of

138. Frances Trollope, *Domestic Manners of the Americans,* ed. Donald Smalley (1832; repr. Gloucester, Mass., 1974), 27–30; Alice Felt Tyler, *Freedom's Ferment: Phases of American Social History to 1860* (Minneapolis, Minn., 1944), 206–10, 428, 433, 429–30; Faust, *Mothers of Invention,* passim.

139. Caroline E. Janney, *Burying the Dead but Not the Past: Ladies' Memorial Associations and the Lost Cause* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 2008), 171–73; Karen L. Cox, *Dixie's Daughters: The United Daughters of the Confederacy and the Preservation of Confederate Culture* (Gainesville, Fla., 2003), 1–7; quotes from United Daughters of the Confederacy, https://hqudc.org/, accessed July 14, 2013.

southern racial injustice; the 1962 movie adaptation of Lee's novel, starring Gregory Peck, won the Academy Award for best actor and drew a massive movie audience. *To Kill a Mockingbird* was followed by equally powerful (though less influential) short stories by another white southern woman, the Mississippian Eudora Welty. Welty's "Where Is the Voice Coming From?" (1963) portrays white racism through the eyes of a man who murders a Black civil rights worker (based on the Medgar Evers murder), while her subsequent story "The Demonstrators" (1966) expands upon the theme of dehumanization of Blacks in the Jim Crow South.[140]

However, Americans also witnessed white women aiding the murderers of a Black youngster. Fourteen-year-old Emmett Till was kidnapped and brutally murdered in 1955 because, as a Black northerner visiting relatives in the Mississippi Delta, he made the fatal mistake of speaking in a familiar tone to a white woman. The trial of accused murderers (the woman's husband and his brother) proceeded, and American television and newspaper audiences saw the men in the company of their supportive, attractive young wives, women whose "honor" they had defended by murdering a teenaged boy. Both men were acquitted by an all-white jury (the defense argued Till's mutilated body was unrecognizable) and quickly sold their confessions to *Look Magazine*.[141]

In the fall of 1960, a gang of New Orleans women became ugly

140. Jo Ann Gibson Robinson, *The Montgomery Bus Boycott and the Women Who Started It: The Memoir of Jo Ann Gibson Robinson,* ed. David J. Garrow (Knoxville, Tenn., 1987), ix–xv; W. J. Rorabaugh, *Kennedy and the Promise of the Sixties* (New York, 2002), 70; Henry Hampton and Stephen Fayer, eds., *Voices of Freedom: An Oral History of the Civil Rights Movement from the 1950s through the 1960s* (New York, 1990), 17–33; Eudora Welty, "Where Is the Voice Coming From?" and "The Demonstrators," in *Collected Stories of Eudora Welty* (New York, 1980), 603–22; Suzanne Marrs, "The Huge Fateful Stage of the Outside World: Eudora Welty's Life in Politics," in *Eudora Welty and Politics: Did the Writer Crusade?* ed. Harriet Pollack and Suzanne Marrs (Baton Rouge, La., 2001), 74–87. *To Kill a Mockingbird* is discussed in chapter 6, this work.

141. Stephen J. Whitfield, *A Death in the Delta: The Story of Emmett Till* (1988; repr. Baltimore, Md., 1991), ix–xi, see second-to-last photograph of the women with their husbands in the portfolio following pp. 114, reproduced from UPI (United Press International); Rorabaugh, *Kennedy and the Promise of the Sixties,* 93–94.

symbols of white racism and resistance to school integration. Following a court order to desegregate the Orleans Parish schools, federal marshals daily escorted four young Black children—Ruby Bridges, Leona Tate, Tessie Prevost, and Gail Etienne—to two formerly all-white elementary schools in New Orleans' Ninth Ward. The decision to initially enroll only the six- and seven-year-old girls was no doubt motivated by memories of the violent 1956 Little Rock (Arkansas) Central High School integration and the mistaken belief the presence of small girls might prevent a reprise. Instead, large crowds of working-class whites gathered daily to harass the children and federal marshals as they entered and departed McDonogh and William Frantz Elementary Schools. Leading the mob were so-called "cheerleaders"—young, working-class mothers who agitated the crowd by screaming racist epithets and spitting at the marshals and their young wards. The New Orleans cheerleaders immediately drew worldwide media attention and became a national embarrassment.[142]

The writer John Steinbeck first heard about the cheerleaders while touring the southwestern United States. He was driving a camper, accompanied only by his dog, and gathering stories for his memoir *Travels with Charlie* (1961). Steinbeck hurriedly crossed Texas and the Louisiana border, entering New Orleans to witness the spectacle for himself. He wrote that at a police barricade he found the group of women who, "by some curious definition of the term 'mother,' gathered every day to scream invectives at the children" in front of hundreds of spectators who assembled "to enjoy and applaud their performance." Steinbeck wrote that these bigots, representing "three hundred years of fear and anger and terror of change in a changing world," stood arrayed against "the littlest Negro girl you ever saw, dressed in shining starchy white, with new white shoes on feet so little they were almost round."[143]

142. Robert Coles, "Ruby Bridges and a Painting," in *Norman Rockwell: Pictures for the American People,* ed. Maureen Hart Hennessey and Anne Knutson (New York, 1999), 104–13.
143. John Steinbeck, *Travels with Charlie* (New York, 1961), 247, 253–54; Coles, "Ruby Bridges and a Painting," 104–13.

Steinbeck continued, describing the cheerleaders screaming one by one in "shrill, grating voices," and the crowd responding with "howls" and applause. "No newspaper had printed the words these women shouted … [b]ut now I heard the words, bestial, and filthy, and degenerate":

> The words written down are dirty, carefully and selectedly filthy. But there was something far worse here than the dirt, a kind of frightening witches' Sabbath… These blowzy women with their little hats and their [newspaper] clippings hungered for attention. They wanted to be admired. They simpered in a happy almost innocent triumph when they were applauded. Theirs was the demented cruelty of egocentric children, and somehow this made their insensate beastliness much more heartbreaking. These were not mothers, not even women. They were crazy actors playing to a crazy audience.

In 1964, four years after Steinbeck stood at the McDonogh school barricades, Norman Rockwell's painting of Ruby Bridges, the little girl "in shining starchy white, with new white shoes" appeared on the cover of *Look Magazine.* That same year, the United States Congress passed the Civil Rights Act, and Fanny Lou Hamer spoke before the credentials committee of the Democratic Party National Convention.[144]

Fannie Lou Hamer once recalled, "Because I believe in God, I asked God to give me a chance to just let me do something about what was going on in Mississippi." Despite the fame that followed her entry into civil rights struggles, Hamer's world always orbited around her Mississippi Delta home. Fannie Lou Townsend was born into a Montgomery County, Mississippi, family of sharecroppers in 1917, and matured amid the struggles of the Black freedom movement. As a youngster, she went to work as a farm laborer, quitting school at age twelve. Married to Perry "Pap" Hamer in 1944, Fanny raised two adopted daughters, farmed and picked cotton and other row crops, and watched with increasing interest as the civil rights movement grew up around her. Emmett Till was murdered in the vicinity of Fanny

144. Steinbeck, *Travels with Charlie,* 255–56; Coles, "Ruby Bridges and a Painting," 110.

and Pap Hamer's Ruleville, Mississippi, hometown, and Fanny learned of the school desegregation struggles in Little Rock, New Orleans' Ninth Ward, and the University of Mississippi in Oxford. In 1962, she attended her first civil rights meeting and enlisted to help the Students Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) in registering Black Mississippians to vote. SNCC was one of several groups with which Hamer would work. Although SNCC subsequently gained a reputation as a separatist Black power group, Hamer was dedicated to achieving an integrated civil rights movement that included northern whites (including Jews) and southern white allies, declaring, "If we're going to break down this barrier of segregation, we can't segregate ourselves."[145]

Blacks had begun to vanish from Mississippi voting rolls around the time of the Redeemers' rise and the 1882 defeat of the Black Republican Congressman Roy Lynch. By 1900, their extirpation was complete and they would stay shut out through the 1950s. Although Dixiecrats had a falling out with Harry Truman in 1948, they returned to the party in the 1950s to stage a last stand against the desegregationist wave. In 1964, Mississippi Senators James Eastland and John Stennis joined Al Gore, Sr., Harry Byrd, William J. Fulbright, Strom Thurmond, Russell Long, Robert Byrd, Sr., Richard Russell, and ten more southern Democrats to filibuster the Civil Rights Act. Their obstruction lasted for over two months until a bipartisan Senate supermajority, led by Hubert Humphrey, Mike Mansfield, and Everett Dirksen, broke the filibuster and passed the bill. Defeated at the national level, segregationists aimed to retain their clout within the Democratic Party, which was on track to nominate President Lyndon Johnson (a Texan and supporter of civil rights), with Hubert Humphrey as his running mate. When delegates arrived at their national convention in Atlantic City in August of

145. Maegan Parker Brooks and David W. Houck, eds., *The Speeches of Fannie Lou Hamer: To Tell It Like It Is* (Jackson, Miss. 2011), xi–xxxii. Hamer's "I asked God" quote is in David Rubel, *Fannie Lou Hamer: From Sharecropping to Politics* (Edgewood Cliffs, N.J., 1990), 13, and her 1963 statement "we can't segregate ourselves" is quoted in Nicolaus Mills, *Like a Holy Crusade: Mississippi 1964—The Turning of the Civil Rights Movement in America* (Chicago, 1992), 64. "SNCC" is pronounced "Snick."

1964, a conflict was brewing, and Fanny Lou Hamer was there to stir the pot.[146]

The work to register Mississippi Black voters over fierce white opposition gave rise to a shrewd plan in which Fanny Lou Hamer played an important role. Predictably, Dixiecrats squashed Black voter registration and participation in caucus selection of Mississippi's convention delegates. Hamer herself had been harassed, arrested, and physically beaten, because she tried to register to vote and to register others. SNCC, having publicly attempted and failed at every legal means of voter registration and caucus participation, then methodically created their own desegregated process, selecting both Black and white convention delegates under the banner of the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party (MFDP). Those delegates traveled to Atlantic City, where they petitioned the credentials committee to be seated as the rightful Mississippi delegation. MFDP chose Fannie Lou Hamer as one of their witnesses to testify before the committee.[147]

President Lyndon Johnson, an advocate for racial equality and the 1964 Civil Rights Act, was now caught between the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party and the Dixiecrats. Like Harry Truman, Johnson saw desegregation as just (and inevitable) and the Dixiecrats as doomed. But Johnson also needed southern electoral votes in the November election. After having labored long and hard to help pass the Civil Rights Act, he was impatient with liberals bent on humiliating Dixiecrats in front of a national television audience and splintering the Democrat coalition in a presidential election year. Johnson was willing to hold his nose at the Dixiecrat smell for one more election cycle. In characteristic fashion, he dispatched Walter Reuther and Hubert Humphrey (and Humphrey's young protégé Walter Mondale) to try to broker a deal between the liberals

146. "Landmark Legislation: The Civil Rights Act of 1964," United States Senate, https://www.senate.gov/artandhistory/history/common/generic/CivilRightsAct1964.htm, accessed Aug. 5, 2013; Mills, *Like a Holy Crusade,* 144. Senate Democratic Senators voted 46-21 to pass the Civil Rights Act; Republicans voted 27-6 for passage.

147. Mills, *Like a Holy Crusade,* 134–38; Brooks and Houck, *Speeches of Fannie Lou Hamer*, 42.

and the Dixiecrats. Well aware of Fannie Lou Hamer's persuasive speaking style, Johnson scheduled his own news conference to preempt her credentials committee testimony. However, Fanny's talk was so riveting the news networks re-ran it in its entirety, and Hamer instantly became a national (and international) sensation.[148]

"My name is Mrs. Fannie Lou Hamer, and I live at 626 East Lafayette Street, Ruleville, Mississippi, Sunflower County," in the home state "of Senator James O. Eastland and Senator Stennis," she began in her thick Mississippi accent. Her brief testimony told three powerful stories—her first attempt to register to vote, her subsequent loss of her job, and the beating she took after attending a civil rights organizing meeting. Fannie stated that on August 31, 1962, "eighteen of us traveled twenty-six miles to the county courthouse in Indianola to try to register to become first-class citizens." After taking a literacy test and being ordered to leave, "city police and the state highway patrolmen" detained and fined them while en route home. That evening, the farmer for whom she and Pap had worked for eighteen years (she called him the "plantation owner") was "raising Cain because I had tried to register" and insisted she withdraw her paperwork. Hamer refused, declaring, "I didn't try to register for you. I tried to register for myself." He fired her and she "had to leave the same night."[149]

On June 9, 1963, Fannie continued, "I had attended a voter registration workshop [and] was returning back to Mississippi" when a state highway patrolman arrested and booked her in the county jail in Winona, Mississippi. There she heard a woman being beaten because she refused to call a police officer "Sir." Three white men, one of whom was a state patrolman, entered Hamer's cell, announcing, "We are going to make you wish you was dead." As she lay on a bunk face down, the patrolman ordered "Negro prisoners" to beat her. "After the first Negro had

148. Mills, *Like a Holy Crusade,* 147, 152–53.

149. "Testimony before the Credentials Committee at the Democratic National Convention, Atlantic City, New Jersey, August 22, 1964," in Brooks and Houck, *The Speeches of Fannie Lou Hamer,* 43–45.

beat me until I was exhausted," a second beat her while the first sat on her feet to keep her still.

> I began to scream and one white man got up and began to beat me in my head and tell me to hush. One white man—my dress had worked up high—he walked over and pulled up my dress, I pulled my dress down and he pulled my dress back up.

As she spoke before the stunned credentials committee members and a national television audience, Fannie Lou Hamer concluded, "If the Freedom Democratic Party is not seated now, I question America. Is this America, the land of the free and the home of the brave where … our lives be threatened daily because we want to live as decent human beings, in America? Thank you."[150]

In the end, the committee only offered the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party two at-large seats, with the Dixiecrat delegation remaining intact. They refused the offer, with Hamer declaring, "We didn't come all this way for no two seats." And besides, the MFDP had brought their story of racial injustice before the American people in a fashion more dramatic and influential than they could have ever hoped for. Congress passed a Voting Rights Act in 1965, and by 1972 60 percent of eligible Black Mississippians were registered to vote (today, Mississippi has a higher per capita level of Black registration than Massachusetts). Fannie Lou Hamer became a nationally recognized civil rights leader who made national speeches, testified before Congress, and traveled to Africa. Yet as the mid-1960s turned into the early 1970s, Hamer typically kept her sights set on her Mississippi Delta home.[151]

Returning to Ruleville, Fannie Lou Hamer ran unsuccessfully for the U.S. Congress and the Mississippi State Senate before focusing her efforts on economics. Her days with SNCC and her trip to Africa had instilled an interest in local socialism that

150. Ibid.

151. Nies, "Fannie Lou Hamer," 230-33; Ilya Shapiro, "Voting Rights in Massachusetts and Mississippi," *Cato at Liberty* (March 6, 2013), https://www.cato.org/blog/voting-rights-massachusetts-mississippi, accessed Aug. 8, 2013.

she now pursued. Hamer organized a low-income housing cooperative and an innovative Pig Bank, which loaned pregnant sows to needy families (who kept the piglets and returned the sow to the bank). Hamer's group next purchased 640 acres and dubbed it Freedom Farm, to be populated and worked by needy families. Funded by government and private bank loans and money she raised from a legion of liberal admirers, Fannie's utopian experiment resembled the one launched by the other Fanny—Frances Wright—145 years earlier at Nashoba, 150 miles to the north. The end results of Freedom Farm and Nashoba were also similar. The inherent difficulties of collective farming combined with Hamer's disputatious nature and her ongoing medical problems (diabetes and hypertension) led to the Freedom Farm's bankruptcy. Hamer's physical condition worsened. On March 14, 1977, Fannie Lou Hamer died of heart failure in Mound Bayou, Mississippi.[152]

In retrospect, Fannie Lou Hamer is an important historical figure in the Black freedom movement, a woman who worked with others to cleanse the Democratic Party of segregationists. Yet no one at the time could have predicted the extent of damage to the 1960s and '70s southern Democratic Party, which sat on the precipice of huge losses to the Republicans. Just as the South had become Republican during the desegregationist era following the Civil War, it returned to the Republican fold exactly one hundred years later, amid the downfall of Dixiecrats.[153] Fannie Lou Hamer played an important role in this. Yet the rebirth of the southern GOP was also the result of the labors of another Mississippi Valley woman—one who resided in Alton, Illinois.

Alton, just north of Saint Louis, has given America two controversial and important freedom fighters. The fiery abolitionist newspaperman Elijah P. Lovejoy was hanged by pro-

152. Nies, "Fannie Lou Hamer," 233–36. Writing to Robert Dale Owen about the failure of socialism at Nashoba, Fanny Wright dryly remarked, "Cooperation has nigh killed us all," quoted in Alexander Winston, "Utopia: Dream Into Nightmare," *The Freeman* (March 1971), https://fee.org/articles/utopia-dream-into-nightmare#axzz2bXckFNYC, accessed Aug. 9, 2013.

153. Earl Black and Merle Black, *The Rise of the Southern Republicans* (Cambridge, Mass. 2002).

slavery fanatics in the streets of Alton in 1837. One hundred and twenty-seven years later, a young Alton political activist named Phyllis Schlafly penned *A Choice Not an Echo,* a book that signaled a huge shift in the politics of the Mississippi Valley and all of America. Although Schlafly is best known as an opponent of '60s-style American feminism, her life story is one of a fiercely independent woman who rose to fame in a world dominated by men. Born in Saint Louis in 1924, Phyllis Stewart matured during the Great Depression as her librarian mother supported the family and her attorney father—a rock-ribbed Republican—looked for work. Schlafly paid her own way through Saint Louis' Washington College by working graveyard and swing shifts at the Saint Louis Ordnance Plant, test-firing rifle and machine gun ammunition manufactured for use in World War II. She graduated at age nineteen, earned an M.A. in political science from Harvard (Radcliffe) in 1945, and worked briefly as a political researcher before marrying Fred Schlafly, a banker, in 1949. Phyllis began raising a family that grew to six children, and she appeared to be settling down to a comfortable life in Alton, Illinois. But as the 1950s and early 1960s unfolded, Schlafly, like Fannie Lou Hamer, was drawn into the dramatic political upheaval going on throughout America.[154]

As it had been for Hamer, 1964 proved to be Phyllis Schlafly's crucible. Always active in GOP politics, she became a member of the grassroots campaign that seized Republican Party leadership from East Coast progressives—those whom Schlafly disparagingly called "eggheads," "kingmakers," "Rockefeller Republicans," and "alleged Republicans." Schlafly and her fellow rebels succeeded in nominating the conservative Arizona Senator Barry Goldwater for president. Goldwater, the first American of Jewish ancestry (though not a practicing Jew) to stand for the presidency, was a staunch anti-Communist and states' rights conservative.[155] He favored individual freedom via

154. Donald T. Critchlow, *Phyllis Schlafly and Grassroots Conservatism: A Woman's Crusade* (Princeton, N.J., 2005), 13–24; Carol Felsenthal, *The Sweetheart of the Silent Majority: The Biography of Phyllis Schlafly* (Garden City, N.J., 1981), 71–102, 118–19; Phyllis Schlafly, *A Choice Not an Echo* (Alton, Ill., 1964).

minimal government, low taxes, balanced budgets, and a strong military. Schlafly later reflected, "It is unlikely that any nominee for President who was not elected ever had the lasting influence on American politics that Barry Goldwater did."

> Barry Goldwater was the undisputed original leader of the modern conservative movement… If there hadn't been a Barry Goldwater, there wouldn't have been a Ronald Reagan… Goldwater was authentic, and what you saw was what you got. His political positions and agenda came from his personal convictions, not from reading the polls… By proclaiming from the start that he offered "a choice not an echo," Goldwater made his supporters understand who their enemy was. That enemy was the liberal, eastern Rockefeller Republicans who, every four years from 1936 through 1960, had inflicted the Republican Party with a presidential candidate who "me-too-ed" the Democrats on the fundamental issues… The 27 million [voters] who withstood Big Media's vitriol in 1964 kept the faith, and they grew into the 54 million mighty majority that validated the Reagan Revolution in 1984.

Goldwater's popular 1960 book, *Conscience of a Conservative,* was joined in 1964 by *A Choice Not an Echo,* Schlafly's own GOP manifesto and intellectual biography of the Senator. Schlafly published *A Choice Not an Echo* herself, through a company she dubbed Pere Marquette Press. Though lacking an agent or professional distributor, the book caught fire during the GOP primaries and convention process. By November, three and a half million copies had sold. All experts agree that Schlafly's book played a major role in securing Goldwater the GOP nomination, and *A Choice Not an Echo* stands as one of the most widely read political tracts in American history.[156]

155. See Rick Perlstein, *Before the Storm: Barry Goldwater and the Unmaking of the American Consensus* (New York, 2001) and Peter Iverson, *Barry Goldwater, Native Arizonan* (Norman, Okla., 1997).
156. Critchlow, *Phyllis Schlafly and Grassroots Conservatism,* 119–25; quotes in Schlafly, "The Legacy of Barry Goldwater," *Eagle Forum* (June 10, 1998), https://www.eagleforum.org/column/1998/june98/98-06-10.html, accessed Aug. 17, 2013. Governor Nelson Rockefeller of New York ran unsuccessfully against Goldwater in the 1964 GOP primaries, and the Goldwaterites booed him off the stage when he tried to speak at the San Francisco convention.

Schlafly was, like Goldwater, a small government desegregationist. One of her biographers, an enemy-turned-admirer, confesses being "so deep-down suspicious" and "hungry for anything I could get" on Schlafly that she invested hundreds of hours trying to unearth her assumed racist past. But there was no such past. Schlafly "had never shown herself to be a racist; had never tried to block or even stall integration." Schlafly's strong belief in property rights no doubt led her, like Goldwater, to question the tortured definition of "public" in the public accommodations section of the 1964 Civil Rights Act. The public accommodations clause led Goldwater to vote against the entire bill—a principled action that proved a huge political mistake. Goldwater had belonged to the NAACP, and he desegregated his family's Phoenix department store. As a U.S. Air Force major general, Goldwater was in charge of the desegregation of the Arizona Air National Guard. Yet he was unfairly branded a racist (and unwittingly embraced by some white southern segregationists) for his states' rights views. Phyllis Schlafly never opposed the Civil Rights Act and in fact worked hand in hand for years with her fellow Illinoisan, Senator Everett Dirksen, a key Republican backer of the bill.[157]

"Why would a regular party Republican write a book which exposes the Convention intrigues of a few alleged Republicans?" Schlafly rhetorically asked in *A Choice Not an Echo.* Her answer was that in 1964, "the survival of American freedom and independence may depend on a Republican victory." Of course, Schlafly and the Goldwaterites never reached their optimistic goals. The national media immediately branded Goldwater an extremist, and Johnson and Humphrey thumped him soundly in November. Goldwater won only 39 percent of the popular vote and the electoral votes of six states, one of which was his native Arizona. Yet he also won Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama,

157. Critchlow, *Schlafly and Grassroots Conservatism,* 129–130, 142; Felsenthal, *Sweetheart of the Silent Majority,* xvii–xix. In a speech delivered a few weeks after the Senate passed the Civil Rights Act, Dirksen nominated Goldwater for the presidency at the GOP National Convention; the 1964 GOP platform pledged full enforcement of the Civil Rights Act. A less generous analysis is in Black and Black, *Rise of the Southern Republicans,* 208–10.

Georgia, and South Carolina—the first time these states had voted Republican since 1872 and 1876.[158]

Thus the Republican Party began to recapture the South. Though some of Barry Goldwater's southern vote no doubt came from segregationists, their day was done. The new southern Republicans who emerged in the 1970s and '80s were all *de*segregationists. With the important exception of Strom Thurmond, all of the old Dixiecrats—Gore, Fulbright, Byrd, Faubus, Stennis, Eastland, Russell, and their brethren Bull Connor and Lester Maddox—remained in the Democratic Party, where they ended their careers. George Wallace and a few others became Independents, refusing to join the GOP. Gradually, following both the GOP lead and the vision of Fannie Lou Hamer, southern Democrats replaced their old guard with desegregationist leaders like Jimmy Carter, Al Gore, Jr., and Bill Clinton. They lost the Deep South but remained competitive in Arkansas, west Tennessee, Missouri, and Florida. And in the upper Mississippi Valley, Democrats would remain strong in Iowa, Illinois, Wisconsin, and, of course, Hubert Humphrey's home state of Minnesota.[159]

Meanwhile, Phyllis Schlafly continued her career as a political activist from her new home base on the Illinois side of the Mississippi River. Throughout the 1970s, Schlafly battled liberal feminists and the proposed Equal Rights Amendment (ERA), which aimed to constitutionalize gender equality. In a stance that would probably have infuriated Fanny Wright but pleased southern women who sought to remain on the pedestal, Schlafly argued that the ERA was both unnecessary (because the 14th Amendment already codified citizen equality) and potentially dangerous (because it might lead to women being conscripted into military service or to the loss of their dependent wife social security benefit status). When the Equal Rights Amendment died

158. Schlafly, *A Choice Not an Echo,* 117; Critchlow, *Schlafly and Grassroots Conservatism,* 136.

159. Black and Black, *Rise of the Southern Republicans,* 142–43, 211, 222, 390. Bull Connor served as Alabama's Democratic national committeeman; Alabama Governor George Wallace ran as a third party candidate for president in 1968 and in the 1972 Democrat primaries before he was wounded by an assassin. For the 1980s rise of southern Democrat desegregationists, see ibid., 175–76.

short of passage, both its supporters and opponents gave Schlafly a great deal of the credit or blame.[160]

One of the Schlafly's most important crusades is also the least known of her efforts. In the mid-1980s, at the height of Ronald Reagan's popularity, she almost singlehandedly prevented many of her own conservative allies from calling a national constitutional convention to pass a balanced budget amendment. Although Schlafly certainly supported a balanced budget, she astutely foresaw nightmare scenarios for conservatives that might result were liberals to wrest control of the proposed constitutional convention. For example, she feared expanded Supreme Court powers, four-year terms for Congressmen, and the elimination of the Electoral College and the Senate filibuster. Phyllis Schlafly almost singlehandedly squashed the balanced budget amendment convention when it was only two states shy of approval.[161]

The derision and venom Schlafly drew from women of the American left was unprecedented. The feminist Betty Friedan actually told Schlafly, "I'd like to burn you at the stake." Her public talks were almost always peppered with catcalls and interruptions. However, Schlafly thrived amid the hostility and was known for cool demeanor and sharp wit in the face of hecklers. She was also known for her work ethic. In addition to her constitutional battles of the '60s, '70s and '80s, she founded a political action group (Eagle Forum), ran unsuccessfully for Congress, served several terms as Illinois Republican Committeewoman and GOP National Convention delegate, appeared regularly on television and radio (eventually hosting her own weekly Eagle Forum radio show), and traversed the country as a guest speaker. In 1978, in the midst of the ERA battle, Schlafly earned a juris doctorate from Washington University. She continued to write, eventually publishing twenty

160. Critchlow, *Schlafly and Grassroots Conservatism,* 212–42, 283–85.

161. This is based on my recollection of a 1987 speech Schlafly gave at Tennessee Technological University (Cookeville) and a conversation during our drive to the Nashville airport. Schlafly soon spent weeks in the Montana state capitol of Helena, where she at last stymied the balanced budget amendment convention proposal.

books. In 1998, *Ladies' Home Journal,* a magazine known for strong editorial support of the ERA, named Schlafly one of the 100 most important women of the twentieth century. In 2016, Phyllis Schlafly died at her Saint Louis, Missouri, home, succumbing to cancer at the age of 92.[162]

Phyllis Schlafly helped found the national political movement that elevated her fellow Mississippi Valley native Ronald Reagan to the presidency. Schafly's work to bolster local and state power against the increasing authority of the federal government helped reshape the American political landscape and create the second Republican South. A century after the conclusion of the American Civil War and Reconstruction, the rise of a strong desegrationist states' rights movement was in part a result of her labor.

162. Critchlow, *Schlafly and Grassroots Conservatism,* 189–90, 194–202, 221, 238–39; Manuel Roig-Franzia and Monica Hesse, "Murdoch Is the Latest in a Long Line of Pie-throwing Pranksters' Targets," *Washington Post,* https://www.washingtonpost.com/lifestyle/style/murdoch-is-the-latest-in-a-long-line-of-pie-throwing-pranksters-targets/2011/07/19/gIQASokmOI_story.html, accessed Aug. 22, 2013; Ladies Home Journal, *100 Most Important Women of the Twentieth Century* (New York, 1998). Friedan quote in Elizabeth Colbert, "Firebrand: Phyllis Schlafly and the Conservative Revolution," *New Yorker,* https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2005/11/07/firebrand, accessed Aug. 22, 2013. Schlafly had also run for Congress in 1952. She graduated from the Washington University School of Law 27th in a class of 178 and passed the Illinois bar the same year.

Chapter 6

MISSISSIPPI VALLEY MOVIES AND TELEVISION SHOWS

> When Fortuna spins you downward, go out to a movie and get more out of life.
>
> Ignatius Reilly, in John Kennedy Toole, *A Confederacy of Dunces*[1]

> The fact is I am quite happy in a movie, even a bad movie. Other people, so I have read, treasure memorable moments in their lives: the time one climbed the Parthenon at sunrise, the summer night one met a lonely girl in Central Park and achieved with her a sweet and natural relationship, as they say in books. I too once met a girl in Central Park, but it is not much to remember. What I remember is the time John Wayne killed three men with a carbine as he was falling to the dusty street in *Stagecoach,* and the time the kitten found Orson Welles in the doorway in *The Third Man*
>
> Binx Bolling, in *The Moviegoer*[2]

In 1935–36 Hollywood, California, three Mississippi River steamboats, the *Claremont Queen, Cotton Blossom,* and *Magnolia,* were sailing strong, captained by Will Rogers, Charles Winninger, and W. C. Fields. Three feature-length movies, *Steamboat Round the Bend, Show Boat,* and *Mississippi,* released one after the other to enthusiastic audiences, showed the Mississippi Valley was a facet of American culture well suited to popular

1. John Kennedy Toole, *A Confederacy of Dunces* (New York, 1980), 55.
2. Walker Percy, *The Moviegoer* (1960; repr. New York, 1998), 7.

culture portrayals and marketing. In the 1930s, as always, American history and the popular arts were intertwined.

Steamboat Round the Bend, the nonmusical of the movie trio, was the final movie role for the beloved Oklahoma comic entertainer Will Rogers, who died in an airplane accident soon after filming. In 1933, Rogers had purchased movie rights to a novel by Ben Lucien Burman, a noted chronicler of Mississippi Valley folklore and "shantyboat" (houseboat) life. Rogers sold the idea to 20th Century Fox, who tapped a new talent, John Ford, to direct what turned out to be their biggest moneymaker of 1935.[3]

In *Steamboat Round the Bend,* Rogers plays "Doctor" John Pearly, an 1890s Louisiana snake oil ("Pocahontas Elixir") salesman and entrepreneur who buys the steamer *Claremont Queen* with his favorite nephew, Duke Peabody (John McGuire), a pilot. But Duke is in trouble, having fallen in love with spunky "swamp girl" (shanty-boater) Fleety Belle (Anne Shirley), and, in self-defense, killed her assailant, Big Steve. To save Duke from the hangman's noose, Pearly must track down the only witness to the killing, an itinerant evangelist called the New Moses (Berton Churchill). He must also win a steamboat race with Captain Eli (Irvin Cobb) of the *Pride of Paducah,* assisted only by Fleety at the wheel, the inept deckhand Jonah (Steppin Fetchit), and the drunken engineer Efe (Francis Ford).[4]

The cinematographer George Schneider weaves in actual western rivers steamboat footage with soundstage shots to produce a crisp black-and-white Mississippi Valley setting. The movie's script succeeds in combining Duke's impending execution with the high comedy of catch and chase. The old vaudevillian Rogers is a natural snake oil salesman, Churchill's

3. Ben Lucien Burman, *Steamboat Round the Bend* (1933; repr. Boston, 1935); John Ford, dir., *Steamboat Round the Bend* (1935; 20th Century Fox, 2007), DVD. In this and all subsequent movie analyses I have used the movies themselves as my main source, consulting selected, cited criticism and Leonard Maltin's *Movie Guides* to crosscheck data and review synopses. When I have watched the movies on VHS or DVD format, I cite that format following the date of release; no citation means I viewed it in a movie theater, on network television, or via a commercial mail-order outlet that cuts its own, unnumbered DVDs. Subsequent references are by film title only.

4. *Steamboat Round the Bend*.

evangelist New Moses is lots of fun, and Ford's drunken engineer Efe is hilarious. At Duke and Fleety's jailhouse wedding, Sheriff Rufe Jeffers's daughter plays "Listen to the Mockingbird" (the only song she knows) in lieu of the wedding march as the sheriff (Eugene Palette) marries the two ("Can't nobody rightly say nothin' agin marriage," Jeffers intones, "'cause, I reckon God … knowed what it was to be lonesome"). At one point, Pearly, Jonah, and Efe try to raise cash for Duke's lawyer with Dr. John's Floating [Wax] Museum and decide it will be more profitable if they turn the European wax characters into Americans. So, Queen Elizabeth I becomes Pocahontas and King George III is George Washington (they also turn Moses into Jesse James and General Grant into Robert E. Lee). While some can set aside modern sensibilities regarding alcoholism to enjoy Efe's drunken antics, the racial stereotyping in Stepin Fetchit's Jonah is, with exceptions, too dated for much laughter.[5]

Steamboat Round the Bend's racing finale uses actual steamboat footage to thrilling results. Dr. Pearly combines the race between the *Claremont Queen* and *Pride of Paducah* with a trip to Baton Rouge to beg the governor (his old Confederate Army comrade) to pardon Duke. The race starts with a bang—a huge crowd, a brass band playing "Dixie," and six actual smoke-belching riverboats. En route, Pearly throws a long loop and ropes the New Moses, dragging him from shore to boat to testify (Rogers used cowboy rope tricks as part of his vaudeville act). Running out of fuel, Jonah and Efe begin chopping up parts of the boat for firewood before discovering that, when afire, the alcohol-laden Pocahontas Elixir generates considerable heat! One hundred bottles later, Captain Fleety sails the *Claremont Queen* into Baton Rouge with the star witness aboard and the *Pride of Paducah* miles to the rear. Duke is saved from the gallows, and he and Fleety are reunited to sail the Mississippi with Pearly, who is confirmed in his belief that "the Lord's a lot broader-minded than you think he is anyhow."[6]

5. Ibid.
6. Ibid.

MUSICAL MOVIES

Although American audiences have enjoyed forms of musical theater since colonial times, the modern Broadway musical is a product of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.[7] And among the many settings and themes of Broadway musicals, the American heartland—the Mississippi River Valley—is recurrent. Throughout the twentieth century, Broadway writers turned to the Mississippi Valley as a setting for classic American musicals such as *Show Boat, Mississippi, Meet Me in St. Louis, The Music Man, State Fair,* and *The Pajama Game.*

The birth of Broadway musicals also parallels development of motion pictures,[8] and, although the great Mississippi Valley musicals were created and produced as Broadway shows, it was the emergent movie medium that brought them a huge national audience. The number of Americans who attend musical theater, on Broadway or otherwise, is minuscule compared to the movie theater audience. The movie theater is a home to America's democratic culture. Certainly, it is problematic to examine these shows primarily in their film versions—cast members sometimes changed and Hollywood producers altered scripts and changed music and settings.[9] Yet Broadway casts often migrated intact to film their work out west. And movie versions of Broadway shows are undoubtedly the best way to explore how these shows affected millions of Americans and the foreign audiences who flocked to watch them. Moreover, Hollywood producers took the Mississippi Valley musical one step further by creating their own original (non-Broadway) musical movies and soundtrack musicals.

Show Boat is the first and best known of the Mississippi Valley musicals. The 1927 Jerome Kern and Oscar Hammerstein

7. Gerald Martin Bordman, *American Musical Theatre: A Chronicle,* 2d ed. (1978; repr. New York, 1992), 1–182; Leroy Ashby, *And Amusement for All: A History of American Popular Culture since 1830* (Lexington, Ky., 2006), 112–13.
8. Ashby, *And Amusement for All*, 186–97, 290–91.
9. In his seminal work *American Musical Theatre*, Gerald Bordman does not mention the movie versions of Broadway shows; the nouns "movie," "film," and "Hollywood" do not appear in his index. Another analysis different from my own my own is Ethan Mordden, *When Broadway Went to Hollywood* (New York, 2016).

Broadway show, based on the Edna Ferber novel, achieved instant success because of its strong combination of drama, music, set, and costumes. Only two years after *Show Boat*'s Broadway debut, a black-and-white screen version appeared, and the well-known full-color *Show Boat* (with Ava Gardner) was filmed in 1951. In between, the director James Whale's 1936 *Show Boat* is arguably the best of three movie versions of this American classic. Filmed mostly on California sound stages in black and white, Whale uses the rear projection technique, showing actual Mississippi River footage on a screen behind the sound stage, providing the illusion of the shimmering river. A strong cast, musicians, and production team make the 1936 *Show Boat* entertaining fare to this day.[10]

There are two engaging parallel storylines in *Show Boat.* The main tale is about Magnolia "Noly" Hawks (Irene Dunn), a young girl reaching womanhood aboard the steamboat *Cotton Blossom,* owned and operated by her mother, Parthy (Helen Westley), and father, "Cap'n" Andy (Charles Winninger). The *Cotton Blossom*'s troupe of musicians and actors entertains Mississippi River townspeople with singing, dancing, and melodramas. Noly falls in love with the charming, reckless Gaylord Ravenal (Allan Jones), whom Parthy calls "a cheap river gambler with a high and mighty air." Over her parents' objections, Noly marries Ravenal and they have a child they name Kim (using the first letters of Kentucky, Illinois, and Missouri because she is born at the confluence of the Ohio and Mississippi). Ravenal takes Noly and Kim away from their beloved *Cotton Blossom* to Chicago, where he continues his dissolute ways. Noly at last leaves him and returns to the *Cotton Blossom* and Kim's adoring grandparents. In the end, Kim grows up to become a famous singer, the chastened Ravenal returns, and the family is reunited.[11]

The powerful subplot to *Show Boat* reflects Kern's and Hammerstein's desire to address the role of race and slavery in

10. Bordman, *American Musical Theatre,* 434–35; James Whale, dir., *Show Boat* (1936; repr. MGM/UA Home Video, 1990), VHS. See also Miles Kreuger, *Show Boat: The Story of a Classic American Musical* (New York, 1977).

11. *Show Boat*.

America's past. Helen Morgan plays Julie LaVerne, the *Cotton Blossom's* talented singer/actress whose given French surname Dozier is a hint to her secret creole (mulatto) ethnicity. She is married to the white entertainer Steve Baker (Donald Cook), and the two are in violation of miscegenation laws. "Your pop was white, your mammy Black?" a southern sheriff sternly asks Julie. "Yes, that's right," she bravely answers. "You've got Negroes acting as whites," the sheriff tells Cap'n Andy. Thus, moviegoers learn the sobering consequences of America's one-drop rule, which ruins Julie's career and leads her on the path to alcoholism. Supporting Morgan and Cook in this gripping storyline are Hattie McDaniel as Nolie's "mammy," Queenie (a character type she reprised with Vivian Leigh in *Gone with the Wind* [1939] to become the first Black recipient of an Academy Award), and Paul Robeson, the acclaimed Black opera singer, as the *Cotton Blossom's* deckhand Joe.[12]

Much of *Show Boat's* power derives from Kern's and Hammerstein's songs—"Can't Help Lovin' That Man," "Bill," "After the Ball," and "Make Believe." Auditioning for a Chicago singing job, Noly announces, "I do Negro songs," and her accompanist performs "Can't Help Lovin' That Man" in what they call a "ragged" or "raggedy" style. But Paul Robeson's rendering of "Ol' Man River" is the unforgettable song from the show. Combining Negro spiritual motifs with formal Euro-American style, the tune uses the Mississippi River's southward journey as a metaphor for Black endurance and stoicism. As Julie is driven away from the *Cotton Blossom,* Joe the deckhand sings of the loss of freedom and hard lives that Blacks endure: "Here we all work 'long the Mississippi … while the white folk play," he begins. Life is so hard that Joe wants to cross the "River Jordan" to escape the "white man boss." "You and me, we sweat and strain / Bodies all achin' and wracked with pain," he laments. But Joe's fate, like that of most southern Blacks, is a life of hardship and toil:

I gets weary and so sick of tryin'

12. Ibid.

I'm tired of livin', but I'm feared of dyin'
And Ol' Man River, he just keeps rollin' along.

Thus, the weary slaves and freedmen somehow endure as "Ol' Man River, he just keeps rollin' along."[13]

The 1935 movie *Mississippi* is among the first of Hollywood's many non-Broadway movie musicals, though it does have connections to the New York stage. Edward Sutherland, the director, added music to Booth Tarkington's play *Magnolia* and borrowed a few plot elements from both the Broadway and 1929 movie renditions of *Show Boat.* However, *Mississippi* is no *Show Boat,* and only strong performances from W. C. Fields and Bing Crosby compensate for its silly screenplay. Unlike *Show Boat's* frank portrayal of southern race relations, *Mississippi* never mentions race or the institution of slavery. Also filmed on Hollywood sound stages in black and white, the interweaving of actual Mississippi River footage and extant steamboat film gives *Mississippi,* like *Show Boat,* a realistic touch.[14]

The old vaudevillian Fields is hilarious as the showboat *River Queen's* "Commodore" Orlando Jackson, a cigar-chomping, julep-swigging pitchman. When he is not cheating at cards (in one game he plays five aces against his two adversaries' combined eight!), Jackson is shilling Tom Grayson (Crosby), a Quaker singing sensation with a (concocted) past as a dashing riverboat gambler and duelist. Of course, there is an overdue bank note on the *River Queen,* and the love interest is cute Lucy Rumford (Joan Bennett), whom Crosby wins from a rival by foregoing violence and enlisting the support of her servant (played by Queenie Smith). Along the way, the showboat's Black crewmembers (notably a group of cabin kids called the Inklings) treat viewers to lively song and dance routines in scenes that range from endearing to racially derogatory. Bing sings "Swanee River" and "Down by the River," crooning "You will remember when you hear my song / Down where the river rolls along." But it is W. C. Fields as Commodore Jackson who steals the show

13. Ibid. See Todd Decker, *Who Should Sing "Ol' Man River"?* (New York, 2014).
14. Edward Sutherland, dir., *Mississippi* (1935; repr. Universal, 2010), DVD and liner notes.

in *Mississippi* with wit, sarcasm, and sight gags. He bombards passengers with lies of his exploits in the "Indian wars … cutting a path through a wall of human flesh, with my canoe behind me." And every time the commodore raises his empty hand into the air, a waiter puts a mint julep into it. An unforgettable sight is Commodore Orlando Jackson in full uniform steering the *River Queen,* standing behind a huge wheel, mint julep in hand and cigar in mouth, using his mouth to rapidly shift the cigar up and down between the spokes of the rotating wheel![15]

Meet Me in St. Louis (1944) is the first of what one might call the upper Mississippi Valley musicals, shows that use the upper Midwest as a setting to entertainingly portray the imagined lifestyle and values of the American heartland. *Meet Me in St. Louis,* like *Mississippi,* was created and produced as a movie, not a Broadway musical and is based on Sally Benson's *New Yorker* short stories. The director, Vincente Minnelli, cast Judy Garland (his soon-to-be wife), alongside Leon Ames, Mary Astor, and the brilliant child actor Margaret O'Brien, in this story about the Smiths, a large middle-class Saint Louis family eagerly anticipating the 1904 Louisiana Purchase Exposition, also called the world's fair.[16]

Portraying the months from the summer of 1903 until spring of 1904, the movie storyline features Smith family togetherness and disagreements, youthful romances (and their complications), and the hijinks of precocious daughter Tootie (O'Brien). When Alonzo Smith (Ames) informs his wife Anna (Astor) and children that his employers have promoted him and they are all moving from Saint Louis to New York, a family crisis ensues. Things come to a head during Christmas, when Alonzo at last relents and announces they will stay in Saint Louis after all. Meanwhile, daughter Esther (Garland) sings "Wish Yourself a Merry Little Christmas," the most moving piece in a lively songbook that also includes "Meet Me in St. Louis." At movie's end, all the Smiths (including the girls' beaus) attend the gala spring opening of the world's fair. One of the movie's most important themes is, quite

15. Ibid.
16. Vincente Minnelli, dir., *Meet Me in St. Louis* (1944, repr. Warner Brothers, 2004), DVD.

simply, midwestern pride. "New York hasn't got a copyright on opportunity! Saint Louis is headed for a boom that'll make your head swim!" exclaims Alonzo when announcing the family will remain in the Mississippi Valley. "This is a great town!" Gazing out at the splendor of the Saint Louis world's fair, Esther shares her father's enthusiasm about their hometown: "I can't believe it. Right here where we live. Right here in Saint Louis."[17]

State Fair (1945), the second upper Mississippi Valley musical, tells the story of the Abel Frake family's adventures at the Iowa State Fair in Des Moines. *State Fair* began as a 1932 Phil Stong novel that became a (nonmusical) 1933 motion picture starring Will Rogers. The dominance of the emerging motion picture industry over live theater is obvious in the fact that Richard Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein first wrote the *State Fair* musical score for the 1945 Hollywood movie remake, not a Broadway show. Although a third *State Fair* movie (with Pat Boone and Ann-Margaret) appeared in 1962, there was no live, theater version of *State Fair* until 1969, and none on Broadway until 1996. Of its three movie versions, the 1945 *State Fair*—directed by Walter Lang and starring Jeanne Crain, Dana Andrews, Dick Haymes, Vivian Blaine, Fay Bainter, and Charles Winninger—is superior. Rodgers and Hammerstein's songs include "It Might as Well Be Spring," "All I Owe Ioway," "That's for Me," "Grand Night for Singing," and the lively title song "State Fair," sung with the syncopated snorted accompaniment of the Frakes' prize pig Blue Boy![18]

Though Brunswick, Iowa, the tiny town near the Frake family farm, is fictitious, Phil Stong's novel is very specific about its southeastern Iowa location near the juncture of the Des Moines and Mississippi Rivers. For their fall pilgrimage to Des Moines, the Frakes follow the river road through Ottumwa, Osacaloosa, and Pella. Aboard their truck are the farmer Abel Frake (Winninger), his wife Melissa (Bainter), their daughter Margy (Crain), and son Wayne (Haymes). Abel aims to enter Blue Boy,

17. Ibid.
18. Phil Stong, *State Fair* (1932; repr. New York, 1950); Walter Lang, dir., *State Fair* (1945; repr. 20th Century Fox, 2006), DVD, liner notes, and special features.

his pride and joy, in the prize hog competition, while Melissa enters her delicious mincemeat in the state fair cooking competition. Margy and Wayne, of course are looking for love, which they soon find after meeting the Des Moines newspaperman Pat Gilbert (Andrews) and the singer Emily Edwards (Blaine).[19]

Along the way, viewers see an idyllic midwestern landscape (via rear projection) and the sights and sounds of the Iowa State Fair (recreated on a modest but workmanlike sound stage), including a shady carny pitchman played by a youthful Harry Morgan. The fair's garden nightclub venue spotlights the torch singer Edwards and gives the movie up-to-date 1940s big band scenes. The entire audience joins in on "It's a Grand Night for Singing," and in "All I Owe Ioway" members of the cast humorously celebrate the midwestern lifestyle. When one Iowa man sings, "I think I'll move to Californ-i-ay," Blaine and the chorus respond, "What a shame! … When you leave your native state / you'll be feeling' far from great! / You'll be good and gosh-darn sorry when you go!"

> Oh, I know all I owe I owe Ioway.
> I owe Ioway all I owe and I know why.
> I am Ioway born and bred,
> And on Ioway corn I'm fed,
> Not to mention her barley, wheat, and rye![20]

As *State Fair* moves towards its conclusion, Blue Boy wins the fair's grand prize, as does Melissa's mincemeat (thanks to a generous amount of cooking sherry). While Margy and Pat find true love, fast-living Emily breaks Wayne's heart and makes him see the value of his hometown sweetheart. The Frakes return home to their southeastern Iowa farm, contented with their accomplishments, loved ones, and a wholesome rural American lifestyle.[21]

The 1957 movie musical *The Pajama Game* is based on the

19. Stong, *State Fair,* 34–41; *State Fair,* DVD.
20. *State Fair,* DVD.
21. *State Fair,* DVD.

Broadway musical of the same name, which was based on Richard Bissell's 1953 novel *7½ Cents.* Bissell, a native of Dubuque, Iowa, worked in his father's clothing factory (manufacturing pajamas and other garments) before putting his Harvard degree to use as a 1940s towboat pilot on the upper Mississippi, Ohio, and Illinois Rivers. He took up writing and struck it rich when *7½ Cents* was adapted for the Broadway stage. Set in an upper Mississippi River pajama factory, *The Pajama Game* is a lighthearted tale about a labor dispute (over a 7½ cent pay raise) in the Sleeptite Pajama Factory and a stormy romance between the union's female leader and the factory manager. The 1957 movie adaptation (directed by George Abbott and with a script by him and Bissell) features Doris Day as Babe Williams, the leader of the Amalgamated Shirt and Pajama Workers of America. The rest of the cast reprise their Broadway roles: John Raitt as Sid Sorokin, Sleeptite's manager; Stanley Prager as the factory owner, Myron Hassler; and Eddy Foy, Jr., and Carol Haney as Hassler's underlings. Bob Fosse choreographed the dance scenes to a songbook that includes "Hernando's Hideaway," "I'm Not at All in Love," "Steam Heat," and "Once-a-Year Day."[22]

While *The Pajama Game's* musical score (by Richard Adler and Jerry Ross) does not compare to those of *Show Boat* or *State Fair,* the movie provides entertaining fare thanks to strong performances by Day as the spunky union activist Babe and Raitt as Sid, who is both smitten by Babe and befuddled by Sleeptite's all-female workforce. Also befuddled is the floor boss (Foy), who at one point cries out, "This is a crisis! The tops are fifteen minutes behind the bottoms!" Haney is a standout as Gladys, Sleeptite's quirky bookkeeper, and her singing and dancing renditions of "Hernando's Hideaway" and "Steam Heat" are highlights of the show. A key ingredient to *The Pajama Game* is

22. Richard Bissell, *My Life on the Mississippi, or Why I am Not Mark Twain* (Boston, 1973); Richard Bissell Induction File, National Rivers Hall of Fame, National Rivers Museum, Dubuque, Iowa; Richard Bissel, *7 ½ Cents* (Boston, 1953); Bordman, *American Musical Theatre,* 589–90; George Abbott, dir., *The Pajama Game* (1957; repr. Warner Brothers, 2005), DVD. For Bissell, see chapter 7, this work.

the factory floor set, replete with beautiful colored fabric and the women's eye-pleasing work attire (designed by William and Jean Eckart). Mr. Hassler, who is cooking the books, provides the plot pivot and happy ending as he succumbs to labor's demands and the two lovers are reunited.[23]

The Music Man, filmed five years after the movie version of *The Pajama Game,* shifts the viewer's gaze backward in time to the Gay Nineties and the small Iowa town of River City. The movie's huge success can be credited to the Iowa-born songwriter Meredith Willson, the director Morton Da Costa, and an exceptional cast—including Robert Preston (reprising his Broadway performance) as Professor Harold Hill, Shirley Jones as the librarian and music teacher Marian Paroo, and introducing young Ronny Howard as Paroo's little brother, Winthrop. *The Music Man's* award-winning songs include "Iowa Stubborn," "Gary, Indiana," "Ya Got Trouble," "There Were Bells," "Till There Was You," "Goodnight, My Someone," "Wells Fargo Wagon," and the rousing "Seventy-Six Trombones."[24]

When Professor Harold Hill arrives in River City, Iowa, the town is devoid of soul or laughter. "Professor" Hill is a con man ("slipperier than a Mississippi sturgeon") who sells musical instruments and band uniforms to form the River City Boys Band, despite the fact he cannot read a note of music (Hill advocates the Think System of musicianship, teaching that if the students think very, very hard about a song ["The Varsouvienne"] they will eventually be able to play it!). Paroo learns Hill is a fraud, but falls madly in love with him anyway, and defends him when his scheme is exposed. The two are eventually united, and along the way, the community comes together and finds hope and purpose.[25]

A sense of place is essential to *The Music Man,* which, like *Meet Me in St. Louis, State Fair,* and *The Pajama Game,* is very much an upper Mississippi Valley musical. "River City, station stop

23. *Pajama Game*.
24. Bordman, *American Musical Theatre,* 606–607; Morton Da Costa, dir., *The Music Man* (1962; repr.Warner Home Video, 1999), DVD.
25. *Music Man*.

River City," the conductor of the train carrying Hill announces, "just crossed the state line into Ioway, Population 20 hundred and 12, cigarettes illegal in this state." The character of the local "neck-bowed Hawkeyes" is the subject of "Iowa Stubborn," an opening song describing Iowans in a less flattering style than *State Fair's* "All I Owe Ioway." "We're so by God stubborn," River City's townspeople sing, "We could stand touchin' noses / For a week at a time / And never see eye to eye." A subsequent tune celebrates the Hoosier home of Hill's supposed alma mater, "Gary, Indiana." On July 4, Hill begins to work his magic, and downtown River City is transformed into a kind of Main Street USA, its courthouse square replete with rural trappings, American flags, the *American Gothic* farm couple, and of course his imaginary marching band playing "Seventy-six Trombones."[26]

Hill makes early reference to the music of both W. C. Handy and John Philip Sousa, and at one point he and Marian dance to Joplin-like rag music. The show is peppered with songs that are spoken, not sung, in playful folk poetry recited in rapid staccato.[27] These spoken songs—featured in the opening railroad car number, in "Ya Got Trouble" ("Trouble with a capital T and that rhymes with P and that stands for pool"), and in the women's chants of "Pick a little, talk a little" and "Shi-poo-pi"—are a cousin to today's cowboy poetry, rap, and hip-hop styles.

Preston brilliantly plays Harold Hill as a secular evangelist, a spellbinding pitchman who comes to believe his own dreams and is saved by love. Young Shirley Jones earns her spurs in her portrayal of Marian Paroo ("Till There Was You" so impressed young Paul McCartney that he made it a regular part of the early Beatles' song list). Ronny Howard's portrayal of the fatherless Winthrop is strong; as he regains hope, Winthrop performs his own memorable rendition of "Gary, Indiana," complete with a brief soft-shoe dance routine (Howard went on to play Opie Taylor on *The Andy Griffith Show* and many more roles in his more than five decades in show business). And along the way, viewers meet excellent supporting characters, notably Buddy

26. Ibid.
27. Ibid. Bordman calls this "modern-day patter," in *American Musical Theatre,* 607.

Hackett as Hill's sidekick, Marcellus Washburn; Paul Ford as River City's blustering Mayor Shin; Hermione Gingold as Shin's wife, Eulayley (a hilarious devotee to the arts and modern dance); and four bickering school board members (played by the accomplished Buffalo Bills quartet), whom Hill fuses into a barbershop quartet with tight harmonies that symbolize River City's emergent sense of community.[28]

The Music Man is built on opposites and the resolution thereof. Fantasy and reality, falsehood and truth, hope and cynicism, risk and security, love and loneliness—all these are reflected in Harold and Marian's improbable romance and River City's longing for a boys' band. In response to Winthrop's anger over his lies, Hill confesses, "I always think there's a band kid." Winthrop replies, "I wish you'd never come to River City," but Marian interjects:

> No, you don't Winthrop… I believe everything he ever said. I know what he promised us and it all happened just like he said. The lights, the colors, the cymbals and the flags… And the way every kid in this town walked around all summer. And looked and acted. Especially you.[29]

Later, with Hill under arrest and standing in front of the angry community, Marian scolds, "I should think some of you could forget your everlasting Iowa stubbornness long enough to remember what this town was like before Harold Hill came," before "there were things to do and be proud of, and people to go out of your way for." As River City's citizens are swayed by Marian's argument to replace their cynicism with hope, the boys' band miraculously produces a cacophony vaguely resembling "The Varsovienne," conducted by the (handcuffed!) Hill. By movie's end, River City's hope has once again produced a fantastic marching band playing "Seventy-six Trombones" and, led by the drum major Harold Hill, parading down Mainstreet, USA.[30]

28. *Music Man.* McCartney first heard the Peggy Lee version of "Till There Was You."
29. *Music Man;* Bordman, *American Musical Theatre,* 607.
30. *Music Man.*

As Hollywood moviemakers released the upper Mississippi Valley musicals, they simultaneously took the Mississippi Valley musical movie one step further by creating Elvis Presley movies, a unique subgenre of thirty-one motion pictures starring the Tupelo, Mississippi, rockabilly sensation.[31] Beginning in 1956 and ending in 1970, the Elvis movies possess identifiable characteristics: Elvis's star power in an action role (race car driver, aviator, boat skipper, soldier, juvenile delinquent or outlaw, rock singer, cowboy, etc.), an interwoven romance plot (usually with two competing female love interests), approximately half a dozen songs, and, during the early (pre-army) years of Elvis's film career, a lower Mississippi Valley cultural background and locale.

Film critics often dismiss Elvis Presley's movies as substandard B pictures, and there is certainly truth in that assessment. The squandering of Elvis Presley's great talents by his agent "Colonel" Tom Parker, record companies, and Hollywood movie studios is well-known. Although Presley was eager to pursue a serious acting career, most (not all) of his thirty-one movies were half-baked projects done on the fly between his concert performances and recording sessions. Hal Wallis, who produced many of these movies, is a chief culprit, alongside Colonel Parker. Yet Wallis had a long and distinguished moviemaking career, with credits that include *Yankee Doodle Dandy, Casablanca,* and *The Maltese Falcon*. Although Elvis Presley had no prior acting experience, Wallis immediately saw that the Hillbilly Cat possessed highly marketable talent. The rub, as always, would come in the compromise between art and commerce—between fully utilizing that talent and watering it down for marketing purposes—and in this conflict Presley's inability to strongly advocate for the former would prove his downfall. However, Elvis did produce some good work during his movie career. The same critics who pan the Elvis Presley movies also agree that Presley possessed raw acting talent to supplement his musical genius, and that

31. Douglas Brode, *Elvis Cinema and Popular Culture* (Jefferson, N.C., 2006); Hal Schuster, *The Films of Elvis: The Magic Lives On* (1987; repr. Las Vegas, 1989). Presley is also discussed in chapter 8, this work.

several of his movies, especially early ones set in the lower Mississippi Valley, possess merits alongside failings.[32]

Love Me Tender (1956), Presley's first movie, is a case study in the misuse of his talents. Produced by Wallis and directed by Robert D. Webb (with Colonel Parker as "Technical Advisor") in black and white, the movie features four original songs, "Love Me Tender," "We're Gonna Move," "Let Me," and "Poor Boy," all credited to the cowriters Elvis Presley and Vera Matson.[33]

Love Me Tender is (very) loosely based on the historic Civil War–era Missouri/Kansas border wars, which, as we saw in an earlier discussion of the outlaw Belle Starr, took place in the lower Arkansas and Missouri River valleys. This was a violent time during which legitimate warfare and criminal activity became intertwined in the checkered careers of Starr and men like William Quantrill and Jesse James. Presley plays Clint Reno, a young Texan who works the family farm with his mother while his three brothers are away serving as Confederate cavalrymen. In the waning days of the war, Clint receives word that his oldest brother, Vance (Richard Egan), has been killed in action; Vance's fiancée, Kathy (Debra Paget), believes Vance is dead and marries Clint. As the movie begins, it is April 1865 and the newlyweds are home on the farm when Vance and his two brothers, very much alive, come riding in with Rebel yells and a stolen Union Army payroll. "Vance, I don't reckon you could know about this but me and Kathy got married about three months ago," Clint tells his stunned brother, who somehow manages to respond, "Well, we always wanted Kathy in the family"![34]

Thus two parallel storylines carry *Love Me Tender.* Though married to Clint, sultry Kathy craves honorable Vance, who is forced to deal simultaneously with her advances and criminal charges stemming from the stolen payroll. Robert Buckner's

32. Peter Guralnick, *Last Train to Memphis: The Rise of Elvis Presley* (Boston, 1994), 259–62, 384–85. See Hal Wallis and Charles Higham, *Starmaker: The Autobiography of Hal Wallis* (New York, 1980).

33. Robert D. Webb, dir., *Love Me Tender* (1957; repr. 20th Century Fox, 2014), DVD; Grualnick, *Last Train to Memphis*, 327–45.

34. *Love Me Tender.* The Hollywood screen writer Robert Buckner thus moves the Kansas/Missouri border wars to Texas and makes Texans out of Indiana's Reno brothers.

uneven script takes this complexity to incongruity through a clumsy attempt at nuance, portraying Vance as a conflicted hero/villain amid contentious gang and family members. Yet Egan is a good enough actor to weather the script, and Paget is terrific as the voluptuous temptress. Elvis ably plays Clint as an innocent, earnest lad led astray by love and conniving gang members. "Go on, Kathy, say it, say I'm lyin'!" Clint implores in Elvis's strongest scene. "Say you don't want your lover! Say you ain't laid awake by my side every night thinkin' of him! Wishin' I was Vance! Wishin' you'd waited for him and never married me!"[35]

Love Me Tender's post–Civil War setting presents a big musical problem for Presley, because it is not possible to perform rock-and-roll in a nineteenth-century context. The best songs are the title tune, *Love Me Tender* (based on the traditional folk ballad *Aura Lee)* and Clint's front-porch gospel number, "We're Gonna Move," an authentic syncopated, call-and-response (and metaphoric) church song. "There's a leak in this old building," Clint and the Reno boys sing, "We're gonna move to a better home!" Clint's singing of "Let Me" at a community festival incongruously combines traditional folk music with edgy 1950s dance moves, complete with a half dozen screaming, swooning girls clad in pioneer dresses and sunbonnets! "Poor Boy" works better, because Clint's guitar is backed with banjo, drums, and accordion. The crowd enjoys traditional square and line dances.[36]

By movie's end, the tormented Clint must die. After shooting unarmed Vance in the shoulder, Clint is shot by a gang member; his last words are an apology to his family. The lawman John Siringo and the U.S. Cavalry arrive, but the Reno brothers turn over the stolen loot and all parties agree the affair was a misunderstanding. Thus Vance, who has never lost the moviegoers' trust, at last wins his true love Kathy, and he and his brothers go free. In the movie's final scene, an angelic Clint reappears, looking down from Heaven with guitar in hand singing "Love Me Tender" as the family walks back to the farm together.[37]

35. Ibid.
36. Ibid.

Given Elvis Presley's popularity in 1956, *Love Me Tender* would have been a hit movie regardless of its quality. Happily, and thanks to the strength and professionalism of Hal Wallis and his team, the movie turned out fine, and everyone learned a thing or two about making Elvis movies. Elvis Presley and his Hollywood colleagues would improve their craft over the next two years, starting with *Loving You.*

In producing *Loving You* (1957), Wallis followed Elvis's request to cast him as a character that was like himself, and this naturally lent itself to a lower Mississippi Valley setting. Hal Kanter wrote and directed the story of Deke Rivers, a talented young rockabilly singer who rises to stardom with the help of a country singer, Tex Warner (Wendell Corey), and a comely press agent, Glenda Markle (Lizabeth Scott). Along the way Deke fights prejudice against rock-and-roll music, stars on a country radio show (just as Elvis had appeared on *Louisiana Hayride* in Shreveport, Louisiana), wows a live audience that includes Elvis's real-life parents (Vernon and Gladys), and is torn by his attraction for both his sensuous agent and her sweet, younger rival, Susan (Dolores Hart). The songbook is strong: "Teddy Bear," "Loving You," "Mean Woman Blues," "Lonesome Cowboy," and "Got a Lot of Livin' to Do" are true to the southern country and rockabilly music that Presley performed. In *Loving You,* Elvis hones his own, untutored version of the reticent, understated style of his acting heroes Robert Mitchum, Marlon Brando, and James Dean.[38]

Jailhouse Rock (1957) adds a criminal record to Elvis's rockabilly movie hero persona. Presley's successful portrayal of a troubled, teenaged youth fits into a larger genre of juvenile delinquent (JD) movies. Arguably a modern variant of the frontier outlaw, the JD character took off in the 1955 movies *Blackboard Jungle* and *Rebel without a Cause*. Elvis proved a natural to play the JD as a pensive loner for whom romance and a rock-and-roll music career offer some hope for happiness. He is a

37. Ibid.
38. Grualnick, *Last Train to Memphis,* 261, 383–95; Hal Kanter, dir., *Loving You* (1957; Warner Home Video, 1987), VHS.

rebel with a southern drawl. Directed by Richard Thorpe and featuring Elvis, Judy Tyler, Mickey Shaughnessy, and Dean Jones, *Jailhouse Rock* is Presley's most famous movie, and includes the songs "Treat Me Nice," "Young and Beautiful," "I Wanna Be Free," "One More Day," "You're So Square," and the title chart-buster "Jailhouse Rock." Presley was excited to get the role and worked very hard with his lines before the Hollywood shoot.[39]

As the movie begins, viewers meet Vince Edwards (Presley), a friendly young construction worker upon whom fate lays a heavy hand when he accidentally kills a man in a barroom fight. Sentenced to the state prison for manslaughter, Vince has as cellmate Hunk Houghton (Shaughnessy), a down-home southern country musician who helps him hone a natural music talent. A successful performance in a prison show motivates Vince to try his hand at show business upon his release. He meets Peggy Van Alden (Tyler), who reprises her *Loving You* role of the accomplished, sultry press agent. From this point on, *Jailhouse Rock* becomes a story of hubris, as fame goes to the rising Vince's head. On his way to learning some humility, Vince tangles with Hunk, who later explains to a concerned Peggy, "Well, there's not much oxygen up where he lives, and the man gets light-headed." Then there is the romantic choice between the mature and sexy Peggy and a dim Hollywood starlet (at one point Peggy dryly notes to Vince, "Every time I see you, you're working a neck").[40]

Although the setting for *Jailhouse Rock* could be anywhere in America, Elvis's and Hunk's southern accents and their performance of country and rock-and-roll music introduce a lower Mississippi Valley element. Woven throughout are Elvis's performances of his hardest-rocking musical score to date. His singing and dancing on the rockabilly numbers "Treat Me Nice" and "You're So Square" are sharp and memorable, but the show-stopper is Alex Romero's choreographed "Jailhouse Rock" scene. Elvis played an artistic role in creating this sensual, rhythmic

39. Grualnick, *Last Train to Memphis,* 323–24, 405–19; Stehen Tropiano, *Rebels and Chicks: A History of the Hollywood Teen Movie* (New York, 2006), 48–61; Richard Thorpe, dir., *Jailhouse Rock* (1957; repr. Warner Home Video, 2000), DVD. Thanks to Joe Meyer.

40. *Jailhouse Rock*.

dance of prison-striped convicts to Elvis's wailing, "Come on and do the Jailhouse Rock with me!" Certainly, the movie *Jailhouse Rock* is not Academy Award material, and Vince's transition from erstwhile construction worker to bitter ex-con to vain show business sensation is a little ragged. Yet the movie proves that Elvis Presley's hard work at acting was beginning to pay off. *Jailhouse Rock,* as the Presley biographer Peter Grualnick has written,

> offered a neat little parable in black and white on the debilitating effects of fame… It was a point that Elvis had been arguing by deed, if not by word, for years, and one to which he clearly took, in a performance that marked an even further advance over the significant progress shown in *Loving You.* You couldn't say that he had achieved an acting style, because in each scene he was a little different; there were traces, of course, of Dean and Brando… In any case, it was a most creditable performance, and one of which Elvis could be proud.[41]

All this led immediately to *King Creole* (1958), Hal Wallis's most ambitious Presley project and Elvis's last movie before his two-year army service. Based on the Harold Robbins story *A Stone for Danny Fisher* and directed by Michael Curtiz (whose credits include *Casablanca*), *King Creole* starred Elvis as Danny Fisher, a New Orleans high school senior living with his sister and unemployed father (Dean Jagger) in the French Quarter. Reflecting elements of *Loving You, Jailhouse Rock,* and the JD movie genre, the film focuses on Danny, a high school dropout and aspiring singer working a dead-end job when he is drawn into a street gang led by Shark (played by a young Vic Morrow). Offered a singing job by the crime boss Maxie Field (Walter Matthau) in his nightclub the Blue Shade, Danny has to decide between good and evil and, of course, between the sweet, blonde Nellie (Dolores Hart reprising her *Loving You* persona) and Maxie's gun moll, the fallen angel Ronnie (Carolyn Jones). Wounded in a gunfight, Danny is nursed back to health by Ronnie in her Gulf Coast hideaway, and an enraged Maxie kills

41. Ibid.; Grualnick, *Last Train to Memphis,* 419.

Ronnie just as the police arrive. At movie's end, Danny chooses to follow a straight path and a singing career at the reputable New Orleans nightclub King Creole.[42]

Filmed on location in New Orleans, the black-and-white film noir camera work by Russell Harlan evokes the coarse, exotic atmosphere of New Orleans. Elvis has nicely honed his JD persona, Matthau ably portrays the evil Maxie, and Carolyn Jones is terrific as the boozy, tragic Ronnie. Elvis's hard-hitting rhythm and blues songs "Trouble" and "Hard Headed Woman" are complemented by tunes with a New Orleans Dixieland jazz component. His rendering of "Crawfish" in call-and-response (with a Black female street vendor) with a compelling Afro-Caribbean rhythm is *King Creole's* opener, immediately following the credits. Clad in white t-shirt and jeans, Elvis sings from a small wrought-iron veranda outside his family's humble second-story apartment as the camera sweeps the Crescent City's newly washed, early morning streets. The filming and recording of this moment is so good that one forgives the movie's failings and reflects on what could have been in Elvis Presley's checkered motion picture career.[43]

With one exception, *King Creole* serves as a pivot before Elvis Presley's army service and return to two dozen much less remarkable movie performances. At the very end of that movie career, Presley again found himself in a good movie. It also had a progressive social justice theme and a very small lower Mississippi Valley connection. In *Change of Habit* (1970), Elvis played a young physician working with Catholic nuns helping poor ghetto youth. Walking alongside Sister Michelle (played by Mary Tyler Moore) in one scene, the drawling young doctor sports a University of Tennessee Medical College (Memphis) sweatshirt.[44]

In an evolution that began when Broadway shows were remade as Hollywood movies and progressed to Hollywood's

42. Grualnick, *Last Train to Memphis,* 449–56; Michael Curtiz, dir., *King Creole* (1958; repr. Paramount, 2000), DVD.
43. *King Creole*.
44. William Graham, dir., *Change of Habit* (1969; repr. Good Times Home Video, 1998), VHS.

own non-Broadway musicals and then to the Elvis Presley movies, late 1960s moviemakers added another unique movie musical variant that can be called the soundtrack movie. In soundtrack movies, prerecorded vocal music is a very important feature but songs are never sung or performed by the actors themselves. These movies use vocal music for their introductions and conclusions, and to prominently score scenes and serve in transitioning from one scene to another. Previous nonmusical movie soundtracks used music in the background,[45] but here it becomes an even more important element of the movie. Soundtrack albums from these movies often became hit records.

One of the earliest and most innovative soundtrack movie—*Easy Rider* (1969)—reaches its crescendo in the lower Mississippi Valley. Directed by Dennis Hopper on a shoestring budget, *Easy Rider* brings the story of the Oregon Trail up to date, as Captain America (Peter Fonda) and his pal Billy (Hopper), flush with a wad of bills from a big drug deal, ride their motorbikes from west to east, bound for the New Orleans Mardi Gras. On their quest for freedom on the open road, the pair sail across a serene western landscape in leather-fringed jackets to the refrain of Steppenwolf's "Born to Be Wild." They admire the independence of a western ranch family and visit a hippie farm commune and go skinny-dipping with two of the (female) flower children to the accompaniment of the Byrds' "I Wasn't Born to Follow." Their entry into the Mississippi Valley, however, is wrought with tension and the strains of Jimi Hendrix's "If 6 Was 9." After the sobering murder of their new friend George (Jack Nicholson), the two become as aimless as *Easy Rider*'s script (cowritten by Hopper, Fonda, and Terry Southern). The New Orleans Mardi Gras turns into an LSD-induced nightmare, and the movie reaches a finale by resorting to late 1960s stereotypes about the South. Two rednecks in a pickup truck shoot and kill Billy as he rides west, and Captain America kneels over his body as Roger McGuinn of the Byrds sings "The Ballad of Easy Rider":

The river flows, it flows to the sea

45. Claudia Gorbman, *Unheard Melodies: Narrative Film Music* (Bloomington, Ind., 1987).

…
Flow river flow, let your waters wash down
…
All he wanted was to be free.
And that's the way it turned out to be.
Flow, river flow, let your waters wash down.
Take me from this road to some other town.[46]

O Brother, Where Art Thou (2000) combines the Hollywood musical and the soundtrack movie genres with the bizarre storytelling that is the mainstay of Hollywood's Coen Brothers (Ethan and Joel), who have based this movie (ever so) loosely on Homer's *Odyssey.* The cinematographer Roger Deakins casts a dreamy autumn mood over a 1930s Mississippi Delta populated by a lively and motley cast of characters. George Clooney plays Everett Ulysses McGill, a fast-talking convict whose chain gang partners are Pete (John Turturro) and Delmar (Tim Blake Nelson). Holly Hunter is Everett's estranged wife Penny, and Charles Durning plays Mississippi Governor Pappy O'Daniel, host of country music radio's *Flour Hour.* John Goodman plays the bible salesman Big Dan Teague, Daniel von Bargen is Sheriff Cooley, and Chris Thomas King plays the bluesman Tommy Johnson.[47]

The movie opens with the convict trio fleeing a Mississippi chain gang to find buried treasure—$1,200,000 in loot Everett claims to have hidden after an armored car heist. Everett appoints himself the group's leader because he "figured [the leader] should be the one with the capacity for abstract thought," but the men must get the money before the new Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA) hydroelectric dam turns Everett's family homestead into a lake. Meanwhile, Sheriff Cooley's bloodhounds are in hot pursuit of the aroma of Everett's hair oil.

46. Dennis Hopper, dir., *Easy Rider* (1969; repr. Columbia Pictures, 1999), DVD; The Byrds, "Wasn't Born to Follow," on *Best of The Byrds*, vol. 2, 1972, Columbia, KC 31795, CD, and "Ballad of Easy Rider," on *Ballad of Easy Rider,* 1969, Columbia, CS 9942, CD.
47. Ethan Coen and Joel Coen, dirs.., *O Brother, Where Art Thou?* (2000; repr. Touchstone, 2001), DVD. The American road story—from Bradford's *Of Plymouth Plantation* to Parkman's *Oregon Trail* to Kerouac's *On the Road* to Hopper's *Easy Rider*—is a unique and worthwhile genre in its own (non-Greek *Odysssey*) right.

Unbeknownst to Pete and Delmar, Everett's loot does not exist; he is interested only in finding and remarrying Penny, the mother of his seven daughters. A self-described "patriafamilias," Everett later states, "Me an' the old lady are gonna pick up the pieces and retie the knot, mixaphorically speaking." As the men prepare to enter the heart of the Mississippi Delta, they meet (the *Odyssey*'s) blind seer, who warns them, "The treasure you seek shall not be the treasure you find."[48]

Along their winding path, the trio meets characters and experiences adventures to the accompaniment of every form of indigenous American music. They pick up a Black hitchhiker, Tommy Johnson, at the Delta crossroads, where he has sold his soul to the Devil in return for a bluesman's expertise. They form the Soggy Bottom Boys quartet and record a bluegrass tune, "Man of Constant Sorrow," at the Delta radio station WEZY. Pete and Delmar are baptized in the river and "absolved" of all their crimes ("Even if that did put you square with the Lord," Everett notes, "the State of Mississippi's a little more hard-nosed"). They hitch a ride with the mobster Babyface Nelson near Itta Bena, are seduced by three riverside "si-reens," severely beaten by a bible salesman, and nearly lose their lives rescuing Tommy from a Ku Klux Klan mob (Everett recurrently punctuates the beginning of each scrape: "Damn! We're in a tight spot!"). All the while, their recording "Man of Constant Sorrow" soars to the top of the country music charts. Their unlikely savior is the governor and country music fan Pappy O'Daniel, who pardons them in return for their endorsement over his opponent, Homer Stokes (Wayne Duvall), a leader of the Ku Klux Klan. In so doing, Pappy becomes an unlikely champion of civil rights and integration and promises to make the Boys his administration brain trust. Despite their pardon, Sheriff Cooley tries to hang the Soggy Bottom Boys, who are saved at the last minute by Everett's prayerful conversion and a TVA flood of biblical proportions. By movie's end the "patriafamilias" is able to "retie the knot."[49]

O Brother, Where Art Thou? is bathed in American religious and

48. *O Brother, Where Art Thou?*
49. Ibid.

secular music. T. Bone Burnett, the musical producer, assembled an all-star musical team, and the movie's soundtrack album achieved huge success while introducing a new generation of Americans to authentic gospel, country, bluegrass, and blues. Viewers hear music recorded between 1928 and 2000 in the background and transitions of *Oh Brother, Where Art Thou?* They also hear traditional music performed (or lip-synched) by the movie's actors, and some of the songs re-appear in instrumental variants. The impressive assemblage of recording artists includes Ralph Stanley, Allison Krauss, Gillian Welsh, Emmylou Harris, John Hartford, Norman Blake, James Carter and the Prisoners, Harry McClintock, Alan O'Bryant, Chris Thomas King, the Whites, Cox Family, Kossoy Sisters, Sarah, Hannah, and Leah Peasall, Tim Blake Nelson and Pat Enright, Alan O'Bryant, Fairfield Four, and others. The movie's songs include "Po Lazarus," "Big Rock Candy Mountain," "You Are My Sunshine," "Down to the River to Pray," "Hard Times Killing Floor Blues," "Keep on the Sunny Side," "I'll Fly Away," "Didn't Leave Nobody but the Baby," "In the Highways," "I Am Weary," "O Death," "In the Jailhouse Now," "Indian War Whoop," "Lonesome Valley," and, of course, the movie's theme and hit record, "Man of Constant Sorrow," sung by the real Soggy Bottom Boys, Dan Tyminski, Harley Allen, and Pat Enright. While *O Brother, Where Art Thou?* ranks alongside a score of important Mississippi Valley movies, its soundtrack is unparalleled.[50]

A fifth and final subgenre of the Hollywood movie musical is the Disney animated movie. Walter Elias Disney had strong Mississippi Valley connections. Born in Chicago in 1901, Disney moved with his family to a farm outside of Marceline, Missouri, in 1906. Marceline, located about 90 miles west of Mark Twain's hometown of Hannibal, was the Disney family's home until 1911. It was in Marceline that Walt Disney took his first train ride, started school, and saw his first movie. From Marceline, the Disneys moved to Kansas City, Missouri, where Walt attended the Kansas City Art Institute and began to make movie shorts. He

50. Ibid.; Various artists, *O Brother, Where Art Thou,* 2000, Lost Highway, ASIN B00004XQ83, CD.

and his brother Roy landed in Hollywood in 1923, but they never forgot their Mississippi Valley roots. Walt visited Marceline throughout his life and generously supported the town's Walt Disney Elementary School and the museum created to honor his life and work.[51] During the early stages of a long and successful moviemaking career, Walt Disney and his team turned to Mississippi Valley stories and histories for many of their plotlines. Disney's popular nonanimated (live-action) movies *Davy Crockett: King of the Wild Frontier* (1955), *The Great Locomotive Chase* (1956), *Davy Crockett and the River Pirates* (1956), and *Old Yeller* (1957) are all set in the trans-Appalachian West.[52] Of his animated movies set in the Mississippi Valley, the musicals *Steamboat Willie* (1928), *Song of the South* (1945), and *The Princess and the Frog* (2008) merit attention and analysis.

Steamboat Willie, probably named after Buster Keaton's popular 1928 silent movie feature *Steamboat Bill, Jr.,* was the first cartoon with sound produced by Walt Disney and his colleague Ub Iwerks. Because it introduces the character Mickey Mouse, *Steamboat Willie* is one of the most important of all the Disney cartoons. Though Mickey does not speak, musical sound is essential to the eight-minute short. Leonard Maltin writes that Disney's team "calculated that if the film ran at ninety feet per minutes (twenty-four frames a second), they could animate their silent cartoon to a musical beat" with "an orchestra, which would synchronize the musical track." The main musical theme is a ragtime-inspired march, to which we first meet a whistling Mickey, piloting a side-wheeled river steamboat. After the bully cat Captain Black Pete forces him to give up the wheel, Mickey brings Minnie Mouse (with her ukulele and a roll of sheet music) and a menagerie of animals aboard, then uses the animals to entertain Minnie with a musical number. A goat eats the ukulele and sheet music so they crank his tail and play him like a Victrola, with musical notes spewing out of his mouth to the tune of "Turkey in the Straw." The tune continues as Mickey drums on

51. See Bob Thomas, *Walt Disney: An American Original* (New York, 1976), 19–66; Walt Disney Hometown Museum, https://www.waltdisneymuseum.org/, accessed Dec. 12, 2021
52. Leonard Maltin, *The Disney Films* (New York, 1973), 122, 132, 134, 145.

a galley washboard and pots and pans, and "plays" (forces noises from) a cat and duck in syncopation; pigs squeal a calliope accompaniment when Mickey pulls their tails, and he plays a cow's teeth like a xylophone. Captain Pete angrily forces him to peel potatoes in the galley, but the story ends on a high note with spunky Mickey tossing spuds at a taunting parrot while the ragtime march concludes the cartoon.[53]

Nearly two decades passed before Walt Disney Studios returned to America's lower Mississippi Valley for a themed cartoon setting. During that time, Disney's team had perfected their art in several shorts and the feature-length animated movies *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (1938), *Pinocchio* 1940), *Fantasia* (1940), *Dumbo* (1941), *Bambi* (1942), and others.[54]

Shortly after World War II, Disney launched an ambitious new project combining animated work with human live-action footage to produce a unique cartoon/movie hybrid based on American folk traditions. Joel Chandler Harris's *Tales of Uncle Remus* served as the basis for *Song of the South* (1946), a movie directed by Wilfred Jackson and Harve Foster in alternating cartoon and live-action sequences to the accompaniment of a musical score that included "Song of the South," "That's What Uncle Remus Said," "Everybody's Got a Laughing Place," and, most famously, "Zip-a-Dee Dooh Dah." The latter was sung by the Black actor James Baskett, who played Uncle Remus and did the voice-overs for one of the animated characters, Brer Fox. Baskett, who won a special Academy Award for his performance, appeared alongside young Bobby Driscoll playing Johnny and the Academy Award winner Hattie McDaniel as Aunt Tempy.[55]

Song of the South's live-action scenes tell the story of Johnny, a sad child who lives with his mother and grandmother on the family's Georgia plantation during the years following the Civil War. Distraught over his parents' separation and the teasing of

53. Ibid., 4; Walt Disney and Ub Iwerks, dirs., *Steamboat Willie* (1928; repr. Walt Disney Studios, 2002), DVD; Richard Schickel, *The Disney Version: The Life, Times, Art, and Commerce of Walt Disney* (New York, 1969), 130. Thanks to Little Joey Jr.

54. Maltin, *Disney Films,* 25, 32, 38, 49, 53.

55. Ibid., 73–74; Wilfred Jackson and Harve Foster, dirs., *Song of the South* (1946; repr. 2018), DVD. Joel Chandler Harris's Uncle Remus tales are discussed in chapter 2, this work.

cruel neighbor boys, Johnny turns to the freedman Uncle Remus, who leads him (literally) into a world of fantasy and stories whose morals teach Johnny how to weather life's storms. The transformation begins as Uncle Remus cheers Johnny up by singing "Zip-a-Dee Dooh-Dah" and the live-action Uncle Remus is suddenly surrounded by a brilliantly animated blue sky. In a stunning scene, Uncle Remus walks through a colorful southern countryside replete with chirping birds and animals who join him in song. Using this pioneering segue, three of Joel Chandler Harris's transcribed folktales provide the storyline for *Song of the South's* three animated segments. Brer (Brother) Rabbit uses psychology to outwit sinister Brer Fox and Brer Bear when they catch him in first a snare trap and, then, in a tar baby. In a hilarious finale, Brer Rabbit tricks the two villains into disturbing a beehive, and they suffer the terrible consequences. The stories are well-known to this day, largely because of Disney's *Song of the South*.[56]

In late 1940s America, Bassett's performance and Academy Award were viewed as further evidence of progress towards civil rights, paralleling President Harry Truman's desegregation of the armed forces and Jackie Robinson's breaking the color barrier in professional baseball. The African-American subscribers to the *Pittsburgh Courier* read that *Song of the South's* "truly sympathetic handling of the entire production from a racial standpoint is calculated … to prove of inestimable good in furthering interracial relations."[57]

Yet within two decades, prominent Black civil rights organizations like the National Association for the Advance of Colored People (NAACP) were condemning the movie for its racism. Although the general movie-going public enjoyed *Song of the South,* some 1960s liberals condemned what they saw as the film's condescending depiction of Black "slaves" (*Song of the South,* like Joel Chandler Harris's stories, is set in the *postbellum* South, where Uncle Remus is a freedman), their untutored speech (professional folklorists and linguists attest to the

56. *Song of the South*. These three tales are also discussed in chapter 2, this work.
57. Maltin, *Disney Movies,* 78.

accuracy of Harris's transcriptions of Black and white folk language, upon which *Song of the South's* script is based), and depictions of harmonious relations between southern Blacks and whites. Bowing to pressure, the Disney Studio team announced in 1970 they had permanently withdrawn the movie and would never show it again. Although shifting attitudes and widespread public fondness for the movie has led to reissues, *Song of the South* was unavailable for VHS or DVD home viewing until the twenty-first century, when it began to slowly re-insinuate itself into the popular imagination. Viewing the movie today, one is struck by its visual beauty, the skill with which it was produced, and James Baskett's evocative performance and role as the true hero of *Song of the South.* Most important is the movie's message, drawn from African-American folklore—that small, seemingly powerless animals and folk can use their brains to survive and overcome oppression.[58]

In 2008, the Walt Disney Studios borrowed a European folktale and set it in Jazz Age New Orleans, an American city with cultural traditions of European, African, and Indigenous origin. *The Princess and the Frog* is loosely based on "The Frog Prince," a tale wherein an evil sorcerer turns a prince into a frog, who must gain an aristocratic maiden's kiss to break the spell, restore his humanity, and win her hand in marriage. Peter Del Vecho (producer), Ron Clements and John Musker (cowriters and directors), Ian Gooding (art director), and Randy Newman (music composer) released this evocative animated feature the same year Americans elected Barack Obama their first African-American president. Like *Song of the South,* this movie tells a lively story interwoven with Mississippi Valley folk culture, accenting the themes of work ethic, good versus evil, democracy, and race.[59]

The Princess and the Frog features the voice actress and singer

58. Ibid., 78. A recent online search verifies that *Song of the South* has been reissued and is available for purchase from varied marketers.

59. D. L. Ashliman, trans. and ed., *Frog Kings: Folktales of Aarne-Thompson-Uther Type 440 About Slimy Suitors,* https://sites.pitt.edu/~dash/frog.html, accessed Jan. 22, 2012; Ron Clements and John Musker, dirs., *The Princess and the Frog* (2008; repr. Walt Disney Studios Home Entertainment, 2010), DVD.

Anika Noni Rose as Tiana, a hard-working 1920s African-American waitress who aims to fulfill her deceased father's dream by owning her own restaurant; Bruno Campos supplies the voice of Prince Naveen, a charming but irresponsible (and insolvent) foreign aristocrat in love with New Orleans jazz; Peter Bartlett is Lawrence, Naveen's valet, who conspires with the evil voodoo magician Dr. Facilier, voiced by Keith David; Oprah Winfrey is Tiana's widowed mother, Eudora, a seamstress for the wealthy, white La Bouff family; Jennifer Cody is Charlotte La Bouff, Tiana's flighty friend since childhood; John Goodman is "Big Daddy" La Bouff, king of the New Orleans Mardi Gras parade; Michael-Leon Wooley is Louis, a delightful jazz trumpet–playing alligator; Jim Cummings is Ray, a goofy, brave, and loyal Cajun firefly; and Jennifer Lewis is Mama Odie, a spunky old swamp priestess whose white magic ultimately foils the evil Facilier. The movie's dialog flows in Creole-, Cajun-, cracker-, and Afro-accented English, spiced with recurrent French phrases and song lyrics. Randy Newman's score—performed by Dr. John, Jennifer Lewis and the Pinnacle Gospel Choir, Ne-Yo, Jim Cummings, and each of the cast leads—is firmly rooted in Dixieland jazz and Cajun waltzes, and zydeco, boogie, and gospel music.[60]

The use of a European folktale in an American setting presents an interesting challenge to Disney's screenwriters: There is no monarchy in America, and thus no true princess for a prince to kiss, much less a kingdom for them to rule afterwards. This is handled in a complex yet workable (and democratic) plotline. Facilier uses black magic to substitute the shifty Lawrence for Naveen; Lawrence is to marry Charlotte La Bouff, daughter of Big Daddy La Bouff, the wealthy Mardi Gras king. Meanwhile, Facilier turns Naveen into a frog who kisses Tiana, who also becomes a frog. Naveen's *first* wedding to Tiana, when they are both frogs, is performed by Mama Odie, who combines their wedding kiss with her own white magic to thwart Facilier and produce a happy ending. This somewhat convoluted plotline

60. *Princess and the Frog*. Soundtrack album is *The Princess and the Frog,* 2009, Walt Disney Records, B00204J4F2, CD.

seems not to have concerned the millions of young moviegoers (and their parents) who flocked to see *The Princess and the Frog,* another sign of democratic pop culture in action.[61]

The Princess and the Frog reflects Louisiana's multiethnic gumbo culture. The movie's characters are Americans of Black, French Creole and Cajun, cracker, and biracial ancestry. While some viewers no doubt wanted a Black prince for Tiana, they do get an olive-skinned aristocrat of diverse (though unidentified) non-European ancestry. The movie's artists continually accent Naveen's and Tiana's compelling brown eyes. At the same time, the storyline indirectly weaves the issue of race into Tiana's quest to start her own restaurant, Tiana's Place. White bankers dismissively cancel her loan, stating, "A little woman of your background woulda had her hands full tryin' to run a big business like that. You're better off where you're at." In the end, Tiana succeeds because she has learned a lesson from her father. "Hard work of your own" enables you to "do anything you set your mind to." Of course, Tiana also succeeds thanks to the help of Naveen, Louis, and Ray, and the magic of Mama Odie. Married (for a second time) in New Orleans's Jackson Square Cathedral, Tiana and Naveen host their festive wedding party in Tiana's Place, which they have built together. The movie ends with happy wedding guests dancing to Louis' jazz combo (playing Randy Newman's "Down in New Orleans") while the Mississippi River rolls on by.

Before ending this review of Mississippi movie musicals, it is important to point out an oddity. *Big River: The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*—one of the most important and popular Broadway musicals about the Mississippi Valley—has never been made into a motion picture. Scripted by William Hauptmann with original songs by Roger Miller, *Big River* was highly acclaimed, won seven Tony Awards, ran for 1,005 Broadway performances (1985-87), and boasted a soundtrack that became a bestselling CD. It remains a repertory company favorite.[62]

61. *Princess and the Frog,* DVD.
62. Soundtrack, *Big River: The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn,* 1985, MCA Records, MCAD-6147, DIDX-425,CD.

So, why no movie?

Perhaps there is a connection to Hollywood's failure to make an enduring *nonmusical* movie about Huckleberry Finn. Since 1920, there have been nine Huck Finn movies, counting silent and made-for-television movies (but not counting animated features and adaptations of *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*). Some excellent actors have played Huck Finn, including Donald O'Connor, Mickey Rooney, and Ronny Howard. And Jim's portrayers include Rex Ingram, Archie Moore (a heavy-weight boxing champ), and Paul Winfield. One of the best of the attempted movie versions is, arguably, Walt Disney Studios' 1993 *The Adventures of Huck Finn,* starring Elijah Wood and Courtney Vance, and yet it too has faded from view. Jeff Nichols's *Mud* (2013), the coming-of-age story of a young river rat named Ellis (Tye Sheridan) amid emotional strife, adventure and intrigue succeeds because its ties to Mark Twain are only implied. *Mud's* boys are modern, dirt-bike-riding Arkansas youths who get some help from an old houseboat dweller named Tom Blankenship.[63]

Moviemakers have made the same mistake that Mark Twain made in his initial, and ultimate, indecision over whether to make *Huckleberry Finn* a children's book sequel to *Tom Sawyer.* The actors listed above played Huck too much like a child, and not enough like an abused adolescent struggling with his conscience to do right by Jim. Yet in the Broadway production of *Big River,* Daniel H. Jenkins's portrayal of Huck Finn and Ron Richardson's Jim are true to Mark Twain's highest aims, as are Hauptmann's script and Miller's score. The next time Hollywood moviemakers are mulling over another try at *Huckleberry Finn,* they ought to make a Mississippi movie musical of *Big River.*

63. Soren Anderson, "Huck Finn Faithful to Twain's Tale," *Tacoma News Tribune,* April 2, 1993, p. 3; "Filming Tom Sawyer," https://twain.lib.virginia.edu/tomsawye/nostalgia/movies/tsmovieshp.html, accessed March 27, 2012; Jeff Nichols, dir., *Mud* (2013; Lionsgate, 2013), DVD. Blankenship is the name of the Hannibal, Missouri, youngster after whom Twain modeled his character Huckleberry Finn.

AMERICA'S MOST FAMOUS HISTORIAN

In an article in an academic quarterly, one scholar called the documentary moviemaker Ken Burns "the most famous historian in the country" and an artist who has "single-handedly redefined the historical documentary as a cultural form." Burns figures importantly in our work here because he spent years of his formative youth in the upper Mississippi River Valley and has, over a long career, made many movies about characters and events drawn from the history of the Mississippi Valley.[64]

While the historical documentary genre of motion picture can be traced to several sources, the American 1930s New Deal cinematographer Pare Lorentz is one of the most important. As we learned earlier, Lorentz combined high art, popular culture, and propaganda in his federally subsidized black-and-white movies *The Plow That Broke the Plains* (1936) and *The River* (1937), and his work influenced contemporaries and subsequent documentary moviemakers. Ken Burns is removed by one generation from Lorentz, and his body of work is greater than that of the 1930s master in both quantity and quality. Burns's American trilogy—*The Civil War* (1990), *Baseball* (1994), and *Jazz* (2000)—tells important Mississippi Valley stories within a larger American historical context and has attracted well over 200,000,000 viewers.[65]

Despite the quality and popularity of Ken Burns's documentaries, and their role in sparking new interest in American history among the public, many leading academic historians have condemned the moviemaker. For example, after praising the technical and artistic components of *The Civil War,* the Princeton historian Sean Wilentz characterized it as "crushingly sentimental and vacuous in its historical judgments of the war's origins and meaning." The Berkeley history professor Leon Litwack was even more vicious, likening *The*

64. David Harlan, "Ken Burns and the Coming Crisis of Academic History," *Rethinking History* 7, no. 2 (2007), 169.

65. Lorentz's *The River* is discussed in chapter 5, this work. Burns has recently released *The Vietnam War* (2017), an evocative and important series that does not directly relate to the Mississippi Valley.

Civil War to D. W. Griffith's racist motion picture *Birth of a Nation* (1915). Many other intellectuals have piled on, and the consensus within the Ivory Tower is that Burns's movies are merely a form of mass entertainment, brimming with lively stories but tainted by nostalgia, factual errors, and absence of deep analysis. These criticisms extend to successful popular historians besides Burns, notably David McCullough, Stephen Ambrose, and Shelby Foote.[66]

When asked why he makes documentary movies about American history, Ken Burns once declared he is driven by "an absolutely undying love of my country." This kind of frank patriotism is extremely rare in today's academic history circles. Born in Brooklyn in 1953, Ken Burns grew up in the upper midwestern city of Ann Arbor, Michigan, where his father taught anthropology at the University of Michigan. After earning a film studies degree from Hampshire College in Massachusetts, he formed Florentine Pictures and, in 1981, aired his first movie, *The Brooklyn Bridge* (based in part on the David McCullough book), on the Public Broadcasting System (PBS). During the eighties he made more one- and two-hour documentary movies and perfected the difficult art of attracting large donations from corporate sponsors. With ample experience and cash on hand, he then tackled his most famous project, *The Civil War* (1990).[67]

In *The Civil War,* Ken Burns introduced the revolutionary documentary style he had developed and would continue to hone in his subsequent movies. *The Civil War* is an epic movie series, divided into nine episodes adding up to nearly eleven hours. The episodes proceed chronologically, from 1861 to 1865, with approximately two titled episodes (e.g., "The Cause, 1861," "The Universe of Battle, 1863," "Simply Murder, 1863," "The Better Angels of Our Nature, 1865") per year. Because Grant's and Sherman's Mississippi Valley campaigns (the western theater)

66. Harlan, "Ken Burns and the Coming Crisis of Academic History," 170, 183, 188n8. See Robert Brent Toplin, ed., *Ken Burns' Civil War: The Historians Respond* (New York, 1996).
67. Harlan, "Ken Burns and the Coming Crisis of Academic History," 182; Ken Burns, dir., *The Brooklyn Bridge* (1981; repr. PBS, 1996), DVD; David G. McCullough, *The Great Bridge: The Epic Story of the Building of the Brooklyn Bridge* (New York, 1972).

were so crucial to the military history of the Civil War, they are recurrent in *The Civil War*'s episodes.[68]

Each episode begins and ends with a summary prologue and epilogue that serve as bookends to, on average, ten themed chapters (e.g., "Bottom Rail on Top," "Gettysburg: The First Day," "Died of a Theory," "I Want to See Richmond," "Was It Not Real?" and "The Picklocks of Biographers"). Each episode and chapter title appear on a black background with a traditional typeface that has become a leitmotif of the Burns documentaries; the movie's closing credits appear in a smaller font in the same motif and cite all the movie's sources of information. The movie series is thus presented in the form of a visual, audible, and scholarly history book.[69]

David G. McCullough's resonant baritone voice narrates *The Civil War*'s main storyline, written by Burns's colleague Geoffrey C. Ward. Ward, like McCullough and Burns, has no formal training in history; he graduated in studio art from Oberlin College and was chief editor of *American Heritage* magazine. McCullough never appears on camera. His narrative is frequently complemented by filmed observations from academic historians, including James MacPherson, Stephen B. Oates, and Barbara Fields; National Park historians (Edwin Bearss); nonacademic commentators; and the novelist Shelby Foote. While the narrative is dominated by descriptions of military strategy and battles, there is ample coverage of political and economic developments, both North and South, and stories of life on the home-front, women's issues, and the European perspective. Morgan Freeman, Julie Harris, Sam Waterston, and many more actors read from letters, diaries, and newspapers, weaving the voices of actual Civil War witnesses and participants into *The Civil War*'s narrative. The voices of slaves and Black soldiers, abolitionists, Copperheads, nurses, teachers, businessmen, enlisted men like Privates Sam Watkins and Elisha Hunt Rhoades are heard alongside those of Lincoln, Davis, Lee, and Grant. Thus Burns again follows the scholarly model, using

68. Ken Burns, dir., *The Civil War* (Alexandria, Va., 1990), VHS.
69. Ibid.

titled and verbally cited secondary and primary sources to document the movie's artful narrative.[70]

Equally important as *The Civil War*'s narrative is its visual imagery. Throughout each episode, the viewer sees hundreds of black-and-white photographs, some from the camera of Mathew Brady. One of Burns's most notable innovations is in making still black-and-white photographs come to life, as it were, through the movement of his camera. The camera slowly pans photographs from side to side and up and down, and moves towards them in a slow zoom technique that gives the pictures a lifelike motion. To add variety, he utilizes historic and modern artists' drawings and paintings, and his camera zooms and pans sepia-toned historic material artifacts—clothing, farm equipment, furniture, and other house furnishings. Colored film of actual battle sites, focusing on the natural world's rivers, grasses, and trees, constitutes the final component of the visual palette. Unlike many historical documentaries, there are no reenactors—no modern-day Americans dressed up in period costumes and soldiers' uniforms. However, Burns does utilize remarkable black-and-white film made from 1911 to 1938 at Civil War veterans' reunions. These grainy, fluttering movie shorts include unforgettable images of the 50th-anniversary commemoration of the Battle of Gettysburg, and a scene of grey-haired, bearded septa- and octogenarian Civil War veterans walking the final course of Pickett's Charge.[71]

There is recorded music at the beginning and end of each episode, interwoven throughout the visuals and spoken narrative, and serving as transitions between scenes. *The Civil War*'s soundtrack is composed almost entirely of period music, played on traditional stringed, brass, and woodwind instruments. Listeners hear some of the tunes on multiple occasions, but played on different instruments and in different arrangements, upbeat or subdued, depending on how Burns seeks to portray the events they accompany. The songs range from lively fiddle and guitar arrangements of folk songs

70. Ibid.
71. Ibid. Thanks to Stephen Disharoon and Kenneth J. Edgell.

("Kingdom Coming" and "Marching through Georgia") to military marches ("Dixie," "Cheer, Boys, Cheer," "Parade," and "Yankee Doodle") recorded by the New American Brass Band. The pianist Jacqueline Schwaub plays somber renditions of "Johnny Has Gone for a Soldier," "All Quiet on the Potomac," and "Battle Cry of Freedom." The only two songs with words, "Battle Hymn of the Republic" and "We Are Climbing Jacob's Ladder," are sung by the Abyssinian Baptist Church Choir in a Black gospel style that emphasizes the humanity of the movie's slave and freedmen characters. *The Civil War*'s only composed (nontraditional) song is also the series' most famous. The fiddler Jay Ungar's "Ashokan Farewell" (1986), an evocative waltz inspired by a traditional Scottish lament, provides the mournful signature to Burns's history of a war that cost more than 650,000 American lives.[72]

Many other sounds, natural and manmade, accompany *The Civil War.* The first images of Fort Sumter are accompanied by sounds of Charleston Harbor's lapping waves and crying seagulls. Burns's scenes of the green, forested world in which the Civil War was fought often include sounds of chirping birds and crickets. The menacing buzz of cicadas is a recurrent motif, a transition from the peaceful natural sounds of a pre-battle Shiloh, Antietam, or Chickamauga to horses whinnying, the pounding of military drums, men shouting, and then, small arms fire and whistling, exploding artillery shells. Tolling bells are also woven into *The Civil War*. They ring to commemorate John Brown's death, secession of the lower South (one bell sounding for each state), and the mourning of a New England village; bells warn of McClellan's approach on the Confederate Capital Richmond and, three years later, they sound as Jefferson Davis evacuates that city. Thousands of northern church bells ring in celebration of General Robert E. Lee's surrender to General Ulysses S. Grant.[73]

And then there is Shelby Foote. Unlike David McCullough, Foote's speaking talent and great potential as a historian

72. *Civil War.* Thanks to Kris Fenton and Jacque Clinton.
73. Burns, *Civil War.* Thanks to Joseph R. Atkinson, Amanda Ridge, and William Genschow.

commentator went untapped until he was in his 70s and Ken Burns interviewed him for *The Civil War.* Initially planning to use pieces of a Foote interview in a few scenes, Burns quickly realized he had struck gold; by the project's conclusion, Shelby Foote's commentary constituted a full hour—one-eleventh—of the entirety of *The Civil War.* The reason for this is as obvious to the viewer as it was to Burns when he first began shooting in Foote's elegant, book-lined Memphis study. Shelby Foote combines historical expertise with the storytelling skills of a raconteur, effortlessly relating war tales in the mellow drawl of a southern gentleman. Shelby Foote is no neo-Confederate, yet his evocative, metaphoric war tales bring a southern voice to *The Civil War.* Foote possesses such great knowledge, and the stories roll so beautifully from his tongue, that the listener comes to see him as a surrogate firsthand witness to the Civil War. In *The Civil War,* Foote is a contemporary ancestor of sorts, a direct link to the American past.[74]

In the concluding episode of *The Civil War,* Shelby Foote makes a linguistic observation that is as good a summary as any about the significance of the War between the States. Although he is not the first to make the point, Foote does a better job than any of the academic scholars who have noted an interesting verb/noun construction that changed in nineteenth-century America. Because "the United States" is a plural noun, antebellum Americans naturally and accurately used the plural "are" as its verb. Hence, "The United States *are* a collection of individual states forming a nation governed under a federal Constitution" is a typical antebellum sentence. Yet an American today would never use the (grammatically correct) plural verb "are" in such a sentence. We instead use the (grammatically incorrect) "is": "The United States *is* a nation of individual states governed under the Constitution." The reason, of course, is that the Civil War restored the Union and made nationalism, not sectionalism, the

74. Shannon Farley, "Shelby Foote: The Civil War Trilogy," manuscript, in author's possession; Chapman, *Shelby Foote*, 257–69. Shelby Foote speaks in a style some linguists term an "educated southern accent." For contemporary ancestors, see mountaineers, below.

American norm. Shelby Foote knows all of this, but explains it to listeners using about 10 percent of the verbiage of this writer:

> Before the war, it was said "the United States are." Grammatically, it was spoken that way and thought of as a collection of independent states. And after the war, it was always "the United States is," as we say today without being self-conscious at all. And that sums up what the war accomplished. It made us an "is."[75]

Ken Burns's documentary *The Civil War* appeared initially only on PBS, a television channel with relatively low viewership. Yet 23,000,000 Americans watched *The Civil War*'s first two episodes, and 14,000,000 watched the entire nine episodes. In a pattern repeated by Burns's subsequent popular documentaries, viewing expanded widely after the premiere via reruns, classroom use, and home viewing via video marketing and streaming. Thus the historian David Harlan estimates the ultimate number of *The Civil War*'s viewers at around 100,000,000.[76] Although there is no way to of calculate this exactly, the impact of the series is significant, dwarfing any books or other productions ever made by academic historians. And it was only the beginning.

Alongside *The Civil War,* several more Ken Burns documentaries focus on Mississippi Valley topics. *Lewis and Clark* (1997) recounts the adventures of the Corps of Discovery, while *Mark Twain* (1994) is the definitive documentary portrait of the boy from Hannibal, Missouri, who became America's most famous author. Burns ventures into the twentieth century in *Frank Lloyd Wright* (1997), the story of the Wisconsin architect who founded the Prairie School of American architecture centered in Chicago, Illinois. *Huey Long* (2002) reflects Burns's admiration for the early career and political philosophy, if not the methods and ultimate path, of the Louisiana populist Democrat turned demagogue.[77]

75. *Civil War,* episode 9.
76. Harlan, "Ken Burns and the Coming Crisis of Academic History," 169.
77. Ken Burns, dir., *Lewis and Clark* (PBS, 2001), VHS; Burns, *Mark Twain* (PBS, 2004), VHS; Burns, *Frank Lloyd Wright* (PBS, 1997), DVD; Burns, *Huey Long* (PBS, 2002), DVD.

In another of his Mississippi Valley histories, Burns turns his lens on the work of a Missouri painter, *Thomas Hart Benton* (1988). Benton's life and art perfectly match Burns's method; he blends narrative with ample late nineteenth- and twentieth-century photographs and film of the artist; his camera zooms and sweeps shots of Benton's lively and colorful murals to wonderful effect. One can speculate on the personal nature of Burn's attraction to the work of the brilliant yet cantankerous Benton. Like Benton, Burns is an artist and intellectual who is also a patriot and populist; like Benton, Burns is a realist who seeks to bring art to mainstream, educated Americans. Ken Burns certainly does not express as open a disdain for the high art class as the profane Benton, but the two share the role of artists who have been shunned by the nation's elite intellectual class. It is no accident that, in *Thomas Hart Benton,* Burns recurrently subjects Benton's quintessentially American murals to the scathing criticism of the effete New York art critic Hilton Kramer. As bow-tied Kramer warms to the business of denigrating what he sees as Benton's naïve provincialism, he loses the viewer's sympathy, thus reinforcing Ken Burns's admiration of Benton's evocative populist realism.[78]

"The animating question of all my work," Burns states, "is what it means to be an American." Although each of Burns's documentaries works towards answering this question, *Baseball* (1994) and *Jazz* (2000), alongside *The Civil War,* form the heart of his mission. Burns describes this trilogy of epic-length movies as "a meditation on race in America." *Baseball* is an eighteen-hour series divided into nine episodes, representing the nine innings of a baseball game. Each episode begins like each game, with the playing of the national anthem. While *Baseball's* storyline (narrated again by McCullough) and images span all of the United States of America, the Mississippi Valley is pivotal because of baseball's reflection of national race relations, segregation, and civil rights. Burns's depiction of professional baseball's segregated Negro leagues makes up an important

78. Ken Burns, *Thomas Hart Benton* (1988; PBS, 2002), DVD. For Benton, see chapter 4, this work.

portion of *Baseball*, with lively commentary from Buck O'Neil, star of the legendary Kansas City Monarchs. Burns uses the metaphor of a baseball to describe the Negro leagues' importance to Black people. The leagues "stitched black America together, helped hold it together by its seams in small southern towns and teeming northern ghettos."[79]

Jazz, the third work in Ken Burns's trilogy, is also a product of his collaboration with the writer Geoffrey C. Ward. By the third decade of his moviemaking career, Burns had honed his technique, and the viewer enters familiar stylistic territory. *Jazz* casts as wide a chronological net as *Baseball.* The series is divided into ten episodes, each nearly two hours in length; each episode begins with a summary and preview, and ends with a summary and transition to the next episode. The narrator Keith David tells the story of jazz, from the origins of the jazz idiom ("Gumbo") and Dixieland jazz to the modern era; along the way, the viewer meets all the major swing, be-bop, cool jazz, avant-garde, and fusion artists, from Louis Armstrong to Benny Goodman to Ella Fitzgerald to Dave Brubeck to Miles Davis. Photographs and film footage, mostly black and white, are interwoven to the rich accompaniment of jazz music from each chronological era. Unlike *The Civil War* and *Baseball,* which use music for background and transitions, *Jazz's* music also furnishes the series' subject matter, and Burns chooses wisely from an abundant songbook. Jazz musicians and promoters give the movie audience a firsthand perspective, while the secondary sources are jazz critics, fans, and historians.[80]

Even more than *Baseball*, *Jazz* is a movie series anchored in the Mississippi Valley, especially New Orleans, Chicago, and Kansas City, yet it follows the musicians as they travel and win fans throughout America, Europe, and the world. The New Orleans trumpeter Wynton Marsalis performs a role in *Jazz* as important

79. Harlan, "Ken Burns and the Coming Crisis of Academic History," 171–72, 177; Ken Burns, *Baseball* (1994; repr. PBS, 2000), DVD. A new update episode, "Tenth Inning," appeared in 2010.

80. Ken Burns, *Jazz* (2000; PBS, 2004), DVD; Harlan, "Ken Burns and the Coming Crisis in Academic History," 178.

as that of Shelby Foote in *The Civil War,* and his thoughtful yet playful commentary is one of the series' highlights. In the introduction, Marsalis sets the tone for *Jazz:*

> Jazz music objectifies America. It's an art form that can give us a painless way of understanding ourselves. The real power of jazz, and the innovation of jazz, is that a group of people can come together and create art, improvise art, and can negotiate their agendas with each other, and that negotiation *is* the art. Like, you hear all the time that Bach improvised. And he *did* improvise. But he wasn't goin' to look at the second viola and say, "Okay, let's play *Ein Feste Burg."* They were not gonna do that. Whereas in Jazz, I could … go to Milwaukee tomorrow, and there'd be three musicians. I'd walk into a bar at 2:30 in the mornin' and say "What you wanna play, man? Let's play some blues." All four of us are gonna start playin' … So that's our art. The four of us can now have a dialog. We can have a conversation. We can speak to each other in the language of music.[81]

Looking over Ken Burns's work, there is certainly cause for criticism. His photographs of Civil War, jazz, and baseball participants accompanied by firsthand accounts are very effective, but on occasion it is not clear to television viewers if they are looking at the individual who wrote the words or just a representative photograph Burns has chosen. In *The Civil War,* Burns spends too little time educating the viewer in the complex causes of the war, and even less explicating the *results* of the war as they played out for Black Americans during and after the waning of the Reconstruction era. In *Jazz,* Burns is far too timid in his portrayal of significant Euro-American origins and components of the jazz idiom. Then too, in *Huey Long,* Burns is overly generous in his portrayal of Long's populism (the movie's ending helps to balance things). Although *Huey Long* identifies Long's status as a lifelong Democrat, the uninformed viewer of *Jazz* does not learn that the corrupt Kansas City boss Tom

81. *Jazz,* episode 1. After he says, "All four of us are gonna start playin,'" Marsalis vocally simulates the sounds of a call and response between trumpet, bass, and drums. He pronounces the name of Bach's Cantata *Ein Feste Burg* in an American vernacular accent, not German, to spoof European pretensions, and thus *Feste* becomes *Feisty.*

Pendergast was a staunch Democrat loyalist. Indeed, while *Jazz*'s viewers learn that Franklin D. Roosevelt was "helpless" to move antilynching legislation past strong southern congressional opponents, no mention is made of the fact that opposition came from Roosevelt's own segregationist Democrat allies.

The above criticism, however, is gentle compared to the thrashing Ken Burns has taken, and continues to take, from the Ivory Tower. Standing back and assessing Burns's three-decade career, a fair-minded person must conclude the quantity and quality of his overall work are remarkable. Ken Burns has taken the craft of the historian into the age of multimedia and set the parameters for an innovative historical scholarship. *The Civil War, Baseball,* and *Jazz* stand as some of the best histories of their subjects ever produced, and Ken Burns has earned the title of professional historian. All the railing against Burns is partly due to intellectuals' jealousy of his growing influence and popularity. Ken Burns does not believe his huge success somehow counterbalances this criticism. He displays no hubris and, indeed, remains troubled by the vitriol his movies have unleashed. "It is only in the academic community," he said, "that I've found a particularly—and for me, a particularly sad and painful—sort of rejection."[82]

SOUTHERNS

When Sally Field signed for her first major movie role in *Stay Hungry* (1976), she was pulling out of a television career dive and simultaneously creating a southern pistol movie persona that would win accolades and keep her working steadily for over a decade. Born into a show business family, Field had enjoyed early teenage success as television's *Gidget* (1965–66) and as Sister Bertrille, the heroine of the inane hit sitcom *The Flying Nun* (1967–70). Later, typecast and out of work, Field divorced, studied acting, and won a 1976 Emmy for *Sybil,* her riveting portrayal of a woman with multiple personalities. In *Stay Hungry,*

82. Harlan, "Ken Burns and the Coming Crisis of Academic History," 170.

she got a chance to work with the director Bob Rafaelson, also in a lull after helping produce *Easy Rider* (1969) and directing the acclaimed *Five Easy Pieces* (1970). To play opposite Field, Rafaelson cast Jeff Bridges, a rising star also from a show business family. Rounding out the bill was a movie newcomer, the Austrian world champion bodybuilder Arnold Schwarzenegger.[83]

Set in 1970s Birmingham, Alabama, *Stay Hungry* opens to a white-columned southern mansion and its owner, Craig Blake (Bridges), riding horseback alone in the surrounding woods. Craig Blake's inherited wealth is from modern Birmingham's steel industry, not southern cotton fields, and moviegoers soon learn that, upon the sudden death of his parents, Craig has fallen in with some shady real estate men. To facilitate their razing a city block to build a high-rise office building in downtown Birmingham, Craig must surreptitiously buy the one remaining property, a bodybuilding gym called the Olympic. Yet after insinuating himself at the gym, lonely Craig finds a surrogate family among the eccentric staff and customers, especially Joe Santo (Schwarzenegger) and feisty Mary Tate Farnsworth (Field), with whom he falls in love. A string of adventures ensues, not all of which quite make sense. But *Stay Hungry*'s mix of love, karate, bar fights, pretentious country clubbers, water skiing, bluegrass music, seedy white-collar criminals, and two dozen bodybuilders jogging through downtown Birmingham is highly entertaining, and by movie's end, Joe and Mary Tate teach Craig that money isn't everything. "I don't like to be comfortable," Joe tells Craig. "Once you get used to it, it's hard to give up. I want to stay hungry."[84]

"Pistol" is a folk term describing a strong, adventurous, fun-loving, and sexually attractive rural woman—a female Alligator Horse. While the noun "pistol" denotes a handgun, a "pistil" is a flower's female reproductive organ. As Mary Tate in *Stay Hungry,* Sally Field found the southern pistol role she was born to play. Moviemakers immediately tapped her to appear opposite Burt

83. Bob Rafaelson, dir., *Stay Hungry* (1976; repr. MGM, 2004), DVD, special features.
84. *Stay Hungry,* Bob Rafaelson commentary in special features.

Reynolds in the wildly successful comedy *Smoky and the Bandit* (1977). However, it was in Martin Ritt's *Norma Rae* (1979) that Field turned her pistol persona into a powerful dramatic performance that earned her an Academy Award. Filmed in Opelika, Alabama, *Norma Rae* tells the story of a minimum-wage textile worker who overcomes great obstacles and suffers personal loss while leading a successful movement to unionize her factory. Field plays Norma Rae opposite Reuben (Ron Liebman), a northern Jew and union representative, while Beau Bridges (Jeff's older brother) plays Norma's husband, Sonny. The success of *Norma Rae* meant that, in nine years, Sally Field had risen from a washed-up television career to become one of America's leading actresses. More southern roles followed, including 1984's *Places in the Heart* (earning her a second Oscar) and *Steel Magnolias* (1989), and Field soon branched out to play a variety of female roles. Yet it was Sally Field's skill at portraying feisty lower Mississippi Valley heroines that made her career.[85]

Stay Hungry and *Norma Rae* are latter-day contributions to an important movement in the history of American motion pictures. Beginning in the late 1940s, Hollywood moviemakers began to produce works set in the twentieth-century South, often the lower Mississippi Valley. Although not as popular or significant as the ubiquitous westerns of the era, there are enough of these movies, and they are of such quality, that they constitute an important dramatic movie subgenre that one might call the southern. In addition to Sally Field's work, this subgenre includes, but is by no means limited to, *Pinky, A Streetcar Named Desire, A Face in the Crowd*, *The Defiant Ones, Cat on a Hot Tin Roof, Wild River, Long Hot Summer, To Kill a Mockingbird, In the Heat of the Night, Cool Hand Luke, Down in the Delta,* and *Sling Blade*.[86]

Southerns lack the easily identifiable formula of classic westerns—the tension between civilizing and wild forces on the frontier. Yet they possess a related theme, the clash between

85. Martin Ritt, dir., *Norma Rae* (1979; 20th Century Fox, 2001), DVD. For *Smoky and the Bandit,* see chapter 7, this work. For the pistol's folkloric ancestors, see Teresa Jordan, *Cowgirls: Women of the American West* (New York, 1982), xix–xxi.

86. Jordan, *Cowgirls,* 334–54, 540–46.

modernity and tradition. A staple of these movies is the historic role of the South as an agrarian, slaveholding society, defeated in the Civil War, and forced to make the difficult adjustment to modern, industrial conditions.[87]

At the same time, a sense of place is extremely important to southerns and is reflected in the movies' settings, musical scores, language and accents, food, and other folkways. Southerns often include themes of religion, male and female roles and sexuality, class, and family, and because of the South's peculiar history, race is often an important plot component. Moreover, southerns are populated by archtetypal characters. There are the southern gentlemen and their belles, now living without their slaves and, in some movies, having lost their wealth. Black characters, the descendants of slaves, are those who stayed in the South, but sometimes they are joined by those who migrated north and returned. Black and white working-class southerners appear as sharecroppers (and textile workers), and many movies feature marginal white crackers. The Alligator Horse reappears as a good ole boy or Black sharper or bluesman, or in the female form of a southern pistol. In between are white, middle-class southern townspeople—the storekeepers, housewives, sheriffs, doctors, teachers, lawyers, and judges who inhabit the modern South.[88]

One of the most important creators of the southern was Elia Kazan (1909–2003), a producer discussed briefly in a previous chapter. Kazan built a career on both the New York stage and Hollywood sound studio, producing dramatic art that was often based on lower Mississippi Valley stories. Yet Kazan's fascination with the American South was not the result of a firsthand connection. Born Elia Kazanjoglous to devout Russian Orthodox parents in Istanbul, Turkey, in 1909, he changed his surname

87. For westerns, see John G. Cawelti, *The Six-Gun Mystique* (Bowling Green, Ohio, 1984), 61–94. Southerns are connected to the literary and movie subgenre of contemporary westerns in the work of the Texan Larry McMurtry and others; see William Savage, Jr., *The Cowboy Hero: His Image in History and Culture* (Norman, Okla., 1979), 41–46, and Michael Allen, *Rodeo Cowboys in the North American Imagination* (Reno, Nev., 1998), 37–40.

88. My analysis is based on Cawelti, *Six-Gun Mystique,* Savage, *Cowboy Hero,* and viewing the movies cited below. Another viewpoint is Deborah Barker and Kathryn McKee, eds., *American Cinema and the Southern Imaginary* (Athens, Ga., 2011).

to Kazan upon immigration to America. Kazan first achieved success directing the New York City theater debuts of *All My Sons* (1947), *Death of a Salesman* (1949), and *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* (1958), all of which earned him Tony Awards. In New York, he became a leading proponent of method acting, a technique pioneered by Constantin Stanislavski and Lee Strasberg that sought more introspective dramatic performances. Kazan, Cheryl Crawford, and Robert Lewis founded New York's Actors Studio in 1947 to train young performers in the method; the technique quickly migrated to Hollywood where it was epitomized in the reticent styles of Marlon Brando, Montgomery Clift, and James Dean. Kazan also moved on to Hollywood, where he spent the latter half of his career directing twenty-one Oscar-nominated movie performances and garnering two Best Director Oscars, for *Gentlemen's Agreement* (1947) and *On the Waterfront* (1954).[89]

A member of the American Communist Party (CP) in the 1930s, Elia Kazan had by the late 1940s concluded that Russian Stalinists and their American apologists were as tyrannical as those they labeled despots and sought to replace. Convinced of the dangers communism posed to American freedoms, and angry at the attempts of CP officials to edit his scripts, he later joined others (including the writer Bud Schulberg) in cooperating with 1950s congressional investigators of communist infiltration of the Screen Actors Guild. Hollywood leftists never forgave Kazan for breaking the solidarity of America's pro-communist movement, and Kazan returned the favor by openly expressing contempt for those so naïve as to deny global communist genocide. Yet Kazan's beliefs did not lead him to become a conservative; indeed, he remained a champion of liberal causes, especially Black civil rights and the fight to expose anti-Semitism.[90]

As noted, the worldly and cosmopolitan Kazan was strongly drawn to Mississippi Valley subjects and southern gothic writers

89. Elia Kazan, *Elia Kazan: A Life* (New York, 1988), 21–23, 63, 90, 319–22, 331–34, 355–68, 439–40, 517–28, 540–45.
90. Ibid., 127–33, 456–63, 467–71.

from the time of his work in the New York theater. The most famous examples are his multiple (and occasionally rancorous) collaborations with the Mississippi playwright Tennessee Williams. Between 1947 and 1958, Kazan directed the New York runs of five of Williams's plays, including *A Streetcar Named Desire* (1947) and *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* (1955). Kazan took most of the Broadway cast of *A Streetcar Named Desire* with him to Hollywood to make the 1951 movie version, but a disagreement with Williams over *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*'s ending (Kazan insisted Big Daddy not die until act 2) led the playwright to seek another director for the 1958 movie version. In the meantime, Kazan found three more excellent scripts that stoked his fascination with stories set in the lower Mississippi valley, resulting in the movies *Pinky* (1949), *A Face in the Crowd* (1957), and *Wild River* (1960).[91]

Kazan filmed the movie version of *A Streetcar Named Desire* on a Hollywood soundstage set replicating the seedy New Orleans French Quarter neighborhood of Tennessee Williams's play. The black-and-white movie effectively uses light and shadows, Mississippi River fog, cigarette smoke, and roiling cigar smoke over the poker table at Stanley (Marlon Brando) and Stella (Kim Hunter) Kowalski's cheap New Orleans apartment. When Stella's sister Blanche DuBois (Vivian Leigh) arrives, she seems to bring an upper-class bearing to the Kowalskis' coarse working-class lifestyle, but it turns out the once-proud DuBois have fallen on hard times. Belle Reve, their family's Mississippi plantation, has gone to creditors, and unstable Blanche has lost her high school teaching job under mysterious circumstances. Blanche possesses only a trunk full of fine clothing, the last remnants of her former social standing. Although Stella welcomes her sister to New Orleans, Stanley is jealous of Stella's attachment to Blanche, resentful of Blanche's pretensions, and suspicious of her past. Everything was "all OK 'til she showed up here," he shouts at Stella. "Huey Long said 'Every man is a king,' and I'm the king

91. Ibid., 334–54, 540–46. See Margaret Eby's review, "Southern Gothic," *Paris Review Daily,* March 27, 2012, https://www.theparisreview.org/blog/, accessed March 27, 2012. Kazan's movie *Wild River* (1960) is discussed in chapter 5, this work.

around here and don't you forget it!" In secret, Blanche urges Stella to leave Stanley because he is a "brute," a "survivor of the Stone Age." In her most telling insult, Blanche declares, "He's *common.*"[92]

While Tennessee Williams often used themes of class and fallen gentility in his plays, *A Streetcar Named Desire* is also powered by the interplay of class with sexual lust. "When we first met, you thought I was common… I was common as dirt!" Stanley taunts Stella. "You showed me a snapshot of a place with columns and I pulled you down off those columns and you loved it!" Of course, lust is not exclusive to the working class, and we learn that Blanche is infamously promiscuous and has lost her teaching job because of an affair with a seventeen-year-old student. Even Blanche's suitor Harold Mitchell (Karl Malden), the nicest fellow in the movie, descends to verbal abuse and a base sexual advance when he learns that Blanche has slept with many men. While all the characters are consumed by sexual desire, it is the men, and especially Stanley, who possess the aggressive physical strength to get their way. Thus, *A Streetcar Named Desire* is also about abuse—wife-beating and rape. With Stella safely away giving birth to their first child in the hospital, Stanley coldly overpowers Blanche and rapes her. This drives the fragile Blanche over the edge, and at movie's end Stanley and Stella commit her to an insane asylum. Just a few minutes before the taxi arrives to take her away, Blanche, unaware of her fate, listens to the sound of Jackson Square church bells, and remarks, "The cathedral chimes. They're the only clean things in the Quarter."[93]

A Streetcar Named Desire achieved huge box office success and earned Academy Awards for Leigh, Malden, and Hunter, while Elia Kazan continued to look for new scripts. This led him back to the writer Bud Schulberg (his 1954 collaborator in *On the*

92. Kazan, *Elia Kazan,* 383–87; Elia Kazan, dir., *A Streetcar Named Desire* (1951).

93. *A Streetcar Named Desire.* In Tennessee Williams's play, Stella denies Blanche's accusations of rape ("I couldn't believe her story and go on living with Stanley"), but for the movie Kazan deferred to censors and penciled in an ending that has Stella incongruously leaving Stanley at the same time Blanche is being taken to the mental hospital. Williams was not pleased. See Kazan, *Elia Kazan,* 432–37.

Waterfront), whose short story "The Arkansas Traveler" became the 1957 Warner Brothers feature *A Face in the Crowd*. As usual, Kazan assembled a talented entourage of actors. Andy Griffith makes his movie debut in a brilliant portrayal of Larry "Lonesome" Rhodes, a conniving Arkansas radio singer and storyteller. Rhodes's manager and lover, Marsha Jeffries, is played by Patricia Neal, a native Kentuckian and talented veteran of stage and screen whose credits included a Broadway stint as Maggie in Kazan's *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*. Walter Matthau, a favorite of Kazan, is Mel Miller, a Tennessee journalist who loves Marsha and is wise to Lonesome's evil duplicity from the start. Tony Franciosa is Joey DePalma, an ambitious entertainment industry promoter, while Kazan taps the Grand Ole Opry comic Rod Brasfield to play Lonesome's lackey, Beanie. Also debuting is stunning Lee Remick as Betty Lou Fleckum, Miss Arkansas Drum Majorette of 1957 and Lonesome's teenaged bride. Filmed in black and white on location in Piggett, Arkansas, *A Face in the Crowd* casts local citizens as extras and features a blues, gospel, and rock soundtrack sung by Griffith and written by Schulberg and Tompall Glaser.[94]

Kazan and Schulberg use *A Face in the Crowd* to indict America's Old Right, the isolationist (and unnamed) Republicans who claimed New Deal Progressivism was "coddling [Americans] from the cradle to the grave." The story begins as Marsha (who has studied folk music at Sarah Lawrence College), discovers Lonesome Rhodes in jail while doing interviews for her radio show, *A Face in the Crowd.* Drawn by Rhodes's talent, and smitten by his edgy country charm, Marsha signs him to do a show on radio station KGRK, "the voice of Northeast Arkansas." Lonesome immediately creates a stir with his lively rhythm-and-blues music and down-home banter. He also taps a strong populist vein in his audience, chiding rich businessmen and seemingly reaching out to the common man and housewife. "There's a whole lotta people in trouble out there," he states

94. Kazan, *Elia Kazan,* 566–69; Elia Kazan, dir., *A Face in the Crowd* (1957; repr. Warner Brothers, 2005), DVD.

gravely in a broadcast dedicated to helping a homeless Negro family.[95]

As Lonesome's fame grows, his cynical and egotistical ways are slowly revealed. He betrays Marsha's trust and sleeps around ("Larry just thinks he's gotta take a bite outta every broad he comes across," an ex-wife remarks). Hired to push Vitajex instant-energy pills on a primetime coast-to-coast television show, he attracts the attention of Senator Worthington Fuller, a presidential candidate and critic of "left-wing New York newspapers." Fuller wants Lonesome to be his "wielder of opinion" through "mass persuasion." "The mass has to be guided by the strong hand of a responsible elite," the senator informs Lonesome, who is happy to oblige:

> I'm not just an entertainer… I'm an influence. A force… This whole country's just like my flock of sheep. Rednecks. Crackers. Hillbillies. House Fraus… Peapickers… Stupid. I gotta think for 'em.

Lonesome Rhodes's hubris soon causes his downfall. Like Huey Long (whom he resembles much more than the old GOP isolationists), Rhodes is subsumed by his own lust for power. During the closing credits of his television show, after his microphone has been turned off but his image remains on the screen, Lonesome begins to brag to fellow cast members. "Those morons out there?" Lonesome snarls, "I can sell chicken fertilizer and they'll think it's caviar. I can make 'em eat dog food and they'll think it's steak." Meanwhile, inside the recording booth, a disgusted Marsha turns his microphone back on. Millions of fans hear him rant, "Good night, you stupid idiots. Good night, you miserable slobs. They're a lot of trained seals. I toss 'em a dead fish and they'll flap their flippers." As his show ends with a religious hymn, Lonesome is ruined. Mel, who has quit the show to write an exposé entitled *Demagogue in Denim,* rushes back into the studio, commenting to a stunned Lonesome, "I heard you just wrote the ending to my book."[96]

95. *A Face in the Crowd*.
96. Ibid.

While Elia Kazan was making *A Face in the Crowd,* Tennessee Williams had agreed to a 1958 Hollywood version of *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* directed by Richard Brooks, who also cowrote the screenplay. This movie features the themed elements of the emerging southern subgenre—place, language and folkways, family, class and vanished gentility, sexuality, strife over money, and, most of all, fear that the family's legacy will die. Set in 1950s Mississippi on the nouveau riche Pollitt plantation, *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* tells the story of "Big Daddy" Pollitt (Burl Ives), who worries he will die from cancer before he can safely pass on his land—"28,000 of the richest acres this side of the Valley Nile"—to his favorite son, Brick. Newman plays the brooding, childless, alcoholic Brick to perfection. Big Daddy adores Brick's wife, Maggie (played expertly by Elizabeth Taylor), and wants her to give him grandchildren, but Brick will not sleep with Maggie. He still grieves for his deceased friend and football teammate, Skipper. Meanwhile, Brick's older brother, Gooper (Jack Carson), bereft over Big Daddy's favoritism, is plotting legal action to make his own family heirs to the plantation.[97]

Upon Big Daddy's return from the hospital, Big Momma (Judith Anderson) asks him, "Did the storm [last night] cause any damage?" and he responds, "Which storm you talking about, the one on the outside or the hullabaloo I heard going on in here?" Like Tennessee Williams's play, most of *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*'s action is centered around Brick and Maggie's bedroom on the day of Big Daddy's 65th birthday celebration. Although there is indeed much "hullabaloo" and seemingly not much to celebrate, the director and cowriter Richard Brooks manages to alter Williams's play and serve up a happy conclusion: Movie's end finds Brick and Maggie in one another's arms and headed for bed. This overly smooth finale did not upset Tennessee Williams nearly as much as Brooks's muting of his play's major dramatic pivot—Brick's homosexual relationship with Skipper. All in all, Williams might have wished he had retained Elia Kazan.[98]

Another Mississippi Valley writer who brought his art to

97. Richard Brooks, dir., *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* (1958; repr. MGM, 1998) DVD.
98. Ibid.

Hollywood only to see it watered down and commercialized made no complaints whatsoever. William Faulkner had much more to protest than Tennessee Williams, yet he enjoyed a convivial and lucrative relationship with his movie industry colleagues. This good will probably stemmed from Faulkner's 1940s determination to branch into moviemaking to remedy his financial difficulties. Faulkner needed money and he accepted work on Hollywood's terms; he understood moviemaking for what it was and worked to produce the best movies he could under the circumstances. This resulted in a dozen motion pictures with a direct connection to Faulkner stories, including sloppy adaptations of *The Sound and the Fury* (1959) and *Sanctuary* (1960). The Faulkner movie adaptations that turned out best were *The Reivers* (1969), starring Steve McQueen, and *Tomorrow* (1972), starring Robert Duvall. Faulkner's Pulitzer Prize–winning novel *The Reivers* is the most humorous and succinctly written of his works and made for lively Hollywood fare. *Tomorrow,* based on Horton Foote's adaptation of a Faulkner short story, was first produced as a successful Broadway play; the made-for-TV movie adaptation won over, and retains, a small cadre of loyal fans.[99]

The Long Hot Summer (1958) mirrors the pitfalls and rewards of a Faulkner film adaptation. The script writers Harriet Frank, Jr., and Irving Ravetch patched together Faulkner's stories "The Hamlet," "Barn Burning," and "The Spotted Horses" with borrowed pieces from *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof.* The director, Martin Ritt, assembled a terrific cast, including Paul Newman, Orson Welles, Joanne Woodward, Lee Remick, Tony Franciosa, Angela Lansbury, and Richard Anderson (note that Newman, Remick, and Franciosa are part of an emerging stable of performers known for their southerns). As the movie begins, the wily sharecropper and alleged arsonist Ben Quick (Newman) enters Frenchman's Bend, Mississippi, to learn that the Varner family owns and runs everything. Visiting their white-columned mansion, Ben soon wins over Will Varner (Welles), the family's

99. Recently, the Faulkner estate sold the rights to all his collective works to television producers.

coarse, widowed, nouveau riche patriarch. Will is as concerned as Big Daddy about his lineage and legacy. He wants his high-toned, schoolteacher daughter Clara (Woodward) to marry the ambitious, hard-working Ben, producing more robust heirs than his own son Jody (Franciosa), who seems interested only in cavorting with his comely and dim wife Eula (Remick). Will informs Clara, "I'm gonna get me some *men* in the Varner family, some good, strong, strappin' *men* Varners! … by means of that big stud horse."[100]

For most of the movie, Clara is repulsed by "that big stud horse" and continues a doomed liaison with Alan Stewart (Richard Anderson), Frenchman's Bend's own Ashley Wilkes. But after several colorful scenes spotlighting Ben's trickster qualities—a slapstick wild horse chase, church bazaar, treasure hunt, and an aborted barn burning—Clara at last succumbs to his charms. The movie's ending might well have made Tennessee Williams squirm, but it sent William Faulkner back to the pay window. As Jimmy Rodgers sings the movie's romantic theme, "The Long Hot Summer," moviegoers watch a crescendo of coupling in the Varner mansion: Jody chases Eula around the upstairs as Ben and Clara passionately embrace and kiss below. And even Will enters the romantic fray, proposing to his long-suffering mistress Minnie Littlejohn, played marvelously by Angela Lansbury.[101]

The southern's focus on racial themes began following World War II and closely paralleled the nation's tumultuous civil rights era through congressional passage of the Civil Rights Acts of 1964 and 1965. Elia Kazan pioneered Hollywood's contribution to the civil rights movement, beginning in 1947 with *Gentleman's Agreement,* the first movie to expose and condemn American anti-Semitism. Two years later, Kazan tackled Black civil rights in *Pinky,* a movie starring Jean Crain and Ethel Waters. Crain plays Pinky Johnson, a southern Black woman who appears to be white and has moved north and "passed" as a white person while earning a nursing degree. When Pinky returns south to

100. Martin Ritt, dir., *The Long Hot Summer* (1958; repr. 20th Century Fox, 2003), DVD.
101. Ibid.

visit her Granny (Waters), she faces and triumphs over racial prejudice and threats. While Kazan was criticized for casting a white actress to play a mulatto, *Pinky* gave Americans an unprecedented cinematic look at the racism of the one-drop rule and radically changed the Hollywood landscape.[102]

Kazan used Black actors in a minor way in *Face in the Crowd* and they form an important subplot to *Wild River,* but it was Stanley Kramer who directed the next pivotal racial southern movie. The premise of *The Defiant Ones* (1958) is simple and powerful. Two convicts, John "Joker" Jackson (Tony Curtis) and Noah Cullen (Sidney Poitier), escape from a southern prison chain gang shackled together, with the police in hot pursuit. Jackson is white and Cullen is Black. The two immediately come to hate one another, mirroring the ugly racial prejudices typical of their time and region. Yet as the movie plot develops, and they are forced to work together to elude capture, the two form a bond of mutual respect that continues after they shed their chains.[103]

Hollywood's racial southerns were growing in number and quality in a trajectory leading to a masterful black-and-white movie, *To Kill a Mockingbird* (1962). The film was based on the 1960 Pulitzer Prize–winning novel by Harper Lee, an Alabaman. It featured hauntingly beautiful music by Elmer Bernstein. Robert Mulligan directed a strong cast that included Gregory Peck as the Maycomb, Alabama, defense attorney Atticus Finch, Phillip Alford and Mary Badham as the widower Finch's children Jem and Scout, John Megna as their impish friend Dill, and Brock Peters as Tom Robinson, a Black farmer falsely accused of raping a white woman. James Anderson and Collin Wilcox Paxton play Tom's ignorant, white trash accusers Bob and Mayella Ewell, and Frank Overton is Sheriff Heck Tate. Robert Duvall, unseen until movie's end, plays the reclusive, mentally retarded, and courageous Arthur "Boo" Radley, who rescues Scout by killing Bob Ewell. Using the first-person memoir voice of Lee's novel,

102. Kazan, *Elia Kazan,* 250–51, 374–76; Elia Kazan, dir., *Pinky* (1949; repr. 20th Century Fox, 2010), DVD.

103. Stanley Kramer, *The Defiant Ones* (1958, repr. MGM, 2001), DVD.

To Kill a Mockingbird's narrator (Kim Stanley) tells a story that evocatively combines the innocent happiness of a Depression-era southern Alabama childhood with the ugly bigotry the Finch children witness, and in which they become entangled.[104]

As director, Mulligan films most of the story in sets depicting the Finch's neighborhood and the Maycomb County Courthouse, where Tom Robinson stands trial, defended expertly by Atticus. There is no medical proof Mayella has been raped, and Atticus cleverly proves it was physically impossible for Tom to have beaten and choked her (Tom's left arm was maimed beyond use in a cotton gin accident). Atticus argues that, in fact, homely, lonely Mayella tried to seduce Tom, who fled the scene just as her drunken (left-handed) father Bob Ewell arrived, severely beating Mayella himself and concocting the rape story to save face. Ewell has called Atticus a "Nigger lover," and an important current in the plot is the community's assumption the all-white jury will naturally take the Ewells' word over that of a Black man. Atticus addresses this in his final words to the jury, one of the most famous courtroom speeches in American literature and art:

> Now gentlemen, in this country our courts are the great levelers, and in our courts all men are created equal. I'm no idealist to believe firmly in the integrity of our courts and of our jury system. That's no ideal to me. That is a living, working reality. Now I am confident that you gentlemen will review without passion the evidence that you have heard, come to a decision, and restore this man to his family. In the name of God, do your duty! In the name of God, believe Tom Robinson!

As Atticus later departs the courtroom, Black community members in the segregated upper gallery rise to show respect, and their preacher instructs Jem and Scout (who snuck in to watch the trial) to "stand up. Your father's passin'." But Harper Lee's story and the movie stay true to historic context. The jury

104. Robert Mulligan, dir., *To Kill a Mockingbird* (1962; Universal Pictures Home Entertainment, 2012), DVD.

finds Tom guilty, and he is soon shot and killed in a desperate escape attempt.[105]

Immediately following the trial and Tom's death, the story returns to the Finch family neighborhood, because *To Kill a Mockingbird* is also the story of a father and his children and neighbors. Tom Robinson's ordeal is paralleled by Scout's and Jem's coming of age and learning what kind of man their father is, and learning the truth about their tormented, reclusive neighbor, Boo Radley. *To Kill a Mockingbird* ends when the stories of Tom and Boo collide. On a fall evening, Bob Ewell, angry that Atticus has bested and humiliated him, hunts down the Finch children and tries to kill them with a knife. However, Boo appears and saves their lives by stabbing and killing Bob, leaving Atticus and Sheriff Heck Tate to deal with the legal repercussions. Heck rises to the occasion, declining to "drag [Boo] with his shy ways into the limelight… I may not be much Mr. Finch, but I'm still sheriff of Maycomb County. And Bob Ewell *fell* on his knife."[106]

While *To Kill a Mockingbird* portrays the 1930s segregated South, *In the Heat of the Night* (1967) is set in the mid-1960s, the tense, dangerous years immediately following passage of the federal civil rights acts. Directed by Norman Jewison and filmed in color on location in Mississippi, this riveting movie uses a murder mystery to reflect interwoven themes of human ignorance, racism, poverty, loneliness, and, ultimately, courage and hope. Sidney Poitier plays Virgil Tibbs, a Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, police detective who has been visiting his mother in Mississippi. Awaiting a train, Tibbs is literally dragged into the unsolved murder case of a northern businessman (Mr. Colbert), first as a suspect and then as a detective assisting the white chief of police, Gillespie (Rod Steiger) in Sparta, Mississippi. As the two unravel the complex case, Detective Tibbs dramatically changes Chief Gillespie's racist worldview.[107]

Sparta, Mississippi, is peopled by characters ranging from the

105. Ibid.
106. Ibid.
107. Norman Jewison, dir., *In the Heat of the Night* (1967; repr. MGM, 2008), DVD.

sublime to the ridiculous. Warren Oates plays the police officer Sam Ward to the hilt as a sort of sinister Deputy Barney Fife. Ward is surrounded by a full complement of white trash characters, including the prime suspect Harvey Oberst (*In Cold Blood*'s Scott Wilson), the teenaged vixen Delores Purdy (Quentin Dean), the sleazy diner cook and actual murderer Ralph Henshaw (Anthony James), and a band of redneck hot rodders who call Gillespie a "nigger lover" and try to beat up Virgil and run him off. The middle class is represented by Tibbs, Gillespie, and wily Mayor Schubert (played by the southern movie regular William Schallert) and his city council. The town's richest citizen is Eric Endicott (Larry Gates), whose fear of the economic consequences of Mr. Colbert's new factory makes him a suspect; Endicott is a genteel version of Big Daddy, supervising his cotton fields from the conservatory of his (obligatory) white-columned mansion and cooing that, like his greenhouse plants, "the Negras need care and feeding … and that takes time." Upon learning he is a suspect, he slaps the uppity Tibbs, who returns the favor. Balancing Endicott is Colbert's widow (Lee Grant), who recoils at Sparta's vicious racism. "My God," she scolds Gillespie, "what kind of people are you? What kind of place is this?"[108]

In the Heat of the Night's most important contribution to the southern movie genre is its presentation of a nuanced southern lawman archetype. Before and after the 1960s, southern lawmen were portrayed in polarized fashion as either sinister and sadistic pursuers (*The Defiant Ones, Cool Hand Luke)* or incompetent buffoons (*The Flim Flam Man, Smoky and the Bandit*). This began to change in the early 1960s, with Frank Overton's Sheriff Heck Tate in *To Kill a Mockingbird* and Andy Griffith's Sheriff Andy Taylor in *The Andy Griffith Show.* Rod Steiger brought the southern lawman archetype home in his Oscar-winning portrayal of Sparta's Chief Gillespie. Gillespie begins the movie as a sinister, sunglass-wearing, gum-chewing, Dr. Pepper-swilling redneck, but with buffoon affectations, as in his error-prone investigative techniques, which lead him, hat in hand, to

108. Ibid.

beg for Virgil Tibbs's help. Yet the viewer soon learns that Gillespie is a courageous and complex man who is also very vulnerable, as when he invites Tibbs for drinks and an informal dinner at his bachelor abode. "I got no wife, I got no kids … nobody comes here, never," he confesses, asking Tibbs, "Don't you get just a little lonely?" By movie's end the two have solved the murder case and become friends, and the viewer is treated to the sight of Chief Gillespie carrying Virgil Tibbs's suitcase for him as they walk to the train that will take him up north. "Thank you. Bye," Gillespie says as the two shake hands. And then, as Tibbs climbs aboard, he adds, "Virgil, you take care, y'hear?"[109]

Down in the Delta (1998), Maya Angelou's debut as a movie director, is an innovative and engaging motion picture with qualities outweighing its critical reception. Although the movie fell beneath the late 1990s radar, its re-release on cable television has fostered a following among Black and white audiences alike. *Down in the Delta's* ambitious screenplay (by Myron Goble) turns the tale of the southern Black diaspora north on its head, as members of the Sinclair family leave the south Chicago ghetto to spend a summer with their aunt and uncle in Maryanna, Mississippi, down in the Delta. The all-Black cast (only a smattering of white people appear in the movie) includes Mary Alice as widowed Rosa Lynn Sinclair, Alfre Woodard as her dissolute daughter Loretta, and Mpho Koaho and Kulani Hassen as Loretta's erstwhile son Thomas and autistic daughter Tracy. In Mississippi, they meet their Black Sinclair relatives, Rosa Lynn's brother-in-law, the restaurateur Earl (Al Freeman, Jr.), his Alzheimer-ridden wife Annie (Esther Rolle), and their son Will (Wesley Snipes), an attorney who lives in Atlanta with his own family.[110]

Loretta's drug use and alcoholism have driven Rosa Lynn to put her and her children on a Greyhound bus, but the decision reflects Rosa Lynn's wisdom. Ironically, the same Mississippi Delta country portrayed in such sinister fashion in *In the Heat of the Night* is now a potential haven for Loretta, Thomas, and

109. Ibid.
110. Maya Angelou, dir., *Down in the Delta* (1998; rpr. Miramax, 1999), DVD.

Tracy. In an opening scene, the movie makes sharp contrast between their blighted Chicago neighborhood and the green fields surrounding Earl and Annie's quiet Maryanna, Mississippi, home. Upon arrival, Loretta finds herself in culture shock, a stranger in a strange land. When she sees how far Annie has descended into dementia, she tells her Uncle Earl, "Maybe she oughta be in a home," to which Earl replies, "She *is* home." As the story progresses, however, Loretta matures and prospers. She goes to work in Earl's fried chicken restaurant, makes friends, attends church with her family, and sees Tracy make incremental progress in speech as Thomas flourishes amid Maryanna's safety and freedom. "I wasn't born here but I kinda got reborn here," she later tells a community gathering. And in addition to a new life for her family, Loretta also gains knowledge of the Sinclairs' old life—the family's slave origins and the horrible obstacles they faced and conquered.[111]

Down in the Delta thus combines a modern civil rights consciousness with traditional southern values of family, community, tradition, Christianity, and work ethic. "Can we do it?" Loretta asks community members and coworkers about her plan for a worker-owned chicken-processing plant, and they respond, "Yes, we *can!*" The call-and-response cadence here is just one of many ways the movie weaves folkways into its storyline. Black vernacular English is spoken throughout, and viewers hear similarities in Black rural and urban speech. Southern food and cooking are an essential movie ingredient, and Loretta develops a spicy chicken recipe she hopes "could be bigger than cotton ever was." While the movie begins with urban rap music, it ends with a full gospel choir. Most important, *Down in the Delta* is based on an oral tradition, the Sinclair family story of how their nineteenth-century ancestor Nathan was torn from his family and sold downriver for the price of a silver candelabra, and how Nathan's son Jesse stole the candelabra and the family kept it for generations as their only remembrance of Nathan. Near movie's end, when Thomas asks Rosa about Nathan, Jesse,

111. Ibid.

and the candelabra, she replies, "Lemme tell you a story. About a family stayin' together."[112]

As evidenced by *Down in the Delta,* the southern was alive and well in the final decades of the twentieth century, reinvigorated by new moviemakers and changing attitudes. Sally Field won another Academy Award for her portrayal of a young widow who fights to keep her east Texas farm in *Places in the Heart* (1984), and one year later Black women heroines played by Whoopi Goldberg, Margaret Avery, and Oprah Winfrey shone in Stephen Spielberg's acclaimed movie *The Color Purple.* The southern pistol role was expanded to include spunky older women and courageous youngsters in the *Steel Magnolias* (1989) lineup of Sally Field, Dolly Parton, Shirley MacLaine, Daryl Hannah, Olympia Dukakis, and Julia Roberts. *Fried Green Tomatoes* (1991) also employed a strong female cast—Kathy Bates, Mary Stuart Masterson, Mary-Louise Parker, Jessica Tandy, and Cicely Tyson—in an exploration of the life of an aged southern woman (Tandy) that gave new insights to a contemporary southerner (Bates). *Mississippi Masala* (1992), one of the most original of the '90s southerns, starred Sarita Choudhury and Denzel Washington in the story of Ugandan Indian immigrants to the contemporary lower Mississippi Valley. Masala, a south Asian spice, joined gumbo as a symbol of the multidimensional southern melting pot.[113]

Filmed on location in Benton, Arkansas, *Sling Blade* (1996) is one of the most powerful and disturbing artistic portrayals of the white southern lower class. Billy Bob Thornton, a native of Hot Springs, Arkansas wrote, directed, and starred in this Oscar-winning feature, which Daniel Lanois of New Orleans underscored with ethereal space music. While *Sling Blade* is a story about a unique character who befriends, and is befriended

112. Ibid.

113. Robert Benton, dir., *Places in the Heart* (1984; repr. Sony Pictures Home Entertainment, 2001) DVD; Steven Spielberg, dir., *The Color Purple* (1985; repr. Warner Brothers, 2011), DVD; Herbert Ross, dir., *Steel Magnolias* (1989, repr. Sony Pictures Home Entertainment, 2000), DVD; Jon Avnet, dir., *Fried Green Tomatoes* (1991; Universal Pictures Home Entertainment, 2006), DVD; and Mira Nair, dir., *Mississippi Masala* (1992; repr. Sony Pictures Home Entertainment, 2003).

by, a young boy and his mother, it is also a story about abuse. Thornton plays Karl Childers, a mildly retarded man recently released from the state hospital where he has been incarcerated for killing his abusive, adulterous mother and her boyfriend with a sling blade scythe. Returning to his hometown of Millsburg, he meets Frank Wheatley (Lucas Black), whose mother Linda (Natalie Canerday) lets him live in their garage while he works at a local lawnmower repair shop. Linda works at a dollar store managed by Vaughan Cunningham (John Ritter), who is gay ("He's funny you know," Frank informs Karl, "not ha-ha funny, funny queer. He likes to go with men instead of women"). Linda is trapped in a relationship with Doyle Hargraves (expertly played by the country singer Dwight Yoakum). A bigoted, violent construction worker, Doyle and his dissolute ways, bad guitar playing, and overall cluelessness border on comedy ("When you've been drinking as long as me, Vaughan, you build up a tolerance") until moviegoers realize Linda and Frank are too poor and weak to safely escape his sociopathy. Karl's father does not appear until movie's end, when, ironically, *To Kill a Mockingbird*'s Robert Duvall plays the hateful, abusive parent to Karl's Boo Radley. J. T. Walsh rounds out the cast as Karl's erstwhile hospital warden and probation supervisor.[114]

As Karl and Frank walk Millsburg's streets and explore the countryside, viewers hear the chirping birds, see the verdant landscape and kudzu-draped trees, and feel the heat and humidity of a real southern working-class town. They also see the Frosty Cream Drive-In, the lawnmower shop, the dollar store, and the run-down homes that line Millsburg's streets. Disturbingly, they see the dilapidated shed where Karl spent his boyhood, sleeping in a rag-filled hole and eating table scraps. It is near this shed that Karl "buried the little feller"—the aborted fetus of his baby brother. When Frank suggests that maybe Karl's mother and her lover deserved their fate, Karl responds, "I've growed up and learned you ain't supposed to kill nobody." Viewers thus learn that Karl is more thoughtful than Doyle's

114. Billy Bob Thornton, dir., *Sling Blade* (1996; repr. Miramax, 2005), DVD.

recurrent reproach of "*Re*-tard" would indicate. Karl has been studying the Bible, and as the movie progresses we learn that the Old Testament is slowly winning out over the New. He goes to Linda and tells her he wants to be baptized—cleansed and sanctified really—only a few days before he again becomes a killer angel, cutting Doyle's head open with a sharpened lawn mower blade.[115]

Frank has told Karl that Doyle has "threatened to kill [Linda] if she ever left him." Karl agrees that Doyle "ain't no count. He's mean to you and your momma." As Karl watches Doyle's drunken bullying, he manages to stay out of the fray, slowly mulling it all over. He goes to make amends with his own father but finds him filthy, disheveled, and abusive to the end. "I ain't got no boy," he barks at Karl, who finally responds, "I studied on killin' you [but] you'll be dead soon and the world'll be shut of you… You ought not to 'uv killed my little brother." When Doyle moves into Linda's home ("We're gonna be a family, Frank, *my* family," he declares), Karl makes his final preparations. He tells Frank he loves him and informs Vaughan that he will not "go to Hades" for his homosexuality. He leaves money in a book with a note to Frank, "You will be happy." He finds Doyle alone, passed out in a chair, and wakes him up to die. Moviegoers do not see the murder scene, but afterwards Karl calls 911 and tells the dispatcher the police should look for a truck inscribed "Doyle Hargraves Construction." While waiting for the police to arrive, he eats cold biscuits with jam. The movie closes to Karl staring out the window of the mental hospital, telling a fellow inmate, "The world was too big," and "I met a boy."[116]

To summarize, the modern southern subgenre emerged after World War II and continues to this day. A sense of place is crucial to the movies' settings and musical scores, the characters' accents, and their food and folkways. Recurrent themes are religion, politics, masculinity and southern womanhood, sexuality, social class, and family ties. Race is often a critical plot component, as is the clash between modernity and tradition in

115. Ibid.
116. Ibid.

portrayals of southerners adjusting to the industrial revolution. Archetypal characters appear—southern gentlemen (and their nouveau riche successors), belles, Black descendants of slaves, Black and white working-class southerners (including sharecroppers and factory workers), and white trash. The Alligator Horse reappears and a new female character—the southern pistol—takes the stage. White, middle-class southern townsmen—lawyers, storekeepers, housewives, doctors, teachers, and judges—people these movies, as do southern lawmen and sheriff archetypes.

While all the southern movies discussed are worthwhile, they are of unequal quality. One can criticize the southern accents in several of these movies. Some characters' accents come and go, and do not always accurately correspond to the region or socioeconomic status of the speaker. While *To Kill a Mockingbird*'s Scout and Jem speak in an accurate Alabama twang (both actors are Alabamans), Gregory Peck's Atticus shows no trace of southern speech. Is one supposed to assume that Jean Crain's character Pinky lost her accent during a few years at a northern nursing school, or that Sidney Poitier's Virgil Tibbs retains no vestige of his childhood speech? While sisters Blanche and Stella Dubois are native Mississippians, only Blanche sounds like one. Few movie producers and directors were willing to spend the effort and money necessary to accurately replicate southern speech.

At the same time, moviemakers sometimes failed to accurately represent southern landscape and flora. *To Kill a Mockingbird* is an excellent movie, yet it was filmed on a constructed film set that bears little resemblance to southern Alabama. The show's producers said at the time they had "brought the South to California," but *To Kill a Mockingbird*'s summer scenes amid leafless bushes and trees stretch the informed moviegoers' imagination. So too does *The Long Hot Summer*'s opening scene of a river towboat pushing a barge with Paul Newman aboard—a scene obviously shot in the Far West, not the lower Mississippi Valley. It is true that these criticisms of inauthentic speech and stage sets could be leveled against moviemakers in every genre,

not just those who make southerns. However, they do show that some moviemakers are either ignorant about southern culture or unwilling to do what it takes to accurately portray the South.[117]

All in all, Elia Kazan scores highest in the accuracy of his southern portrayals. *A Face in the Crowd* and *Wild River* feature excellent location shots and include locals as extras. Although Kazan had originally planned a southern shoot for *A Streetcar Named Desire,* he wisely changed his mind and successfully recreated Stanley and Stella's seedy New Orleans neighborhood on a Hollywood soundstage. New Orleans's historic cosmopolitan demographic naturally produced a different accent in Stanley, and in *A Face in the Crowd,* Lonesome's and Marsha's accents are spot-on, as is Walter Matthau's Mel Miller, the Vanderbilt-educated newsman. To be sure, the producers and directors Billy Bob Thornton, Maya Angelou, and Robert Mulligan have matched Kazan's authenticity in single movies and scenes in *Sling Blade, Pinky, Down in the Delta,* and *To Kill a Mockingbird.* However, Elia Kazan's body of work in development of the southern movie has not been equaled.

MOUNTAINEERS, HILLBILLIES, AND ASSORTED HICKS

While the eastern slope of the Rockies is technically a part of the Mississippi Valley, it is the western slope of the Appalachians that, culturally speaking, constitutes the Valley's major mountainous region, extending southward from western Pennsylvania to northernmost Georgia and Alabama. Although there are small, hilly areas interwoven throughout the Midwest and high bluffs astride the upper Mississippi, these are not true mountains. The only challenge to the Appalachians' supremacy is the Ozark region of Missouri and northwest Arkansas, which constitutes a truly mountainous zone within the Valley outside of Appalachia. Because there are cultural links between the Appalachians and the Ozarks, artistic portrayals of the

117. The set of *To Kill A Mockingbird* is discussed in the special features of the DVD, with mention of the dangers of trying to film the movie on location amid early 1960s civil rights turmoil.

Mississippi Valley's mountain people often combine Ozark with Appalachian caricatures.[118]

The mountains have inspired numerous portrayals in high and low culture. Aaron Copland's composition for chamber orchestra, *Appalachian Spring*, was written in 1944 to accompany a ballet performed by Martha Graham's dance troupe; the title was taken from a poem by Hart Crane. Like many of Copland's works, *Appalachian Spring* is influenced by American folk music. Harold Abbey also turned to Appalachian music as a basis of his masterful *Four Mountain Carols*. Yet the major artistic works inspired by Appalachia are literary and tied to popular culture expressions in published folk humor and, in the twentieth century, radio, movie, and television portrayals. Surveying Appalachian literature, two distinct character types emerge—the mountaineer and the hillbilly.[119]

The mountaineer folk hero type originates in tales about the historic Daniel Boone and Appalachian long hunters. These celebratory stories migrated from word of mouth to southwestern newspaper and almanac literature, and they were utilized by James Fenimore Cooper for *The Last of the Mohicans* (1826) and its prequels and sequels set in the upper Appalachians of New York and western Pennsylvania. As the nineteenth century waned, and as we shall see below, the Tennessee author Mary Noilles Murfree formalized the mountaineer character later used by twentieth-century portrayers of Sergeant Alvin York and other mountaineer heroes of movies and television.[120]

The mountaineer's alter ego is the hillbilly, a less savory character based on oral tales and historic Appalachian travelers' accounts. Unlike mountaineers, hillbillies are portrayed as isolated misfits whose behavior, though occasionally humorous,

118. For Mississippi Valley mountain geography, see prolog, this work.

119. Neil Butterworth, *The Music of Aaron Copland* (Gloucester, U.K., 1985), 99–101. An important alternate analysis of hillbilly movies is J. W. Williamson, *Hillbillyland: What the Movies Did to the Mountains and What the Mountains Did to the Movies* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1995).

120. Henry D. Shapiro, *Appalachia on Our Mind: The Southern Mountains and Mountaineers in the American Consciousness, 1870–1920* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1978), 18–26. For Boone, Cooper, and southwestern literature, see chapters 1 and 2, this work.

reflects poverty, laziness, ignorance, and violent ways. The term "hillbilly" is relatively modern and was used by the Baltimore journalist H. L. Mencken in his sardonic coverage of Tennessee's Scopes Monkey Trial (1925). Descendants of the Alligator Horse, early hillbilly characters appeared in the southwestern literature of Hardin E. Taliaferro (1811–75). A minister who grew up near Mount Airy, North Carolina, Taliaferro portrayed mountain folk in *Fischer's River (North Carolina) Scenes and Characters* (1859) with bemused tolerance, though his depictions occasionally turned grim. Some of *Fischer's River*'s ill-bred mountain folk, Taliaferro writes, kept "their thumb-nails oiled and trimmed as sharp as cat's claws. Ask them why, they would reply, 'To feel fur a feller's eye-strings, and make him tell the news.'" [121]

George Washington Harris was a contemporary of Taliaferro and the author of numerous 1840s and '50s newspaper and almanac stories published as *Sut Lovingood: Yarns Spun by a Nat'ral Born Durn'd Fool* (1867). A Tennessee postmaster and steamboat pilot turned author, Harris created Sut as a humorous character with some bad habits. Although Sut wished he "cud read and write jis' a littil" he resolved "ove all [people] the worild has tu contend wif, the edicated wuns am the worst." Nor did Sut like government officials, and he carries on a running battle with his nemesis, Sheriff Dolton. Although "Sherifs am orful 'spectabil peopil [I] never seed the 'spectabil part myself." "No country … kin ever 'lect me to sell out widders' plunder ur poor men's co'n."[122]

Though nineteenth-century readers chuckled at, and lived vicariously through, the Sut Lovingood yarns, some twentieth-century Americans found hillbilly characters offensive and threatening. The 1925 Scopes Monkey Trial in Dayton, Tennessee—an infamous clash between evolutionists and

121. Shapiro, *Appalachia on Our Mind,* 18-26; Hardin E. Taliaferro, *The Humor of H. E. Taliaferro,* ed. Raymond C. Curtis (Knoxville, Tenn., 1987); Dickson A. Bruce, *Violence and Culture in the Antebellum South* (Austin, Texas, 1979), 228–29 (qtn.).

122. George Washington Harris, *Sut Lovingood's Yarns,* ed. Sylvia E. Bowman (1867; repr. New Haven, Conn., 1966), 25–26, 175. Sut is referring to the sheriff confiscating debtors' property to pay creditors. See also James H. Justus, *Fetching the Old Southwest: Humorous Writing from Longstreet to Twain* (Columbia, Mo., 2004), 213, 542, 553, 557–65.

creationists—became grist for hillbilly art in the popular movie *Inherit the Wind* (1960). The historic trial pitted the Democrat orator and fundamentalist Christian William Jennings Bryan against Clarence Darrow, with the caustic atheist Baltimore newspaperman H. L. Mencken reporting to the nation about Tennessee's ignorant "hillbillies" and the "Boobocracy." Darrow defended John Scopes, a Dayton high school biology teacher who had been arrested for teaching Charles Darwin's evolutionary theory despite a Tennessee law forbidding the teaching of "any theory that denies the story of Divine Creation of Man as taught in the Bible." As producer and director, Stanley Kramer adapted the Jerome Lawrence and Robert Lee play into a long (127-minute) black-and-white United Artists movie set in fictitious Hillsboro, Tennessee (Dayton), with Dick York as Bertram T. Cates (Scopes), Spencer Tracy as Henry Drummond (Darrow), Fredric March as Matthew Harrison Brady (Bryan), Gene Kelly as E. K. Hornbeck (Mencken), and Harry Morgan as the presiding judge Mel Coffey. To supplement the historic plot Kramer invents the Bible-thumping Reverend Jeremiah Brown (Claude Akins), whose daughter Rachel (Donna Anderson) is Scopes's fiancée; Florence Eldridge plays Brady's wife Sarah, who supposedly has a lifelong friendship with Drummond.[123]

Inherit the Wind's hillbillies appear in the anti-evolution crowds that gather for the trial and in the Reverend Brown's fire-and-brimstone camp meeting sermon. At one point, the camera focuses on a chimpanzee wearing a straw hat and bib overalls, an inexplicable part of Kramer's attempt to portray the carnival atmosphere of the trial. On several occasions Kramer attaches Ku Klux Klan motifs to the crowd via flaming torches and robes, and Hornbeck mugs dressed in a Ku Klux Klan hood. The rhythmic, traditional hymn "Gimme That Old Time Religion" is played without syncopation as a slow dirge underneath the movie's opening credits and in more lively renditions thereafter. *Inherit*

123. Stanley Kramer, dir., *Inherit the Wind* (1960; repr. MGM, 2001), DVD. As above, my analysis is based almost exclusively on my viewing of the movie. For a historic account of the Scopes trial, see George E. Webb, *The Evolution Controversy in America* (Lexington, Ky., 2002), 84–93, passim.

the Wind's depiction of actual courtroom procedure is absurdly constructed so that the talented March and Tracy can give long speeches and make humorous asides throughout the movie's trial scenes. The crescendo loosely reflects the historic incident of Darrow interrogating, and embarrassing, Bryan in pointed questions about his belief in biblical miracles—Jonah and the whale, the Red Sea's parting, original sin, and of course the Genesis story of creation. But Stanley Kramer is heavy-handed and the *Inherit the Wind* script is overdrawn. "Are you looking for a nice, clean place to stay?" a townswoman asks Hornbeck, who replies, "Madam, I had a nice clean place to stay… and I left it, to come here." "That remark is an insult to this entire community," the prosecution at one point informs Drummond, who replies, "And this community is an insult to the world."[124]

Inherit the Wind ends, more or less, like the historic 1925 trial, with Cates (Scopes) convicted but the judge levying only a $100 fine. Stanley Kramer elects to have Brady immediately die on the courtroom floor in the middle of yet another bombastic speech (Bryan did die five days after the trial). Then Kramer tries to salvage his overwrought movie through a thoughtful closing speech by Drummond, who points to Brady's historic contributions and the sincerity of his beliefs. This is a speech that belies the courtroom grilling Drummond has just given Brady and everything the movie viewer has seen thus far.[125]

Viewers received a more artful and nuanced, but equally negative, movie portrayal of ignorant mountain folk with the release *Deliverance* (1972). John Boorman directed the adaptation of James Dickey's novel set on the Chatooga River in the Georgia Appalachians (near Clayton, in Reuben County). Dickey's *Deliverance* screenplay is built on tensions between modernity and tradition, city and country folk, and civilization and wild nature; four Atlanta friends on a river canoeing trip represent the range of that spectrum. Lewis (Burt Reynolds) is the macho leader of this expedition of city men who seek to experience the Cahulawassee River wilderness before a power company's

124. *Inherit the Wind*.
125. Ibid.

hydroelectric dam transforms the landscape. While his friends Bobby (Ned Beatty) and Drew (Ronny Cox) are soft and citified, Ed (Jon Voight) is torn between his love for the dangerous wilderness and his family's comfortable urban lifestyle. Reynolds is perfect in the role of Lewis, denouncing the "rape [of] this whole goddamn landscape … the last wild, unpolluted, unfucked up river in the South." As his salty language attests, Lewis is no peaceful environmentalist and, like Ed, has brought a bow and hunting arrows along on the river trip. As it turns out, the men will be forced to use their weapons on humans, not animals.[126]

The four friends immediately meet some "pretty rough lookin' hillbillies" near their river launch, but a musical exchange between Drew on guitar and a mountain boy picking the banjo softens the specter of rural poverty while producing *Deliverance*'s signature theme song, "Dueling Banjos." The hillbillies (sometimes they are called mountain men) hate the hydro dam (and the power company that is forcing them off their land) as much as Lewis, but they do not see the "city boy" outsiders as allies or kindred spirits. "What the hell you wanna go fuck around with that river for?" one mountain man taunts Lewis, who replies "Because it's there." "It's there all right," the man snaps. "You get in and can't get out, you're gonna wish it *wasn't* there." The four launch their two canoes into the wild river, spending their first night camped in what seems to them a veritable Garden of Eden. But the wilderness is also home to wild men who do the work of the devil.[127]

The next day, as they paddle downstream, two hillbillies capture Bobby and Ed and hold them at gunpoint while one rapes Bobby in a violent anal sex act. Just as the second man prepares to force Ed to perform fellatio, Lewis suddenly appears and kills the rapist in gruesome style, shooting an arrow completely through his chest. Lewis insists, and the three friends

126. John Boorman, dir., *Deliverance* (1972; repr. Warner Brothers, 2007), DVD. See James Dickey, *Deliverance* (Boston, Mass., 1970) and Zachary J. Lechner, *The South of the Mind: American Imaginings of White Southernness, 1960–1980* (Athens, Ga., 2018), 106–11.

127. *Deliverance,* DVD.

reluctantly agree, they must bury the body and keep the murder a secret. But the second hillbilly has escaped to stalk them, and more wilderness horrors await. Capsizing the canoes in raging rapids, Drew drowns and Lewis severely breaks his leg. Ed rises to the occasion, stalking the stalker, killing him with bow and arrow, sinking his body in the Cahulawassee River, and leading Bobby and Lewis out of the wilderness. Although a criminal investigation follows, the hydroelectric dam will soon make a lake and bury the dead men forever. The sheriff (played in cameo by James Dickey) orders the trio home: "Don't ever do nothing like this again. Don't come back up here." Lewis's simple belief that progress is evil and nature is good has gone helter-skelter.[128]

Deliverance's portrayal of ignorant, violent hillbillies carries on an earlier tradition that continues to the present day. From the frightening hillbillies in the 1996 "Home" episode of television's *X-Files,* to the oversexed mountain folk who drug and capture Inman in Charles Frazier's novel *Cold Mountain* (1998), to the Harlan County, Kentucky, misfits pursued by U.S. Marshal Raylon Givins in the FOX television series *Justified* (2010), this character type remains especially popular among modern television and movie audiences. Debra Granik's *Winter's Bone* (2010) introduces methamphetamine addiction as a plot element in her gripping movie featuring Ree Dolly (Jennifer Lawrence) as a brave mountain girl fighting to save her family's Missouri Ozarks home. Ree's perseverance shows positive hillbilly qualities, and even *Deliverance* avoided a completely negative portrayal of hillbillies. The opening sequence with the banjo-playing boy is light-hearted, and the closing section, when Bobby and Ed are sheltered in a mountain lodge awaiting the arrival of the sheriff, shows generous and helpful mountain folk. There is room for the virtuous mountaineer in even the most disturbing of hillbilly portraits.[129]

128. Ibid.

129. *Deliverance,* DVD; Charles Frazier, *Cold Mountain* (New York, 1997), 208–25; *X-Files,* season 4, episode 2: "Home" (1996), DVD. Walter Hill, dir., *Southern Comfort* (1981; repr. MGM, 2001), DVD, serves up *Deliverance* in a Louisiana setting, with Cajun swamp hunters taking the hillbilly role. Thanks to Liam McCann and Keith Edgerton.

Turning to celebratory portrayals of noble mountaineers, modern movie and television depictions stem, as noted, from the late nineteenth-century short stories and novels of Mary Noilles Murfree. Murfree wrote under the pseudonym Charles Egbert Craddock during a time when both novels and women writers were viewed with suspicion. A well-heeled central Tennessean, she formed a romantic view of mountain folk during her family's summer holidays in the Great Smoky region of the southern Appalachians; she used the Smokies as a setting for her numerous short stories and novels, notably *In the Tennessee Mountains* (1884) and *In the "Stranger People's" Country* (1891). Murfree portrayed mountaineers as unspoiled children of nature—hardy, thrifty, innocent, and pious Christian folk. Mountaineers were contemporary ancestors, carrying on traditional ways in a modern, industrializing America. This is evident in Murfree's description of Budd Wray, a mountaineer hero of "Old Sledge at the Settlemint":

> He was perhaps twenty-three years of age, a man of great strength and stature, and there were lines about his lips and chin which indicated a corresponding development of a firm will and tenacity of purpose… There was an expression of settled melancholy on his face very usual with these mountaineers, reflected, perhaps, [in] the indefinable tinge of sadness that rests upon the Allegheny wilds, that hovers above the purpling mountain tops.[130]

Given this artistic context, the true story of Sergeant Alvin C. York of Tennessee was a moviemaker's dream come true. Born and raised near the village of Pall Mall, in Tennessee's remote upper Cumberland mountain region, Alvin York (1887-1964) was a farmer and devout member of the Church of Christ. Conscripted to fight in World War I, York did a lot of praying and soul-searching before deciding the necessity of halting German aggression far outweighed his conscientious objector and isolationist beliefs. A brave soldier and crack shot, York was

130. Charles Egbert Craddock [Mary Noilles Murfree], "A Play-in' of Old Sledge at the Settlemint," in *In the Tennessee Mountains* (Boston, Mass., 1884), 90 (qtn.); Craddock, *In the "Stranger People's" Country* (New York, 1891).

armed with a pistol and a rifle when he entered the Battle of the Argonne Forest in October 1918. He left the battlefield having *singlehandedly* killed twenty-five German soldiers, captured another one hundred thirty-two, and silenced thirty-five German machine guns. Awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor, Sergeant York arrived back in the United States a national hero, honored in a New York City ticker tape parade and in countless newspaper articles and the pages of the *Saturday Evening Post.* Yet York declined the lucrative commercial opportunities his fame brought, returning instead to his Pall Mall mountain home a humble man devoted to his family and the education and progress of his fellow upper Cumberland mountaineers. In March of 1940, however, York's desire to found and fund a local high school led him, somewhat reluctantly, to meet with Warner Brothers movie executives in Crossville, Tennessee. There, he agreed to serve as a paid consultant in making the feature-length movie titled *Sergeant York*.[131]

Alvin York's desire to build a school also combined with his concern over grave international developments. German aggressors had once again begun a world war, and President Franklin D. Roosevelt was working hard to persuade reluctant, isolationist Americans to enter the fray. Roosevelt was joined by Hollywood moviemakers, many of them Jews who foresaw the Nazi Holocaust. York's experience of having overcome his own pacifism and isolationist views made him naturally sympathetic, and thus *Sergeant York* has political as well as artistic significance. When the movie drew a huge national audience and garnered two Academy Awards, President Roosevelt was reportedly very happy.[132]

Sergeant York starred Gary Cooper as York and Joan Leslie as his wife, Gracie (York insisted his wife be played by an actress who neither drank nor smoked, a tall order that Warner Brothers somehow fulfilled). Walter Brennan played Rosier Pile, York's feisty Church of Christ minister and spiritual advisor. Howard

131. Michael E. Birdwell, *Celluloid Soldiers: Warner Brothers' Campaign against Nazism* (New York, 2000), 87–108.
132. Ibid., 2–4, 108–30.

Hawks filmed the movie in ninety days on a Hollywood soundstage replete with one hundred twenty-one trees and enough topsoil for a forty-foot mountain. Although the characters' old English accents defy belief, the movie's portrayal of other Appalachian folkways—food, dress, farming, rail-splitting, and telling of Daniel Boone tales—is accurate and entertaining. To buy land and marry Gracie, Alvin wins a shooting contest in the manner of Boone, Davy Crockett, and Mike Fink. He even gobbles like a turkey to trick the bird into showing its head so he can shoot it (he later uses the same trick to foil the Germans). Depiction of York's conversion to Christianity is pivotal, and comes with a lightning storm and a church full of enthusiastic believers singing "Gimme That Old Time Religion." Led by Pastor Pile (Brennan) in syncopated call and response, *Sergeant York's* version of the hymn is *much* more authentic than that rendered two decades later by *Inherit the Wind's* dour church folk. Deciding to "render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and unto God the things that are God's," Alvin York has become a soldier of God. Later asked if all the killing violates his religious beliefs, York tells his commander that he killed only to save lives:

> Well I'm as much agin' killi' as ever, sir. But it was this way, Colonel. When I started out, I felt just like you said, but when I hear them machine guns a-goin', and all them fellas are droppin' around me … I figured them guns was killin' hundreds, maybe thousands, and there weren't nothin' anybody could do, but to stop them guns. And that's what I done.[133]

Sergeant Alvin York remained humble upon his return, but his admirers sang his praises. In the movie, Pastor Pile exclaims, "Why, you're the *dang-swangdest hero* raised in these parts since Dan'l Boone and Andy Jackson!" Sergeant York's story resonated because he fit perfectly into American mythology. Early twentieth-century Americans saw the dominance of industrialization and modernity; a nation of farmers had become

133. Ibid., 117; Howard Hawks, *Sergeant York* (1940; repr. Warner Brothers, 2006), DVD.

urban and commercial. Americans enjoyed the fruits of their progress, yet they somehow yearned for the vanished agricultural world of their past—a world they believed was peopled by hard-working, humble, pious, family-centered, and patriotic common folk. Sergeant Alvin York fit that description, in his actual life and in their imaginations, yet he did so in the modern context of World War I and mechanized, modern warfare. Like Charles Lindbergh, another folk hero of the time, Sergeant York was a modern American who retained important traits of the old America, the America of "Dan'l Boone and Andy Jackson." York was thus a contemporary ancestor, a modern mountaineer carrying Appalachian traditions into the new century.[134]

Mid-twentieth-century Americans continued to enjoy movies, television shows, and comic strips that most often portrayed mountain people as affable hillbillies. At least one generation removed from the farm, modern Americans were drawn to stories and characters from an imagined American past, and hillbillies continued to fill the bill. From 1934 to 1977, the cartoonist Al Capp brought newspaper readers daily installments of the Ozark adventures of *Li'l Abner* and his Mammy, Pappy, and girlfriend Daisy Mae. In 1949, the first of ten *Ma and Pa Kettle* movies appeared, starring Marjorie Main and Percy Kilbride as a hillbilly couple who resided in neither the Ozarks nor Appalachia. *Ma and Pa Kettle* movies were based on *The Egg and I* (1947), Betty MacDonald's novel set in Washington State's Olympic Mountains, and hillbilly stereotypes probably motivated moviemakers to invent a Mississippi Valley connection for Ma and Pa in *The Kettles in the Ozarks* (1956). Meanwhile, television's first weekly hillbilly comedy starred *Sergeant York*'s Walter Brennan as Grandpappy Amos McCoy in *The Real McCoys* (1957), the first of several situation comedies

134. For contemporary ancestors, see William Goodell Frost, "Our Contemporary Ancestors in the Southern Mountains," *Atlantic Monthly* 83 (March 1899), 311–20; David D. Lee, *Sergeant York: An American Hero* (Lexington, Ky., 1985); John William Ward, "The Meaning of Charles Lindbergh's Flight," *American Quarterly* 10 (Spring 1958), 3–16; and Michael Allen, *Rodeo Cowboys in the North American Imagination* (Reno, Nev., 1998), 7–8, 208–10.

that put country folk in the city to produce laughter while teaching simple lessons. "From West Virginny they came to stay, in sunny Cali-forn-i-a," the show's theme song explained, and "Week after week, you're gonna be showed, another human episode," which often revolved around the McCoy family solving modern problems with traditional folk wisdom and values. *The Real McCoys* and related shows continued the gradual move away from dumb hillbilly stereotypes in that they all featured one or more virtuous mountaineer characters who possessed both humor and common sense.[135]

Right on the heels of *The Real McCoys* came *The Beverly Hillbillies* (1962–71), a raucous hit television show about Tennessee's Clampett family—Jed (played by Buddy Ebsen, Davy Crockett's 1955–56 movie buddy Georgie Russell), Granny (Irene Ryan), daughter Ellie Mae (Donna Douglas), and nephew Jethro Bodine (Max Baer). *The Beverly Hillbillies* also boasted an introductory song, sung by Jerry Scoggins, that was rerecorded and became a hit record for the Nashville bluegrass musicians Lester Flatt and Earl Scruggs. The song explains the show's premise: "Let me tell you a story 'bout a man named Jed, a poor mountaineer barely kept his family fed / Then one day he was shootin' at some food, and up from the ground came a' bubblin' crude. Oil that is." Finding himself fabulously wealthy, Jed Clampett decides that "Californy is the place [they] oughta be / So they loaded up the truck and they moved to Beverly. Hills that is / Swimmin' pools, movie stars."[136]

There ensued nine years of adventures, the best of which used comedy to contrast the Clampetts' Appalachian folkways with the frenetic pace of 1960s-era Californians and the

135. Li'l Abner, http://www.lil-abner.com, accessed March 16, 2012; Betty MacDonald, *The Egg and I* (1947; repr. New York, 1987). Richard Crenna played Luke McCoy. See also Williamson, *Hillbillyland,* 41, 53–57, 274.

136. This is largely based on my own viewing over the past fifty years. See also Williamson, *Hillbillyland,* 56, 274, and Doris Schroeder, *The Beverly Hillbillies: The Saga of Wildcat Creek* (Racine, Wisc., 1963). Flatt and Scruggs appeared on the show but were not regular cast members. Thanks to Larry Whiteaker, who informs me that although the Clampetts are supposed to be Tennesseans, sloppy scriptwriters peppered the dialog with references to the Missouri Ozarks.

moneygrubbing ways of their neighbor and financial advisor, Milburn Drysdale (Raymond Bailey). As the Clampetts confront modernity, Granny cooks up possum dishes and remedies and yearns for home, Jed seeks a simple life around their mansion's "*ce*ment pond" (swimming pool), and Ellie Mae salves homesickness by raising a zoo of stray critters. The only content member of the family is dimwitted hillbilly Jethro, who grows to love Beverly Hill's plush lifestyle as he attends school (fifth grade in his mid-20s!) and relentlessly seeks girlfriends and a career.[137]

Thus, as mid-1960s and 1970s Americans spent their days pondering countercultural social change, the civil rights revolution, and Vietnam War protest, they retreated to their television sets each week for therapeutic visits with the McCoys, Clampetts, and several other rural families in spinoff shows like *Green Acres* and *Petticoat Junction.* The latter highlighted clownish hillbilly behavior and lacked an identifiable Mississippi Valley locale, in contrast with *The Andy Griffith Show* (1960–68, see below) and *The Waltons* (1972–82), a popular mountaineer show that won multiple Emmys for its cast and crew. *The Waltons* was based on a memoir by Earl Hammer, Jr., that was made into a 1963 Walt Disney movie, *Spencer's Mountain,* and a 1971 television pilot, *The Homecoming: A Christmas Story,* costarring Patricia Neal as Olivia Walton. The pilot set a dramatic standard *The Waltons* aspired to for a decade. Narrated in first person by the family's oldest child, John Boy Walton (Richard Thomas), an aspiring writer, *The Homecoming* is set in Depression-era Jefferson County, in Virginia's Blue Ridge Mountains. It is Christmas Eve, and the close-knit Walton family (mother, grandparents, and seven children plus their dog, Reckless) are at their Walton's Mountain home. The family nervously awaits the return of John (Ralph Waite), who has been forced to hitchhike over hazardous, snowy mountain roads from his sawmill job in a distant town. After a long and stressful night, and scenes and adventures featuring family members and idiosyncratic neighbors, John Walton at last returns home with Christmas

137. This is based on my viewing of numerous televised *Beverly Hillbillies* episodes.

gifts, including a Big Chief paper tablet for his writer son and a promise to his wife Olivia never to leave their beloved Walton's Mountain again.[138]

The most famous of the television mountaineers is Andy Griffith, a North Carolinian whose singing and acting career spanned six decades. Griffith's first big show business break came with his portrayal of the affable, naïve hillbilly Private Will Stockdale in *No Time for Sergeants* (1955–57). He had played a range of Appalachian types before developing the character of Sheriff Andy Taylor of Mayberry, North Carolina, in television's long-running *The Andy Griffith Show*. While Griffith's initial roles, including the first season of *The Andy Griffith Show*, leaned heavily towards modified hillbilly portrayals, he eventually settled into a modernized version of the noble mountaineer persona, playing off the talented cast of *The Andy Griffith Show* regulars. The length and range of Andy Griffith's career have made him an important American actor and a direct mythic descendant of Daniel Boone by way of Sergeant Alvin York.[139]

On June 1, 1926, Andy Griffith was born Andy Samuel Griffith, the only child of Geneva and Carl Lee Griffith, in the small Appalachian town of Mount Airy, North Carolina. A big fish in a small pond, he loved to tell stories and perform in school and church plays. He was inspired to play trombone after seeing *Birth of the Blues* (1941) at the local theater, and he also played guitar and sang in the church choir. Griffith graduated from Mount Airy High School in 1944 and enrolled at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Deeply religious, he aimed to study for the ministry, but his love of performing naturally led him into college plays and musicals, and in 1949 he graduated with a bachelor of arts degree in music. Andy taught music and

138. Delmer Daves, dir., *Spencer's Mountain* (1963; repr. Warner Brothers, 2003), DVD; Fielder Cook, dir., *The Homecoming: A Christmas Story* (1971; repr. Paramount, 2003), DVD. Patricia Neal appeared only in the pilot; Michael Learned played Olivia in the television series.

139. There is no Griffith autobiography or biography. Richard Kelly, *The Andy Griffith Show* (1981; repr. Winston-Salem, N.C., 2002) is a thorough and analytical study. See also Daniel de Vise, *Andy and Don: The Making of a Friendship and a Classic American TV Show* (New York, 2015); Lechner, *The South of the Mind,* 40–46; and Ron Howard and Clint Howard, *The Boys: A Memoir of Hollywood and Family* (New York, 2021), 68–114.

drama at Goldsboro (N.C.) High School from 1949 to 1952 while continuing to act in the annual Roanoke Island summer pageant, *The Lost Colony,* where he costarred alongside his first wife, Barbara Edwards. *The Lost Colony* was a historic drama about the 1585 founding and demise of Roanoke, and from 1946 to 1952 Griffith played nearly every role, including Sir Walter Raleigh.[140]

Throughout this time Andy and Barbara had been developing a traveling stage show—"The Andy Griffith Show"—combining Andy's storytelling with folk poetry, playful "sermons," guitar-picking, and country and gospel songs. Griffith's stories took country comedy well beyond the jokes and one-liners of accomplished Grand Ole Opry comics like Rod Brasfield and Minnie Pearl. His stories, five to fifteen minutes in length and spoken in a hillbilly accent, often played with the tension of high and low art, reflecting Griffith's own path from Mount Airy to Chapel Hill. Mining his formal university training, he gave the audience history lessons on Columbus's discovery of America and Marc Anthony and Cleopatra, and he delivered hilarious plot summaries of *Romeo and Juliet, Swan Lake,* and *Carmen*.[141]

In his stories, Andy Griffith especially enjoyed botching Latin translations (Caesar's profession of love for Cleopatra thus becomes "As sure as vine twines 'round the stump / You are my darlin' sugar lump") and European language pronunciations (*Carmen*'s Don Jose becomes Don Hosey). He pivots his entire *Swan Lake* routine around mispronunciations and mistranslations of the French ballet movements. When dying Caesar cries out, "Et tu, Brute?" Brutus responds, "Yeah, me too!" Griffith begins his outrageous rendering of *Carmen,* "Now, I know you all say opera ain't nothin' but hollerin'. And it *ain't*. But, well, it's *high class* hollerin'." In *Romeo and Juliet,* Griffith explains, Juliet calls out, "Romeo, Romeo, wherefore art thou Romeo? And he popped up and said 'I'm right 'chere!'" Indeed, Romeo is so

140. Exhibit narrative, Andy Griffith Museum, Mount Airy, North Carolina, visited March 10, 2012. Many thanks to the museum staff and Mount Airy community for their loving preservation of Andy Griffith's story.

141. Kelly, *Andy Griffith,* 19; Andy Griffith, *The Wit and Wisdom of Andy Griffith,* 1997, Capitol Records, CD, EMI-Capitol 72438-19402-2-8.

smitten with Juliet, "he give a soliloquy right there. He did. And it wasn't about bein' or not bein', it was about doin' or not doin'. And, well, the do's won out over the don'ts!"[142]

Andy Griffith's most famous monolog was a ten-minute satire of college football. In a country twang, Griffith plays an earnest but naïve member of a traveling gospel troupe witnessing his first-ever football game. The routine's hook is the friendly yokel's awe over what most Americans consider to be a normal sporting event, but one that, upon reflection, does indeed possess unusual (and violent) traits. This was ambitious hillbilly humor. Griffith recorded "What It Was, Was Football" on Colonial Records in 1953, and the New York music producer Richard Linke heard it on his car radio while traveling through the South. Intrigued by Griffith's innovative rural humor, Linke became his agent and booked him for a spot on the *Ed Sullivan Show.* He next signed Griffith to a one-hour television performance in the *United States Steel Hour's* March 15, 1955, debut of *No Time for Sergeants.* Adapted from Mac Hymans's 1954 novel, *No Time for Sergeants* launched Andy Griffith into stardom as it evolved from television show to Broadway play to motion picture, all in the short span of two years.[143]

Less than fifteen years after Americans' grave experiences in World War II and the Korean War, moviegoers thirsted for the lighthearted portrayal of peacetime military life of *No Time for Sergeants*. Borrowing a cue from *Sergeant York,* Will Stockdale (Griffith) is a Georgia hillbilly draft dodger conscripted into the U.S. Army Air Corps. Though dubbed a "big dang donkey," Will is in fact a strong, affable, and well-intentioned fellow, eager to serve his country (his father hid the conscription letters). Treated with derision and suspicion by his drill sergeant, Orville King (Myron McCormick), and all authority figures he encounters, Will nevertheless stays upbeat, makes friends with fiery Private

142. "Andy and Cleopatra," "Romeo and Juliet" (parts 1 & 2), "The Discovery of America," "Swan Lake," and "Opera Carmen," in Griffith, *Wit and Wisdom*.

143. Kelly, *Andy Griffith Show,* 19; "What It Was, Was Football," Griffith, *The Wit and Wisdom*. "What is Was, Was Football" is discussed in chapter 7, this work.

Ben Whitledge (Nick Adams), and successfully navigates a series of boot camp adventures.[144]

To utilize Griffith's storytelling skill, the director Mervyn LeRoy uses Will Stockdale's voice to narrate the movie's introduction, synopses, and transitions, and Will's onscreen character occasionally makes eye contact with the movie audience. In his many adventures, Will serves as PLO (permanent latrine orderly), survives a battery of army tests (one administered by Corporal Brown, played by the actor Don Knotts, of Morgantown, West Virginia), stands up to the platoon bully, and then drinks him and Sergeant King under the table at the Purple Grotto tavern. The latter scene ends with the obligatory barroom brawl, and Will good-naturedly triumphs. For the grand finale, Will and Ben and their air crew unwittingly fly into an atomic testing site and, like Tom Sawyer, live to see their own memorial service. Will and Ben are decorated heroes, and Sergeant King is completely flummoxed by the naïve, good-natured hillbilly who adores him, and toasts, "To Sergeant King! The best *dang* Sergeant there is in the whole *dang* Air Force!" Most important, by movie's end Andy Griffith has created a new kind of Appalachian hero, one whose character is located somewhere between the mountaineer and the hillbilly. Will Stockdale is not quite noble, but he has a good heart, he wins our affection, and he makes us laugh.[145]

The success of *No Time for Sergeants* combined with Griffith's comedy recordings' popularity to propel him on a summer Florida concert tour of the "Andy Griffith Show," featuring the country musician Ferlin Husky (himself a hillbilly actor) and a promising young Memphis singer named Elvis Presley. *No Time for Sergeants* garnered Griffith a Tony Award nomination and he later earned a Grammy nomination for his comedy recordings.

144. Mac Hyman, *No Time for Sergeants* (1954; repr. Baton Rouge, La., 1995); Hyman, *No Time for Sergeants* [adapted theater script] (New York, 1956). All my description and quotes are from the movie version: Mervyn LeRoy, dir., *No Time for Sergeants* (1957), https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TMtjDddYSnk, accessed Jan. 21, 2018. The 1955 televised *United States Steel Hour*'s rendition is on *The Golden Age of Television* (Los Angeles, 2009), DVD.

145. *No Time for Sergeants* (1957).

This all led to Elia Kazan casting him opposite the Kentuckian Patricia Neal as Larry "Lonesome" Rhodes in the riveting 1957 movie drama *A Face in the Crowd,* discussed above. It is important to note that although Griffith's Lonesome Rhodes is a rural character, he is no Will Stockdale. Lonesome is a mean-spirited con man who parlays his folksy charm into national celebrity status and great political power, only to see it collapse because of his selfishness. Griffith's powerful portrayal of the diabolical Rhodes in *A Face in the Crowd* shows the actor's great breadth.[146]

At this point, Andy Griffith faced two clear career paths. His work in *A Face in the Crowd* had made it possible for him to focus on a movie and stage career as a dramatic actor and leading man. But his *No Time for Sergeants* role kept him on the comedy acting career path, playing congenial storytelling, singing hillbilly characters on stage, film, and television. The latter goal was the same he had pursued since the early 1950s; *A Face in the Crowd* was a significant detour. After a brief return to Broadway in 1959 (and another Tony nomination for *Destry Rides Again),* Griffith got an opportunity to star in a weekly Columbia Broadcasting System (CBS) television show that he would help create and sustain, a show about a sheriff named Andy Taylor in the imaginary North Carolina Appalachian town of Mayberry. After airing a 1960 pilot episode on the *Danny Thomas Show, The Andy Griffith Show* debuted in the fall of 1960, running eight seasons, two hundred forty-nine episodes, and garnering dozens of Emmys for its cast and crew. Initially, Griffith played Sheriff Andy Taylor as a hillbilly, but he soon transitioned to a nuanced modern mountaineer character in performances that made him one of America's most beloved television actors.[147]

The Andy Griffith Show (*TAGS*) was a product of Griffith's partnership with several talented individuals, most notably Aaron Ruben (executive producer and writer), Sheldon Leonard (producer), Richard Linke (associate producer), Bob Sweeney (director), and a stable of writers that included Harvey Bullock,

146. Exhibit narrative, Andy Griffith Museum; *A Face in the Crowd* (1957), DVD, is discussed with movie southerns, above; Elia Kazan, *A Life*, 566–99.

147. Kelly, *The Andy Griffith Show,* 3, 19.

Everett Greenbaum, and Jim Fritzell. *TAGS* was a one-camera show—filmed like a movie using different sets, not in front of a live audience like *I Love Lucy* or the *Honeymooners. TAGS* was produced at Desilu Studios in Los Angeles, where the seasoned crew filmed the interior shots, moving to their Culver City lot to film Mayberry downtown exteriors and the Taylor family neighborhood; they filmed the Appalachian mountain scenes, including Andy and Opie's famed fishing hole introduction, in the Los Angeles foothills at nearby Franklin Canyon Reservoir.[148]

The story of Mayberry was very generally tied to Griffith's own experiences growing up in Mount Airy, North Carolina, a small town near the crest of the Appalachians and the Cumberland Gap. Many *TAGS* character names and place names (Ellie, Wally, Floyd, Emmett, Mount Pilot, Siler City, etc.) were of Mount Airy origin. *TAGS* boasted a large cast and recurrent guest players. Griffith starred as widowed Sheriff Andrew Jackson Taylor alongside his son Opie (Ronny Howard), Aunt Bea (Frances Bavier), Deputy Barney Fife (Don Knotts), the barber Floyd Lawson (Howard McNear), the filling station attendant Gomer Pyle (Jim Nabors), Gomer's cousin Goober (George Lindsey), Andy's and Barney's girlfriends Ellie Walker (Elinor Donahue), Helen Crump (Aneta Corsaut), and Thelma Lou (Betty Lynn), and a score of recurring characters, the most famous of which were the town drunk Otis Campbell (Hal Smith), the county clerk Howard Sprague (Jack Dodson), and the hillbillies Ernest T. Bass (Howard Morris) and the Darling family (Denver Pyle, Maggie Peterson, and the Dillards, a respected Ozarks bluegrass quartet). Two well-known characters no one ever saw were Sarah the telephone operator and Juanita, the waitress at the Bluebird Diner.[149]

148. Kelly, *Andy Griffith Show,* 24–35. In the discussion below I have relied on my fifty-plus years viewing *The Andy Griffith Show,* seasons 1–5 (1960–64; repr. Paramount, 2007), DVD, and Kelly's excellent study. Episodes are cited in numbered order of telecast, following Kelly, *Andy Griffith Show,* 227–80. Kenneth MacKinnon's *Hollywood's Small Towns: An Introduction to the American Small Town Movie* (Meutchen, N.J., 1984) does not discuss Mayberry but surveys genres and variations. The Franklin Canyon locale, while as authentic as possible given southern California's geography, was too dry to truly replicate North Carolina.

149. Kelly, *Andy Griffith Show,* 39–56. Elinore Donahue played Andy's girlfriend Ellie for season

Professor Richard Kelly of the University of Tennessee ascribes the success of *TAGS* to its unique blending of situation comedy with domestic comedy. While the former is based mainly on humorous occurrences with complications the characters must resolve, the latter emphasizes a sense of place and development of the characters' unique personalities. The *TAGS* portrait of Mayberry was both comforting and compelling, and the name Mayberry became (and remains) a symbolic American household word. *TAGS* certainly boasted a wealth of talented character actors, but the show's rapid ascent can be directly tied to Don Knotts's brilliant portrayal of Deputy Barney Fife, a role that won him five Emmys.[150]

Knotts played Deputy Fife as a loyal and good-natured man who was also nervous and childlike, a man whose insecurities (and his constant overcompensating for them) simultaneously invited laughter and empathy from Sheriff Taylor and the audience. None of this was planned; both Griffith and Knotts recall the Fife character coalesced slowly during the first season. But in playing opposite Knotts, Andy Griffith had to make a major adjustment. Because of the acclaim for *No Time for Sergeants,* Griffith naturally assumed he should play Sheriff Andy Taylor like the hillbilly Will Stockdale; although Andy's demeanor had to be more dignified than Will's (he was, after all, the county sheriff), during season 1 he often spoke and acted like a hillbilly clown. However, as Griffith came to realize the comic talent of his supporting cast, and Don Knotts's star power, he reportedly told Sheldon Leonard, "My God, I just realized that I'm the straight man. I'm playing straight to these kooks around me." Griffith's shift is obvious to anyone who watches and compares seasons 1 and 2 of the *Andy Griffith Show* (Griffith later confessed, "I find it hard to look at the first year's show on reruns"). By season 2 he has changed to a much more mature

1, replaced by Sue Ann Langdon (Mary the county nurse) in season 2, and, finally, Aneta Corsaut as Miss Crump in season 3. One hundred miles east of the Cumberland Gap, the streams of Mount Airy, North Carolina, run to the Atlantic and so Mount Airy is, technically speaking, not a Mississippi Valley town. Culturally, however, it is very much a part of the Mississippi Valley.

150. Kelly, *Andy Griffith Show,* 75, 80–81, passim.

character; Sheriff Taylor is still thoroughly southern, but he now acts like a leading man. Leonard called Griffith's new persona "Lincolnesque," an apt term if one remembers Lincoln was closely tied, in history and myth, to the frontier mystique of Daniel Boone. Sheriff Andrew Jackson Taylor remained an Appalachian mountain man, but he had evolved from hillbilly to mountaineer.[151]

Fans divide eight years of *TAGS* episodes into the black–and-white (1960-64) and color (1964-68) periods. This division is apt because Don Knotts departed at the end of season 4, just before the show began filming in color. All critics agree the black-and-white episodes are the best, due in large part to Knotts's performances. A very brief review of a few of those black-and-white shows reveals the range and strengths of the series. "The New Housekeeper" led off as Aunt Bea moves to Mayberry to help widowed Andy raise Opie, and, despite Opie's initial doubts, a bond of love forms among the three. Because Andy Taylor was a sheriff, there were many crime and punishment episodes, but the *TAGS* treatment was unique. Andy seldom carried or used a weapon (the only gunshots on the show came from Barney misfiring the *one* bullet Andy rationed him!), but a couple times each year desperate criminals passed through Mayberry and the pair had to round them up. This always involved overenthusiastic Barney fouling things up, and Andy setting things straight while simultaneously allowing Barney to save face or even be the hero. "The Manhunt," "High Noon in Mayberry," "Jailbreak," "Lawman Barney," "The Big House," and several more episodes fit this pattern, but "Convicts at Large" is the most outrageous. In this show, Barney and the barber Floyd Lawson are held hostage in a mountain cabin by three escaped women convicts, and Barney must use his powers of seduction to win the day. Meanwhile, Floyd has made himself at home and seems perfectly satisfied with the new living arrangements![152]

151. Kelly, *Andy Griffith Show,* 39–41, 81; *The Andy Griffith Show*, DVD, seasons 1 and 2. Interestingly, Griffith returned to the hillbilly persona in each week's commercials for Jello, Post Cereal, etc., which he punctuated with "It's mmmmm *good!* I 'preciate it, and good *night!*"

"Here Come the Darlings," the first of the hillbilly family's several *TAGS* appearances, finds the Darlings in town to meet man-hungry Charlene's fiancé Dud, just home from the army. The Darling episodes show how *TAGS* incorporated American music (bluegrass, folk, and gospel) into plotlines, as Andy always sings and plays with these comic, talented hicks from the sticks. There is also singing in "Christmas Story," the enjoyable season 1 adaptation of Charles Dickens's *Christmas Carol.* Here, Mayberry's own Scrooge is the grumpy businessman Ben Weaver, who forces Andy to jail a mountain moonshiner on Christmas Eve, tearing him away from his wife and children. However, Andy, Ellie, Barney, Aunt Bea, and Opie make things right by moving into the jail themselves to throw a big Christmas Eve dinner for the moonshiner and his family. Ben Weaver looks on wistfully as the revelers sing "Away in the Manger," the classic carol in which "the little Lord Jesus lay down his sweet head." Ben catches the Christmas spirit himself, passes out presents, and then passes out himself from too much moonshine.[153]

"Andy Discovers America" and "Opie the Birdman" both feature Ronny Howard, the child actor whose career first took off in *The Music Man.* "Andy Discovers America" finds Opie in big trouble with his new teacher, Miss Crump, because he "hates history." Andy also angers Miss Crump and tries to make amends. He organizes Opie and his friends into the Mayberry Minutemen history troop, whetting their interest by telling them an elaborate tale about the real Revolutionary War Minutemen. Barney has also been coaching the boys, but of course he is ignorant of American history and will not admit it. When Andy suggests the boys form a history troop, excited Barney interjects, "Will you help us?!" In the end, the boys learn to love history, Miss Crump is delighted, Andy has a new girlfriend, and Barney

152. "The New Housekeeper" (episode 1), "The Manhunt" (episode 2), "High Noon in Mayberry" (episode 80), "Jailbreak" (episode 50), "Lawman Barney" (episode 70), "The Big House" (episode 95), and "Convicts at Large" (episode 74), in Kelly, *Andy Griffith Show,* 230, 240, 244–46, 249, passim, and *The Andy Griffith Show*, DVD, seasons 1, 2, and 3.

153. "The Darlings Are Coming" (episode 88) and "Christmas Story" (episode 11), in Kelly, *Andy Griffith Show,* 247, 232, passim; *The Andy Griffith Show*, DVD, seasons 1 and 3; The Dillards, *The Dillards: There Is a Time (1963–70),* 1991, Vanguard, VCD 131/32, CD.

is left trying to understand the Emancipation Proclamation. "Opie the Birdman" is a much more serious story. Ignoring his father's strict instructions for using his new slingshot, Opie accidentally kills a mother bird nesting in a tree in the Taylors' yard. Andy shames Opie, ordering him to listen to "them young birds chirping for their momma that's never coming back." Then, with Andy's support, Opie raises the orphaned chicks (he names them Winkin', Blinkin', and Nod) to atone for his mistake. The episode ends with Opie freeing the matured birds out his bedroom window. When Opie remarks on how empty their cage looks, Andy replies, "But don't the trees sound nice and full."[154]

Although *The Andy Griffith Show* is seen by many as the highlight of Griffith's long career, it was in fact preceded and followed by accomplishments significant enough to constitute several careers. Following *TAGS,* and after a few stumbles, Griffith parlayed a television movie role in *Diary of a Perfect Murder* (1986) into *Matlock,* a television series that ran from 1986 to 1995 in one hundred seventy-seven episodes. A widowed defense attorney, Benjamin Leighton Matlock is no Appalachian mountaineer, but he is a folksy, cantankerous southerner. Matlock lives humbly in a Georgia farmhouse, and each week dons his signature summer suit to crack cases in a downtown Atlanta courtroom. Shortly after *Matlock* ended, Griffith resumed his music career and won the 1997 Best Gospel Album Grammy for *I Love to Tell the Story,* followed by a 1999 Grammy for the gospel album *Just as I Am*. Returning to live in coastal North Carolina, Andy Griffith pursued a less strenuous life but continued to perform until his death in 2012. Mount Airy's citizens built the Andy Griffith Playhouse and Andy Griffith Museum to pay homage to their native son, and in 2005 President George W. Bush awarded Andy Griffith the Presidential Medal of Freedom. Since its primetime network run ended in 1968, *The Andy Griffith Show* has constantly appeared in syndication on cable television and at present can be viewed in back-to-back segments and marathons on *TV Land, MeTV,* and

154. *The Andy Griffith Show,* DVD, seasons 2 and 3; Kelly, *Andy Griffith Show,* 102–3, 228, 247, 249.

other networks. The Andy Griffith Show Rerun Watchers Club boasts thousands of members, an online store, podcasts, lectures, cruises, and festivals.[155]

"A prevalent attitude among intellectuals is that television is throw-away entertainment, not art," writes Richard Kelly, noting that at one time intellectuals also held novels and plays in low regard. To be sure, there have been, and will be, many bad television shows (and bad novels and plays), but that does not preclude greatness. "The acting, writing, production, directing, and scoring" of *The Andy Griffith Show,* Kelly concludes, "were painstakingly worked out and blended to produce one of the more popular *and* artistic creations of the 1960s."[156]

"Man in a Hurry," an Emmy-winning season 3 episode written by show veterans Everett Greenbaum and Jim Fritzell, brings Richard Kelly's argument home. The episode opens to Malcom Tucker (Robert Emhardt), a well-dressed Raleigh businessman, leaving his stalled automobile on the highway to trudge into Mayberry on a warm Sunday in search of a mechanic. He finds the town completely deserted until a ringing bell draws him to Andy, Barney, Aunt Bea, and Opie leaving church with a throng of local worshippers. Andy explains that no Mayberry businesses are open and that Sunday is a day of rest for the town car mechanic, Wally, but Tucker will not take no for an answer. He has important business in Raleigh and must get there immediately. So, Andy introduces him to the filling station attendant, Gomer Pyle, who is friendly but clueless (though Gomer say his cousin Goober could fix the car if he were not out fishing). As the day proceeds, and as it becomes painfully obvious he will get no immediate assistance in this sleepy little town, Tucker fumes. Andy takes him home to share in Aunt Bea's wonderful Sunday chicken dinner, but Tucker refuses to eat. He keeps trying to use the telephone but fails because, as Andy

155. Andy Griffith, *I Love to Tell the Story: 25 Timeless Hymns,* 1997, CD, Sparrow, SPD1440; Griffith, *The Christmas Guest: Stories and Songs of Christmas,* 2003, Sparrow, CD, SPD 1815. In 2011, Griffith starred on Brad Paisley's video "Waitin' On a Woman," winner of the Country Music Association Best Video Award. For The Andy Griffith Show Rerun Watchers Club, see www.tagsrwc.com, accessed Jan. 20, 2018.

156. Kelly, *Andy Griffith Show,* ix–x.

explains, the aged Mendelbright sisters are given exclusive use of Mayberry's only phone line each Sunday. The sisters are lost in a conversation about their feet falling asleep, and Tucker becomes furious. Turning to Andy, Barney, and Opie at the dinner tables, he screams,

> I can't believe this is happening to me! A public utility being tied up like this! You people are living in another world! This is the twentieth century! Don't you realize that? The whole world is living in a desperate space race! Men are orbiting the earth! International television has been developed! And here, a whole town is standing still because two old women's feet fall asleep!

Barney's only response is, "I wonder what *causes* that?"[157]

Eventually retreating to the front porch to smoke a cigar, Tucker finds Andy and Barney on the porch swing. They are relaxed after their big afternoon meal, yawning, picking on the guitar, and planning their evening activities. At one point, in a famous *TAGS* moment, Barney announces, and repeats *numerous* times, "Yep, that's the plan. You know what I'm gonna do? I'm gonna go home, take a nap, then go on over to Thelma Lou's and watch a little TV." Andy's plan, also repeated, is that maybe later, "We oughta go uptown and get us a bottle of pop." But as Malcom Tucker pensively smokes his cigar, Andy again picks up his guitar, and he and Barney begin to sing the hymn "Church in the Wildwood." "Oh, come to the church in the wildwood / oh, come to the church in the vale," the two sing in tight harmony. "No place is so dear to my childhood / than the little brown church in the vale." As the two friends begin the hymn's second verse, the camera moves to Tucker. He has stopped smoking and is leaning against the porch post, listening to them sing. He obviously remembers the song. As the camera continues its slow movement towards Tucker, his face shows a touch of melancholy and then a sad smile, and the television audience ponders what his memories and thoughts might be. Then he begins to sing along softly with Andy and Barney. "No place is so dear to my

157. "Man in a Hurry" (episode 79), in Kelly, *Andy Griffith Show,* 245–46; *Andy Griffith Show,* DVD, season 3.

childhood," Malcom Tucker sings, "than the little brown church in the vale."[158]

Gomer suddenly interrupts Malcom Tucker's reflections. He bursts in with the news that his cousin Goober is back from the lake and will soon be finished fixing the automobile. Greatly relieved, Tucker starts to resume his former pose, but there is a noticeable difference. Near show's end, and loaded with a sack lunch of Aunt Bea's fried chicken and chocolate cake, Tucker decides his business can wait and accepts the Taylors' invitation to stay the night in Mayberry (Opie is thrilled to give up his bed, because he now gets "to sleep on an ironing board between two chairs. Now that's *adventure sleepin'*!") At this point, the writers Greenbaum and Fritzell wisely forego further romanticizing of this classic portrayal of everything the town of Mayberry and its townspeople represent. Come morning, Malcolm Tucker will no doubt return to Raleigh and the twentieth century, but he will never be the same.[159]

158. "Man in a Hurry"; Kelly, *Andy Griffith Show,* 4, 9.
159. *The Andy Griffith Show,* DVD, season 3.

Chapter 7

THE MODERN FOLK AND POPULAR CULTURE

> I had spent a year in gathering and culling over folk-tales. I loved it… So I slept a night, and the next morning I headed my toe-nails toward Louisiana and New Orleans in particular.
>
> Zora Neale Hurston, *Mules and Men* (1935)[1]

Although Zora Neale Hurston, the John Lomax family, Benjamin Botkin, and others helped pioneer the scholarly study of American folklore, the novelist Kate Chopin wrote important works about the Louisiana folk during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Chopin was a Saint Louis native who began writing fiction after she moved to the lower Mississippi Valley to wed a Louisiana Creole (a native Louisianan of French ancestry). Chopin was not trained as a folklorist, nor did she see herself as using folkloric method. In an 1894 letter to a publisher, she described her method in writing the popular short story collection *Bayou Folk* (1894):

> I shall go on writing stories as they come to me. It is either very easy for me to write a story, or utterly impossible; that is, the story must "write itself" without any perceptible effort on my part, or it remains unwritten. There is not a tale in "Bayou Folk," excepting the first, which required a longer time than two, or at most three sittings of a few hours each.[2]

1. Zora Neale Hurston, *Mules and Men* (1935; repr. New York, 1969), 229.
2. Ibid., passim; "About the Lomax Family Collections," American Folklife Center, Library of

Dubbed a local color artist by early critics, Kate Chopin was in fact the first American author to understand and communicate the important cultural distinctions between Louisiana Creoles and Acadians (Cajuns) to a national readership. *Bayou Folk* and *A Night in Acadie* (1897), not the Creole-centered *Awakening* (1899), first gained Chopin a national audience as she took her readers on a journey to meet the Creoles' country cousins, the Cajuns. They resided in central Louisiana, near Cloutierville and Natchitoches, along the Red and Cane Rivers and the Atchafalaya bayou country, where Chopin once lived. For the first time in American history, readers heard stories of the "'Cadians," "'Cadian Ball[s]," "little 'Cadian" children living on the "'Cadian prairie," "them Cajuns," and rural folk described by one of Chopin's characters as "dem low-down 'Cajuns o' Bayeh Teche!"[3]

We earlier learned some of the methods of professional folklorists and can use them again now to glean an abundant harvest from *Bayou Folk*.[4] We get a taste of Cajun food—broiled and "glistening perch and trout," breaded chicken "fried in bacon fat" and "chicken-pie," chicken "gumbo-file," and "pecan broulet" served with "*café au lait*" or "ink black coffee."[5] We hear folktales

Congress, https://www.loc.gov/folklife/lomax/, accessed Feb. 2, 2018; Kate Chopin to Waitman Barbe, Oct. 2, 1894, in *Kate Chopin's Private Papers,* ed. Emily Toth and Per Seyersted (Bloomington, Ind., 1998), 205 (qtn.). Chopin is discussed in chapter 4, this work.

3. Kate Chopin to A. A. Hill, Jan. 1, 1995, in Toth and Seyersted, *Kate Chopin's Private Papers,* 206; Kate Chopin, *Bayou Folk* ((1894; repr. New York, 1999), 34, 46, 106, 142, 159; Daniel S. Rankin *Kate Chopin and Her Creole Stories* (Philadelphia, Pa., 1932), 130–40. Creoles and Cajuns are discussed at length below.

4. See chapter 2, this work, and Lawrence Levine, "How to Interpret Folklore Historically," in *Handbook of American Folklore,* ed. Richard M. Dorson (Bloomington, Ind., 1983), 338–40; Jan Harold Brunvand, *The Study of American Folklore* (New York, 1986), 1–36; Ronna Lee Wilder Sharpe, "Lore for the Folk: Benjamin A. Botkin and the Development of Folklore Scholarship in America," in *America's Folklorist: B. A. Botkin and American Culture,* ed. Lawrence Rodgers and Jerrold Hirsch (Norman, Okla., 2010), 35–55; and Richard M. Dorson, "The Identification of Folklore in American Literature," in "Folklore in Literature: A Symposium," *Journal of American Folklore* 70 (January-March 1957), 1–24. Other perspectives are Gene Bluestein, *Poplore: Folk and Pop in American Culture* (Amherst, Mass., 1994), 12–27; Regina Bendix, *In Search of Authenticity: Formation of Folklore Studies* (Madison, Wis., 1997); Simon Bronner, *Folk Nation: Folklore and the Creation of American Tradition* (Wilmington, Del., 2002); and Charles Joyner, *Shared Traditions: Southern History and Folk Culture* (Champagne, Ill., 1999).

about visions and premonitions, and we also hear the music of fiddles and guitars. At a Cajun ball, the dance caller "call[s] the figures," shouting, "S'lute yo' partnas!" as the dancers move "fus' fo'ard an' back!" and "right an' lef' all 'roun'! Swing co'nas!"[6] And, of course, we attend Catholic mass, burn candles, "hum … the Kyrie Eleison," and "read our litany together in the morning and say a *chapalet.*" In one tale, young lovers exchange holy water with their fingertips.[7]

Kate Chopin's skill in writing vernacular English is comparable to that of Mark Twain. Because she was writing for American English speakers, Chopin does not weave in as much French as Louisiana folks spoke at the time. But her Cajun English is peppered with French, some of it translated in footnotes. Daniel Rankin notes that her "skillful handling" of vernacular English is "discreet," adding interest to a story without distractions.[8]

For example, Kate Chopin's Cajuns "make their Easters" when they receive Easter communion each year. And when the little Cajun girl Fifine takes a mind to get rid of her father's fiddle, she declares, "I'm goin' smash it, dat fiddle, some day in a t'ousan' piece'!" In another story, Chopin introduces the "soft, rhythmic monotone" of the plantation manager Pierre Manton describing his work: "W'en a chimbly breck, I take one, two de boys; we patch 'im up bes' we know how." Pierre explains, "We keep on men' de fence', firs' one place, anudder." And when one of Chopin's Cajun matriarchs, Baptiste, warns her husband Tontine that he is treating an Indian servant girl too harshly, she implores,

> You been grind that girl too much. She ent a bad girl—I been watch her close, 'count of the chil'ren; she ent bad. All she want it 's li'le mo' rope. You can't drive a ox with the same gearin' you drive a mule. You got to learn that, Tontine.[9]

5. Chopin, *Bayou Folk,* 50–51, 73, 87, 100–101, 146.
6. Ibid., 62, 122–23, 153 (tales), 152–53 (songs), 117–18 (dancing).
7. Ibid., 37, 65, 98–99.
8. Rankin, *Kate Chopin and her Creole Stories,* 137–38.

Black English is interwoven with the French English vernacular, as it was in historic Louisiana. Chopin's character La Folle says, "*Oui,* madame, I come ax how my po' li'le Cheri to, 's mo'nin.'" When the irresponsible Chouchoute cries out that his horse is missing, a "sullen-looking mulatto" man grumbles, "Who you reckon tech yo' hoss, boy? … You did n' have no call to lef' in in de road, fus' place." Chopin's Black plantation worker La Chatte ("the female cat") criticizes a New Orleans businessman for his attentions to the bethrothed heroine Euphrasie: "Dat young man, ef he want to listen to me, he gwine quit dat ar caperin' round Miss 'Phrasie." Her work mate retorts, "Law! La Chatte, you ain' gwine hinder a gemman f'om payin' intentions to a young lady w'en he a mine to."[10]

American folk speech, folktales, and history all come together in Chopin's (very) short story about Old Aunt Peggy, an aged Louisiana plantation slave entering her new life as a free person because "the war was over." Indifferent to the pivotal events surrounding her, "Aunt Peggy went to Monsieur, and said:—'Massa, I ain't never gwine to quit yer. I'm gittin' ole an' feeble, an' my days is few in dis heah lan' o' sorrow an' sin. All I axes is a li'le co'ner whar I kin set down an' wait peaceful fu de en.'" Aunt Peggy is given a nice cabin and a rocking chair, and "she has been rocking ever since," but Chopin ends the story with a little surprise. Employing a recurrent tale motif (also used by Mark Twain), Chopin concludes dryly, "Aunt Peggy is a hundred and twenty-five, so she says. It may not be true, however. Possibly she is older."[11]

ALLIGATOR HORSE, ALWAYS

Kate Chopin's stories mirror an interesting niche within a huge body of late nineteenth- and twentieth-century Mississippi

9. Ibid., 137; Chopin, *Bayou Folk,* 53, 8, 112. Chopin translates Pierre's expletive *tonnerre* as "thunder and lightning!"
10. Chopin, *Bayou Folk,* 60, 118, 15.
11. Ibid., 61–62. Tales of centenarian slaves are in Harriet C. Frazier, *Runaway and Freed Missouri Slaves and Those Who Freed Them, 1763–1865* (Jefferson, N.C., 2004), 13–14, passim.

Valley folk traditions. While it is impossible to systematically discuss all contemporary Mississippi Valley folkways, this chapter will look at a small sampling of folk heroes, religious practices, food, and workways in the traditions of southern Jews, Cajun cowboys, houseboaters, and rivermen. A good place to start is a modern folk hero type with strong connections to America's antebellum era.

Prior to and during the 1985 Sugar Bowl game in the New Orleans Superdome—featuring the arch rival Miami Hurricanes and Tennessee (UT) Volunteers—Southeastern Conference (SEC) college football fans were treated to a customized version of the 1950s country western hit "The Battle of New Orleans." The new lyrics came from UT fans, whose Volunteer mascot celebrates Tennesseans' army enlistment rates when Andrew Jackson fought the real Battle of New Orleans in 1815. As the Tennessee coach Johnny Majors prepared for kickoff, the UT Pride of the Southland Marching Band played the tune that had been airing on Knoxville radio stations for a month: "On New Year's Week Johnny Majors took a flight / Down the Mississippi with his men of orange and white / The Vols had made a promise to win by any means / They had a date for battle in the town of New Orleans." The song went on to name nearly a dozen star players for the "Orange of Tennessee" and praise their "fired-up" defense and offensive players so fast they arrived in the "end zone with not a Hurricane in sight." "With a bunch of Volunteers that had turned into a team," the song concluded, "That's how we won the Battle of New Orleans!"[12]

"The Battle of New Orleans," the 1950s recording penned by Jimmy Driftwood and sung by Johnny Horton, was a spiritual if not literal descendant of "The Hunters of Kentucky," written by Noah Ludlow a few years after Andrew Jackson's famed 1815 victory. Like the original tune, Driftwood's tribute tells the story of Jackson's sharpshooting militiamen outwitting their hapless British foes. Though omitting Ludlow's famous reference to

12. Kelly McKeethan, *SEC Football: Religion of a Region* (Bloomington, Ind., 2011), 59–60; "Tennessee Traditions," University of Tennessee Athletics, https://utsports.com/sports/2017/6/14/history-traditions-html.aspx, accessed Feb. 2, 2018.

Jackson's men as "Alligator Horses," the song proclaims, "We fired our cannons 'til the barrel melted down / Then we grabbed an Alligator and we fired another round." It was left to the Florida Gators to keep SEC football fans directly connected to their Alligator folk tradition. In Florida's stadium—known as "the Swamp"—thousands of rabid fans show their support via the "Gator Chomp," a ritual of slapping their extended arms together. Indeed, SEC football players, alongside their Big 10 brethren, must be "half horse, half alligator" to triumph in the college football stadiums of the Mississippi Valley states once known as the Old Southwest and Old Northwest. The Alligator Horse is still alive and kicking.[13]

Although the American folk hero genre that began with Crockett, Fink, Henry, and Lovingood has continued to the present day, there have been interesting detours and variations along the way. When we last discussed the Alligator Horse, the Mississippi Valley archetype had given up his hatred of machines and embraced the railroad engine (Casey Jones), steamboat (Mark Twain's Stephen W.), modern warfare (Sergeant Alvin York), and airplanes (Charles Lindbergh and Amelia Earhart). And as the twentieth century advanced, he (and sometimes she) fully embraced modernity, racing stock cars, running moonshine on winding mountain roads, playing college football, and performing jazz, blues, country western, and rock music. Just as the old southwestern hero made the transition from oral lore to popular almanacs, newspapers, melodramas, and songs, his modern heir began to appear in movies, television shows, and recorded music. Whether he was behind the wheel of a NASCAR racer or strapping on a Fender Telecaster guitar, the Alligator Horse continued to represent the individualistic values of the

13. "The Hunters of Kentucky" is discussed in chapter 2, this work (in the custom of the time, Ludlow referred to all westerners as Kentuckians despite Jackson's well-known Tennessee origins). The best modern re-creation of Ludlow's tune is Cathy Barton and Dave Para, "The Hunters of Kentucky," *Living on the River,* 2000, Roustabout Records, RO4CD, CD. For Jimmy Driftwood and Johnny Horton, see Bill Malone, *Country Music U.S.A.,* rev. ed. (Austin, Texas, 1985), 284–85. For Florida Gators, see McKeethan, *SEC Football: Religion of a Region*, 133–65, 325 ("Swamp Chomp" and "Gator Chomp").

Mississippi Valley frontier. The modern Alligator Horse became, and remains, a "contemporary ancestor."[14]

Mosquitoes (1927), the Mississippian William Faulkner's second novel, provides a telling reference to the old oral tradition. In an outrageous aside, Faulkner's "hero" Dawson Fairchild, a New Orleans writer, tells a gullible Englishman about Old Hickory Jackson and his horse farm and "dude ranch" in Florida. After Jackson turned all his horses loose, Fairchild yarns, they got mixed up with swamp alligators and interbred—creating a "half horse and half alligator" species. A generation later, Old Hickory's "direct descendant," Al Jackson, inherited both the ranch and the tall tale business. When Al began raising sheep in the swamp, the evolutionary process escalated, begetting "half sheep, half fish" and, ultimately, a critter that was "half Jackson, half shark."[15]

As Faulkner penned the above passage in the 1920s, the identity of the Alligator Horse had begun to branch into two distinct yet connected streams. The Jazz Age saw the alligator part of the Alligator Horse metaphor join African American vernacular English and New Orleans jazz slang. An alligator, or a "gator," was a Black jazz musician, a character known for musical skills, fast living, promiscuity, and, occasionally, violence. An important vestige of this era is the parting salutation, "see you later, alligator," or "later, gator." As gators migrated north, their mystique was integrated into that of the Black urban ghetto hipster. At his worst, the ghetto gator was an addict shooting up "horse" (heroin), but in his stride, he was a trickster, hustler, player, and fast talker. Just as Mike Fink, Davy Crockett, and John Henry had verbalized their prowess in elaborate boasts, Black street tricksters still "play the dozens," exchanging rapid-fire insults, talking trash in contests to talk down one another. Like their folkloric ancestors, these Black tricksters had a violent

14. See William Goodell Frost, "Contemporary Ancestors in the Southern Mountains," *Atlantic Monthly* 83, no. 497 (March 1899), 311–19; David D. Lee, *Sergeant York: An American Hero* (Lexington, Ky., 1985); John William Ward, "The Meaning of Charles Lindbergh's Flight," *American Quarterly* 10 (Spring 1958), 3–16; Michael Allen, *Rodeo Cowboys in the North American Imagination* (Reno, Nev., 1998), 7–8.

15. William Faulkner, *Mosquitoes* (1927; repr. New York, 2011), 67–68, 291–96.

side, and sometimes carried knives and guns. Yet this violence and braggadocio could be mainstreamed and even commercialized, as in the meteoric rise of the fast-talking Louisville boxer Cassius Clay—Mohammed Ali—a contemporary American folk hero who, it was said, could "float like a butterfly, sting like a bee."[16]

Meanwhile, the horse part of the Alligator Horse idiom began to drift towards the world of the redneck, the modern descendant of the nineteenth-century cracker. Hillbilly musicians called one another "Hoss," and country songs often featured a cracker hoss hero—a wise-cracking trickster fond of horsing around. Hank Williams was a hard-drinking Alligator Horse whose 1940s and '50s honky-tonk songs reflected the cracker mystique. Williams was followed by George Jones, Buck Owens, Merle Haggard, and their heirs Dwight Yoakum and Junior Brown. Waylon Jennings sang, "When you cross that ol' Red River, Hoss, that don't mean a thing / Once you're down in Texas, Bob Wills is still the King."[17]

Braggart Alligator Horse language precedes lyrical fistfights in country music. In 1970, Merle Haggard warned Vietnam war protestors and traitors, "When you're runnin' down my country, Hoss, you're walkin' on the fightin' side of me." In the cult movie *Payday* (1972), the country singer Maury Dann (played by Rip Torn) sprinkles his down-home talk with hoss language and allusions. "It's over, Hoss," he angrily ends an argument with his manager. Greeting the boyfriend of one of his sexual conquests, he says, "How you doin', Hoss, pleased to meet ya." But he soon

16. Stuart Berg Flexner, *Listening to America: An Illustrated History of Words* (New York, 1982), 23; Roger D. Abrahams, "Playing the Dozens," *Journal of American Folklore* 75 (July–September 1962), 209–20; Lawrence Levine, *Black Culture and Black Consciousness: Afro-American Folk Thought from Slavery to Freedom* (New York, 1977), 344–58; Thomas Sowell, *Black Rednecks and White Liberals* (New York, 2005), 1–63; "Float Like a Butterfly, Sting Like a Bee," in Jan R. Van Meter, *Tippecanoe and Tyler Too: Famous Slogans and Catchphrases in American History* (Chicago, 2008), 260–64. See John Cottrell, *Muhammad Ali, Who Was Once Cassius Clay* (New York, 1967).

17. Harold Wentworth and Stuart Berg Flexner, eds., *Dictionary of American Slang* (New York, 1967), 175; Allen, *Western Rivermen,* 230; Waylon Jennings, "Bob Wills Is Still the King," *Dreaming My Dreams* (orig. 1975), 2001, Sony Legacy, BOOOO5QD6M, CD; Malone, *Country Music USA,* 395.

suggests, "Why don't you just hop on your damn horse and ride on outta here" before killing the boyfriend in a knife fight. Then too, the hoss could be mainstreamed into a softer yet equally compelling pop culture hero: throughout the 1950s and '60s, Dan Blocker, of Paris, Texas, charmed Americans while playing the character Hoss Cartwright on television's popular series *Bonanza.*[18]

In a related vein, 1950s Mississippi Valley rock-and-roll musicians inherited the Alligator Horse mystique from jazz and country artists and modified it once again. In both folk life and folklore, the rockabilly stars Jerry Lee Lewis, Carl Perkins, Eddie Cochran, Gene Vincent, and Johnny Cash were beer-swilling, girl-chasing rockers. So too were the Black rhythm and blues men Chuck Berry, Ike Turner, and James Brown. Berry, Turner, and Brown faced off law enforcement officers over varied criminal charges, including tax fraud, assault, and consorting with teenaged girls. Jerry Lee Lewis's career crashed for more than a decade after he married his teenaged second cousin. Wanda Jackson of Oklahoma added a literal *growl* to the male bop cats' vocal whoops and hiccups, all the while consuming her share of alcohol and assorted drugs. In 1955–56, Jackson shared the bill on a tour with the sensational Mississippi rock-and-roller, Elvis Presley.[19]

Although Elvis Presley was known for his good manners and humility, an important part of his appeal was his mythic wild and dangerous side, which frightened staid Americans while titillating his fans. Elvis never married his first cousin, but he did host his teenaged fiancée Priscilla Beaulieu at his Graceland estate for several years, mentoring her and subsidizing her parochial school education until she reached marriageable age.[20]

18. Merle Haggard, *Fightin' Side of Me,* 1970, King, KG-0352-2, LP; Malone, *Country Music USA,* 318–19; Daryl Duke, *Payday* (1973; Warner Brothers, 2008) DVD; "*Bonanza:* How They'll Carry On without Hoss," *TV Guide* (October 7, 1972), 38–40.
19. Michael Lydon, *Rock Folk: Portraits from the Rock'n'Roll Pantheon* (New York, 1968), 20–21, 40–41; Peter Guralnick, *Last Train to Memphis: The Rise of Elvis Presley* (Boston, Mass., 1994), 286, 322, 438; Wanda Jackson, *Wanda Jackson: Queen of Rockabilly* (orig. 1956–63), n.d., Ace Records, CDCHD 776, CD.
20. Peter Guralnick, *Careless Love: The Unmaking of Elvis Presley* (Boston, Mass., 1999), 140–47.

Elvis led the rockabilly revolution, and the bop cats' oiled hair (combed into pompadours), tight jeans, and electric guitars lent a menacing touch, and a modern technological flare, to their mystique.

Meanwhile, young white and Black Americans danced to the rhythmic new music. A popular dance called the Gator swept 1960s Mississippi Valley college fraternity parties. Encircled by other dancers, single males danced on the ground in an alligator crawl; one of the dance's recurrent moves was the lewd simulation of sexual intercourse. More benign gator motifs showed up in fraternity apparel in the form of popular colored polo shirts with small embroidered alligators on the breast. The University of Florida, as noted, was the most famous of dozens of southern college and high school sports teams adopting a Gator mascot. When, in 1965, University of Florida coaches asked consulting physicians to develop a beverage to help players compete in stifling southern heat, Gatorade—and the popular sports drinks industry—was born.[21]

From the time Red Grange was dubbed the "Galloping Ghost" of the University of Illinois 1920s Fighting Illini football team, the Mississippi Valley's Big Ten and SEC conferences spotlighted athlete heroes. As mentioned, football heroes exemplified Alligator Horse traits of strength, courage, and athletic prowess, and they were often hard-living tricksters. The 1950s southern entertainer Andy Griffith served up a funny portrait of the college game in his monolog "What It Was, Was Football." Watching two opposing "bunches" of players sparring over possession of the ball, he recalled,

> Both bunches wanted that thing. One bunch got it and it made the other bunch just as mad as they could be! And Friends, I seen that evenin' the awfulest fight that I ever have seen in all my life! They would run at one another and kick one another and throw one

21. "Alligator Dance Ruled Obscene," *Pittsburgh Press,* March 8, 1966; McKeethan, *SEC Football,* 325; Emily Spivack "The Story behind the Lacoste Crocodile Shirt," *Smithsonian,* June 4, 2013, https://www.smithsonianmag.com/arts-culture/the-story-behind-the-lacoste-crocodile-shirt-91276898/, accessed April 18, 2014; Gatorade, https://www.gatorade.com, accessed April 18, 2014.

> another down and stomp on one another and grind their feet in one another and I don't know what-all and just as fast as one of 'em would get hurt, they'd tote him off and run another one on!![22]

Joe Namath exemplified the mythic SEC football star as a hard drinker and party animal. Born in 1943 in Beaver Falls, Pennsylvania, a tough steel factory town six miles from the Beaver River's juncture with the Ohio, Namath was recruited by the legendary coach Bear Bryant to play quarterback for the University of Alabama's Crimson Tide. He soon became famous in Tuscaloosa for both his dazzling play and his love of alcohol and women—"I like my Johnnie Walker Red and my women blonde," he later boasted. At the close of Namath's stellar sophomore season, Bryant had to suspend him from the team's Sugar Bowl finale for breaking curfew. Namath continued to flourish on the field and in the barroom. He left Tuscaloosa in 1965, at the end of his senior year, taking his "rocket arm," newly acquired southern accent, and hard-living ways to New York City and an unprecedented half-million-dollar contract with the New York Jets. "He was like a rebel with a cause," his teammate John Dockery recalls of Namath's professional career. "It was like traveling with a rock star." Soon after, University of Alabama football fans welcomed Kenny "the Snake" Stabler, a native Alabamian who matched Namath in both football prowess and alcohol consumption.[23]

Although Georgia's Herschel Walker gained fame and respect for his football prowess without the baggage of drinking and promiscuity, he was also known for flashes of violent anger both on and off the football field. The Auburn University star Bo Jackson, however, flourished with an aura more like that of Daniel Boone (or John Henry) than Big Mike Fink. After leaving Auburn, Jackson simultaneously played two professional

22. Andy Griffith, "What It Was, Was Football," *The Wit and Wisdom of Andy Griffith,* 1997, CD, Capitol Records, EMI-72438-19402-2-8, CD.
23. Larry Schwartz, "Namath Was Lovable Rogue," ESPN Classic, https://www.espn.com/classic/biography/s/namath_joe.html, accessed Feb. 2, 2018; McKeethan, *SEC Football,* 42.

sports—baseball for the Kansas City Royals (and Memphis Chickasaws) and football for the Los Angeles Raiders.[24]

One of the most important contemporary Alligator Horse heroes is the stock car racer. The term "stock car"—in modern parlance, NASCAR (National Association for Stock Car Auto Racing—is in fact a misnomer because it refers to automobiles identical to those sold on car dealers' lots. Although 1940s racing stock cars did closely resemble their commercial counterparts, that soon changed; today, radical customization has rendered the NASCAR nearly unrecognizable when compared to its commercial version. However, one thing about stock car racing has not changed: the individualistic, freedom-loving, courageous mystique of the man (and woman) behind the wheel.[25]

The first legendary stock car driver was Robert Glenn Johnson, Jr., known as Junior Johnson. Tom Wolfe took many stories circulating about Junior to produce his lively 1965 *Esquire Magazine* piece "The Last American Hero." Born in 1931 in North Carolina, Junior Johnson was raised in a family of moonshiners and came of age transporting illegal liquor in fast hot rods over treacherous Appalachian mountain roads. In 1955, his exploits landed him in prison for nearly two years (thirty-one years later, President Ronald Reagan pardoned Johnson—alongside Merle Haggard—of his crimes). Once out of prison, Junior employed his driving expertise and mechanical skills to become a successful automobile racer. Meanwhile, Johnson's personal connection to fast cars and illegal liquor led to many stories that rapidly transitioned from oral tradition to popular culture, launching a new contemporary ancestor hero type.[26]

While the eastern Appalachian foothills spawned the tales of Junior Johnson, "King Richard" Petty, and several other NASCAR driver heroes, the Mississippi Valley was close behind. Ival

24. McKeethan, *SEC Football,* 37, 25–40.
25. Mark D. Howell, *From Moonshine to Madison Avenue: A Cultural History of the NASCAR Winston Cup Series* (Bowling Green, Ohio, 1997); Tom Wolfe, "The Last American Hero," *Esquire* (March 1965), 1–43.
26. "Junior Johnson NASCAR Oral History," Special Collections, Ramsey Library, University of North Carolina, Asheville, http://toto.lib.unca.edu/findingaids/oralhistory/NASCAR/default_nascar.html, accessed Feb. 2, 2018.; Wolfe, "Last American Hero," 1–43.

Cooper reputedly learned his racing skills driving logging trucks on winding Arkansas roads before moving across the river to the state of Mississippi and taking up a stock car racing career (he died in a 1984 race). Ricky Stenhouse, Jr., of Olive Branch, Mississippi, is a more recent lower Mississippi Valley stock car standout. Upriver, Danica Patrick revolutionized the auto racing world to become the first woman to compete in the Indianapolis 500. Patrick grew up on the Rock River in Rockton, Illinois, where she remembers developing a "lead foot and road rage" and frequent visits with local police and highway patrolmen. "I've probably done 130 [miles per hour] on the street, but that was once, when I was 16," she jokes. Patrick also works as a professional model. Photographs of her wearing swimsuits and provocative evening dresses reprise the old Alligator Horse's sexuality and virility in a contemporary female folk heroine.[27]

Only a few years after the stories of Junior Johnson began to circulate, Hollywood moviemakers discovered the marketability of Alligator Horse bootleggers in fast cars. The 1958 movie *Thunder Road* starred Robert Mitchum as Luke Doolin, a contemporary Appalachian mountaineer liquor runner. Behind the wheel of a 1950 Ford two-door (fitted out with liquid storage tanks), Luke faces off against both federal revenuers and organized crime bosses. Tom Wolfe's *Esquire* article followed *Thunder Road* by seven years and begat the 1973 movie *The Last American Hero,* starring young Jeff Bridges as Junior Jackson, the pop culture version of Johnson. Yet it was the 1977 Burt Reynolds and Sally Field movie *Smokey and the Bandit* that best captured and marketed the stock car racer tale type.[28]

Burt Reynolds is Hollywood's greatest contemporary Alligator Horse movie hero. A Waycross, Georgia, native who played halfback for the Florida State Seminoles, Reynolds was half-horse, half-alligator in both life and art. After learning the actor's

27. Nicki Gostin, Devin Gordon, and Marc Peyser, "Danica Patrick," *Newsweek*, June 13, 2005, p. 87; Alexandra Wolfe, "Danica Patrick," *Wall Street Journal,* Jan. 6–7, 2018, C11.

28. J. W. Williamson, *Hillbillyland: What the Movies Did to the Mountains and What the Mountains Did to the Movies* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1995), 284–85; Arthur Ripley, dir., *Thunder Road* (1958; Netflix ed., 2018), DVD; Lamont Johnson, dir., *Last American Hero* (1973; 20th Century Fox, 2006), DVD; Hal Needham, dir., *Smokey and the Bandit* (1977; Netflix ed., 2014), DVD.

trade as a stuntman and in 1960s television westerns, he first earned celebrity in the dark Appalachian mountain moving picture *Deliverance* (1972). His lively portrayal of a southern moonshiner in *White Lightning* (1973) led to a sequel, *Gator* (1976). Reynolds was thus a natural for the role of Bo "Bandit" Darville in *Smokey and the Bandit* (1977). Directed and co-written by Hal Needham, of Memphis, Tennesee (who had worked alongside Reynolds as a stuntman), *Smokey* tapped into the abundant oral and popularized lore of Junior Johnson and his contemporaries.[29]

Needham and colleagues showed genius in the ways they embellished the basic moonshining and fast cars storyline with folk-based variants. Instead of hard liquor, the Bandit is running Coors beer across state lines for a big party staged by Big Enos and Little Enos Burdette (Pat McCormick and Paul Williams) to celebrate their Southern Classic stock car race. They offer to pay Bandit $80,000.00 to deliver four hundred cases of Coors. In the 1960s and '70s, Coors beer had developed a folkloric status. Brewed from fresh spring water in the Colorado Rockies, upstart Coors was feared by large corporate brewer competitors because of its high sales; big labor unions disliked Coors for its nonunion shop and the conservative politics of its owners. Claiming that Coors beer was a health risk (it was unpasteurized), opponents successfully lobbied legislators to prohibit its sale on the Pacific Coast and east of the Mississippi River. Yet market forces countered and created a cult, as young men crossed state lines to haul illegal cases and kegs of Coors to thirsty partygoers. To these beer-swilling youngsters, Coors' spring water brew not only tasted good—it was an outlaw beer representing freedom borne of anti-authoritarianism.[30]

29. *Smokey and the Bandit,* DVD, special features. See Zachary J. Lechner, *The South of the Mind: American Imaginings of White Southernness, 1960–1980* (Athens, Ga., 2018), 164–65. *Deliverance* is discussed in chapter 6, this work.

30. Ibid. Most of this is based on the recollections of the author, who in 1968 made his first Coors run from Ellensburg, Washington, to Post Falls, Idaho, and back, driving a 1956 Packard Clipper and obeying the 60 mph speed limit. In between runs, the author saved empty Coors cans to take to parties, surreptitiously fill with legal beer, and drink in the most conspicuous manner possible.

Hauling four hundred cases of beer requires a semitrailer, and so the Bandit enlists Cleatis "Snowman" Snow (played to the hilt by the country singer Jerry Reed) and his eighteen-wheeler. With Cleatis hauling the contraband brew, the Bandit will run point in his black 1976 Pontiac Trans Am, racing ahead, doing reconnaissance, and blocking and delaying pursuing law officers. In this way, two contemporary ancestor icons—the long-distance trucker and race car driver—are allied. The comic villain is Buford T. Justus (Jackie Gleason), a redneck Texas sheriff whom Cleatis calls "Smokey," a trucker term for highway patrolmen (who wear Smokey the Bear hats). Driving a 1977 Pontiac LeMans, Buford is in hot pursuit of both the Coors shipment and a young woman named Carrie, who has jilted his son at the altar. Thus, *Smokey and the Bandit*'s crowning touch is the addition of a southern pistol—Sally Field as Carrie—to ride shotgun and create a romantic interest for the Bandit. Together they race alongside the Snowman, from Georgia to Texarkana and back again in twenty-eight hours. As the Bandit reflects, they race "for the good old American life. For the money, for the glory, and for the fun. Mostly for the money."[31]

There is even more to *Smokey and the Bandit*'s comedy and action. Citizen band (CB) radio trucker vernacular punctuates the script and helped foster a late 1970s national CB craze. Snowman, who sports an American flag on his vest, rides with a basset hound named Fred by his side. Jerry Reed's composition "East Bound and Down" ("loaded up and truckin'") serves as *Smokey*'s theme song and rose to number one on the country music charts. Then, too, Jackie Gleason's portrayal of Sheriff Buford T. Justus, always bumbling (and grumbling, "Sumbitch"), adds an important variant to southern movie lawman types that span from Rod Steiger's Academy Award–winning role as the police chief Bill Gillespie in *In the Heat of the Night* (1967) to Harry Morgan's goofball Sheriff Slade in *The Flim Flam Man* (1967). While Confederate flags abound in *Smokey,* Sheriff Justus is upbraided and dazzled by a Black Arkansas sheriff (George

31. *Smokey and the Bandit,* DVD.

Reynolds), whom he soon regrets calling "boy" (Buford wonders aloud, "What the hell is this world comin' to?"). *Smokey* features car wrecks galore; the production team destroyed three Trans Ams and two police cars in filming. Of note is the use of western motifs, cowboy boots, hats, and art throughout *Smokey and the Bandit,* bringing home the mythic connection between cowboys and rednecks. The Bandit always appears wearing his (black) felt cowboy hat—the only times he doffs it is to have sex. "Take your hat off. If you want to," Carrie at last requests, to which the Bandit responds, "I want to."[32]

Smokey and the Bandit is a good example of how oral traditions can be successfully modified and woven into popular culture. The movie spawned many late twentieth-century contemporary Alligator Horse variants, including the 1979–85 television series (and 2005 movie) *The Dukes of Hazzard*. In the twenty-first century, this took the form of reality TV shows on cable networks like Discovery Channel, History, TruTV, A&E, and Animal Planet. Shows such as *Ice Road Truckers, Ax Men, American Loggers, Swamp Loggers, Swamp People, Gold Rush* (formerly *Gold Rush Alaska), Deadliest Catch, The Crocodile Hunter*, and *Gator Boys* all featured half-horse, half-alligator men and women who battled the forces of nature as they drove trucks, logged, fished, mined for gold, and hunted gators across North America. Like *Smokey and the Bandit,* this television subgenre is exemplary low art, and we will leave it to others to conduct critical analysis of its interweaving of the myth and reality. Billy Bob Thornton once said, "You know, down South we consider *Smokey and the Bandit* a documentary."[33]

32. Ibid. For the southern sheriff movie types, see chapter 6, this work. For cowboy, redneck, and cracker connections, see Allen, *Rodeo Cowboys in the North American Imagination,* 11.
33. *The Dukes of Hazzard* (1979–85; Warner Home Video, 2007), television series, and Jay Chandrasekhar, dir., *The Dukes of Hazzard* (2005; Warner Home Video, 2005), film, DVD. For the TV shows, see, for example, http://www.crocodilehunter.com.au/crocodile_hunter/about_steve_terri/. Billy Bob Thornton quote comes by way of Burt Reynolds, interview, special features, *Smokey and the Bandit,* DVD. For Thornton, see chapter 6, this work.

THE CHOSEN PEOPLE

"In a town where everyone was either Lutheran or Catholic, we were neither one," recalls Garrison Keillor in *Lake Wobegon Days.* "We were Sanctified Brethren, a sect so tiny that nobody but us and God knew about it, so when kids asked what I was, I just said Protestant. It was too much to explain, like having six toes. You would rather keep your shoes on." Although Keillor's Lake Wobegon is a fictitious town, he draws its stories in part from his own Mississippi River hometown, Anoka, Minnesota. And having grown up an evangelical Protestant among Lutherans and Catholics, he has some stories to tell. Keillor's novel *Lake Wobegon Days* and weekly radio show *Prairie Home Companion* featured running gags about Lake Wobegon's rival churches and comparisons of sensible, boring Lutherans with emotional fundamentalists and the ornately traditional parishioners of Our Lady of Perpetual Responsibility.[34]

In Lake Wobegon's annual Memorial Day parade, the Knights of Columbus "are definitely the flashier outfit … in their smart black suits and satiny capes with silver sabers at their sides and gorgeous white plumes on their black tri-corn hats." Even car ownership "is a matter of faith in Lake Wobegon": "Lutherans drive Fords, bought from Bunsen Motors, the Lutheran car dealer, and Catholics drive Chevies from Main Garage, owned by the Kruegers… Fundamentalist Brethren, being Protestant, also drove Fords." One Lake Wobegon exile composes *95 Theses,* a remarkable diatribe against his parents' brand of Lutheranism that teaches God "is going to slap me one if I don't straighten out fast." Taking off his own gloves, Keillor skewers the Kruegers, who celebrate the Christmas holidays by watching "The Perry Como Christmas Special" and drinking "martinis, a vicious drink that makes them sad and exhausted."[35]

From Lutheran Minnesota to Catholic New Orleans, with the Protestant Bible Belt in between, religious roots run deep in the soil of the Mississippi Valley. This religiosity is based on

34. Garrison Keillor, *Lake Wobegon Days* (New York, 1985), 125–26. See chapter 7, this work.
35. Keillor, *Lake Wobegon Days,* 139–40, 147, 314–34, 397–410.

important historical trends discussed previously. Although New England was home to the First Great Awakening, it was Jacksonian Americans west of the Appalachians who spearheaded the Second Great Awakening, influenced by the enthusiastic Black slave church. From 1830 to 1844, Mormonism swept from upstate New York across the Midwest to Independence, Missouri, and then back to Nauvoo, Illinois, before the main body of Saints departed for Utah. In the 1830s, Cincinnati boasted twenty different churches, including Methodist, Baptist, Episcopalian, Presbyterian, Catholic, and a Jewish temple. Frances Trollope commented, "No evening in the week but brings throngs of the young and beautiful to the chapels and meeting-houses, all dressed with great care, and sometimes with great pretension." Venturing into the countryside and upon a camp meeting, Trollope made careful note of Second Great Awakening revivalism and the emotional religiosity it fostered:

> No image that fire, flame, brimstone, molten lead, or red hot pincers could supply; with flesh, nerves, and sinews quivering under them, was omitted. The perspiration ran in streams from the face of the preacher; his eyes rolled, his lips were covered with foam, and every expression had the deep expression of horror it would have borne had he, in truth, been gazing at the scene [of hell] he described… Groans, ejaculations, broken sobs, frantic motions and convulsions succeeded; some [congregants] fell on their backs with a slow motion and crying out—"Glory! Glory! Glory!" I quitted the sport and hastened to the forest for the sight was too painful, too melancholy. Its sincerity could not be doubted, but it was the effect of overexcitement, not of sober reasoning.[36]

As the nineteenth century progressed, Mississippi Valley church folk retained their fundamentalist Protestant core amidst increasing diversity in the Great Valley. At the most radical end of the spectrum was Hoodoo, a lower Mississippi Valley blend

36. Richard Wade, *The Urban Frontier: Pioneer Life in Early Pittsburgh, Cincinnati, Lexington, Louisville, and St. Louis* (Chicago, 1959), 133, 264–65; Frederick Marryat, *A Diary in America, with Remarks on Its Institutions* (1839; repr. New York, 1962), 241–43; Frances Trollope, *Domestic Manners of the Americans* (1832; repr. Gloucester, Mass., 1974), 74–75, 78–81. For Mormonism, see chapter 1, this work.

of African and Caribbean magic beliefs with French Catholicism. Zora Neale Hurston, a native Alabamian and Floridian who became a novelist during the Harlem Renaissance, conducted the first serious study of the religion called Hoodoo, or "Voodoo as pronounced by the whites." Hurston drove south from Columbia University in 1928 to New Orleans, "the hoodoo capital of America," where she apprenticed under Luke Turner, who claimed to be the nephew and pupil of the famed nineteenth-century "queen of conjure" Marie Laveau. Turner taught Hurston the Hoodoo beliefs and rituals she later described in her book about Black southern folk life, *Mules and Men*.[37]

Hoodoo worship is partly composed of magic spells from the Caribbean and those used by antebellum American slave conjurors. Worshippers go to the Hoodoo doctor (a term synonymous with priest in this context) to attain desired results—to make an errant husband obey his wedding vows, to win a new lover, or to run off a troublesome in-law. The remedy is often a potion and a ritual—sprinkling salt, red pepper, vinegar, or mustard seeds, chanting and singing, and even tossing beheaded chickens out a car window. In one ritual for a female believer who seeks to run off a man's wife (so she can marry him herself), the Hoodoo doctor instructs her to write the couple's names nine times on a piece of paper and embed the paper in a lemon and bury it "bloom-end down … where de settin' sun will shine on it." Also woven into Hoodoo are identifiable Christian motifs such as the altar and candles and "the power of water to sanctify as in baptism." Luke Turner's account of Marie Laveau confirms her connections to Judeo-Christian traditions. At her celebration of the "feast of St. John's," Laveau reputedly arose out of the waters of Lake Pontchartrain with a "great communion candle." Then, she "open[ed] the waters" like Moses and "walked upon the waters to the shore" like Jesus.[38]

Mississippi Valley Judaism is a good example of religious diversity and tolerance in America's cultural hearth. To be sure, Jews represented a minuscule portion of the overall population

37. Hurston, *Mules and Men,* 229–54 (qtns., 229).
38. Ibid., 229, 234–35, 241, 252–53.

(today they constitute only one-half of one percent of the American South's entire population), and anti-Semitism and persecution persisted well into the twentieth century. Yet, when studying this kind of prejudice and other shameful aspects of American history, one should always ask, Compared to what? How did Mississippi Valley Jews fare in comparison to members of other global Jewish communities?

From its inception, America was one of the few places in the world where Jews could live in relative peace, practice their religion, and secure clear title to land and property. Most ancient Jews were extirpated from the Middle East and spread across Europe, where they survived in ghettoes and shtetls through the Middle Ages and into the early modern era. Some adventurous immigrants came to America, including the American South, and by 1749 there were small Jewish communities in Savannah, Georgia, and Charleston, South Carolina. During the American Revolution, Charleston's Jews formed a patriot militia unit that the locals called the Jews' Company. Later, while Polish and Russian Christians were launching a series of nineteenth-century pogroms, small, sturdy Jewish communities had become part of the culture of Cincinnati, Saint Louis, Memphis, Nashville, Vicksburg, Natchez, Greenwood (Mississippi), Hot Springs (Arkansas), Donaldsonville (Louisiana), New Orleans, and the adjacent hinterland, a trend that continued into the twentieth century. Thus, a list of prominent Mississippi Valley Jews includes Judah P. Benjamin (secretary of war then of state for the Confederate States of America), Erich Sternberg and Bernard Goudchaux (founders of New Orleans's Goudchaux Department Store), E. J. "Mutt" Evans (mayor of Durham, North Carolina, 1951–63), Reuben Greenberg (the Black Jewish chief of police in Charleston, South Carolina), Jack Cristil (for five decades the radio voice of Mississippi State University Bulldog football), and Shelby Foote (Memphis novelist and Civil War historian).[39]

39. Marcie Cohen Ferris and Mark I. Greenberg, eds., *Jewish Roots in Southern Soil* (Lebanon, N.H., 2006), 1–17. The standard works are William Penack, *Jews and Gentiles in Early American* (Ann Arbor, Mich., 2008); Leonard Dinnerstein and Mary Dale Palsson, eds., *Jews*

Mississippi Valley Jews seem to have done well. Compared to what? Today, New Orleans boasts approximately thirteen thousand Jewish residents, seven thousand fewer than all the Jews in Poland. In Baghdad, Iraq, the Jewish population is estimated at seven or eight, while in Cairo, Egypt, there are seven Jews.[40]

Nineteenth-century Mississippi Valley Jews immigrated along three paths—directly from Europe; via South America and the Caribbean; or indirectly from the above via the cities of the northeastern and southeastern American Atlantic coast. The immigrants included both Sephardic (Spanish and North African) and Ashkenazic (German) Jews. Saint Louis traces the first of its Jewish citizens back to 1807, four years after the Louisiana Purchase. The Shaaraai Chesed Reformed congregation formed in New Orleans in 1828, thanks to the patronage of the merchant Judah Touro. Two years later, the Ohio state legislature chartered the first Orthodox synagogue west of the Appalachians. Antebellum Natchez, Mississippi, hosted a Reformed synagogue and a lively population of Jewish businessmen and their families, some of whom were minor slaveholders. Memphis Jews followed suit, and their Temple B'nai Israel continued the trend away from Orthodox Judaism to English-language Reformed observances more in keeping with American democratic religiosity. By the eve of the Civil War, two thousand Jews resided in New Orleans alone, and the Confederacy could claim many Jewish sympathizers and soldiers.[41]

in the South (Baton Rouge, La., 1973); Eli N. Evans, *The Provincials: A Personal History of Jews in the South* (New York, 1973); Nathan Kaganoff and Melvin Urofsky, eds., *Turn to the South: Essays on Southern Jewry* (Charlottesville, Va., 1979); C. Lipson-Walker, "'Shalom Y'all': The Folklore and Culture of Southern Jews," PhD dissertation (Indiana University, 1986); Brian Bain, dir., *Shalom Y'all* (Baton Rouge, La., 2003), DVD. Thanks to D. J. Parker.

40. Ferris and Greenberg, *Jewish Roots in Southern Soil,* 17; Stephen Farrell, "Baghdad Jews Have Become a Fearful Few," *New York Times,* June 1, 2008, https://www.nytimes.com/2008/06/01/world/middleeast/01babylon.html, accessed Sept. 14, 2013; Jared Malsin, "Meet the Last Jews of Cairo," *Time,* https://time.com/4041832/cairo-jews-population-egypt/, accessed Feb. 13, 2018.

41. Walter Ehrlich, *Zion in the Valley: The Jewish Community of St. Louis, 1807–1907* (Columbia, Mo., 1997); Walter G. Cowan et al., *New Orleans Yesterday and Today* (Baton Rouge, La.,

Following the Civil War, Jewish merchants across the Cotton Belt took defeat in stride and immediately moved to fill the economic vacuum left by the defeated planter class. Jews provided groceries, dry goods, loans, and credit to whites and Blacks alike in the emergent sharecropping economy. Increasing numbers of eastern European Jewish immigrants fleeing the Russian pogroms arrived. They found work as brokers and cotton agents, tailors and shoemakers, grocers and butchers, and rural peddlers, fanning out across the Mississippi Valley in a Dixie Diaspora. In the early twentieth century, a common career trajectory for a Jewish peddler was to work until he saved enough capital to marry and open a small dry-goods store in a country town or crossing, fostering a class of rural "Jew Store" (in cracker parlance) proprietors and their families.[42] While the 1915 lynching of the Atlanta businessman Leo Frank is continually discussed as an example of southern persecution of Jews, it is in fact a despicable exception to the general rule of amicable relations. True, there was anti-Semitism, but compared to what? How does southern white bigotry towards American Jews compare to eastern European pogroms, or soon-to-be emergent Nazism? White southerners, including the Ku Klux Klan, ranked Jews far below Negroes on their hate lists and targets. Indeed, a disturbing fact about Leo Frank's famous lynching is that it stands alone alongside hundreds of lynchings of southern Blacks that gained no newspaper headlines at all.[43]

It was beneficial that many southern whites considered Jews to be members of a race as well as a religion. "Philo-Semitism"—a love and respect for the Old Testament Hebrews—was (and remains) a strongly held belief among white Protestant fundamentalists. Jews also learned that in parts of the South it was more important to be religious than it was to belong to a certain religion. Equally important to Jewish success was their

1988), 190–91; Ferris and Greenberg, *Jewish Roots in Southern Soil,* 3–9; Robert N. Rosen, "Jewish Confederates," in Ferris and Greenberg, *Jewish Roots in Southern Soil,* 109–33; Bertram Korn, *The Early Jews of New Orleans* (Waltham, Mass., 1969), 67–73. Thanks to Jody Ann Matthews.

42. Ferris and Greenberg, *Jewish Roots in Southern Soil,* 8–9.

43. Leo Frank is discussed in ibid., 13, but the analysis is my own.

rapid assimilation to selected aspects of mainstream culture. Mississippi Valley Jews sent their children to public schools and on to state colleges, adopted Mississippi Valley vernacular English, and began to cook and serve traditional southern dishes (including pork) and drinks on their dinner tables. They joined in community sports and celebrations, and contributed to local causes and charities. The poet Eli Evans has described the southern Jewish experience by using the metaphor of challah, the traditional braided bread of the Jewish holidays. Like challah, the southern Jewish experience is a braid: the result of weaving together three cultures—Jewish, Southern, and American.[44]

Stella Suberman's memoir *The Jew Store* provides an evocative portrait of the world of a Jewish family in the rural Mississippi Valley in the 1920s and '30s. Suberman was born in Union City, a town of five thousand in northwest Tennessee, near the Kentucky state line. Her father, Aaron Bronson, was a Ukrainian Jewish migrant to New York City who had sailed to Savannah, Georgia, looking for opportunity. He earned the chance from merchant employers in Nashville, Tennessee, to be "set up" in a "Jew Store … selling soft goods—clothing and domestics (bedding, towels, yard goods)—to the poorer people of the town—the farmers, the sharecroppers, the blacks, the factory workers." In 1920, Aaron and Reba Bronson and their children Joey and Miriam drove a horse-drawn cart from Nashville into Union City (renamed Concordia in Suberman's memoir) where they lived and prospered until 1933. Suberman returned to the South as a college student and has lived there ever since. "Jews went wherever there a living to be made, and the South was virgin territory," she recalls. "Once Jews came South, they loved it—the comfort, the ease of living. Many of them [eastern European Jews] had come from very tiny little villages in the old country, and the rural South was in many ways like home. Prejudice might have been a challenge, but they had already been dealing with that for centuries."[45]

44. Bain, *Shalom Y'all,* passim.
45. Stella Suberman, *The Jew Store: A Family Memoir* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1998), 3; "An Interview with Stella Suberman," in ibid., n.p.

As they work to build up Bronson's Low-Priced Store in Concordia, Aaron and Reba initially face some anti-Semitism, and their close relationship with their Black employees Lizzie Maud and Seth (who live in a neighborhood the locals call Niggertown) makes them some enemies. But a supposed Ku Klux Klan threat to stop their store from opening, or boycott it, never materializes. The simple reason is supply and demand—Concordia needs a "Low-Priced Store" and Black and white customers alike soon create a brisk business. Then, too, there is Philo-Semitism, as the Bronsons find a patron and protector in Miss Brookie, an eccentric but respected townswoman who has met Jews in college and welcomes the Bronsons. Racism is most evident in the treatment of Negroes (who are fitted for shoes in the alley) and the harsh reaction of some whites when Aaron hires Seth to wait on white customers.[46]

Much of the dramatic tension in *The Jew Store* comes as the family assimilates to local customs. For the children, assimilation is relatively easy. Joey attends public school, makes friends, and begins to adopt the language and culture of his peers. Weekly, Stella makes "the Sunday school rounds with a selection of Baptists and Presbyterians as well as Methodists." Initially reluctant to conform, Reba learns from Lizzie Maud how to batter and fry chicken and comes to find great pleasure in rural life. She flourishes as a flower and vegetable gardener, a new experience for a New York City woman. When Miriam reaches her teens, her "social life [is] exceedingly active" and includes a group of twenty friends who meet at the ice cream parlor, take turns hosting parties, dance the Charleston (with steps Miriam learns from Lizzie Maud), and begin to date. When Miriam falls in love with Joey's best friend, "T," Aaron is surprised to find himself considering the possibility of a gentile son-in-law.[47]

Indeed, Aaron Bronson has assimilated remarkably well into the culture of the Mississippi Valley. He loves his store and the

46. Suberman, *The Jew Store,* 12, 64, 106–109, 121–25. Suberman has given pseudonyms to all of Concordia's residents.
47. Ibid., 171, 239–41, 166–67, 287.

financial stability and status it has brought him. He has insinuated himself into Concordia's local business and political class, and most townspeople have come to respect him. Long before Reba, Aaron develops a love for the South's rural lifestyle, and during a trip to the Northeast, "the strain of New York City weighed more heavily… He saw it as a place that even on a sunny day was dark." By the end of the 1920s, Suberman writes, "my father thought of Concordia as his home":

> My father guarded against sentimentalizing Concordia, going "too easy" on it, as he said… He wasn't a fool… [But Concordia] was okay by him. And why not? Having in Russia been tormented, chased, and attacked by Cossacks, having in New York been insulted and ignored, whatever maltreatment he had endured in Concordia was minor league. The Ku Klux Klan? Their threats had not materialized. Though my father did not kid himself. "It wasn't because they loved me so much," he would say. No, it was more that having experienced a Jew store, they were now convinced that having one in Concordia was a good thing.[48]

All of this comes to a crashing halt when Reba's sisters Sadie and Hannah arrive from New York City for a visit. Sadie is scandalized by the degree to which the family has veered from their Jewish traditions (Stella's ill-timed parlor performance of "Oh What a Friend We Have in Jesus" does not help matters!). Reba sees the error of her ways, and insists Joey return with her sisters to New York City to study for his bar mitzvah. Later, when Miriam begs for a weekend visit with T, who has begun to study for a degree in agriculture at the University of Tennessee, Reba lays down the law and Aaron relents. After thirteen years, the Bronsons will leave Concordia.

If the 1929 stock market crash and ensuing Great Depression played a major role in the Bronsons' decision to leave, Suberman does not say so. Indeed, as a parting gesture Aaron helps organize a campaign to save the town's failing shoe factory, pledging $22,000.00 of his savings in matching grants to ensure the local economy survives the Depression. However, he also sells

48. Ibid., 37–38, 285–87.

Bronson's Low-Priced Store, and the family moves on. A lengthy farewell article in the local newspaper declares, "The Bronsons leave many friends in Concordia. The *Sentinel* wishes them well." A farmer and loyal customer is less formal: "What's a fact is we was beginning to think of y'all as *kin.*" And Miriam and T's friend Erv declares, "Good-bye to you Jews. Having Jews was the best thing Concordia ever done."[49]

Southern Jews played an important role in the Black freedom movement. Andrew Young, a New Orleans civil rights activist and the U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations, recalled there were many Jewish civil rights activists working "before I joined the movement" and that Jewish synagogues were sometimes the sites of civil rights meetings. Young notes that because of their long history of struggle in the Middle East and Europe, particularly the German Holocaust experience, "Jews totally identified with the civil rights movement and … were much less racist" than other southerners. Although some contemporary activists (and later historians) criticized Jews for failing to stand united against segregation, this was not the view of the Ku Klux Klan, which saw Jews as allies of Black civil rights organizers. While their hardships were minuscule compared to those of Blacks, Jews witnessed the 1958 bombing of Atlanta's Hebrew Benevolent Congregation Temple and the 1963 murder of the Jewish civil rights workers Michael Schwerner and Andrew Goodman alongside their Black colleague James Chaney in Neshoba County, Mississippi. Following the September 1967 bombing of Beth Israel in Jackson, Mississippi, Rabbi Perry Nussbaum declared of the perpetrators, "These are not Americans." And following the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., the Memphis rabbi James Wax proclaimed,

> This city shall witness a new spirit and the memory of this great prophet of our time shall be honored. There will be the bigots and the segregationists and the so-called respectable but unrighteous people who will resist. But in the scheme of history, God's will does prevail.[50]

49. Ibid., 292–94.

Like the Bronson family in *The Jew Store,* late twentieth- and early twenty-first-century Mississippi Valley Jews continue to walk the line between tradition and assimilation. There have been some big changes. The lone merchant families and scattered rural Jewish communities have slowly disappeared and been replaced by a more modern, urban Jewish lifestyle. Towns like Natchez, Greenwood, and Donaldsonville have lost nearly all their active temple congregants, and the summer camps (like Blue Star Camp) where Jews once sent their children to meet, play, and learn with other Jewish youth are all gone. Also vanished are the annual courtship weekends, wherein young Jewish men and women from across the South met to socialize, dance, and find spouses (all under the attentive eyes of elder Jewish chaperones). In place of this old Jewish world is a more sophisticated urban one that has in many (not all) cases increased assimilation and the number of marriages to gentiles. By 1986, the loss of the old lifestyle had become so pronounced that the Museum of the Southern Jewish Experience formed to preserve the artifacts and written records of the vanished rural southern Jewry. Reorganized in Utica and Jackson, Mississippi, as the Goldring/Woldenberg Institute of Southern Jewish Life, the organization's professional staff members have added education, music and art exhibits, movies, and television shows, and rabbinic services to their museum and archival work.[51]

The new urban Jewish immigrants have also taken up different jobs. Traditional merchant Jews have been joined and replaced by Jewish journalists, professors, teachers, doctors, software engineers, and corporate employees and executives. They continue to involve themselves in local festivals and celebrations, like the Natchez Confederate Pageant (renamed the Natchez Historic Pageant) and Memphis Cotton Carnival. And gentile

50. Ferris and Greenberg, introduction to *Jewish Roots in Southern Soil,* 2, 15–16. Young quoted in Bain, *Shalom Y'all.* A more qualified view is Clive Webb, "A Tangled Web: Black-Jewish Relations in the Twentieth-Century South," in Ferris and Greenberg, *Jewish Roots in Southern Soil,* 192–209.

51. Ferris and Greenberg, introduction to *Jewish Roots in Southern Soil,* 14–15; Bain, *Shalom Y'all;* Goldring/Woldenberg Institute of Southern Jewish Life, https://www.isjl.org/, accessed Oct. 10, 2013.

Mardi Gras parade officials, always known for fierce traditionalism, have even agreed to the participation of two Jew Krewes (bands of coordinated marchers) in the annual Mardi Gras parades. Meanwhile, Jews' numbers continue to grow in direct proportion to overall population increase. Of tens of thousands of Jews in the Mississippi Valley, New Orleans claims 13,000, Memphis 8,500, Minneapolis–Saint Paul 40,000, and Saint Louis 55,000.[52]

Assimilation remains the overall characteristic of the southern Jewry, but with important exceptions and variants. Reformed worship, with Americanized variants, was dominant throughout the nineteenth-century Mississippi Valley, yet Orthodoxy has returned. This began slowly in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries with eastern European immigration and has accelerated in the past few decades. Indeed, so many Jewish families keep kosher tables that the popular supermarket chain Kroger employs a full-time rabbi to keep kosher meat departments and kitchens in some of its stores and the hotels it supplies. Meanwhile, in Atlanta and Athens, Georgia, the popular Varsity Drive-In restaurants feature kosher hot dogs and chili onion rings on their menus, and they cater kosher parties. Thus, the above challah metaphor of interweaving cultures can also include hot dog buns and onion-ring breading. And although one might doubt the veracity of a contemporary southern Jewish folktale about the fellow who claims to dip, bread, and deep-fry his gefilte fish, a reported foodway of Jews who add a little Louisiana hot sauce to their matzo ball soup sounds probable (and promising).[53]

52. Ferris and Greenberg, introduction to *Jewish Roots in Southern Soil,* ix, 14, 17; Bain, *Shalom Y'all;* Gunther Plaut, *The Jews in Minnesota: The First 75 Years* (New York, 1959); Cowan et al., *New Orleans Yesterday and Today,* 191. See Stuart Rockoff, "The Fall and Rise of the Jewish South," in Ferris and Greenberg, *Jewish Roots in Southern Soil,* 284–303. Atlanta, Georgia, is home to 85,000 Jews.

53. Rockoff, "The Fall and Rise of the Jewish South," 284–303; Ferris and Greenberg, *Jewish Roots in Southern Soil,* 10–11; Bain, *Shalom Y'all.* Kroger's was founded in Cincinnati, Ohio.

"HIP ET TAIAU"

The folk life of lower Mississippi Valley Cajuns is much better known than that of southern Jews. In the second half of the twentieth century, Americans from all regions began to listen to Louisiana Cajun music and zydeco, and the Cajun food dishes gumbo, jambalaya, and red beans and rice appeared in restaurants outside the lower South. Reality TV producers added Cajuns to their cast of contemporary ancestors, and shows like *Swamp People, Gator Boys, Cajun Pawn Stars, My Big Redneck Vacation, Duck Dynasty,* and *Bayou Billionaires* proliferated.[54] However, there is one important part of Cajun culture that is relatively unknown outside the lower Mississippi Valley: Many Cajuns are, and have always been, cowboys. Cajun cowboys thus form a small but important contingent of the most iconic of American folk hero types.

When the folklorist Alan Lomax, Jr., and his father first heard Cajun musicians singing the song "Hip et Taiau," they thought someone "was pulling our legs." The tune's title and refrain—also spelled and pronounced "Hippy-Ti-Yo," "Hippy-Tai-Yo," "Hippitiyo," and "Hip et Taïauts"—sounded much like two old Texas cowboy tunes, "Whoopee Ti Yi Yo (Git Along Little Dogies)" and "Come-a Ti-yi Yippy Yo." How did Texas cowboy language find its way into the Louisiana swamps? Digging a little deeper, Lomax learned from the musicians that Ti–Yo was in fact the name of an old Louisiana cattle herding town, and that "Ti-yi" and "Ki-yo" were old French and French Canadian cattle calls—expressions mounted cowboys spoke or shouted at the cattle as they were herding them. Like all folkways, oral traditions have anonymous origins, and it is impossible to find definitive documentation of their eighteenth– and nineteenth–century provenance. But in this case, the Lomaxes appear to have solved a mystery: The Texans' "Whoopee Ti Yi

54. Robert Lloyd, "TV's Rugged, Rural Breed"; "TV Shows Filmed in Louisiana," Louisiana Destinations, https://www.louisiana-destinations.com/louisiana-based-tv-shows.htm, accessed Dec. 14, 2016.

Yo" and "Ti-yi Yippy Yo" are probably descended from French Louisiana Cajun cowboys.[55]

Certainly, Spanish and Mexican *charros* and *vaqueros* contributed significant language, workways, and material culture to the American cowboy lifestyle. Because the southern Great Plains cattle frontier began in Texas following the Civil War, many Texas cowboys were Hispanic, as evidenced by the terms "lariat" (*riata*), "lasso," "chaps" (*chapperias*), "rancho," and "rodeo." Yet herding workways came to the southern Plains from places other than Spain and Mexico. In his classic *Trails to Texas,* the historian Terry G. Jordan looked to the southeastern United States to prove the truly multidimensional nature of cowboy culture. Jordan documented the significant role of Anglo- and, especially, Celtic-American herders in creating Great Plains cowboy folkways. The term "cowboy" is itself English, and Scottish and northern Irish Celts were known for their droving expertise on both sides of the Atlantic. The Carolinas, Tennessee, and upland South were home to Anglo- and Celtic-American herdsmen (a famous Carolina Revolutionary War battle is named for cowpens). These southern drovers migrated west to Texas during the antebellum and postbellum decades and exerted an influence equal to that of the Mexican vaqueros.[56]

In *Trails to Texas,* Jordan also began a discussion of Louisiana cattlemen that has since grown into a new body of scholarship. As in Texas, there were several influences. Louisiana's first cowboys were local Caddo Indians who rode Spanish horses and herded Texas Longhorn cattle that had strayed east or that they bought from the Spaniards. After French settlements took root in the early 1700s, Spanish and Mexican vaqueros herded

55. Alan Lomax, Jr., et al., dirs.., *American Patchwork,* episode 3: "Cajun Country: Don't Drop the Potato" (1979–85; repr. Portland, Oreg., 2006), DVD; "Whoopee Ti Yi Yo, Git Along, Little Dogies," John A. Lomax, *Cowboy Songs and Other Frontier Ballads* (New York, 1938), xxix, 4–7; Shane K. Bernard, *Swamp Pop: Cajun and Creole Rhythm and Blues* (Jackson, Miss., 1996), 86–89.

56. Terry G. Jordan, *Trails to Texas: Southern Roots of Western Cattle Ranching* (Lincoln, Nebr., 1981) and *North American Cattle Ranching Frontiers: Origins, Diffusion, and Differentiation* (Albuquerque, N.Mex., 1993). Richard W. Slatta presents the Hispanic thesis in *Cowboys of the Americas* (New Haven, Conn., 1990). For multi-dimensional cowboy culture see Allen, *Rodeo Cowboys in the North American Imagination,* 158–59, passim.

Longhorns across Louisiana on the Old Spanish Trail—by way of Natchitoches to Biloxi, Mobile, and, later, New Orleans stockyards and shipping docks. This was one hundred fifty years before the transcontinental railroads shifted the Texas cattle trade to the central Plains. Later, Louisiana did indeed become a midway point for southern Anglo- and Celtic-American cattle herders working their way west to Texas.[57]

The important point, however, is that by the mid-eighteenth century, Louisiana was home to its own cattle herding tradition—one that was not primarily Indian, Spanish, or Anglo- or Celtic-American. French Louisianans had themselves begun raising cattle on their own *vacheries*—the Louisiana term for ranches—and a Franco-American ingredient was added to the cowboy culture gumbo. The French Louisiana cattle kingdom arose west of New Orleans and the Atchafalaya River basin, where Attakapas Post (renamed Saint Martinville) became its headquarters. One visitor described it as "the centre of the land of shepherds and the paradise of those who deal in cattle." By 1766, 165,000 head of cattle grazed on the prairie in what Terry Jordan describes as a "seasonal rhythm" from springtime until "the frosts of autumn, then retired into the cane brakes and bottom forests for winter foraging."[58]

Louisiana ranching grew even more rapidly with the 1760s arrival of a new group of Frenchmen, Canadian exiles later called Cajuns. The Cajuns' ancestors inhabited Poitou, the marshy southwestern region of France, where herdsmen had for centuries raised cattle on the coastal prairies. Migrating from Europe to French Canada in the early 1600s, some continued their cattle-herding ways in the marshy Nova Scotia lowlands known as Acadia. However, the colonial wars between France and Britain (circa 1701–63) led to French defeat. As portrayed in Longfellow's dramatic poem *Evangeline,* the victorious English deported thousands of rebellious Acadians across North

57. Bill Jones, *Louisiana Cowboys* (Gretna, La., 2007), 17; Susan Jensen, dir., *Vaquero Series,* episode 10: "Bayou Cowboys of Louisiana" (Santa Barbara, Calif., 2014), DVD; Jordan, *Trails to Texas,* 47; Jordan, *North American Cattle Ranching Frontiers,* 120–21.

58. Jordan, *Trails to Texas,* 47; Jordan, *North American Cattle Ranching Frontiers,* 188, 121 (qtns).

America. Those who ultimately arrived on the Attakapas Prairie—the area naturalists call the Chenier Plain—found an ideal environment to continue living as they had for centuries. Thus, French-Canadian herdsmen became "Cajun" (a slurring of "Acadian") cowboys.[59]

Southwest Louisiana's Attakapas Prairie, or Chenier Plain, is bordered on the west by the Sabine River and Texas and on the south by the Gulf of Mexico. Its name is drawn from the Attakapas Indian inhabitants and translates literally as "man eaters." Beginning in 1765, Cajuns began farming, fishing, trapping fur, and raising cattle and sheep there. Whereas previous Louisiana cattlemen had carved out a Spanish Trail from Natchitoches to New Orleans and the gulf, the Cajuns herded their cattle due east to New Orleans via the so-called Creole Trail. Their herds were turned into jerked and salted beef, tallow, lard, and tanned cowhides, all highly marketable goods. Spain oversaw all of this because Louisiana had changed hands following the French and Indian War; Spaniards governed Louisiana until the early nineteenth century, when they returned the province to the French, whose leader Napoleon immediately sold it to the United States in 1803.[60]

In 1805, a federal surveyor, William Darby, described Cajun cattle country:

> Continuing westward, a new and astonishing scene would open: the wide green Attakapas and Opelousas, varied by the irregular chains of woods, narrow and indented. The face of the earth exhibits an expanse of grass, interrupted only by the occasional clump of oak or pine trees… The winds breathe over the pathless waste of savanna.

Darby saw "thousands of horses and cows, of all sizes, scattered over the interminable mead" and "active horsemen who guard them." By 1800, the ratio of cattle to Cajuns was fifteen to one,

59. Carl Brasseaux, *Acadian to Cajun: Transformation of a People, 1803–1877* (Jackson, Miss., 1992), 16–19, passim; Lomax, *Cajun Country;* Jones, *Louisiana Cowboys,* 18; Donald W. Davis, *Washed Away: The Invisible People of Louisiana's Wetlands* (Lafayette, La., 2010).
60. Brasseaux, *Acadian to Cajun,* 16–19; Jones, *Louisiana Cowboys,* 18–19; Jensen, *Bayou Cowboys of Louisiana*.

grazing at about one cow per acre (much less land than a typical Plains herd requires). Most Cajun cattlemen were squatters, building farms and grazing on the public domain. But they were serious about property rights in beef—they branded their cattle, and inspectors kept meticulous records going back to the famed mid-1700s Saint Martinville Brand Book. Cattle thieves felt the wrath of Cajun vigilante committees who served as sheriffs, judges, and jury.[61]

While Cajuns herded cattle much like the Spaniards, Anglos, and Celts, there were important Franco-American variants. "Marsh horses," as they were called, were trained to work in mud and water. Cowboys made palm frond "skeeter brushes" to spare their horses the full force of mosquito swarms. Swimming cattle across bayous was a common mode of herding them throughout the year and especially during the semi-annual cattle drives (Plains cowboys swam their herds across rivers much less often). And dogs played a bigger role in bayou herding than on the late nineteenth-century Great Plains. Demand for beef increased in the antebellum years, but the Civil War ended the good times. In occupied Louisiana, Yankee foragers and raiding parties confiscated horses and decimated the Cajun cattle herds. Afterwards, the Cajuns slowly began to rebuild.[62]

By the late nineteenth century, Cajuns were no longer of pure French extraction. They had courted and married Louisianans of all racial backgrounds, and families of mixed Anglo, Celtic (both Irish and Scottish), and German ethnicity spread across the bayous. American Indians also married Cajuns, adding an important Native element to the racial gumbo. In *Louisiana Cowboys,* Bill Jones uses oral history to tell the stories of Black *vachers*—the Louisiana French equivalent of *vaquero*. One cowboy recalled Floyd "Mano" Clifton, a top hand, horseman, and legendary roper from Opelousas. Clifton spoke Cajun French and, alongside Tom and Peanut Ryan and a small cadre of Black cowboys, worked the famed Gray Ranch during the

61. Darby quote in Jones, *Louisiana Cowboys,* 19; Jordan, *North American Cattle Ranching Frontiers,* 188; Brasseaux, *Acadian to Cajun,* 17–19, 41, 55–56.

62. Jensen, *Bayou Cowboys of Louisiana;* Brasseaux, *Acadian to Cajun,* 67–69.

decades of the mid-twentieth century. He was a "rough and tough" chain smoker. "When you say 'work,' he was there. Mano would rope anything that come up. Oh, he was a good roper."[63]

North of the Attakapas lived a parallel group of Black, French-speaking cowboys in rural communities founded by mid-eighteenth-century free Black Louisianans. Many of these "Creoles of color" (in the food section below we will discuss Louisianans' complex use of the term "Creole") were also cattlemen who, it is said, gained their herding expertise from African ancestors. Though many chose or were forced to live and work in a segregated, Blacks-only society, others married outside their race, and there was considerable intermingling. All of this greatly affects the study of the history of American cowboys. A generation of scholars identified postbellum Texas as the birthplace of African-American cattlemen, the evidence being that during Reconstruction thousands of Black freedmen went to work on the Plains cattle frontier. While this certainly did happen, these scholars were wrong in saying that it was unique. The cultural geographer Donald W. Davis writes, "It is highly likely that southwest Louisiana was the birthplace of the black cowboy."[64]

Cajun cowboys began to experiment with cattle breeding in the late 1800s, replacing the old Longhorn cattle with Brahman mixes. The Brahmans (*Bos taurus indicus)* originally came from south Asia and were much more resistant to heat and mosquitoes than American cattle breeds. Brahman cows are also excellent mothers and, when necessary, can graze belly deep in water. Horse breeding programs followed much later and, like all North American cowboys, Louisianans were drawn to quarter horses,

63. Brasseaux, *Acadian to Cajun,* 43–44, 151–52; Carl Brasseaux, Keith P. Fontenot, and Claude F. Oubre, *Creoles of Color in the Bayou Country* (Jackson, Miss., 1994), 70–71; Davis, *Washed Away: The Invisible People of Louisiana's Wetlands,* 75–76; Jones, *Louisiana Cowboys,* 60-64.

64. For Creole cowboys, see Jensen, *Bayou Cowboys of Louisiana,* and Brasseaux et al., *Creoles of Color,* 7, 15, 19, 20, 23, 26–42, 44, 45, 69, 136, 144. For a discussion of Creole ethnicity and the controversial noun "Creole," see Brasseaux et al., *Creoles of Color,* xi–xii, and the Kate Chopin and food sections, above and below, this work. Creole French dialect is distinct from Cajun French. Phillip Durham and Everett L. Jones, *The Negro Cowboys* (New York, 1965) is a pathbreaking book that points to Blacks' significant role in Plains cattle ranching, but misses their Louisiana origins.

or quarter horse mixes. Quarter horses are named for their great speed at short—quarter-mile—distances. Yet in a sign of things to come, Cajun cowboys found alternatives to horseback herding and long drives, using railroad cars, steamboats, and barges to ship cattle over difficult terrain and eliminating some (not all) of the "big swims."[65]

World War II was a turning point for agriculture and herding throughout the American South. The South was an economic backwater until World War II, and the postwar era ushered in the full benefits of the industrial revolution and accompanying agricultural improvements. By this time, most of the Attakapas had been divided into ranches of three hundred to five hundred acres, with some common pastures remaining. Cajun cowboys' work retained its seasonal rhythm, but with variants. Like ranchers out west, Cajuns had always moved their cattle to better feed in the spring and fall, the time of the roundups, for branding and doctoring the herds. Herding was a very difficult business in open marshland, but following World War II, Cajun ranchers invested in building "ridges"—cow trails that stood above the damp prairie marshes and mud. The result is reminiscent of rice paddy path systems, but the ridges are built ten to fifteen feet wide to accommodate cattle herds. And the ridges work in conjunction with improved transport—cattle trucks and river barges. Indeed, high-speed, maneuverable airboats also expedite cattle herding in bayou country.[66]

Technology did not entirely replace the mounted herdsmen. Archie Berwick, a cowboy on the Johnson Bayou born in 1916, boasted, "I only worked two regular jobs in my life" for about two months. Instead, he "farmed, worked cows, ran some of my own, and trapped—just rode horseback all I could. You know, there

65. Davis, *Washed Away: The Invisible People of Louisiana's Wetlands,* 93, 95; Jones, *Louisiana Cowboys,* 157, 161, passim; Jensen, *Bayou Cowboys of Louisiana.* See also D. J. Millett, "Cattle and Cattlemen of Southwest Louisiana, 1860–1900," *Louisiana History* 28, no. 3 (1987), 311–30.

66. Neil R. McMillen, *Remaking Dixie: The Impact of World War II on the American South* (Jackson, Miss., 1997), xiv; Jensen, *Bayou Cowboys of Louisiana;* Davis, *Washed Away,* 74, 76, 92–93, 96–97. See also S. Miller, "Ranching in the Louisiana Marshes," *Journal of Range Management* 21, no. 1 (1956), 284–85.

aren't many folks who can make that statement." But Berwick's generation saw technology change the nature of Louisiana cowboying. The "big swims" ended and trail drives continued in only vestigial form. Today, journalists and documentary filmmakers are drawn to an annual cattle drive and roundup near Holly Beach and Johnson Bayou, on the Gulf of Mexico. Photographs and movies of mounted cowboys herding cattle along the beach with the broad Caribbean in the background are striking. However, a closer look reveals far more mounted cowboys than necessary for the number of cattle they are working. Like many modern roundups out west, the Holly Beach trail drive has become a community celebration, a time for rural folk to gather and reenact the workways of their ancestors. Although there are still working Cajun cowboys, the Attakapas has been changed forever by railroads, diesel towboats, the Intercoastal Waterway, cattle trucks, and airboats.[67]

"I always wanted to be a cowboy," Boo Ledoux reflected in an interview with Bill Jones. Born in 1912, Ledoux had as heroes the Cajun horsemen "Wesley Fruge, a top hand around Sweet Lake, and a black cowboy named Victorian Caesar." Although Ledoux achieved his goal, he eventually chose to leave Attakapas cowboying and follow a more sedentary lifestyle. He concludes nostalgically:

> I'd a rather stayed on the ranch. You could saddle a horse and ride a day without ever getting off Miss Matilda's [his employer] land. I liked everything about working there, breaking horses, driving cattle, I just liked everything… We were kings out there.

The Cowboy Code—a set of beliefs ascribed to North American herdsmen—lives on among a small number of Louisiana cowboys and flourishes in the beliefs of their fellow Louisianans. Cowboy Code values of individualism, work ethic, loyalty, courage, humility, equality, hospitality, common sense, and anti-intellectualism are strong on the Attakapas, and the

67. Davis, *Washed Away,* 96–97; Jones, *Louisiana Cowboys,* 53 (Berwick qtn.), passim; Jensen, *Bayou Cowboys of Louisiana*.

Cajun cowboys' love of their horses is legendary. Even the Plains cowboys' famed laconic speech patterns have a Cajun French version. Donald Davis is no doubt overly romantic in his conclusion that southwest Louisiana cowboying "has not changed much since its inception." It has changed plenty. But Davis is quite correct in his conclusion that, as in the American and Canadian West, "horses, cowboy hats, boots, cattle, bridles, ropes, belt buckles as large as small plates, and jeans" remain an important "part of the culture of the *Cheniere* Plain."[68]

The popularity of Louisiana rodeo reflects that state's continuing fascination with cowboy culture. American rodeo was born on the Great Plains during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and appears to have arrived later in Louisiana. There were informal competitions and ranch rodeos at Attakapas roundups and cattle drives, and small rodeos began to emerge. Houma, Louisiana, hosted a rodeo in the early 1940s, and Alexandria followed in 1948. While New Orleans boasted a 1953 LSU Rodeo event, the best Louisiana college rodeo team was (and remains) the McNeese State University Cowboys of Lake Charles. In another corner of the state, the famed (and infamous) Angola Louisiana State Prison rodeo recently celebrated its 50th anniversary.[69]

Early Louisiana inductees into the rodeo division of the National Cowboy Hall of Fame (now the National Cowboy and Western Heritage Museum, in Oklahoma City) are the roughstock rider Felix Cooper and the bullfighting clown Rick Young. More recently, the ProRodeo (Professional Rodeo Cowboys Association) Hall of Fame in Colorado Springs inducted two Louisiana cowboys, Clyde Vamvoras and Steve Duhon. Vamvoras, a native of Lake Charles, won the Louisiana

68. Ledoux quoted in Jones, *Louisiana Cowboys,* 50–51; Davis, *Washed Away,* 76, 96–97. For the Cowboy Code, see Allen, *Rodeo Cowboys in the North American Imagination,* 29–30.
69. Houma Rodeo Parade photograph, Alexandria Rodeo program, and "Twelve Months of New Orleans" calendar page, all in Historic New Orleans Collection, New Orleans, La.; Louise Bonnette, "McNeese Rodeo Hall of Fame Inductees," 2003, https://www.kplctv.com/story/1519563/mcneese-rodeo-hall-of-fame-inductees/, accessed Aug. 18, 2014. For prison rodeo, see Daniel Bergner, *God of the Rodeo: The Quest for Redemption in Angola's Prison Rodeo* (New York, 1998), and Allen, *Rodeo Cowboys in the North American Imagination,* 167–68.

High School Rodeo All-Around Championship and went on to qualify for eleven straight National Final Rodeo (NFR) appearances (1963–73), winning two world bareback bronc riding titles (1967–68). A little more than a decade later, Duhon, of Opelousas, turned down an LSU football scholarship to follow his true love—steer wrestling. He qualified for eight National Final Rodeos and won the world steer wrestling championship buckles in 1986, 1987, and 1993. His 1986 3.0 run held the NFR arena record until tied in 2001. The 2016 world champion steer wrestler was Tyler Waguespack, of Gonzales, Louisiana. Meanwhile, back in Johnson Bayou, one of the cowboys regularly riding the famed Holly Beach cattle drive is Josh Barentine, a local hand who has ranked atop the professional bull riding circuit.[70]

A parting look at three Louisiana equestrian folk festivals shows exceptionalism as well as mainstream elements of North American cowboy culture. Horseracing is ubiquitous in the Bayou State, as are the drinking and gambling that accompany formal and informal matches. Cajuns also stage horseback tournaments in which the young men dress up like medieval knights, wearing facsimile armored uniforms. In addition to racing, these remarkable tournaments feature mock jousting competitions and the selection of a festival king and queen. In one event, the knights ride at a full gallop around an arena, attempting to spear a hanging ring with their lances (the winner presents the ring to his lady). Finally, there is Mardi Gras, a pre-Lenten Caribbean festival most Americans associate with colored beads, New Orleans French Quarter parades, and public drunkenness. Yet out west on the Attakapas, some celebrate Mardi Gras on horseback. A tradition among Cajun men is to don masks and costumes and ride as a mounted posse to all the

70. "Felix Cooper" and "Rick Young," National Cowboy Museum, https://nationalcowboymuseum.org/awards-halls-of-fame/rodeo-hall-of-fame-inductees/, accessed Feb. 8, 2016; "Clyde Vamvoras" and "Steve Duhon," ProRodeo Hall of Fame, https://www.prorodeohalloffame.com/inductees/, accessed Aug. 18, 2014; Josh Barentine in Jensen, *Bayou Cowboys of Louisiana.* See also Louisiana Rodeo Hall of Fame, https://www.lrcarodeo.com/, and Ewan McNicol and Anna Sandilands, dirs.., *The Roper* (Seattle, 2013), DVD.

neighboring farmsteads. At each stop they demand chicken, fish, sausage, or a bag of rice for their communal Mardi Gras gumbo.[71]

While Louisiana horsemen boast exceptional characteristics, most of their folkways fit into North American norms (the jousting tournament royalty, for example, look a little like the high school homecoming king and queen, and the Mardi Gras posse ritual resembles Halloween trick-or-treating). Cajun cowboys certainly work in an environment far different from that of their far western brethren, yet as we have seen, their workways have much in common. The point here is that the archetypal Great Plains cowboys learned from the Cajuns, just as Cajuns learned from the far westerners. All cowboys share skills and techniques, Cowboy Code values, a love of horses, rodeo, and western mystique. Perhaps Gino Delafouse, a ranch-raised Creole zydeco musician, best sums up the similarity of Louisiana and Plains cowboys when he reflects, in understated cowboy style, "I think the biggest competition between the Louisiana cowboy and the Texas cowboy is over who can two-step the best."[72]

VITTLES

Food and drink references are woven throughout the stories of Alligator Horses, southern Jews, Cajun cowboys, and, as we shall see below, towboat and houseboat folk. Foodways are important enough to merit a separate discussion here. Mississippi Valley foods—victuals, or vittles, in common language—are coarse, filling, energizing, and gratifying. Although Americans served many of their ancestral European (especially English and Celtic) dishes on the dinner table, American food became and remains exceptional.

Mississippi Valley food has always been described by outsiders, especially Europeans, as indelicate and unhealthy. The historian John Lauritz Larson summarizes the Englishwoman Frances Trollope's view of 1830s American mealtimes: "Men (whether

71. Lomax, *Cajun Country;* Bernard, *Swamp Pop,* 89.
72. Delafouse in Jensen, *Bayou Cowboys of Louisiana*.

gentlemen or tradesmen) ate like animals at table, stuffing their mouths with food, hardly bothering to chew, pausing not to converse but only to wash down their crude repast with vile corn whiskey." Trollope complained constantly of folks who subsisted on "salt meat and dry biscuits," and she referred to "the never-failing accompaniments of American tea-drinking, hung beef, 'chipped up' raw, and sundry sweet-meats of brown sugar hue and flavor." Of watermelon, she wrote, "Foot-long" pieces "are applied to the mouth, from either side of which pour copious streams of the fluid, while, ever and anon, a mouthful of hard black seeds are shot out in all directions."[73]

The Frenchman Constance Volney, who traveled the Ohio and Mississippi Valleys around 1800, remembered Americans breakfasting on hot tea and coffee and "swallow[ing], almost without chewing, hot bread, half baked, toast soaked in butter, cheese of the fattest kind, slices of salt or hung beef, ham, etc." For dinner, they ate

> boiled pastes under the name of puddings … all their sauces, even for roast beef, are melted butter; their turnips and potatoes swim in hog's lard, butter, or fat; under the name of pie or pumpkin, their pastry is nothing but a greasy paste, never sufficiently baked … they take tea almost instantly after dinner, making it so strong it is absolutely bitter to the taste, in which state it affects the nerves so powerfully that even the English find it brings on a more obstinate restlessness than coffee.

Thus, "the whole day passes in heaping indigestions on one another." An English contemporary of Volney provided a pithy summary of frontier cuisine: "They eat salt meat three times a day, seldom or never have any vegetables, and drink ardent spirits from morning til night."[74]

73. John Lauritz Larson, introduction to Frances Trollope, *Domestic Manners of the Americans,* ed. John Lauritz Larson (St. James, N.Y., 1993), xviii; Trollope, *Domestic Manners of the Americans,* 21–22, 52, 125–26. See James E. McWilliams, "Cuisine and National Identity in the Early Republic," *Historically Speaking* (May/June 2006), 6–8, McWilliams, *A Revolution in Eating: How the Quest for Food Shaped America* (New York, 2005), and Marcie Cohen Ferris, *The Edible South: The Power of Food and the Making of an American Region* (Charlottesville, N.C., 2014).

Culling out the prejudices of elite European travelers, the above accounts describe the hearty Mississippi Valley cuisine that endured until well after World War II. As we saw in studying cracker culture, frontier folk needed lots of calories to survive and work, and they got them where they could. Pork and corn were dietary staples, with corn serving triple duty as side dish, bread, and alcoholic beverage. Warm climate necessitated heavily salting meat to preserve it; fresh meat was cooked long and at high temperatures to kill worms and parasites. Green European-style vegetables were initially scarce; Indian vegetables besides corn were popular, especially pumpkins, squash, and beans. Over the course of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, butter beans (cousins of the lima), great northern and pinto beans, and black-eyed peas found their way onto dinner tables, cooked in a fatback (pork) and onion broth. On New Year's Day, Mississippi Valley families cooked up pots of black-eyed peas with a ham hock to bring good luck in the New Year, a tradition that endures. Other popular green vegetables were wild "poke salat" (salad), its domestic cousin collard greens, and green beans, all cooked with the ubiquitous pork and onions. Okra was breaded in cornmeal and fried, and potatoes were served fried, mashed, or, later, in potato salad. Raw green onions (scallions) were served with salt for dipping, and apple orchards provided hearty fruit that could be eaten whole year-round and cooked up into sauces and desserts. Pectin, an apple by-product, facilitated the preservation of fruit jellies and jams.[75]

African-American slaves and freedmen adopted this cuisine and added their own variations. By the mid-twentieth century, the name soul food was attached to Black foodways that were, and had always been, the same as those of Anglo and Celtic

74. Henry Adams, *A History of the United States during the Administrations of Thomas Jefferson and James Madison, 1801–1807,* 4 vols. (1889; rpt. New York, 1930), 1:43–45.

75. Ibid.; Grady McWhiney, *Cracker Culture: Celtic Ways of the Old South* (Tuscaloosa, Ala., 1988), 80–83, 86–89; John E. Uhler and Glenna Uhler, eds., *The Rochester Clarke Bibliography of Louisiana Cooking* (Plaquemine, La., 1966). Loyola University of New Orleans Special Collections possesses several of the cookbooks cited. For apples, see William Kerrigan, *Johnny Appleseed and the American Orchard: A Cultural History* (Baltimore, Md., 2012), and chapter 2, this work. Thanks to Jody Ann Matthews for the pectin information.

Mississippi Valley folk. For example, the New Year's Day black-eyed pea dish was found on both Black and white folks' stovetops, and sweet potatoes, an Indian crop, often appeared as side dish and dessert. Wild rabbit, possum, squirrel, and raccoon meat were fried and baked. Vegetables were always overcooked in fatback broth ("pot liquor"). Fried fish was very important to this diet, because the western rivers provided bountiful fatty, bottom-feeding catfish, perch, and bass. Cooks served small catfish (fiddlers) whole, and they cut the big ones into steaks (ribs) cut vertically to the bone. Then, they breaded the fish in cornmeal or flour and fried it golden brown in about a half-inch of lard or bacon grease.[76]

The addition of poultry and dairy cows to developing farmsteads greatly enriched Mississippi Valley food. Fish were now dipped into an egg and buttermilk batter before being breaded and fried; they were served with hush puppies (fried corn meal, milk, and egg patties) and coleslaw, a cabbage salad heavily dressed in mayonnaise (eggs and vinegar) and white granulated sugar. Of course, cooks also battered, breaded, and fried chicken pieces—legs, thighs, wings, breasts, backs, and innards—creating the classic southern dish. Where crackers raised cattle, they cooked the cheaper beefsteak cuts the same way, eventually naming the dish chicken-fried steak. After frying fish, chicken, or beef steaks, cooks' pans contained rich dregs of meat and grease. Stirring in and browning a little flour and adding milk at high heat produced rich milk gravy to be spooned onto the meat, vegetables, and biscuits. Served at noon, meals like this provided the calories needed to work hard and enjoy life west of the Appalachians.[77]

The evolution of riverboat food over the nineteenth and twentieth centuries mirrors much of the above. Early keelboat, flatboat, and rafting crews partook of a coarse diet. One observer

76. Eugene D. Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll: The World the Slaves Made* (1972; repr. New York, 1976), 540–49 (soul food, 542); Jens Lund, *Flatheads and Spooneys: Fishing for a Living in the Ohio River Valley* (Lexington, Ky., 1995), 127, 130, appendix 1.

77. Junior League of Baton Rouge, *River Road Recipes: The Textbook of Louisiana Cuisine* (1959; repr. Memphis, Tenn., 1997), 31 (slaw), 37 (biscuits), 41 (cornbread), 44 (hushpuppies); Lund, *Flatheads and Spooneys,* 132–33 (fried catfish).

remembered a French-Canadian keelboat crew that daily cooked up "bacon and maize which they call gue" and "seem to prefer above everything." John James Audubon recalled that, for supper, boatmen "preferring Bacon would Cut a Slice from the Side that hung by the Chimney and Chew that raw with a hard biscuit." One Kentucky flatboatman bragged in 1806 of procuring a "kettle of milk," the first he had drunk in two months. Yet by the mid-1800s, a Wabash flatboatman could describe a "glorious" dinner of "wheat bread … *fried ham—fried eggs* and to top all *hot coffee* ... [and] homemade cake sugar to sweeten it." Boatmen as "hungry as wolves" feasted on "hot biscuit, pure white honey, hot coffee, *et cetera,"* and some ate "peach dumplings" for dessert.[78]

As steamboats slowly supplanted nonsteam craft, river cookery evolved to feed hungry crew members and fare-paying travelers. Although nineteenth-century steamboat cuisine was somewhat refined, it retained strong ties to foodways of Mississippi Valley folk on shore. The steamboat galley or cookhouse was located midship, between the main decks, with adjacent space for slaughtering poultry. There was a cooler for fish, meat, and dairy goods, bins for root vegetables, pantry shelves stocked with canned goods (a late nineteenth-century innovation), a large work table for the cook (often called "Cookie"), and a scullery sink for cleanup. The riverman and author Alan Bates recalled the cookhouse was "hot as the very hinges of hell" from coal-fired cooking stoves that were never extinguished. Although the passengers' dining room was on the main deck, the crew ate midship, where the food was "good, plentiful, and filling… The meals were heavy, but so was the work… Breakfast included a couple of meats, fried potatoes, biscuits, eggs done several ways, jellies and jams, and coffee. Dinner (there was no luncheon!) consisted of meats and

78. M. Perrin du Lac, *Travels through the Two Louisianas and among the Savage Nations of the Missouri ... 1801, 1802, and 1803* (London, 1807), 44; John James Audubon, *Journal of John James Audubon Made during His Trips to New Orleans in 1820–21,* ed. Howard Corning (Boston, 1929), 95–96; F. A. L., "Journal of a Trip to New Orleans on a *Broadhorn,"* in "Atalantian," entry for June [?], 1848, manuscript, IV, Indiana Historical Society; "The Beauties of Flatboating; or Journal of a Trip to New Orleans," "Atalantian," entry for July 28, 1845, II.

vegetables and desserts such as pie and cake." Before retiring for the night, Cookie prepared plates piled with cold cuts and trimmings for the hungry crew's midnight snack.[79]

Steamboat cabin passengers ate more upscale fare, though European travelers unanimously refuted any American claims to meeting continental standards. Steamboat companies apparently tried to make up for quality by stressing quantity. One passenger remembered serving tables "literally covered with dishes, wedged together as closely as a battalion of infantry in solid square," and another recalled a single meal with more than thirty separate dishes to choose from. These included "relishes," a flexible term Americans used to mean almost anything added to or served alongside an entrée.[80] The enormity of these repasts still characterizes American all-you-can-eat buffets, including those in gambling casinos that succeeded the Mississippi steamboat gambling rooms.

Aboard steamers, platters were piled high with venison, bear, beef, pork, lamb, wild and tame fowl—a regimen strong on protein and starch and light on vitamins. Some surviving menus list both English and French entrées, side dishes, and desserts in a collage one traveler described as "a most unfortunate attempt to match English and French cooking, without the rude cleanliness of the first and the savory refinement of the latter." Yet steamboat cookery progressed while retaining its earthy roots. The *Delta Queen Cookbook* lists appetizing twentieth-century steamboat entrées such as baby back ribs, chicken and andouille gumbo, marinated pork tenderloin, navy bean soup, pot roast of beef, southern-style fried chicken, turtle soup, and, for dessert, strawberry shortcake, beignets, and Delta Queen bread pudding covered in bourbon sauce. Captain Fred Way, who saw all this cuisine change during his career, wrote sarcastically that "a real steamboat cook could make any of those exotic concoctions with a bucket of lard and ten pounds of sugar."[81]

79. Alan L. Bates, "The Cookhouse," *Waterways Journal* (June 12, 2006), 18; Louis C. Hunter, *Steamboats on Western Rivers: An Economic and Technological History* (1949; repr. Mineola, N.Y., 1994), 399–402.

80. Louis C. Hunter, *Steamboats on Western Rivers,* 399–402.

By the end of World War II, most (not all) of the old steamboats had been replaced by diesel-powered, snub-nosed towboats whose cooks were also respected for their hearty fare. Towboat deckhands counted their meals as part of their pay, declaring, "The more you eat, the more you make." Although there was variety in dishes, many towboat cooks worked around a traditional schedule still seen to this day: Fried chicken on Sundays, pork and beef roasts and chicken and dumplings during the weekdays, fish on Friday, and steaks on Saturday night. Towboat cooks always served their big meal of the day (dinner) at noon, with leftovers and a new entrée for the evening supper. And a good cook left the crew snacks on the counter and in the pantry. Dick Bissell described the dining experience of a 1940s upper Mississippi River boat crew in his autobiographical 1950 novel, *A Stretch of the River:*

> One thing about it, we had a cook who wasn't shy at ordering. We carried the damnedest assortment of food aboard that old tugboat—sardines, pineapple, liederkranz, pork sausage, salami, strawberry preserves, lemon extract, black-eye peas, pickled herring, brown sugar, picnic slices, brick cheese, mayonnaise, grape juice, lunch meats, plum butter, clover honey, smelts, store cookies, vanilla extract, sweet rolls, spareribs, muskmelons, pigs' feet, Mapeline, Salada tea, pie apples, red grapes, watermelons, youngberries, iceberg lettuce, long johns, Postum, celery salt, bulieners, Clabber Girl, hot relish, Indian pudding—only thing missing was pickled eggs and Major Grey's chuntney.[82]

Inevitably, modern health concerns and dietary trends entered the towboat kitchen. Twenty-first-century Americans are concerned with living healthier lives by reducing obesity, and

81. Bates, "Cookhouse," 18; Hunter, *Steamboats on Western Rivers,* 401 (traveler qtn.), 402; "Cynthia LeJeune Nobles, *The Delta Queen Cookbook: The History and Recipes of the Legendary Steamboat* (Baton Rouge, La., 2012), passim; Bates, "Cookhouse," 18 (Way qtn.).
82. Much of this is based on the author's own experience as a line cook for Valley Towing and National Marine Service, 1978–81. See below and *The American Waterways Cookbook: Regional Recipes from the Galleys of the Nation's Towboats and Tugboats* (Arlington, Va., n.d.), in author's possession. Quote is from Richard Bissell, *A Stretch of the River: A Novel of Adventure on a Mississippi River Towboat* (1950; repr. Saint Paul, Minn., 1987), 53.

towboat cuisine is a likely target for transportation company executives concerned with rising health insurance premiums. Dawn Null is a pathbreaking towboat consultant and dietician who stresses healthier diet and exercise for rivermen. Liz Young, a cook for the Ingraham Barge Lines, uses whole wheat macaroni, Greek yogurt, almond milk, and low-fat cheese in some recipes, and serves no fried food except on Friday, "catfish day." "I grew up on Southern cooking, so I can replicate those tastes," she states. "I just do it in a more healthy way."[83]

And though some old river rats may wince at the idea of low-fat towboat food, that alternative is certainly better than another trend in the modern towboat industry—getting rid of cooks altogether. In a cost-cutting strategy abetted by prepared meals and declining culinary standards, many towboat companies simply stock their boats with a freezer full of frozen entrées and a microwave, and crew members are left to fend for themselves. In 2012, one angry towboat man complained that American Commercial Barge Lines (ACBL) "did away with that one little bit of home that their workers enjoyed—they fired all their cooks." In the good old days, he recalled, one ACBL captain "insisted his cooks bake a big ham on Sundays along with the fried chicken; this would be so his deckhands could have home-baked ham sandwiches all week."[84]

Corporate cost-cutters, dieticians, and nutritionists notwithstanding, there are plenty of barbecue cooks on the banks of the western rivers carrying on old Mississippi Valley traditions. Like all folk idiom, the word "barbecue" has obscure origins. It descends from Indians by way of the Spanish noun *barbicoa*—a platform on which Caribbean Indians apparently smoked meat over firewood. Colonial and Revolutionary era Virginians and Carolinians barbecued meat, and the word appears in early national references to Jeffersonian and

83. Dawn Null, "A Study of Living and Working on a Towboat: What Are the Health and Nutritional Implications?" PhD dissertation (Southern Illinois University, 2012); David Murray, "Ingraham Cook, Reality Star Brings Healthy Cooking to Rivers," *Waterways Journal* 125, no. 4 (April 25, 2011), 30.

84. "Name withheld by request," Letter to Editor, *Waterways Journal* 126 (January 30, 2012), 4.

Jacksonian Democrat outdoor campaign parties.[85] However they used the term—wood-fired cooking device (an open pit barbecue), the meat served therefrom (folks ate barbecue), a mealtime gathering (politicians hosted barbecues), a condiment (chicken basted in barbecue sauce), or a cooking method (to barbecue some pork ribs)—Americans became passionate barbecuers early on and remain so. There are, arguably, four major traditional American barbecue types—Carolina, Memphis, Kansas City, and Texas styles. Our focus here is barbecue prepared and consumed in Memphis, on the lower Mississippi, and Kansas City, astride the lower Missouri River.

The core of the barbecue foodway—meat roasted over a smoky wood fire—was and is found throughout the Memphis and Kansas City areas from the nineteenth century to present. Cooks in both regions utilize open-pit and enclosed smokers, cooking their meat slowly at low temperatures (pork ribs, for example, are cooked at about 250 degrees for four and a half hours). Yet major variants appear. While Memphians are partial to hickory wood, Kansas City cooks fuel their smokers with a variety of woods—cherry, oak, apple, and pecan, alongside hickory. While Memphians almost always barbecue pork, Kansas City cooks prepare pork, beef, chicken, turkey, mutton, sausage, and even fish. Most important, Memphis barbecue is "dry" while Kansas City boasts a "wet" barbecue style.[86]

Pork ribs and pulled pork sandwiches stand atop the menu of every Memphis barbecue joint. The modifier "pulled" means the meat is neither diced nor cut into uniform slices; rather it is pulled off the bone in stringy shredded pieces. Before smoking, the pork is coated with a thick dry rub consisting of a paprika base, salt, pepper, garlic, oregano, celery seed, chili powder, and other spices. While the meat is slowly cooking, Memphians "mop" it with a sauce they make by adding a little water and vinegar to the rub. The cooking continues until the meat is so tender that it nearly falls off the bone. Although Memphians

85. Robert F. Moss, *Barbecue: The History of an American Institution* (Tuscaloosa, Ala., 2010), 7–8, 11–53.
86. Ibid., 150–59.

disdain thick, sweet barbecue sauce dressings, they will eat pulled pork sandwiches and barbecue ribs complemented with a thin, vinegary tomato sauce akin to the rub. But Memphis barbecue spotlights the meat, not the sauce. Cabbage coleslaw swimming in sugar, vinegar, and mayonnaise provides the finishing touch on Memphis barbecue plates.[87]

Despite important variants, Kansas City barbecue is related to the Memphis style. Probably too much credit is given to Henry Perry, a Black west Tennessean who moved to Missouri in the early nineteenth century and began smoking meats (the standard chamber of commerce blurb credits Perry with founding Kansas City barbecue). Surely the Memphis style filtered west by way of more than one cook. Yet Perry's barbecue joint loomed large in the Eighteenth and Vine African American neighborhood that also became home to Kansas City jazz, professional Negro league baseball, and the speakeasy and sin trade overseen by "Boss" (Mayor) Tom Pendergast. Kansas City barbecuing matured, using slow-cooking methods to prepare a variety of smoked meat plates accompanied by slaw, baked beans, fried potatoes, and generous portions of sweet, spicy tomato and molasses barbecue sauce. "Burnt ends"—the crusty end pieces of smoked beef and pork roasts—remain a unique Kansas City entrée.[88]

In his study of early national American food, James McWilliams found that Americans balanced European "refinement" with American "provincial ruggedness" while retaining their patriotic pride:

> The refinement of the idealized English (and European) diet was now a quality that young Americans could overtly condemn (rather than, as they once had, praise) without completely dismissing its welcome trappings. Through the virtues that American food embraced—frugality, simplicity, pragmatism, unpretentiousness—the United States could grow into a sophisticated nation while avoiding the enervating habit of complacency into which the British had fallen.[89]

87. Ibid., 150-53; James R. Veteto and Edward M. Maclin, *The Slaw and the Slow Cooked: Culture and Barbecue in the Mid-South* (Nashville, Tenn., 2011), 34–37.
88. Moss, *Barbecue,* 153–59.

Our brief study of Mississippi Valley food takes McWilliams a step further—geographically, chronologically, and analytically. Once Americans crossed the Appalachians, their eating habits evolved, à la Frederick Jackson Turner, in a decidedly more rugged direction. But as time passed, did their diet stay that way, or moderate back in the direction of European norms? Exceptionalism seems to be the rule.[90] And Louisiana and Minnesota—two states often viewed to be very different—provide a final look at Mississippi Valley foodways in the modern period.

Because of its French and Spanish heritage, Louisiana is mistakenly viewed as an American state with decidedly European culture. Architecture, language, and selected folkways lull us into this false analysis. Although Louisianans certainly possess unique cultural traits, they are nevertheless decidedly American. Exceptional Louisiana foodways are celebrated and much discussed.[91] A good way to examine them is to look separately at Louisiana country and city folk—Cajuns and Creoles—and, allowing for variants, identify some patterns.

Like all American immigrants, Cajuns brought cooking styles from their native land, southwestern France, adding elements they learned in Maritime Canada before their mid-eighteenth–century exile southward. Certainly, the tomato sauce bases Cajuns favor were common in their corner of Europe. But in Canada they encountered new kinds of meat, vegetables, and fish, and in Louisiana they learned African foodways and grew fond of hot and sweet peppers and red beans. White rice, introduced to the Americas by the Spanish and Portuguese, is today affectionately called "Cajun ice cream." Poor but proud, these rural folk of the bayous—that region Kate Chopin called the "'Cadian Prairie"—ate wild meat they trapped and shot. They developed a rough cuisine akin to that of crackers and Blacks, complete with cornbread, biscuits, greens, red beans, and bread

89. McWilliams, "Cuisine and National Identity in the Early Republic," 7–8; McWilliams, *Revolution in Eating*.
90. Moss, *Barbecue,* 229; Calvin Trillin, *The Tummy Trilogy* (New York, 1994), xi.
91. Uhler and Uhler, *Rochester Clarke Bibliography of Louisiana Cooking,* passim.

puddings. Their diet might be called Cajun soul food. At the same time, Cajun gumbo (an African word), jambalaya, and dirty rice dishes melded highly spiced peppers, onions, and okra with the meat of rabbit, squirrel, raccoon, opossum, nutria, beaver, muskrat, black bear, deer, duck, goose, chukar, dove, turkey, pheasant, quail, multiple species of fish, shrimp, crawfish, turtle, frog, and alligator alongside chicken, beef, domestic pork, and wild boar. One remarkable Cajun recipe, deep-fried muskrat, calls for marinating the meat in a garlic and pepper mixture for six hours before breading it in flour and frying "until golden brown on all sides and meat floats to surface of the oil."[92]

The term "Creole" is subject to great debate, which spills over into our discussion of food. Originally, "Creole" described only American-born Louisianans of French and Spanish heritage, as in Kate Chopin's writings. However, as we saw in the cowboy discussion above, slavery and the rise of a free Black population slowly led to a growing number of mixed-race Louisianans who also claimed the name. Today, most use "Creole" as a term to describe the latter group, but here we use it in the historic Franco-Hispano-Louisianan sense. While many Creoles resided in rural areas, historic Creole culture remains strongly connected to an urban New Orleans (versus rural Cajun) lifestyle and that city's presumed European foodways. True, some New Orleans restaurateurs aspired (and aspire) to continental standards. Like 1920s and 1930s writers and artists, they imagined New Orleans as a kind of American Paris in which they somehow substituted the Mississippi for the Seine![93]

However, New Orleans cooks tell a more complicated story. "My earliest restaurant memory is Commander's Palace," states the contemporary New Orleans chef John Besh, reminiscing about his family's 1970s visits to the Crescent City. "Going into the city meant you had to wear your Sunday suit. So, that meant you were taking mom out to a very nice restaurant." Although

92. John D. Folse, *After the Hunt: Louisiana's Authoritative Collection of Wild Game and Game Fish Cookery* (Gonzalez, La., 2007), 323 (muskrat recipe), passim.
93. Brasseaux, *Creoles of Color,* xi–xii. For artistic aspirations to create a Left Bank of the Mississippi, see chapter 4, this work.

the Commander's Palace of Besh's memories was indeed "a very nice restaurant," it was not serving haute cuisine. And when discussing his own cooking, Besh confesses, "I'm the first generation from my family away from the farm… Secretly, I love anything fried… The perfect food would be a hot French fry, dipped in mayo when nobody's looking, at least not my cardiologist."[94]

Paul Prudhomme, a Cajun chef originally from Opelousas, Louisiana, never worried about cardiologists; he was extremely generous with butter as he introduced bayou foodways into the big city. The restaurateurs Ella and Dick Brennan hired Prudhomme as head chef of Commander's Palace in 1975, and he immediately brought things down to earth. "I was the first American they'd hired as an executive [chef]," Prudhomme recalls. "It was always Europeans." Ella Brennan remembers, "The French had intimidated America with their supposed better knowledge of cooking. But we eventually became less intimidated." Although the Brennans insisted on calling Prudhomme's cooking "nouvelle Creole," it exuded his Cajun upbringing. A good example is his signature Commander's Palace gumbo, a thick, spicy Cajun stew. True, Prudhomme peppered the dish with andouille, a French pork sausage. But at his gumbo's base was an indigenous roux—a heavy flour and cooking oil thickener.

> The gumbo I did at Commander's was a roux gumbo … it became a staple. It was chicken and andouille gumbo. It was down-and-dirty Cajun. It was what Mama used to do. I'd go into the country and buy the andouille from the guy I'd known since I was a kid. We didn't have andouille in New Orleans until later.[95]

Far upriver, Minnesotans face a daunting task in putting on airs.

94. "In My Kitchen: Bayou Boy John Besh," *Wall Street Journal,* Oct. 22, 2011, D4.
95. Paul Prudhomme, *Chef Paul Prudhomme's Louisiana Kitchen* (New York, 1984); quotes in Brett Anderson, "Paul Prudhomme: An Oral History Chronicles His Role in Revolutionizing New Orleans Cuisine," *New Orleans Times-Picayune,* June 12, 2005, https://www.nola.com/entertainment_life/eat-drink/article_c8980548-bb97-5757-a962-3f97130d8beb.html, accessed July 28, 2014.

Despite the fact that today's Twin Cities (alongside Chicago) are home to many faux Euro restaurants, it is hard to be urbane in the upper Mississippi Valley. Like Louisianans, the original European settlers of the upper Midwest brought their native foodways with them.[96] However, theirs were often Scandinavian customs, not French, and this has somehow led to the myth of bad upper midwestern food. Garrison Keillor plays this theme with a heavy hand: "Good old Norwegian cooking, you don't read much about that," he states drolly in *Lake Wobegon Days,* before adding, "or about good old Norwegian hospitality." Then come the inevitable jokes about lutefisk, "a pale gelatinous substance beloved by all Norwegians, who nevertheless eat it only once a year."[97]

Midwestern food jokes about lutefisk, prune whip, chicken surprise, Jello molds, and tuna noodle mushroom soup casseroles, like many tales, have some basis in fact. After all, Betty Crocker is the fictitious creation of the Minneapolis-based General Mills packaged food corporation. Yet there are southern versions of maligned midwestern dishes—Jello is ubiquitous in southern "meat and three" joints, and many lower Mississippi Valley dinner tables have seen casseroles with potato chip toppings (midwesterners prefer canned fried onion rings) and cheese grits. Throughout the South, precooked hams are warmed and served in Coca-Cola sauces. When southerners eat this way, it is somehow seen as quaint. Minnesotans have been treated so unfairly. And, besides, *Betty Crocker's Cookbook* has some pretty good recipes.[98]

Keillor knows all of this. His joking about the "Moonlite Bay supper club" (with "forty booths with table cloths and candles in glass bowls that reflected on the mirror on the back bar") belies a firsthand knowledge of the little joints that lined the upper river, serving fried fish entrées and T-bone steaks. They

96. Marjorie Kreidberg, *Food on the Frontier: Minnesota Cooking from 1850 to 1900 with Selected Recipes* (1975; repr. St. Paul, Minn., 2004).

97. Keillor, *Lake Wobegon Days,* 186, 281.

98. Ibid., 186; Susan Marks, *Finding Betty Crocker: The Secret Life of America's First Lady of Food* (New York, 2005). For condensed soup casseroles, see Campbell Soup Company, *Campbell's Creative Cooking with Soup* (Camden, N.J., 1985).

still serve deep-fried frog legs on the upper Mississippi. Midwest folks prefer yeast rolls (Parker House), but biscuits appear at breakfast, and pans of cornbread are plentiful. On Sundays, there are fried chicken dinners, with green beans, mashed potatoes, and milk gravy. Upper Mississippi Valley cooks also make cream sauces out of milk, butter, and cornstarch; creamed onions make an excellent complement to a fried walleye dinner.[99]

Like the Louisiana bayous, the swamps of the upper Mississippi Valley flyway produce an abundance of ducks and geese for roasting or pan frying. After the wheat and corn are harvested, hunters harvest pheasants in the fields, and they too are floured and fried. Pork roast is extremely popular, and beef comes by way of Nebraska, Dakota, Iowa, and Chicago feedlots. Rare beef is more common nowadays, but a generation ago, midwesterners still cooked their roasts "stringy," like their nineteenth-century ancestors. On the side, they eat fried or baked potatoes (the latter served with rich midwestern butter and sour cream) and corn on the cob, heavily salted and buttered. The German-American descended cooks of Wisconsin and Minnesota are no strangers to potato salad, served chilled, American style.[100]

What's for dessert? The molasses and Karo syrup do not flow as readily in the upper Mississippi as the lower. Midwesterners like apple and cherry pie, and they like apple strudel (also Americanized). Cold midwestern winters lend themselves to baking, which reaches a crescendo at Christmas time. "Baking begins in earnest weeks ahead," Keillor writes. "Waves of cookies, enough to feed an army, enough to render an army helpless, including powerful rum balls and fruitcakes soaked with spirits (if the alcohol burns off in the baking, as they say, then why does Arlene [Bunson] hide them from her mother?)."[101]

99. Keillor, *Lake Wobegon Days,* 250–51; Peggy Wolf, ed., *Fried Walleye and Cherry Pie: Midwestern Writers on Food* (Lincoln, Nebr., 2013).
100. Wolf, *Fried Walleye and Cherry Pie,* passim.
101. Keillor, *Lake Wobegon Days,* 280–81.

HOUSEBOATING

In 1982, Maggie Lee Sayre resided in the Decatur County Nursing Home in Parsons, Tennessee. Still spry and mentally alert at sixty-two years of age, Maggie had been placed in the home by relatives because she was deaf and could not speak. Summoned to the reception area at 8:00 p.m. one evening, Parsons found the folklorists Tom Rankin and Bob Fulcher waiting for her. The three exchanged written notes as Maggie learned the men sought her out because she possessed a record of her fifty-one years living aboard houseboats on western rivers. In the late 1930s, Sayre had acquired a Kodak box camera, and for three decades she took hundreds of photographs of her family's riverboat world. Though Maggie Sayre was deaf and speechless, she could speak volumes. As soon as she ascertained the men's purpose, she went to her room and returned with two large photo albums. The three spent the evening poring over pictures of the lost world of Mississippi Valley houseboat folk.[102]

"Of all the dwellers in the valley of the great river, those who live in the houseboats have, by far, the most picturesque environment," wrote Clifton Johnson in his 1906 book *Highways and Byways of the Mississippi Valley.* "You find them everywhere, from St. Paul to New Orleans, and not only on the main rivers but on all the larger tributaries. There are many thousands of these water-gypsies in all."[103]

Like Cajun cowboys, stock car drivers, SEC football stars, and New Orleans chefs, houseboat folk possess a mystique. In a sense, Americans who lived on western rivers houseboats continued the traditions of ancient Egyptians inhabiting Nile riverboats, Chinese fishermen families whose craft lined the banks of the Yellow River, or the houseboaters seen today on the Rhine, Seine, and Thames Rivers. Yet American houseboating was exceptional, born in the nineteenth century of its own

102. Tom Rankin, "The Photographs of Maggie Lee Sayre: A Personal Vision of Houseboat Life," *Folklife Annual 90* (Washington, D.C., 1991), 100–102.

103. Quoted in Jens Lund, "Nomadic Architecture: The River Houseboat in the Ohio Valley," in *The Old Traditional Way of Life: Essays in Honor of Warren E. Roberts,* ed. Robert E. Walls and George H. Schoemaker (Bloomington, Ind., 1989), 249.

geographic uniqueness and the interplay of economic necessity and a romantic urge to live on the river. The folklorist Jens Lund writes, "The houseboat was indispensable to a little-known way of life that persisted on North American rivers for almost 150 years."[104]

American houseboat folk do not include those who worked on presteam and steam vessels or modern diesel boats. True, these workers did (and still do) inhabit the river for long stretches of time; some contemporary towboatmen spend eight months of every year of their working lives on the river. However, their towboats are not really homes, and their fellow crewmembers are not literally families. Their cramped cabins and workdays spent amid the sound of screaming diesel engines form a lifestyle so unique it will be described separately below. Tourists traveling the western rivers also got a taste of living on the river, but their stay was too brief (and luxurious) to qualify as houseboating. The term "houseboat folk" cannot be applied to today's Mississippi Valley populace whose "cabins" (some, not all, of which feature modern plumbing and electricity) line the western rivers. Nor does it describe contemporaries who own flat-bottomed, aluminum lake and river craft they take out for weekends and extended fishing and water sport adventures.[105]

Houseboats were "locally built barge[s], with a cabin superstructure, commonly used by itinerant people" in the Mississippi Valley from the beginning of the nineteenth century until the middle of the twentieth century. Houseboats were a subtype of flatboats—the small, wooden pre-industrial versions of modern steel-hulled river barges. The floating barge portion of a houseboat averaged twenty-five to thirty-five feet in length and ten to twelve feet in width. A house or cabin built of lumber and salvaged driftwood was built atop the barge, leaving room for narrow walks on the port and starboard sides; there were also small bow and stern decks that served as work stations and points of entrance and exit. The house was usually made up of two rooms—a bedroom and a kitchen and living room—with

104. Lund, "Nomadic Architecture," 253.
105. Alan L. Bates, "It Takes a Village," *Waterways Journal,* July 6, 2009, p. 14.

a door on each (bow and stern) end; sometimes there was a third room. The roof was usually flat, with a stove chimney protruding. Though most often called houseboats, these craft were also referred to as "cabin boats" and "camp boats"; "shantyboat" was a term used, sometimes derogatorily, by landsmen. One folklorist has noted the architectural resemblance of the houseboat's living space to modern, singlewide trailer houses, homes also inhabited by itinerant folk.[106]

Houseboat folk simultaneously lived and earned their living on the water. Folklorists might call them an occupational folk group, but their occupations varied widely and included both subsistence and market endeavors. Many houseboat men and women fished and sold fish; they harvested mussels from the river's bottom. They also gardened, hunted deer and game birds, trapped rabbits, and gathered edible plants like poke greens. Houseboat residents built and sold boats and furniture, and dealt in firewood and lumber (which they gathered and logged for free); some made and sold shakes and shingles. Houseboat peddlers sold pots and pans and dry goods. There were houseboating photographers, musicians, and showmen. There were prostitutes, bootleggers, and itinerant preachers, at least one of whom staged big fish fries (picnic dinners) to draw crowds to his sermons. Finally, houseboat men could always secure work as steamboat deckhands while the women worked as cook and chambermaids.[107]

Like flatboatmen, houseboat folk navigated downstream only. They lacked the keeled prow and steam or diesel technology that enabled boats to travel upstream. The typical houseboat family worked its way slowly downriver, earning a living until

106. Lund, "Nomadic Architecture," 242–43.

107. Ibid., 248–51; Alan L. Bates, "The Free Life," *Waterways Journal,* Sept. 5, 2011, p. 34. See also Ben Lucien Burman, "Shanty Boat Coming Down," *Saturday Evening Post,* Oct. 15, 1938, pp. 8–9; Malcolm L. Comeaux, "Folk Boats of Louisiana," in *Louisiana Folklife,* ed. Nicholas Spitzer (Baton Rouge, La., 1985), 161–78; Ernest Theodore Hiller, "Houseboat and River Bottoms People: A Study of 683 Households in Sample Locations Adjacent to the Ohio and Mississippi Rivers," *Illinois Studies in the Social Sciences* 24 (1939), 3–146; Harlan Hubbard, *Shantyboat: A River Way of Life* (1953; repr. Lexington, Ky., 1977).

resources grew slim, at which time they untied their lines and floated further downstream in search of a new (rent-free) bank to tie to. The time spent in one locale could vary dramatically, depending on conditions that included the local sheriff's benevolence. Houseboat folks' locations could sustain them from a few weeks to several years. While the lifestyle was often solitary, it was not uncommon to see groups of boats gathered together in small houseboat villages at the mouths of rivers. "In Louisville, at the mouth of Beargrass Creek," Alan L. Bates reminisced in the *Waterways Journal,* "there was a colony of several hundred. We went to school with the kids and played on their fleets." While the average houseboat's lifespan was multiple years, it was not unusual for a family to sail a new boat for one navigational season, then break it up and sell it for lumber. They returned upstream on foot, wagon, horseback, or on the deck of a northbound steamer, built a new boat, and started the next season afresh.[108]

Before the Civil War, houseboaters made up a subset of the larger class of flatboatmen. They lived on the river year-round, earning their livings wherever they tied up. While some locals on the bank called them "chicken thieves," most earned an honest living as produce merchants, peddlers, blacksmiths, tinners, tavern keepers, and professional entertainers and prostitutes. One 1850s Ohio riverman named Jamson kept a bee boat, which he navigated in accordance with the weather and the availability of "fresh 'pastures' for his bees." Store boatmen flew calico flags to attract customers to peruse and buy their inventory; they returned annually (in new boats) to serve regular customers along their routes.[109]

Writing during an 1890s river trip, the historian Reuben Gold

108. Bates, "The Free Life," 34; Burman, "Shanty Boat Coming Down," 8–9; Comeaux, "Folk Boats of Louisiana," 161–78; Hubbard, *Shantyboat,* passim.

109. Timothy Flint, *A Condensed Geography and History of the Western States, or the Mississippi Valley,* 2 vols. (1828; repr. Gainesville., Fla., 1970), 1:229–31, 236–37; Miles A. Stacy, "Flatboating down Old Man River: 1849–69: Reminiscences of Captain Miles A. Stacy as Related to his Daughter Adelaide Frost Stacy. Rearranged and Typed by Her, April, 1945," typescript, Ohio Historical Society, Campus Martius, Museum of the Northwest Territory, Marietta, Ohio, 12–13.

Thwaites romantically described houseboat folk as "a race of picturesque philosophers" and "followers of the apostle's calling" and referred to their "honest-like open-faced sobriety." Four decades later, the Depression-era sociologist Ernest Tiller characterized them in terms reminiscent of Frederick Jackson Turner's frontier thesis: "The free squatting and floating privileges" and "self-help opportunities" that characterize houseboat lifestyle "are survivals of the frontier traditions rather than unique adjustments induced by the depression." The adaptive survival skills of houseboaters have "since pioneer days … enabled and predisposed" their survival. Tiller estimated the 1930s houseboating populace at approximately 50,000.[110]

This large number of houseboaters was nurtured in part by a boom in mussel fishing in the early decades of the twentieth century. The industrial revolution had seen huge growth in clothing factories, and they all needed buttons manufactured from the shells of the Ohio and Mississippi Valleys' plentiful mussel fishery. Muscatine, Iowa, became known as the "Pearl of the Mississippi" because its factories produced 37 percent of the world's pearl (mussel shell) buttons; by 1905, Muscatine was producing 1.5 billion buttons per year. Using crowfoot hooks, mussel gatherers (known as "clammers" or "musselers") harvested nearby stretches of the upper Mississippi and the lower Rock, Iowa, and Des Moines Rivers. They used the meat for fish bait or marketed it as animal feed, and they sold the occasional pearl to local jewelry dealers. As the beds near Muscatine were depleted, mussel shells arrived in barges from other Mississippi Valley fisheries, notably the Tennessee River towns of Savanna, Tennessee, and Muscle Shoals, Alabama, and the Cumberland River town of Nashville. By the late 1930s, however, the button boom was over. Foreign competition, technological inefficiencies, union radicalism, changing fashions (including zippers), overharvesting, and of course the development of plastic buttons all combined to end the pearl

110. Thwaites and Tiller quoted in Lund, "Nomadic Architecture," 249, 251.

button era. Musselers, including many houseboaters, had to seek new opportunities.[111]

As noted earlier, Maggie Lee Sayre left a detailed record of the life of a houseboat girl through her black-and-white photography. Born on April 4, 1920, to Archie and May Sayre, Maggie spent nearly all the first five decades of her life on her family's Tennessee River Valley houseboat. Her fisherman father built a huge (sixty-foot) houseboat from which he caught catfish, buffalo fish, and carp to market in river towns like Smithland, Johnsonville, and Paducah, Kentucky. Maggie Sayre's nomadic river life was briefly interrupted by two stints at the Kentucky School for the Deaf in Danville, where she learned to read and write. Later, she wrote captions for more than two hundred fifty photographs. Looking over one picture of her family home, Maggie remembered,

> My father made the boat. He did it himself. I was a baby. And this was in Paducah, Kentucky. He worked slow and built the boat. It's a three-room boat. There's a bedroom, and there's another very small room, and then there's a larger room. We had a dresser and then my father's bed was in the first room, and then a closet in the first room. In the kitchen area we had a stove where we could make biscuits, and we had a box outside for ice. We drank water from a creek. It was nice water. A spring. My father had a big, big jar that he used for the water.[112]

Combined, Maggie Sayre's photographs and captions provide a comprehensive record of houseboat life, "a pictorial narrative of family, place, work." She photographed her family's boat from all angles and made pictures of her father's trot lines and hoop nets and his gas-powered motorboat. She photographed her mother at work, and family gatherings afloat and ashore. But most of

111. Melanie K. Alexander, *Muscatine's Pearl Button Industry* (Charleston, S.C., 2007), passim; Emery Styron, "Pearl Button Industry Put Muscatine on the Map," *Waterways Journal,* August 8, 2016, pp. 50, 52, 54–57. For pearl dealers, see Henry Clarence Elwell Papers, Bickell Collection, National Rivers Museum, Dubuque, Iowa. For modern musseling, see Anita Wadhwani, "Mussels Take Dive," *Nashville Tennessean,* Oct. 17, 2010, 1E, 4E.

112. Rankin, "Photographs of Maggie Lee Sayre," 102–106; See also Rankin, ed., *"Deaf Maggie Lee Sayre": Photographs of a River Life* (Jackson, Miss., 1995).

all she photographed the fish that provided her family a living. There are many pictures of huge bottom feeders, the catfish, carp, and buffalo fish that Mississippi Valley folk loved to flour and fry. Like all fishermen, the Sayres liked to keep pictures of the big fish they had caught.[113]

Maggie Sayre's photographs document the twilight years of houseboating. With the waning of the Great Depression many houseboat families sought jobs and homes ashore. "Prosperity brought on by World War II wiped [housboating] out," Alan Bates recalled. Moreover, the Depression created a federal government large and powerful enough to end the free and independent houseboat lifestyle. In the heart of the Maggie Sayre's world, the Tennessee Valley Authority built a series of hydroelectric dams. While the dams brought flood control and electricity to change many people's lives for the better, houseboat folk suffered because of them. The dams backed up the rivers to form lakes, and locks brought diesel towboat barge traffic far upstream. Entire river communities were covered in water, and the patterns of river life and fishing never returned. At the same time, new federal bureaus began to police the boats' waste disposal for pollution. Houseboats could never pass the safety standards imposed on inland vessels by the United States Coast Guard. Zoning officials and planners, wharf police, the Army Corps of Engineers, public school administrators, and social workers set their sights on taming the houseboaters. By the time Jens Lund conducted his 1980s field work on Ohio Valley fishermen, the few remnant houseboats were no longer actual homes; they were being used as floating fish markets or had been hauled up on shore for that purpose.[114]

Yet the houseboat mystique lived on in popular culture, because the free, roving lifestyle of houseboat folk proved a popular topic among romantic novelists and children's writers. Books featuring houseboat heroes had appeared in parallel with the second phase of the American industrial revolution; as

113. Rankin, "Photographs of Maggie Lee Sayre," 121.
114. Bates, "Free Life," 34; Lund, "Nomadic Architecture," passim. The Tennessee Valley Authority is discussed in chapter 5, this work.

Americans grew into more modern folk, they simultaneously romanticized houseboat folk. In Arthur M. Winfield's *Rover Boys on the River* (1905), the reader meets Dick, Tom, and Sam, who sail down the Ohio on the houseboat *Dora* in search of freedom and adventure. Incongruously, the *Dora* is replete with "eight sleeping rooms" and hired help! The boys have many brushes with danger, most of which involve protecting their girlfriends from villainous Lew Flapp, "the bully of Putnam Hall" (Dubuque riverman and author Dick Bissell had much fun lampooning the book's stylistic failings and historical inaccuracies). Laura Lee Hope echoed the Rover Boy adventures in her 1915 juvenile tale *The Bobbsey Twins on a Houseboat*.[115]

The most ambitious and historically accurate of the children's books is Lois Lenski's 1957 *Houseboat Girl.* A native of Springfield, Ohio, and prolific author of children's literature, Lenski published more than two dozen titles during the decades following World War II. While some of her books classify as historical fiction, her favorite genre was occupational literature, telling the story of a child growing up within an occupational folk group. These books include *Bayou Suzette* (1943), *Blue Ridge Billy* (1946), *Cotton in My Sack* (1949), *Texas Tomboy* (1950), *Corn Farm Boy* (1954), and others. Lenski's own drawings adorn each book.[116]

In the foreword to *Houseboat Girl,* Lenski states she was inspired by Harlan Hubbard and his 1953 nonfiction work *Shantyboat.* With Hubbard's help, Lenski sought out the Henry and Lou Story family of Metropolis, Illinois, whose lives Hubbard had chronicled. In the summer of 1954, Lenski lived with the Storys aboard their houseboat near Luxora, Arkansas. Using field notes, she wrote *Houseboat Girl,* portraying the lives of these "rugged wholesome people." The itinerant houseboat folk, Lenski writes in her foreword, are "daring and courageous,

115. Lund, "Nomadic Architecture," 238; Arthur M. Winfield, *The Rover Boys on the River* (New York, 1905); Laura Lee Hope, *The Bobbsey Twins on a Houseboat* (New York, 1915).

116. Lois Lenski, *Houseboat Girl* (New York, 1957), frontispiece, foreword, n.p. See Bobbie Malone, *Lois Lenski, Storycatcher* (Norman, Okla., 2016).

resourceful, and independent, poor perhaps in the world's goods, but sweet, loveable, and good."[117]

Like John Henton Carter's 1890 flatboat novel *Thomas Rutherton, Houseboat Girl* is a work of fiction from which the reader learns a good deal of social history. Written for advanced elementary and secondary school children, *Houseboat Girl* describes the Story family's summer odyssey down the Ohio and Mississippi Rivers from southern Indiana to northeast Arkansas. Lenski's illustrations lend artistic detail, and the reader can follow the storyline using her hand-drawn map. She changed the name of the Storys to Foster and made daughter Irene Story into her heroine Patsy. *Houseboat Girl* stresses family ties, community, and work ethic; the women work alongside the men as they fish the river. *Houseboat Girl* also reflects social prejudice against houseboat folk as Patsy suffers the insults of children calling her a "shanty girl" and "river rat." However, her mother retorts, "There's just as good people on the river as on land." Interestingly, *Houseboat Girl* ends with the Fosters moving permanently onto the bank. Yet they haul their houseboat ashore to use as their new home and continue to live near the river wilderness of their nomadic past.[118]

The Dubuque towboatman Richard Bissell experienced houseboating during the exact time that lifestyle was transitioning from occupational to leisure. In 1939, Bissell was newly wed and helping to manage his father's Dubuque clothing factory (an experience that eventually led to his novel *7 1/2 Cents* and the Broadway musical *The Pajama Game*). He and wife Marian caught "houseboat fever," and he reflected in *My Life on the Mississippi, or Why I Am Not Mark Twain,* that they loved houseboating because "*everything you do* is more fun on a houseboat, even washing dishes." The Bissels searched for "a houseboat we could *really live on* full time, forsaking the land utterly and floating, floating all day and night in watery bliss together with the wedding presents, the bullterrier, and the upright piano."[119]

117. Lenski, *Houseboat Girl,* foreword, n.p.
118. Ibid., 2, 81, 163–76. For Carter's *Thomas Rutherton,* see chapter 4, this work.

They soon salvaged a sunken Army Corps of Engineers crew barge and named her *Prairie Belle*. Eighty feet long and two stories high, the *Belle* featured "a gable roof, overhanging Swiss balconies at each end, with *forty* twelve-light windows, it was an awesome sight." They moored the boat in Dubuque Harbor (mile 580 on the upper Mississippi) and fitted her out with a living room, two pantries and a kitchen, sewing room, bedroom with a four-poster bed, bathroom with full-size tub, and music room complete with a piano. "We had no other home," he remembered. "Everything we owned was in this boat, afloat on the Mississippi."[120]

However, the romance of houseboat life evidently wore off, and after a few years Dick and Marian sold *Prairie Belle.* Then in 1948, yearning for "a houseboat to retire to from time to time," they paid $800 for a much smaller (two-room) "shantyboat." This one featured a "plop-plop-into-the-river toilet" built by splicing "an outhouse on one end which stuck out over the water into space." The Bissells never lived on the *Floating Cave* (the name was a family joke). They moored the *Cave* in Dubuque Harbor, and each summer it served as the family's wilderness retreat. They would sail a few miles south and tie her to an "island above Shinkle's Bar, across from Nine-Mile Island." Bissell fondly remembered,

> Tied up just inside the point of the island, we could see all the towboats go by right close up. We had a camp ground, a big tree house, a garden, and a big bull snake. The house was empty all week, the doors were never locked but what you could get in with a jackknife or a claw hammer but in those times we never lost a thing.[121]

However, like Huck and Jim's journey south on a raft, the Bissells' idyll also ended. The success of *The Pajama Game* induced them

119. Richard Bissell, *My Life on the Mississippi, or Why I Am Not Mark Twain* (Boston, 1973), 149–51; Richard Bissell Induction File, National Rivers Hall of Fame, National Rivers Museum, Dubuque, Iowa. Bissell's *Pajama Game* is discussed in chapter 6, this work.
120. Bissell, *My Life on the Mississippi,* 151–56.
121. Ibid., 209–13.

to "gorge on the great immovable cultural feast of the Northeast coast" (like Mark Twain, Bissell could not resist the pull of the eastern literati). The *Floating Cave* was relegated to a slip in East Dubuque. There, beavers "built a house around one end and underneath" and vandals broke out the windows. Visiting in 1972, Bissell saw mallard ducks "lounging on the deck" and, inside, "six duck eggs under the icebox."[122]

Obviously, Dick and Marilyn Bissell differed greatly from earlier houseboaters. Bissell did not earn a living on his boat. Although he did much of his writing afloat, there is a huge difference between someone who fishes, dives for mussels, or rafts timber from their houseboat and someone pecking out screenplays and novels on a Royal typewriter in the study on a two-story houseboat with a piano and four-poster bed! This difference reflects a changing American economy and culture. Yet the two worlds are tied together by a romantic desire to live on water. Though he was pulled irreversibly in the direction of the "immovable cultural feast" of "civilization" on "the bank," Bissell clung to his river days and the freedom of life away from the bank. Nor could the retired towboat captain ever resist the urge to poke fun at posers, contemporary houseboaters who purchased expensive modern craft for occasional weekend retreats:

> Now, you take one of the new houseboats that "sleep eight." Well, you know that means that eight people can lie down somehow and get through the night. After one gay weekend as guests the wives will think of really outlandish excuses to get out of a repeat. There's no room for real comfort on any conventional factory-built cruiser, or sailboat either, until you get into the yacht class; and this is no fun either because all large yachts are owned by people who say things like "Bimini" and "Pipe yourself aboard and we'll buy you a (a) snort (b) drinkie (c) grog (d) martooni."[123]

Although house boating has changed over the past two hundred years, the urge to live on a riverboat remains in fiction and fact.

122. Ibid., 218–19.
123. Ibid., 155. See also Bates, "Free Life," 33.

Mud (2013), a movie written and directed by the Arkansan Jeff Nichols, uses houseboat people as the characters for a modern river thriller with echoes of Mark Twain's *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn.* In the real world, western rivers marinas moor thousands of flat-bottomed lake and river boats with cabins. A few owners live in their boats year-round, though very few make a living on the water like the characters in *Mud.* The houseboat today reflects the affluence and leisure time of modern Americans who long for what they see as a simpler, romantic past.[124]

Thus no one should have been surprised when groups of twenty-first-century investors decided to build condominium barges. One such company, River Cities Condominiums, advertised "attractive and affordable condominium communities" that would sail the western rivers with between three hundred and fifty and four hundred residents in as many as two hundred condos. "Once we have built your home, River Cities will staff each vessel with pilots, crew, and managers who will safely navigate between ports to provide you with a worry-free, yet adventurous living experience."[125]

"We said there warn't no home like a raft, after all," Huck reflects in Twain's *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn.* "Other places do seem so cramped and smothery, but a raft don't. You feel mighty free and easy and comfortable on a raft."[126] Had Huck drifted past a condominium barge, he might have "lit out for the territories" even sooner to get as far away from "sivilization" as possible.

124. Jeff Nichols, dir., *Mud* (2012; Lionsgate, 2013), DVD.
125. Captain Richard Eberhardt, "Developer Plans Floating Condominiums," *Waterways Journal,* March 28, 2011, pp. 24–25; River Cities, www.rivercitiescondos.com, accessed June 30, 2011.
126. Mark Twain, *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1884; repr. New York, 1977), 96.

Chapter 8

MUSIC IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

> I knew the physical separation of the races—but I knew the integration of their souls.
>
> Sam Phillips, Sun Records, Memphis, Tennessee[1]

In the summer of 1960, seventeen-year-old Carla Thomas and her father, Rufus, walked into the Satellite Records studio in Memphis, Tennessee, and recorded a duet, "'Cause I Love You." Carla, who was home on vacation from Tennessee Agricultural and Industrial College in Nashville, had grown up in the Foote Homes Project in a poor Memphis neighborhood. The Thomases—including mother Lorene and siblings Marvell and Vaneese—were a musical family, and Carla began her singing career with the Teen Town Singers on radio station WDIA, where Rufus was a popular disc jockey. She wrote "'Cause I Love You" when she was fifteen, and the 1960 recording became a regional hit record for fledgling Satellite Records. Then, in September of 1960, Carla made a solo recording—"Gee Whiz (Look at His Eyes)"—a song that became Satellite's first national hit record and landed her a spot on the popular television show *American Bandstand.* Although her national success was short-lived, Carla Thomas spent most of her adult life making music. She became a local celebrity whose admiring fans called her the Queen of Memphis Soul.[2]

1. Quoted in Preston Lauterbach, review of Peter Guralnick, *Sam Phillips,* in *Wall Street Journal,* Nov. 7–8, 2015, C7.

Carla and Rufus Thomas's records combined with several other factors that led to the creation of Stax Records, home to a rock-and-roll subgenre known as soul music. The entrepreneurs Jim Stewart and his sister Estelle Axton founded Satellite in 1957 in the old Capitol Theater building on the south Memphis block bordered by McLemore and College Streets. In 1961, fueled in part by profits from the Thomases' records, they expanded their operations, combining the first two letters of each their last names and officially renaming their label Stax. Their studio was soon nicknamed Soulsville USA by a legion of early and mid-1960s rock-and-roll music fans.[3]

Stax was an integrated recording studio. Stewart and Axton were white, and the Stax house band, Booker T. and the MGs (Memphis Group), was one of the first integrated rock-and-roll groups. The band featured Booker T. Jones (organ, piano), Steve Cropper (guitar), Al Jackson, Jr. (drums), and Lewie Steinberg (bass, soon to be replaced by Donald "Duck" Dunn). Booker T. and the MGs scored national hit records of their own (beginning with "Green Onions") while backing dozens of Black Stax Records singers.[4] During its heyday, Stax built a cadre of artists that included Wilson Pickett, Otis Redding, Isaac Hayes, Sam and Dave, Albert King, the Staples Singers, and many more.

Of course, Sam Phillips's Sun Records studio, located to the north of McLemore, had preceded Stax as Memphis's premier rock-and-roll incubator. Chip Moman's American Recording Studio and Hi Records were also important in the Memphis recording scene. And one hundred fifty miles to the southeast, the Florence Alabama Music Enterprises (FAME) studio complemented all this work. Together, these recording studios hosted a very significant group of 1950s and '60s country, gospel, blues, and rock-and-roll musicians, including Rufus Thomas.[5]

2. Robert Palmer, "The Sound of Memphis," in *The Rolling Stone Illustrated History of Rock and Roll,* ed. Jim Miller (New York, 1976), 202.
3. Peter Guralnick, *Sweet Soul Music: Rhythm and Blues and the Southern Dream of Freedom* (New York, 1986), 97–107. See also, Robert Gordon, *Respect Yourself: Stax Records and the Soul Explosion* (New York, 2013), and Mark Ribowsky, *Dreams to Remember: Otis Redding, Stax Records, and the Transformation of Southern Soul* (New York, 2015).
4. Guralnick, *Sweet Soul Music,* 124–28.

Born in 1917 to a poor sharecropping family in Cayce, Mississippi, Rufus Thomas moved to Memphis and began his singing career at Sun Records. In 1953, he stirred up a hornet's nest with a hilarious Sun recording that brought a male perspective to Big Mama Thornton's 1952 record "Hound Dog." Singing "You ain't nothin' but a Bearcat," it was Thomas (and not, as often said, Elvis Presley) who was accused of taking "Hound Dog" from Big Momma. A subsequent lawsuit was settled out of court, and in the meantime Sam Phillips used his profits from "Bearcat" to help fund Sun Records until Elvis Presley arrived. Rufus Thomas kept performing and working as a WDIA disc jockey until "'Cause I Love You" thrust him back into the spotlight as a Stax Records soul man. His 1963 hit "Walkin' the Dog" was the beginning of several dance singles that culminated with 1970's "Do the Funky Chicken." The final cut (number 12) on the Rolling Stones' first album, *England's Newest Hit Makers* (1964), is Rufus Thomas's "Walking the Dog."[6]

There is much debate over the use of the word "integrated" in describing Stax Records. While most musicians and writers agree that Stax musicians were influenced by blues, gospel, and country music, they divide over the exact proportions. Robert Palmer and Peter Guralnick write that about half of Stax studio musicians were "whites from rural backgrounds," and agree the Stax house band, writers, and producers "brought to the music … a country and western background." Palmer, who worked as a rock saxophonist in mid-1960s Memphis, recalls Donald "Duck" Dunn brought "loping country-flavored bass lines" to Stax recordings.[7]

On the other hand, the Stax vocalists were almost exclusively Black performers solidly grounded in the urban blues and gospel

5. Joel Williamson, *Elvis Presley: A Southern Life* (New York, 2015), 139–41; Palmer, "Sound of Memphis," 202, 205; C. S. Fuqua, *Music Fell on Alabama*: *The Muscle Shoals Sound That Shook the World* (Montgomery, Ala., 2006).
6. Jon Pareles, "Rufus Thomas Dies at 84, Patriarch of Memphis Soul," *New York Times,* Dec. 19, 2001, C19; Guralnick, *Sweet Soul Music,* 102–103.
7. Donald Whaley, "Black Nationalism in Pop: Race Relations and Memphis Soul Music," in Larry H. Whiteaker and W. Calvin Dickinson, *Tennessee: State of the Nation* (Mason, Ohio, 2006), 278; Palmer, "Sound of Memphis," 203–204; Guralnick, *Sweet Soul Music,* passim.

music traditions. Syncopation and call and response—Black musical forms—lay at the heart of soul music, and many Stax musicians believed their work was an "expression of Black solidarity." Sam Moore, of the Stax duo Sam and Dave, stated their hit song "Soul Man" was symbolic of "a common cause in fighting for freedom, justice, and equality." The sale of Stax in 1968, in the wake of the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., in Memphis, has been called the symbolic end of an era of interracial collaboration at Stax.[8]

However, historians cannot view the world in black and white and expect to find the truth. The answer to the question of Stax Records' soul music origins lies in synthesis. Lawrence Levine rejected the "longstanding assumption that the gulf between African and European culture was impossibly wide and virtually unbridgeable." The musical folkways Blacks and whites brought with them to America, he wrote, were "not as invariably alien as we have supposed." More important, during the three and a half centuries after their arrival in the New World, Blacks and whites merged their musical styles, developing country, gospel, and blues music.[9]

Thus, the historian Don Whaley writes, "the world of the black musicians at Stax and the world of the white musicians were not so far apart as might be supposed … both black and white musicians at Stax already knew the music of the other group; they were all familiar with country, gospel, and rhythm and blues." Indeed, all American musicians who played blues, country, gospel, jazz, and rock music shared the same backgrounds.[10] To fully understand this, we must turn to the roots of indigenous American music. And in this regard, no region of America approaches the importance of the Mississippi River Valley.

8. Whaley, "Black Nationalism in Pop," 278–79.
9. Levine quote in ibid., 281. See also Lawrence Levine, *Black Culture, Black Consciousness: Afro-American Folk Thought from Slavery to Freedom* (1977; repr. New York, 2007), 24, 60.
10. Whaley, "Black Nationalism in Pop," 281–82.

BLACK AND WHITE KEYS

While "melting pot" has fallen into disuse as a descriptor of American culture, the term "gumbo" has, fortunately, taken its place. Gumbo—a thick, spicy Louisiana stew—is an apt metaphor for the melding and integration that characterizes American music. The term "gumbo" traveled from Africa and the Caribbean to America's lower Mississippi River Valley, the same locale where much indigenous American music took root.[11] Why did that region prove especially fertile in cultivating country, gospel, and blues forms? Throughout the lower Mississippi Valley, despite slavery and pervasive racism, Black and white cultures somehow blended. "Southern music is multicultural, the product of one of the world's great epics of cultural transformation," writes Charles Joyner. "Part of the appeal of southern music to students of the region is that it epitomizes so well many of the paradoxes of our history," notably "our social segregation and our cultural sharing."[12]

African-American blues and gospel, and British- (Anglo- and Celtic-) American folk (hillbilly or country) and church music formed the base upon which jazz and rock-and-roll were later constructed. While other important ethnic traditions influenced American music—American Indian, Cajun and Creole French, German, Spanish, and Mexican—by far the most significant contributions were those of African Americans and British Americans. A discussion of American music must begin with a close look at these exceptional folks and the music they created.[13]

The most important British contribution to American music is the three-chord progression rooted in western European

11. The most recent and influential use of the term *gumbo* by an American music historian is Ken Burns, dir., *Jazz,* 10 episodes (Washington, D.C., 2000), DVD, episode 1: "Gumbo."
12. Charles Joyner, "A Region in Harmony: Southern Music and the Sound Track of Freedom," *Journal of Southern History* 72 (February 2006), 3–38 (qtn., 37); Bill C. Malone and David Stricklin, *Southern Music, American Music,* rev. ed. (Lexington, Ky., 2003), 102–103; Bill C. Malone, "The Southern Thesis Revisited and Reaffirmed," *Journal of American Folklore* 127 (Spring 2014), 226–29. Thanks to Aeron Lloyd.
13. Malone and Stricklin, *Southern Music, American Music,* 102–103; Joyner, "A Region in Harmony," 37–38. See also Fiona Ritchie and Doug Orr, *Wayfaring Strangers: The Musical Voyage from Scotland and Ulster to Appalachia* (Charlotte, N.C., 2014).

classical and folk music traditions. A chord is a group of notes that blend together in harmony. With exceptions—two-chord folk songs like "Pretty Polly" and selected jigs, etc.—most Anglo and Celtic folksongs are composed of three chords, and so too are most American country, blues, gospel, jazz, and rock songs. Steve Ashby writes,

> Musical styles like rock, country, the blues, and jazz are cross-pollinated branches from the tree of Western classical music, whose basic harmonic structure is built around chord progressions. The "chords" are groups of notes which "progress" through some order until they eventually cycle back around (typically producing one or more repeated progressions). Musicians often refer to these chords with Roman numerals. Because Western music is based largely upon seven-note [pentatonic] scales, built from twelve-tone system, "I" through "VII" are typically the chords that correspond with the scale steps… Risking oversimplification, one could say that II-V-I chord progressions … are often considered the basic building blocks for jazz compositions. By comparison, I-IV-V chord progressions are a common characteristic of rock, country, blues, and folk music. They each have a variety of instrumentation, subject matter, and forms of delivery—but identical roots.[14]

Ashby concludes with a list of popular composed songs from the contemporary rock, folk, country, and blues genres—"Johnny B. Goode," "This Land Is Your Land," "Back in the Saddle Again," and "Sweet Home Chicago." All these songs "have nearly identical chord progressions but represent very different musical styles."[15] One could add thousands of other songs to his list, starting with the Christmas carol "Silent Night," moving to "Amazing Grace" and "Danny Boy," and ending with the rock anthem "Louie Louie." Indeed, any musician who knows how to play C, F, and G chords (or I-IV-V chords in any other musical key) can play thousands of songs.

14. Steve Ashby quoted in Leroy Ashby, *With Amusement for All: A History of American Popular Culture Since 1830* (Lexington, Ky., 2006), 561 (n94); Michael Allen, "'About a Half a Mile from the Mississippi Bridge': The Mississippi River Valley Origins of Rock and Roll Music," *Southern Quarterly* 52 (Spring 2015), 99–120.
15. Ashby, *With Amusement for All,* 561n94.

Alongside the I-IV-V chord pattern, Anglo and Celtic folk musicians brought many other traits to America. British folk musicians used sparse instrumentation, a cappella singing, predominantly male performers with no formal musical training, improvisation, and enthusiasm, including the singers' occasional shouts (Scottish "yips"). Musicians arrived with a large repertoire of secular ballads that told stories about love (and lost love) and life's hardships and joys, often using metaphor and symbol to tell those stories. In addition, they sang hundreds of sacred Christian hymns.[16]

By the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, British music had become thoroughly Americanized, altered by the frontier lifestyle and influences of the new land. Americans changed the lyrics to I-IV-V Anglo and Celtic songs, shortening, rewriting, and replacing old verses. Vocal harmonizing (two or more performers singing different but compatible notes) grew very slowly, and fiddlers were joined by guitarists and those who picked the banjo, an African-American instrument. Another African-American influence was syncopated rhythm via hand clapping, tambourines, and "bones" (tapping out rhythms using pork rib bones). Harmony and enthusiasm came together when white Baptist and Methodist shape-note singers performed sacred melodies driven by rhythmic background singers. Like all folklore, British-American folk music authorship was anonymous, and it is difficult to trace the exact origins of songs and musical styles. On the other hand, composed tunes did migrate to America from Britain and were altered or supplemented by American tunes with identifiable authors.[17]

A brief, focused look at the chorus of a religious country

16. Malone and Stricklin, *Southern Music, American Music,* 3, 5, 7, 130–35; Bill C. Malone and Jocelyn R. Neal, *Country Music, USA,* 3d ed. (Austin, Texas, 2010), 1–4, 14–15. Some of this and subsequent analysis regarding enthusiasm and Scottish "yips" and bagpipe-like vocal stylings is my own.

17. Malone and Neal, *Country Music, USA,* 4, 11–14, 20–29. Shape-note singing refers to a folk-based American system wherein singers who did not know how to read music could sing in harmony using sheet music on which the notes are printed in different shapes—diamonds, squares, circles, etc.—denoting different notes on the musical scale. See Marion J. Hatchett, *A Companion to the New Harp of Columbia* (Knoxville, Tenn., 2003).

composition—"Will the Circle Be Unbroken"—helps us understand the I-IV-V chord patterns in American music. Written by Ada R. Habershon in 1907 as a hymn, the song was adapted, performed, and recorded by many musicians, most notably the A. P. Carter Family. "Will the Circle Be Unbroken" uses the circle as a metaphor for the Christian belief in eternal life—the continuation of life in heaven after death on earth. It can be performed in any key (the first note in a scale) utilizing three chords. "Will the circle be unbroken?" the singer asks, strumming the I chord on a guitar or playing it on a piano. Then, playing the IV chord, the singer's response to the question is "By and by, Lord, by and by," with a return to the I chord on the third "by." Remaining on the I chord, the singer continues, "There's a better home a-waiting," and then strums the V chord before concluding, "in the sky, Lord, in the sky," returning to the I chord for the final "sky."[18]

The blending of church and secular music continued as British-American folk music underwent professionalization in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. It is important here to define some terms. What we today call "country" music was originally called "folk" and, alternately, "hillbilly" and "old-time" music. Indeed, 1950s and early 1960s hosts of the *Grand Ole Opry* radio show still referred to its cast as "folk musicians."[19] However, young, urban, white musicians were also playing what they deemed "folk music," and the term became associated with performers like the Weavers, Odetta, Peter, Paul, and Mary, and the Kingston Trio.[20] Nashville musicians then embraced the term "country" and have used it exclusively ever since. All this is further confused by the fact that folklorists call rural acoustic Black blues music "country blues." In the following, I will nevertheless use the term "country" alongside "folk" and "hillbilly" in discussing the late nineteenth and early twentieth

18. Nitty Gritty Dirt Band et al., *Will the Circle Be Unbroken,* 1971, United Artists, UAS 9801, LP.
19. Malone and Neal, *Country Music, USA,* 1; *Grand Ole Opry Old Time Radio,* 2001, B002PX4MI6, CD. Thanks to Ian Moore for access to his collection of Opry shows.
20. Malone and Stricklin, *Southern Music, American Music,* 145–46. This is discussed in the sections "Every Saturday Night" and "The Direction Home," below.

centuries; from the time of Hank Williams's 1940s Opry debut, I use the term "country" exclusively.

Professionalization of country music began with nineteenth-century minstrel and tent shows, and continued with twentieth-century circuses, medicine shows, vaudeville, and gospel tent revivals.[21] Composed tunes began to supplant traditional numbers as "Old Dan Tucker," "Buffalo Gals," "Turkey in the Straw," "Arkansas Traveler," and "Listen to the Mockingbird" gained popularity. Instrumentation made great strides thanks to Sears and Roebuck and Montgomery Ward mail-order catalogs and other brands of inexpensive manufactured guitars, banjos, and fiddles (and, soon, basses, dulcimers, autoharps, dobros, and pianos). The string band became the standard country music ensemble, a development that included musicians of Anglo, Celtic and African American ancestry. The final component in the birth of modern country music was electricity. The early twentieth-century invention of microphones, recording apparatus, records, phonographs, and radio broadcasting catapulted old-time hillbilly music onto the national stage.[22]

All of this came together in 1923–27 in Atlanta, Georgia, and Bristol, on the border of northeast Tennessee and southwest Virginia. Okeh Records had formed to serve a growing market for American blues and hillbilly music. The company used portable recording equipment and traveled to find folk musicians on their home ground. The Okeh talent scout Ralph Peer contracted Fiddlin' John Carson of Cabbagetown, Georgia, to record "Little Old Log Cabin in the Lane" and "The Old Hen Cackled and the Rooster's Going to Crow" in Atlanta in 1923. The record sold so well that Carson declared, "I decided to stop makin' liquor and go to making phonograph records" for a living![23]

Four years later, Peer set up shop in Bristol and struck gold

21. Malone and Neal, *Country Music, USA,* 6–7. For minstrelsy, see chapter 4, this work.
22. Malone and Neal, *Country Music, USA,* 24–27; Ashby, *With Amusement for All,* 210; "Ebony Hillbillies: A Band That Stands Out in the Stomping Masses," *Tacoma News Tribune,* Feb. 23, 2008, p. 1.
23. Ashby, *With Amusement for All,* 211.

with recordings by the Carter Family and Jimmy Rodgers. The Carters—A.P., his wife Sara, and sister-in-law Maybelle—were born and raised in the high Appalachians of southwest Virginia. In Bristol, they began a successful career that would soon include best-selling hillbilly songs like "Wildwood Flower," "Wabash Cannonball," "Walk on the Sunny Side of Life," and "Will the Circle Be Unbroken." Jimmy Rodgers, Peer's other Bristol success story, took country music in a different direction. Rodgers was a Mississippian who added a healthy dose of Black blues and gospel feeling to his yodeling country repertoire. In a meteoric career cut short by tuberculosis, he recorded the country classics "Blue Yodel (T is for Texas, T is for Tennessee)," "In the Jailhouse Now," "Miss the Mississippi and You," and "Blue Yodel No. 8 (Mule Skinner Blues)." Rodgers' first nine records sold 4 million copies.[24]

Another 1927 event coincided with Peer's Bristol sessions to help create modern country music. The Nashville radio station WSM changed the name of its popular *WSM Barn Dance* show (founded in 1925) to the *Grand Old Opry.* We shall continue this story of country music below, but it is important to state here that while the history of country music before 1927 is in large part a story of British Americans, there were several other influences. German yodelers and Mexican guitarists played a role. The rise of Franco-American music in Louisiana and east Texas produced important Cajun and, later, zydeco music country subgenres.[25] Finally, the recordings of Jimmy Rodgers point in an extremely important musical direction. The greatest non-British influence in early American folk music, and the one to which we now turn our attention, is that of Africa and African Americans.

When African-American slaves were forcefully transported to North America in the 1600s, they brought their own musical traditions into the Anglo- and Celtic-American milieu. Although African folklore varied widely across the continent, most American slaves shared similar West African folkways. African

24. Ibid., 211–12.
25. Malone and Stricklin, *Southern Music, American Music,* 61–63.

musicians learned from one another and handed musical techniques down to youngsters. Oral traditions and storytelling figured prominently in their songs, and the absence of written scores allowed musicians to freely improvise. Drummers wove compelling syncopated rhythms into songs. Other instrumentation was sparse, but musicians played precursors of the banjo and strummed one-stringed diddly bows. Although solo male singers were central in West African music-making, audience members participated in important ways. They sang, shouted, and verbally responded to the singers, and their enthusiastic dancing was a significant part of this communal musical entertainment.[26]

"Nothing in the European musical tradition with which the slaves came into contact in America was totally alien to their own traditions," writes Lawrence Levine. Both cultures boasted strong oral traditions, storytelling folkways, and musical improvisation. Africans were familiar with diatonic (seven-note) scales, the basis of European music, and they also employed pentatonic (five-note) scales. And both practiced call and response—a song structure in which a singer's verse is followed by a response from either the singer himself, a musical instrument, or audience members. Europeans had used call and response in church services (the minister or priest reading or singing scripture to which the congregation verbally responded), but the African version was much more rhythmic, improvisational, and enthusiastic. This supports Levine's point that slaves "retain[ed] a good deal of their own musical heritage while fusing it to compatible elements of Euro-American music. The result was a hybrid with a strong African base."[27]

Over the course of 250 years, African Americans slowly helped develop what would become important modern musical genres. We have already seen how sacred and secular music arose in

26. John Lomax, *The Land Where the Blues Began* (New York, 1993), 347, 356–57; Levine, *Black Culture and Black Consciousness,* 6. The diddly bow began as, literally, an archery bow, with the string plucked to make a musical sound. Diddly bows are best known today in the form of washtub basses. The Black rhythm and blues singer Bo Diddley chose to become a namesake.

27. Levine, *Black Culture and Black Consciousness,* 24, 60.

the slave quarters. Blacks learned to speak English in their own African American dialect and became devout Christians, developing worship practices with ties to their African heritage. They altered hymn singing dramatically with syncopation and improvisation. They learned the secular British-American I-IV-V chord songs and changed them to meet their own enthusiastic tastes. Church music and "field hollers," (group work songs) combined to build a nineteenth-century base for future Black gospel, rural blues, and, later, urban blues musicians.[28]

In the early decades of the twentieth century, Black musicians split into gospel and blues camps that, despite antipathy and disavowal of one another, held much in common. Black gospel musicians in the Sanctified, Methodist, Baptist, and Holiness churches moved beyond the old slave spirituals and church songs about the Hebrew children and peace on earth; now they emphasized Jesus Christ and eternal life in heaven. Musically, they added elements of emerging blues, ragtime, jazz, and country styles to their repertoire. Guitars, basses, horns, and woodwinds joined pianos and organs in accompaniment as traditional hymns were bolstered by composed songs like Thomas Dorsey's "If You See My Savior," "Precious Lord," and "Peace in the Valley."[29]

Dorsey, a Georgian who migrated north to Chicago, played piano for the blueswoman Ma Rainey before returning to the Lord, but noted, "I was a blues singer, and I carried that with me into gospel songs." He also declared, "I started putting a little of the beat into gospel that we had in jazz." The gospel singer Mahalia Jackson reminisced that during her New Orleans childhood she often listened to the singing of a neighboring Sanctified Church congregation:

> Those people … used the drum, the cymbal, the tambourine, and the steel triangle. Everybody in there sang and they clapped and

28. Slave songs—sacred and secular—are discussed in chapter 2, this work. See John W. Blassingame, *The Slave Community: Plantation Life in the Antebellum South* (New York, 1972), 28, 51–53, 69–70, 73, and Malone and Stricklin, *Southern Music, American Music,* 5–13.
29. Levine, *Black Culture and Black Consciousness,* 174–89; Jon Pareles and Patricia Romanowski, eds., *The Rolling Stone Encyclopedia of Rock and Roll* (New York, 1983), 223–24.

> stomped their feet and sang with their whole bodies. They had a beat, a powerful beat, a rhythm we held on to from slavery days, and their music was so strong and expressive it used to bring tears to my eyes.[30]

Like white country and gospel musicians who became professionals, Black gospel performers sang on the radio and made records. Popular Black gospel quartets like the Zion Harmonizers, Five Blind Boys, Swan Silvertones, and Dixie Hummingbirds drew national audiences. However, the success of gospel musicians was, and would always be, overshadowed by their secular alter egos, the bluesmen.[31]

"The thing about the blues is," the singer Big Bill Broonzy once reflected, "it didn't start in the North—in Chicago, New York, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, wha'soever it is—it didn't start in the East, neither in the North—it started in the South, from what I'm thinking."[32] And although blues music began in the Mississippi Delta—stretching from north of Memphis, Tennessee, to Vicksburg, Mississippi—during the decades following the Civil War, it connected to other parts of the south, notably east Texas.[33] And the blues goes back much further, back to the slave quarters, to Africa, and, interestingly, to Great Britain. There are two subgenres of blues music—country and urban—and the latter grew out of the former. Both country and urban blues arose at the exact same time that white country music crystallized from its folk roots. Here we will focus mainly on country blues, saving urban blues for a later discussion of its connections to the rhythm and blues subgenre and rock-and-roll music.

Why was the Mississippi Delta region a nexus for the blues? Perhaps one reason is that it was a site for converging Black and white folkways alongside the Mississippi River, which

30. Levine, *Black Culture and Black Consciousness,* 183 (Dorsey and Jackson qtns.).
31. Malone and Stricklin, *Southern Music, American Music,* 76–77. For white gospel, see 67–70, 77–79.
32. Lomax, *Land Where the Blues Began,* 460.
33. Lomax, *Land Where the Blues Began,* ix. The classic works are Lomax, *Land Where the Blues Began,* Levine, *Black Culture and Black Consciousness,* and Malone and Stricklin, *Southern Music, American Music.* For Texas vis-à-vis Delta blues, see Malone and Stricklin, *Southern Music, American Music*, 42–44.

disseminated the delta's music (and musicians). The large work gangs that labored on Mississippi Delta plantations had developed a strong work song repertoire. Then, too, the success of professional Delta bluesmen brought attention to the Delta region, whose less known local players were then cast into the spotlight. A later example of this same phenomenon was the rise of a cadre of lower Mississippi Valley rockabilly stars all born and raised within a few hundred miles of one another.[34]

Whatever the reasons, the Delta proved rich soil for male African-American musicians carrying on a solo, string-accompanied vocal style Lomax ascribes to West African origins.[35] Although they eventually enjoyed commercial recording success, the country bluesmen Charlie Patton, Bill Broonzy, John Hurt, Skip James, Son House, Blind Lemon Jefferson, Robert Johnson, and others perfected their art at plantation fish fries and Saturday night dances. Bluesmen were predominantly male, but important exceptions were Mamie Smith, Bessie Smith, Ma Rainey, and a few others. By the early twentieth century, banjos and diddly bows had given way to affordable manufactured six-string acoustic guitars. Bluesmen used glass bottlenecks or other implements to coax music from their guitars' strings. The wailing sound of this blues guitar style is perhaps connected to popular Hawaiian guitar techniques and is certainly related to the sounds of the country slide dobro (and, later, pedal steel) guitars.[36] W. C. Handy, an early popularizer of the blues, told a tale about when he was traveling on a train with a minstrel troupe in 1903. Handy listened to a bluesman "as he pressed a knife on the strings of a guitar" he was playing, and recalled, "The effect was unforgettable." Bluesmen also tapped their knuckles on their guitars' hollow boxes to add syncopated drumming to their songs.[37]

Blues songs were based on the old three-chord I-IV-V British-

34. Unlike the early lower Mississippi Valley bluesmen, 1950s rockabillies had access to Memphis recording studios.
35. Lomax, *Land Where the Blues Began,* 356–57.
36. John W. Troutman, "Steelin' the Slide: Hawai'i and the Birth of the Blues Guitar," *Southern Cultures* 19 (Spring 2013), 26–52.
37. Ashby, *With Amusement for All,* 165 (Handy qtn.); Malone and Stricklin, *Southern Music,*

American songs Blacks had learned, but with variants and additions. Early on, and before professionalization, there were two-chord blues songs (as in country music), and country bluesmen occasionally liked to skip a beat in a four-count measure. With professionalization, the blues genre slowly transitioned and formalized. The result was a recurrent I-IV-V pattern with a crucial new African-American arrangement of the chords into a call-and-response pattern. Drawing from the Black field hollers and prison work songs, blues singers sang a verse, repeated it, and then sang a final (new) verse to conclude each stanza. Blues songs contained at least three stanzas, and each lasted for twelve four-count measures (meaning that during each blues stanza, one could count to four twelve times).[38]

Blues lyrics reflected a stoicism cultivated among Black folks by the tragic circumstances of slavery and segregation; the blues voiced human determination and resilience alongside sadness and resignation. Bluesmen also sang about love, using metaphor and symbolism to make sly sexual references. Their call-and-response songs were rhythmic, improvisational, and enthusiastic, and welcomed shouting and dancing audience members into the performance. Syncopated rhythm—accenting the second and fourth beat of a four-count bar—was a driving musical force.[39]

"Stone Pony Blues," a 1934 recording by the Delta bluesman Charlie Patton (1891–1934) is a classic twelve-bar, three-chord (I-IV-V), syncopated, metaphoric call-and-response blues song. A close look at the first stanza of "Stone Pony" gives us a good idea of how blues songs work. Although Patton sings about a "stone pony," a "rider," and a "door," these names in fact refer to

American Music, 41–51. Blueswomen are discussed in Malone and Stricklin, *Southern Music, American Music,* 46–49.

38. Ashby, *With Amusement for All,* 561n94. Lomax describes the "three-verse rhymed stanza of twelve to sixteen bars" but either chooses to ignore, or is unaware of, the core role of the European I-IV-V chords. Lomax, *Land Where the Blues Began,* 275.

39. Paul Friedlander, *Rock-and-roll: A Social History,* rev. ed. (Boulder, Colo., 1996), 16; Levine, *Black Culture and Black Consciousness,* 242–44; Kalamu ya Salaam, "Clapping on Two and Four," *Louisiana Folklife Festival Program* (Baton Rouge, 2001), repr. in Folklife Louisiana, https://www.louisianafolklife.org/LT/Articles_Essays/clap_on_2_4.html, accessed Jan. 21, 2015.

an erect male penis, the woman with whom the singer wants to make love, and that woman's vagina. Strumming the I chord on his guitar, Patton sings, "I got me a stone pony, and I don't ride Shetland no more." Next, he strums the IV chord and responds, "I got me a stone pony, don't ride Shetland no more," returning to the I chord on "more." Moving to the V chord, he sings, "You can find my stone pony," then comes down to the IV and continues, "hooked to my rider's door," returning to the I chord on "door" and ending the stanza. The complete song consists of six stanzas, all of which adhere to the same call–and–response pattern.[40]

Although country blues musicians like Patton, Robert Johnson, Bessie Smith, and their record-making counterparts have been depicted as earthy folk artists, their generation in fact represents the transition from Delta front-porch singing to accomplished professional musicianship.[41] They made the trek from the country to the city, and to the manufactured guitars, recording microphones, and radios that played their music. During the 1930s and 1940s, the next generation of bluesmen would plug electric guitars into amplifiers and sing into microphones and public address systems in blues clubs from Memphis to Kansas City to Chicago. Leaving the solo performance model behind, bluesmen hired sidemen. The modern rhythm and blues combo broke a trail that would converge with amplified country music bands and lead towards rock–and–roll.

Just as the piano has black and white keys, country, gospel, and blues musical genres possess strong Black and white connections. All three genres grew from oral traditions and musicians who lacked formal training. Instrumentation was sparse but effective, and performers were most often males. Three-chord storytelling songs (often about love) predominated. The music incorporated, in varying degrees, enthusiasm, improvisation, metaphor, syncopation, and call and response. Of course, Blacks and whites developed selected aspects of their music separately, and of course there were important differences

40. Charlie Patton, "Stone Pony Blues," *Charlie Patton: Founder of the Delta Blues, 1929–1934,* 1995, Yazoo Records, B000000G8M, CD.
41. Elijah Wald, *Escaping the Delta: Robert Johnson and the Invention of the Blues* (New York, 2005).

in Black and white musicianship. But the overall rule was integration. Amidst slavery, segregation, and shameful racism, Black and white musical forms somehow blended. "Out of all the jagged splinters of the broken mirrors of their own culture," writes Joyner, southern folk created musical art of "global significance."[42]

Professor Gerald Early makes an important observation about jazz music, the next subject of this investigation. Early reflects that jazz "was a way for people to break with the old… America no longer had to look back to its past." Black and white musicians, he states, became Americanized. In playing jazz, Blacks were not "looking back to Africa":

> They were looking at America and looking to the future and looking at what they were as Americans. Europeans who came to this country and became Americans were attracted to this music and found in this music a way to break from Europe. Finally, the Emersonian doctrine of "create your art here" from "The American Scholar" came to fruition with this music.[43]

TWELFTH STREET AND VINE

There are many stories about "cutting contests" in Kansas City, Missouri, the after-hours musical duels between the city's talented and highly competitive jazzmen. The contests took place in the city's downtown nightclub and brothel district bordering Vine Street. The most famous of the cutting contest tales recounts a 1933 match between the saxophonists Coleman Hawkins ("Hawk" or "Bean") and Lester Young ("The President" or "Pres") at the Cherry Blossom Club at 1822 Vine. Hawkins was an established jazz star, and had traveled to Kansas City from New York City as tenor saxophonist for the renowned Fletcher Henderson Orchestra. Lester Young, the up and coming player looking to overturn the master, was tenor man for Count Basie, whose band members frequented the Cherry Blossom after

42. Joyner, "Region in Harmony," 37.
43. Early appears in Burns, *Jazz,* episode 1: "Gumbo."

hours. Hawkins had supposedly avoided cutting contests (because there was nothing to gain and plenty to lose), but he brought his horn to the Cherry Blossom that night in December of 1933.[44]

The Kansas City pianist Mary Lou Williams recalled that Hawkins started the match strongly, exhausting a couple of pianists and other musicians with his abstruse key changes. His rivals were the Kansas City tenor men Ben Webster, Herschel Evans, and, of course, Lester Young. Williams remembered Young always took some time to warm up, but then he could "really blow; then you couldn't handle him on a cutting session. That was how Hawkins got hung up." The bassist Gene Ramey agreed: "Hawk was cutting everybody out. Until Prez [Young] got him. He tore Hawk up so bad he missed a date in St. Louis." May Lou Williams added to the Saint Louis finale of the story:

> The Henderson band was playing in St. Louis that evening, and Bean [Hawkins] knew he ought to be on the way. But he kept trying to blow something to beat Ben and Herschel and Lester. When at last he gave up, he got straight in his car and drove to St. Louis. I heard he'd just bought a new Cadillac and that he burnt it out trying to make the job on time. Yes, Hawkins was king until he met those crazy Kansas City tenormen.[45]

This story has been told and retold, and it has appeared in varied popular and scholarly publications. But parts of the tale are exaggerated or concocted. Depending on the version, Coleman Hawkins is bested by either a cadre of Kansas City tenor men, or just Young alone. Then too, Hawkins is always portrayed as an "outsider" from New York (compared to Young and the Kansas City jazzmen), yet it was Hawkins, not Young, who was born and raised near Kansas City (Young was a Mississippian, something never mentioned in any of the tales). Early versions of the story have Hawkins dashing to Saint Louis, but the ruined Cadillac

44. The most accurate account is Douglas Henry Daniels, *Lester Leaps In: The Life and Times of Lester "Pres" Young* (Boston, 2002), 174–77. See also Frank Diggs and Chuck Haddick, *Kansas City Jazz: From Ragtime to Bebop* (New York, 2005), 125–27.

45. Diggs and Haddick, *Kansas City Jazz,* 126–27.

seems to have been added by Williams to frost the folkloric cake.[46]

Count Basie, who was present at the Cherry Blossom that night, tells a much different version. Although there was indeed a jam session with Hawkins and Young, he states,

> I really don't remember that anybody thought it was such a big deal at the time… Some of the stories I have heard over the years about what happened that night and afterwards just don't ring any bells for me… I don't know anything about anybody challenging Hawkins in the Cherry Blossom that night.

The final nail in the coffin of this story is provided by Lester Young himself. Young recalls that in December of 1933, the New York City band leader Fletcher Henderson did come to Kansas City and one night challenged him to play some of Hawkins's sheet music. Young recalls he played it better than Hawkins could have done. However, Young states Coleman Hawkins was not even present at what appears to be an audition of sorts, as Henderson soon hired him for a brief stint in 1934.[47]

The historian Douglas Henry Daniels observed that romantic fabrications of Hawk and the Pres blowing hard *mano a mano*, with Pres emerging the victor, are "perhaps closer to what Kansas Citians wanted to believe" about that night than what happened.[48] Why has the Hawkins-Young cutting contest tale endured? The story's power is rooted in a sort of rural/urban—wild/tame and frontier/civilization—tension between the lead saxophonists of Count Basie's Kansas City western band and Fletcher Henderson's cosmopolitan New Yorkers. The tale thus pits a wily provincial against a city slicker, with the local jazzman winning the day. It seems that the Myth of the West has plenty of room for modern incarnations, including territorial shootouts between jazzmen.

The city of New Orleans is the birthplace of jazz music, yet three Missouri locales also played important roles in the early

46. Daniels, *Lester Leaps In,* 175–76.
47. Ibid., 175–77.
48. Ibid.

history of the genre. As we just learned, out west on the Missouri River, Kansas City (KC) played host to famed territory bands like the Count Basie Orchestra, creating a unique, blues-infused subgenre called Kansas City jazz. Sedalia, Missouri, was home to Scott Joplin, pioneer composer of ragtime music, a crucial building block of traditional New Orleans jazz. To the east, Saint Louis, Missouri, welcomed the jazz trumpeter Louis Armstrong from 1918 to 1921, when he left New Orleans to make music aboard the Streckfus Steamboat Company's upper Mississippi River excursion boats.[49]

Four decades before the Hawkins-Young duel, an important stage in the birth of jazz music commenced when Scott Joplin began a four-year residence in Sedalia, Missouri, ninety miles southeast of Kansas City. Joplin was born to freed slave parents, Giles and Florence Joplin, in 1867 or 1868, and grew up in the lower Arkansas River Valley, in and around Texarkana. Joplin's mother cultivated his prodigious musical talent, and Julius Weiss, a Texarkana Jewish immigrant music teacher, mentored young Scott in classical piano technique. Throughout a productive career that ended tragically in 1917, Joplin melded formal Euro-American piano, opera, orchestral, and dance forms with African-American music to produce revolutionary results. His most famous creations were in the American music jazz subgenre known as ragtime.[50]

The mid-1880s and early 1890s found Scott Joplin in Sedalia, Saint Louis, and Chicago, working in minstrel troupes, playing trumpet and piano, and leading an orchestra. Settling in Sedalia in 1893, he joined the Queen City Cornet Band, formed his own dance band, and worked as a pianist at the Maple Leaf and Black 400, popular social clubs for Black men. Meanwhile, he studied music and composition at Sedalia's all-Black George R. Smith College. Joplin began to write his own music and published two marches and a waltz before his 1899 publication of "Maple Leaf Rag." Within a decade, that song had sold one half million sheet

49. Ibid.; Louis Armstrong Induction File, National Rivers Hall of Fame, National Rivers Museum, Dubuque, Iowa.
50. Edward A. Berlin, *King of Ragtime: Scott Joplin and His Era* (New York, 1994), 3–12.

music copies. Royalties from "Maple Leaf Rag" and subsequent rags enabled Joplin to move to Saint Louis and then New York to pursue myriad musical projects ranging from a symphony and a piano concerto to a vaudeville act. His folk opera, *A Guest of Honor* (1903), dramatized the Black educator Booker T. Washington's famous 1901 visit to the White House as the dinner guest of President Theodore Roosevelt, a story that was a source of great pride to African Americans.[51]

By 1907, Joplin resided in New York City, where he unsuccessfully attempted to stage his magnum opus *Treemonisha,* a three-act folk opera blending African-American music and oral traditions with formal Euro-American orchestration and stagecraft. *Treemonisha* had strong connections to Joplin's Reconstruction-era childhood and his own philosophy of race relations. Created with twenty-seven original songs to be performed by eleven actor-dancers, it told the story of Treemonisha, a "colored waif" found abandoned, playing underneath a tree arbor. Adopted and educated, Treemonisha dedicates her life to leading her people as they adjust to their new lives as Arkansas freedmen. The opera's theme was that the freedmen and their children could survive and flourish through education, a core belief of Joplin's and of his hero Booker T. Washington. Joplin dedicated much of the last decade of his life to honing and marketing *Treemonisha,* which was never performed in its entirety. Suffering from syphilis dementia—and convinced that Irving Berlin had stolen parts of *Treemonisha* for his hugely successful song "Alexander's Ragtime Band"—Scott Joplin died in 1917.[52]

Ragtime music flourished from approximately 1900 to 1920 and moved in the same direction as Scott Joplin's

51. Ibid., 24–44, 115, 119, 128–30, passim; Ashby, *With Amusement for All,* 165–67. For Booker T. Washington, see chapters 3 and 5, this work.
52. Scott Joplin, *Treemonisha, Opera in Three Acts* (New York, 1911), Hogan Jazz Archive, Tulane University, New Orleans; Berlin, *King of Ragtime,* 198–99, 202, 235n67, 237–39. See also Scott Joplin, preface to *Treemonisha. Treemonisha* was not a ragtime opera, though some of its songs contained rag motifs. *Treemonisha* was finally performed in its entirety during a 1970s revival of interest in Joplin fostered by the ragtime soundtrack of the movie *The Sting* (1973).

career—towards the urban centers of Saint Louis, Chicago, and New York City. These cities supplied the composers, publishers, and professional musicians (and the mechanized piano rolls) that popularized ragtime. Ragtime began as solely piano music, with the right hand's syncopated leads complementing the left hand's bass lines. Soon, however, ragtime spread from the piano to orchestras, brass bands, and small instrumental ensembles that included horns (trumpets, cornets, trombones, and tubas), woodwinds (clarinets and flutes), and banjos. Alongside Joplin stood James Reese Europe, a Black Alabama ragtime musician who gained fame in New York City conducting U.S. Army and civilian bands. Ragtime differs substantially from blues and country music because it was, from its inception, *composed* printed sheet music, not a direct product of oral traditions. Although ragtime does share important folk music motifs with country and blues, its practitioners all had some formal training and could read music. Improvisation was unheard of, as ragtime musicians were valued for their technical ability to perform composed tunes exactly as they were written. The result has been described as precise, meticulous, bright, cheerful, and enthusiastic.[53]

Ragtime is situated in a musicological place midway between Euro-American orchestra music and traditional New Orleans jazz. American brass and marching band music is thus a close relative of ragtime, and the standard march form (sixteen two-beat bars or measures repeated four times) is also the most common ragtime form. Call and response and the ubiquitous I-IV-V chords appear in ragtime, but not in a blues pattern, and ragtime songs possess technical variants only professional musicians could perform. For example, Joplin's rag "The Entertainer" (the famous theme from the movie *The Sting* [1973])

53. This discussion and that of the next two paragraphs is based on Ann Charters, ed., *The Ragtime Songbook: Songs of the Ragtime Era by Scott Joplin, Hughie Cannon, Ben Harney, Will Marion Cook, Alex Rogers, and Others, Compiled and Edited with Historical Notes Concerning the Songs and Times* (New York, 1965), Jones Jazz Collection, Tulane University, New Orleans, 8–9, 22–24, 26–30, 60–61, 76–77, 90–91, 106–107, passim. Also see Berlin, *King of Ragtime,* 46–47, and Ashby, *With Amusement for All,* 165–67. Trumpets and cornets are similar instruments.

revolves around I-IV-V chords but with the use of a II chord variant and insertion of a V in a minor key. Ragtime composers took a huge step away from marching band music by introducing African American syncopation, and many rags end strongly on the second beat or offbeat. But ragtime did not abandon the onbeat. Ragtime music features rapid triplets, eighth-, and quarter-note phrases, often played as transitions between bars. Interestingly, trombone slide tricks and horn trills and triplets reflect ragtime's debt to circus marching bands.[54]

In folk vernacular, to "rag" someone meant to playfully joke and tease them. Ragtime musicians customized the verb's usage; to "rag a tune" meant syncopating and teasing it, adding a little rougher edge. In addition to composing their own songs, ragtime musicians commonly borrowed popular marches, and minstrel and show tunes and ragged them, stressing the offbeat and adding ragged flourishes and transitions. This penchant for ragging existing songs increased the ragtime music repertoire exponentially, in much the same way jazz musicians later borrowed popular songs and "jazzed them up." Listening to ragtime, like listening to Dixieland jazz, one is very aware of the Euro-American forms, musical instruments, and, sometimes, the lyrics. Yet one also knows that something in the music has changed dramatically.[55]

For the first two decades of the twentieth century, ragtime dominated American popular music performances and then record sales. The works of Scott Joplin and James Reese Europe served as a base for new compositions and ragged standards. Jewish composers from New York City's Tin Pan Alley music publishing houses became ragtime aficionados. The ragtime songbook ranged from Charles Gimble, Jr.'s, early rag arrangement of Stephen Foster's "Old Black Joe" to Hughie Cannon's "Bill Bailey" to Howard and Emerson's "Hello My Baby (My Ragtime Doll)" to Charles K. Harris's "The Rabbi's

54. For example, listen to Scott Joplin, *The Entertainer: Classic Ragtime from Rare Piano Rolls,* 1974, Biograph, BLP-1013Q, LP; Peacherine Ragtime Orchestra, *That Teasin' Rag: Vintage American Arrangements from the Ragtime Era,* 2011, Rivermont Records, BSW-2215, CD.

55. Ashby, *With Amusement for All,* 165–66.

Daughter." Ragtime became so popular that entrepreneurs watered it down to serve up to an even broader marketplace. Before long, many "ragtime" show tunes and songs bore little resemblance to the music of Joplin, Europe, and other authentic ragtime musicians. Irving Berlin once quipped, "You know, I never did find out what ragtime was."[56]

The study of ragtime serves as a primer for understanding jazz, its more complex, and much more influential, successor. Again, language is important. The origin of the noun "jazz" is unknown, a fact that has not hindered countless fans from claiming to have discovered jazz's linguistic source. Thus, we get stories that "jazz" is an African word meaning "speeded up," or tales about how all New Orleans prostitutes wore jasmine perfume. Civil War–era whites did use the word "jasm" to mean pep and spirit, and there was a sexual connotation in the use of "jizz" as a synonym for sperm. The first appearance of the word "jazz" spelled with two Z's is in a 1913 article about a California baseball pitcher, not a musician. The baseball ace called his new pitch the "jazz ball."[57]

Early practitioners of the music we call jazz had no recollection whatsoever of that term being used in New Orleans before the years 1915-19. Indeed, they claimed it was a northern term. New Orleans musicians used the terms "ragtime," "rag," "raves," "ratty," "gutbucket," and "hot music" to describe traditional New Orleans jazz. A 1916 white minstrel recording titled "That Funny Jas Band from Dixieland," uses a spelling that competed with "jass," "jasz," "jaz," and "jazz." The first-ever jazz record, "Livery Stable Blues," was recorded in 1917 by a group called the Original Dixieland Jass Band. While the record itself spelled the group's name "Jass," the record slip (cover) and accompanying publicity used two Z's. "Jazz" music soon swept the nation, and jazz musicians have used the latter spelling to this day.[58]

56. Charters, *Ragtime Songbook,* 22–24, 26–30, 60–61, 76–77, 90–91, 106–107; Ashby, *With Amusement for All,* 166 (Berlin qtn.). Before his 1919 murder, James Reese Europe composed music that had evolved past ragtime and into jazz.
57. Lewis Porter, *Jazz: A Century of Change* (New York, 1997), 1–12.
58. Ibid., 8, 102–103.

Although the word "jazz" did not originate in New Orleans, jazz music began there. Traditional New Orleans jazz—Dixieland jazz—emerged in the Crescent City in the first two decades of the twentieth century. The traditional jazz band was configured like a small marching band or orchestra, with musicians playing horns (trumpet or cornet, trombone, and tuba), woodwinds (clarinet, but not flute), piano, banjo, and bass drum and snare. Full drum sets (with multiple cymbals), standup basses, saxophones, and guitars would become more common in the 1920s and 1930s. Early jazz musicians were mostly male, Black (the all-white Original Dixieland Jass Band is an exception), and they could read music. Jim Crow laws forced skilled classically trained creole (mixed-race) musicians out of white orchestras and into Black bands. The jazz repertoire included marches, rags, minstrel songs, Tin Pan Alley show tunes, Afro-Caribbean dance music, and syncopated gospel music. Jazzmen often rearranged and orchestrated the music of solo blues guitarists. Just as ragtime players had ragged popular music, early New Orleans musicians took a wide variety of songs and jazzed them up. Importantly, they composed hundreds of their own original Dixieland tunes.[59]

Traditional New Orleans jazz included many of the motifs of country, gospel, and blues, but there were also significant professional embellishments and variations, and unique musical contributions. Blues was extremely important, and there were I-IV-V songs in jazz. But the three chords were not always played in a standard blues progression, and new II-V-I and II-V-I-VI chord tunes predominated. For example, the traditional New Orleans jazz classic "When the Saints Go Marching In" is a three-chord song adapted from a gospel hymn. Although performed with vocal and instrumental call and response, those elements do not fit a I-IV-V blues pattern. Louis Armstrong, whose performances and recordings of "When the Saints Go Marching

59. Ashby, *With Amusement for All,* 205–207; Driggs and Haddix, *Kansas City Jazz,* 1–2; Burns, *Jazz,* episode 1: "Gumbo." The term Dixieland has fallen out of favor among contemporary players of traditional New Orleans jazz, perhaps because of its connection to the Confederate States of America. For the term Creole, see chapter 7, this work.

In" are famous, also recorded the 1920s Dixieland classic "Sweet Georgia Brown." This is a more complex tune, with a bridge and variants all built on the II-V-I-VI chord pattern so popular in jazz. Like ragtime, jazz required more musicianship than traditional country, gospel, and blues music.[60]

Enthusiasm and syncopation were ever present. Most jazz songs were instrumentals, but there were vocals, shouted or sung (without a microphone) by a band member, not a designated vocalist. Fellow band members responded to his calls. There were storytelling songs and sexual metaphors. Unlike sparse country and blues instrumentation, jazz brought the full arsenal of the Euro-American orchestra and marching band to the task. And improvisation soared in songs in which each band member took a solo, and in song choruses that featured three to four simultaneous improvised instrumental voices. The contemporary New Orleans trumpeter Wynton Marsalis states,

> The real power of jazz, and the innovation of jazz, is that a group of people can come together and create art, improvise art, and can negotiate their agendas with each other, and that negotiation *is* the art… [Jazz musicians can] have a dialog. We can have a conversation. We can speak to each other in the language of music.[61]

In sum, early New Orleans jazz musicians produced a Louisiana gumbo, blending together varied Euro-American and African-American musical traditions. This happened in the era of *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896), the infamous New Orleans railroad car court case that constitutionalized segregation in Louisiana and the rest of the South. Although jazz bands and many jazz clubs were segregated, the music itself and the musicians who played it nevertheless interacted and cross-acculturated. Marsalis continues, "Jazz music is not race music. Everybody plays jazz music. Everybody has always played it. But if you teach the

60. For chord patterns, see Ashby, *With Amusement for All,* 561n94. A good sampling is Preservation Hall Jazz Band, *New Orleans Preservation Vol. 1,* 2009, VPS-20084, CD.
61. Marsalis quoted in Burns, *Jazz,* episode 1: "Gumbo." For example, Preservation Hall Jazz Band, *Songs of New Orleans,* 2010 VPS-05, CD.

history of jazz you have white bands and black bands. But musicians don't learn that way. This is the big lie in the ways that it's been taught."[62]

New Orleans's sin economy—prostitution, liquor, and gambling—played a significant role in the rise of the nightclubs that employed hundreds of jazzmen. The Black Storyville neighborhood and its surroundings boasted scores of bars and brothels (known as sporting houses) where jazz combos furnished the soundtrack for drinking, dancing, and revelry. The legendary Buddy Bolden and Papa Jack Laine honed their skills in Storyville bars during the first decades of the twentieth century, and so too did Jelly Roll Morton, who eventually took his compelling New Orleans piano style across North America to Los Angeles. Joe "King" Oliver's band (the term "King" was applied to several New Orleans jazz musicians) was extremely popular in the sporting district, as was the clarinetist Sidney Bechet, who also spread traditional New Orleans jazz on national tours. Freddy Keppard's Original Creole Orchestra traveled from New Orleans to Los Angeles and was so successful that RCA Records approached members with a recording contract. Keppard declined (he feared competitors would use the recordings to copy his unique style), setting the stage for Nick Larocca and the Original Dixieland Jass Band's huge 1917 national hit recordings of "Livery Stable Blues" and "Dixieland Jazz Band One-Step."[63]

The trumpeter Louis Armstrong was born into this musical stewpot "in the Back O' Town section (Jane Alley), New Orleans" on July 4, 1900, to "Mary [May] Ann, the mother of Two Children who she had Raised and Supported All by herself." Armstrong's mother occasionally worked as a prostitute, and his neighborhood was so rough it was dubbed "the Battleground." He got some religious education in the gospel-shouting Sanctified Baptist tradition, and, like Scott Joplin, was mentored by Jews.

62. Ashby, *With Amusement for All,* 206–207. Marsalis in Burns, *Jazz,* episode 5: "Swing: Pure Pleasure." *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896) is discussed in chapter 5, this work.
63. Ashby, *With Amusement for All,* 205; Driggs and Haddix, *Kansas City Jazz,* 1–2; Burns, *Jazz,* episode 1: "Gumbo."

After he was sent out to work at age seven, little Louis was hired by the Karnofsky family to deliver coal to Storyville brothels; he had a tin horn to announce the arrival of the coal wagon. Mrs. Karnofsky watched over him and made sure he ate a big dinner before returning home each night; Louis wore a star of David around his neck for the rest of life. While stating that New Orleans Jews were treated better than the Blacks, Armstrong added, "I had a longtime admiration for the Jewish people['s] … courage, taking So Much Abuse for so long." The Karnofskys also loaned Louie $5.00 to buy a pawn shop trumpet. "After blowing into it for a while I realized I could play 'Home Sweet Home,'" Armstrong recalled. "Then come the blues."[64]

On January 1, 1913, young Louie was arrested for firing a 38-caliber revolver into the air to celebrate the New Year, and a judge sent him to the New Orleans Colored Waifs Home. Months later, his mother proudly watched him marching on parade through the Battleground district, playing trumpet for the Colored Waifs Home band and blowing a syncopated version of the march "Maryland, My Maryland"! Armstrong turned professional at age thirteen. His role models were the early Storyville jazzmen Keppard, Bechet, and especially his musical mentor, Joe Oliver. Admirers of the young prodigy dubbed him Satchel Mouth, shortened to Satchmo. When Oliver left New Orleans for Chicago in 1918, Armstrong was hired to take his place. But times were changing in the Crescent City. World War I austerity had ushered in a U.S. Navy crackdown on drinking, gambling, and prostitution, and many jazzmen were looking for work. Louis Armstrong looked north, to Saint Louis and the Streckfus Steamboat Company.[65]

From 1918 to 1921, Armstrong spent the summer months

64. Thomas David Brothers, *Louis Armstrong's New Orleans* (New York, 2006), 1–2, 31–32, 40,74–77, passim. Armstrong quotes from Thomas Brothers, ed., *Louis Armstrong in His Own Words: Selected Writings* (New York, 1999), 5, 7–8, and Burns, *Jazz,* episode 2: "The Gift." See also Louis Armstrong Induction File, National Rivers Hall of Fame, National Rivers Museum, Dubuque, Iowa. Armstrong took literary license with his birth date—he was born August 4, 1901.

65. Burns, *Jazz,* episode 2: "The Gift"; Brothers, *Louie Armstrong's New Orleans,* 2–3, 96–99, 115–16, 128–31, 140–44, passim.

playing in the Streckfus excursion boat orchestra of the New Orleans pianist Fate Marable. The Streckfus family of Saint Louis owned several steamboats and built a lucrative Mississippi River excursion business. Excursion steamer trips resembled modern-day cruises in that paying customers booked passage for a brief holiday. While some patrons stayed overnight in cabins, many came onboard for only one evening's entertainment. Passengers relaxed, dined, drank, gambled, and danced to the music of the ship's band. The Streckfus dance bands, staffed with experienced Dixieland musicians, played an important role in bringing live New Orleans jazz to the upper Mississippi Valley. Along the way, they inspired young white midwestern musicians (like seventeen-year-old Bix Beiderbecke of Davenport, Iowa) and set the stage for the next phase of the history of jazz.[66]

"Our band put out the best dance music ever," recalled Joseph Streckfus, a boat captain and company co-owner, crediting Marable and an ensemble that included Satchmo Armstrong and the drummer Baby Dodds: "This band while at St. Louis on the *SS St. Paul* was the talk of St. Louis." What Streckfus did not mention is that he and his family (who were themselves accomplished old school musicians) were known for rigidly managing their musician employees' tempos and styles. The Streckfuses aimed to water down Dixieland to appeal to a broader audience. Baby Dodds recalled that tensions arose between the owners and the musicians, "so finally Louis and I left the boat together after handing in written resignations." Louis Armstrong soon accepted Joe Oliver's offer to join his new band (with Baby Dodds on drums), and on August 8, 1922, he boarded the Illinois Central Railroad for Chicago.[67]

Chicago stands alongside New Orleans, New York City, and Kansas City as one of the great early hubs of American jazz. Situated along Lake Erie, near the headwaters of navigable rivers,

66. David Chevan, "Riverboat Music from St. Louis and the Streckfus Steamboat Line," *Black Music Research Journal* 9 (Autumn 1989), 153–80.

67. Joseph Streckfus Memoir, entries for Feb. 18 and 20, 1958, typescript, box 82, Streckfus Collection, St. Louis Mercantile Library, University of Missouri, Saint Louis. Amazingly, Streckfus claimed credit for mentoring Armstrong and successfully changing his musical style! Chevan, "Riverboat Music," 165 (Dodds qtn.).

and at the convergence of transcontinental railroads, Chicago was America's second largest city and, for much of the 1920s, the jazz capital of the world. The crackdown on gambling and prostitution in New Orleans was countered by Chicago's hard-drinking mayor, "Big Bill" Thompson, who welcomed the sin industry and jazzmen with open arms. Thus, during the same decade that Prohibition was the law of the land, Chicago's South Side roared, and Blacks and whites reveled in the desegregated bars and nightclubs on and around State Street. Louis Armstrong and King Oliver held court at the Lincoln Gardens, where they inspired a talented cadre of young white jazzmen, including Benny Goodman, Gene Krupa, and Jimmy McPartland. But organized crime soon put a damper on Chicago's golden era of jazz. City, state, and federal lawmen cracked down on the illegal liquor trade, and jazz musicians, with Louis Armstrong at the lead, moved on to new opportunities in New York City.[68]

Jazz music, incubated in the rich cultural matrix of the Mississippi River Valley, had migrated eastward to the nation's largest city. New York rightly takes pride in its jazz heritage, yet many of that city's accomplished jazzmen arrived there from south of the Mason-Dixon line. Northern cities can boast important country, blues, and jazz music traditions because they offered jobs and homes to the great out-migration of Black and white southerners during the early decades of the twentieth century. New York presented an especially inviting prospect for jazz musicians because of the city's big role in the national entertainment industry—theater, radio, recording, moviemaking, and Tin Pan Alley pop songs. Moreover, the jazz age in New York paralleled and dovetailed with the Harlem Renaissance of African-American literature, dance, and art.[69]

The early New York City jazz scene gravitated around clubs in Harlem and Manhattan and two of New York's greatest band leaders, Fletcher Henderson and Duke Ellington. Henderson, a

68. Levine, *Black Culture, Black Consciousness,* 294–96; Malone and Stricklin, *Southern Music, American Music,* 55–56; Driggs and Haddix, *Kansas City Jazz,* 2–3.
69. Driggs and Haddix, *Kansas City Jazz,* 3; Levine, *Black Culture, Black Consciousness,* 269, 295–96; Burns, *Jazz,* episode 2: "The Gift."

formally trained Georgia musician, landed in New York City in 1920, writing and arranging for the Pace-Handy Music Publishing Company, owned by W. C. Handy of Florence, Alabama, and Black Swan Records in Harlem. A piano accompanist for Bessie Smith and other blueswomen, Henderson formed his own orchestra in 1923 and hired Louis Armstrong away from Joe Oliver. He also hired the promising Kansas City saxophonist Coleman Hawkins. Henderson's orchestra ruled the roost at Roseland Ballroom (just off Times Square) until the late 1920s rise of Duke Ellington. A Washington, D.C., native, Ellington was perhaps an even more brilliant composer and arranger than Henderson. He formed a band called the Washingtonians and worked his way up from the Hollywood Cafe and Kentucky Club on Broadway in Manhattan to a triumphant run at Harlem's Cotton Club. Ellington's career would span six decades and produce a brilliant body of work that one critic calls "a sophisticated orchestral expression of jazz." Following New Orleans and Chicago, New York City set the national standard for jazz and led America into the big band swing music era. New York jazzmen stood unsurpassed until the mid-1930s, when Kansas City, Missouri, captured the spotlight.[70]

When jazz musicians referred to Kansas City and the surrounding region as "the territory," they were using the imagery of the Louisiana Purchase frontier. Kansas City sat at the confluence of the Missouri and Kansas (Kaw) Rivers and first achieved prominence during the era of Manifest Destiny as a jumping-off point for wagon trains bound for Oregon and California. After the infamous Kansas-Nebraska Act (1854) provoked civil warfare over the status of slavery in the territories, Confederate and Yankee guerillas clashed, and the names of John Brown, William Quantrill, Belle Starr, and Jesse James were woven into a violent local lore. The Civil War was quickly followed by the rise of the Great Plains cattle frontier, and Kansas City grew to be a transcontinental rail hub, a beef packer and exporter, and the chief supplier of goods for the lower

70. Driggs and Haddix, *Kansas City Jazz,* 3–4; Burns, *Jazz,* episode 2: "The Gift." See also Thomas Brothers, *Louis Armstrong: Master of Modernism* (New York, 2014).

Missouri and Arkansas River valleys, Oklahoma, and north Texas. All this economic growth was accompanied by a boom in both high and low culture, as opera houses arose a few blocks from houses of ill repute. This also gave rise to a new style of corrupt urban politics.[71]

Tom Pendergast was the Irish Democrat boss of Kansas City (KC) from 1911 until 1938, when he was incarcerated in federal prison for income tax evasion. In the interim, he built a political machine fueled by payoffs from gambling, prostitution, and, during the years 1919-33, illegal alcohol sales. All this flourished in a district encompassing both the city's white downtown and its major Black neighborhood. The well-known song "Kansas City" was written by Jerry Leiber and Mike Stoller in 1952, not by KC jazzmen in the 1920s, but Leiber and Stoller got the address "12th Street and Vine" exactly right. During the 1920s and '30s that neighborhood was abuzz. Barbecue joints sold wet Kansas City style beef, pork, and chicken plates. Negro League baseball players strolled the district before and after Kansas City Monarchs games. And when the sun went down, the nightlife began. The KC pianist Mary Lou Williams remembered, "The town was wide open for drinking, gambling, and pretty much every form of vice":

> Work was plentiful for musicians, though some of the employers were tough people… I found Kansas City to be a heavenly city—music everywhere in the Negro section of town, and fifty or more cabarets rocking on Twelfth and Eighteenth Streets.[72]

Isolated from New Orleans, Chicago, and New York City, Kansas City jazz musicians developed a unique style. Kansas City possessed each of the fundamental building blocks of jazz, yet their trajectory was different than in other cities. For example,

71. Driggs and Haddix, *Kansas City Jazz,* 5; Ross Russell, *Jazz Style in Kansas City and the Southwest* (Berkeley, Calif., 1971), 4–5. For Quantrill and Starr, see chapter 2, this work.
72. Nathan W. Pearson, Jr., "Political and Musical Forces That Influenced the Development of Kansas City Jazz," *Black Music Research Journal* 9 (Autumn 1989), 184n5. Russell, *Jazz Style in Kansas City and the Southwest*, 6–24 (Williams qtn., 8). For Kansas City style barbecue, see chapter 7, this work. For the Pendergast machine and Harry S. Truman, see chapter 5, this work.

ragtime lasted much longer in KC than elsewhere because Missouri was the epicenter of the ragtime movement. Scott Joplin had resided nearby in Sedalia, and KC ragtimers like James Scott worked the Lincoln Theater vaudeville venue well into the 1920s. The playlist of the Benny Moten Band, Kansas City's first accomplished jazz orchestra, was peppered with ragtime tunes, including "Twelfth Street Rag." Brass bands had also formed and thrived in communities throughout KC and western Missouri, and the clarinetist Lawrence Denton recalled, "We played concerts … in the park… We played a mixture: ragtime and marches and classics, waltzes." Traditional New Orleans jazz came to KC via Missouri River steamboats, but it arrived later than in Chicago. Jesse Stone, arranger and pianist for the Kansas City Rockets and Clouds of Joy, stated that New Orleans jazz "creeped northward years later," and "we developed an independent style." He also noted that while Dixieland jazzmen played for funerals and danced in the streets, "in Kansas City they wouldn't do anything like that."[73]

Joe Oliver and Louis Armstrong had proceeded from New Orleans to Chicago and then New York City, never residing or playing long stands in Kansas City. Music historians characterize the Chicago style Oliver and Armstrong helped create as one that "emphasized individual soloists and a freer rhythmic approach," while the New York style of Fletcher Henderson and Duke Ellington introduced complex, written scores with "arrangements orchestrating the sections and soloists." This all evolved into swing music and the rise of the Chicagoan Benny Goodman's and the Harlem drummer Chick Webb's great big bands. By the mid-1930s, however, Chicago and New York swing music was losing some of its punch, and audiences were searching for a fresh approach. They found it in KC.

Kansas City jazz was "vigorous swing music," writes the historian Nathan Pearson. The typical KC configuration was an all-Black, male, eight-man band (the singer made nine), composed of reeds, horns, and a rhythm section of drums, bass,

73. Pearson, "Political and Musical Forces," 183–91 (qtns., 187, 191). Denton says brass bands did play for funerals, ibid., 187. See also, Driggs and Haddix, *Kansas City Jazz,* 15–16, 31–33.

guitar, and piano. Kansas City bands specialized in upbeat versions of the twelve-bar blues music so popular in the Mississippi Delta, Texas, Oklahoma, Arkansas, and Missouri. Pearson describes their music,

> with its foundation of an unstoppable dancing beat over which soloists and ensembles wove intricate designs. With this heritage, it is not surprising that Kansas City's greatest swing orchestras—Bennie Moten, Thamon Hayes, Count Basie, and Jay McShann—were all famed for their rhythm sections and excelling at dance music.[74]

KC's blues-based bands reenergized big band jazz and pointed American popular music in the direction of rhythm and blues and rock-and-roll.

The great Kansas City bands share a lineage and core group of musicians that begin with Bennie Moten's orchestra and, as noted, progress to Walter Page's Blue Devils and the swinging bands of Count Basie, Jay McShann, the Kansas City Rockets, and several more. In the early 1920s, as the jazz revolution began in KC, Bennie Moten converted his ragtime trio to a larger band, which became the city's premier jazz group. In the late '20s, Moten hired musicians (notably Count Basie and Lester Young) away from the Blue Devils, a hot Oklahoma City territorial band. This began a KC pattern of bandleaders outbidding competitors for talented players to form even stronger bands. Other territorial musicians frequented the Kansas City clubs, including two white Texans—the trombonist Jack Teagarden and the trumpeter Harry James—and the Oklahoma City guitarist Charlie Christian.[75] Western swing, a popular Texas subgenre of big band jazz, became part of the Kansas City repertoire.

Kansas City produced the most important female instrumentalist in the early history of American jazz. There were

74. Pearson, "Political and Musical Forces," 188–91 (qtn., 189). See also Pearson, *Goin' to Kansas City* (Urbana, Ill., 1987). For example, listen to *The Real Kansas City,* 1996, Columbia Legacy Records, CK 64855, CD.

75. Russell, *Jazz Style in Kansas City and the Southwest,* 53–73, 74–112, 120–32; Martin Williams, "Jazz: What Happened in Kansas City," *American Music* 3 (Summer 1985), 172–73.

1920s female blues and jazz vocalists, and KC bands featured Julia Lee, Arvella More, and Myra Taylor. But the Pittsburgh, Kansas, native Mary Lou Williams became the first nationally prominent female jazz band artist who was not a singer. A former vaudeville pianist, Williams was married to John Williams, saxophonist for a Texas band, Andy Kirk and the Clouds of Joy. In 1929, the Clouds were vying with Bennie Moten for notoriety in Kansas City, and Kirk hired Mary Lou to play for a recording session. She stayed on for thirteen years as pianist and arranger. Williams anchored the band's rhythm section while winning notice for her solos, and she made many recordings, including her own version of "Twelfth Street Rag." Although the Clouds of Joy played New York's Roseland Ballroom and other East Coast venues, they headquartered in Kansas City, where their popular dance music gained them steady work throughout the Great Depression at the Vanity Fair, Pla-Mor, and Fairyland nightclubs. Throughout her five-decade career, Williams won praise for her stride style and boogie-woogie (barrelhouse) piano work, but in 1965 she noted, "No one can put a style on me. I've learned from many people. I change all the time."[76]

While the Bennie Moten Orchestra, Blue Devils, and Clouds of Joy helped build the Kansas City sound, William James "Count" Basie and his orchestra came to personify and spread it across the nation and the world. Born in New Jersey in 1904, Basie learned formal piano technique from his mother but was soon drawn to emergent ragtime and jazz music. Tutored in stride and barrelhouse style by Fats Waller, Basie played in vaudeville shows, silent movie theaters, and Harlem nightclubs before moving west in search of work in the late 1920s. Bennie Moten hired him away from Walter Page's Blue Devils in 1929, and Basie began his long stint in Kansas City and the territory. When Moten died in 1935, Basie hired key players and formed his own band—Count Basie and the Barons of Swing—a group that would become the Count Basie Orchestra. Headquartered at

76. Russell, *Jazz Style in Kansas City and the Southwest,* 163–66, 217–18 (qtn., 218); Pearson, "Political and Musical Forces," 184.

KC's Reno Club, Count Basie's players revitalized big band swing music in a new upbeat blues style unique to the territory.[77]

Basie's nine-man Reno Club band featured sharp, powerful instrumental calls and responses between the horns and reeds built on top of one of the best rhythm sections in big band jazz. Count Basie's musicians' familiarity with the blues led to much improvisation through use of "head arrangements," so-called because the jazzmen did not rely on written sheet music and could play wherever their moods took them. Basie's piano playing was a hallmark of the orchestra, whose songs often contained brief piano preludes and solos. But Basie's piano style was unusually crisp and understated, making "space time" part of the band's overall presentation and adding great power the moment the horns and reeds rejoined the rhythm section. Much of the Barons of Swing repertoire was instrumental, but Jimmy Rushing (so rotund and short he was dubbed "Mr. Five by Five") belted out blues vocals. Basie's players honed their skills at the after-hours jam sessions and cutting contests for which KC was famous. "Count Basie and his eight men had instituted a new kind of music in the Reno Club by putting the best aspects of the Kansas City 'back room' session directly before its audience," writes the music historian Martin Williams. Driggs and Haddix concur, noting Basie and other KC jazzmen "transcended that [New York] influence to create a rawer, hard-swinging style of orchestral jazz."[78]

Jo Jones, a drummer for Basie, recalled the band's Kansas City "jam sessions … were unlike any other jam sessions I have heard since. It has to do with … head arrangements in the Basie band and how we didn't have to rehearse back in Kansas City. It was just there and we played it." In 1937, Count Basie's band got a big opportunity when the Chicago jazz promoter John Hammond heard them on the radio and immediately drove to Kansas City

77. Williams, "Jazz: What Happened in Kansas City," 174; Russell, *Jazz Style in Kansas City and the Southwest,* 133–34.

78. Williams, "Jazz: What Happened in Kansas City," 174; Driggs and Haddix, *Kansas City Jazz from Ragtime to Bebop,* 4. See also Russell, *Jazz Style in Kansas City and the Southwest,* 134–37, and listen to Count Basie and His Orchestra, *Basie Swings Standards,* 2009, Pablo Records, PAB-31240, CD.

with an offer to manage them. Hammond soon arranged for Chicago and New York City dates, a national tour, and recording sessions. He also urged Basie to add three new musicians (and, later, three more), including a promising blues singer named Billie Holiday. The Basie big band was born, and a string of national hit records followed, several written or cowritten by Basie himself: "Jumpin' at the Woodside," "One O'Clock Jump," "Lester Leaps In" (featuring Lester Young on saxophone), "April in Paris," "Every Day I Have the Blues," "Goin' to Chicago Blues," and many more.[79]

The Count Basie Orchestra and other KC jazzmen made one final, and very important, contribution to American jazz music. In Kansas City, the saxophone rose from relative obscurity to become a respected and featured jazz instrument. Coleman Hawkins began this movement in Topeka and Kansas City before migrating east to front the Fletcher Henderson reed section. Hawkins was known for his bold, energetic solos, played with vibrato and choppy phrasing. Then, in the mid-1930s, Lester Young (who played for the Blue Devils, Bennie Moten, and the Count Basie Orchestra) took the saxophone in another direction. Young was a charismatic and sharp-dressing jazzman who, it was said, subsisted on orange soda pop and pork and beans. He countered Hawkins's forceful, hard-driving solos with a much smoother style. Young's saxophone solos have been praised for their mellow, relaxed, and sweet sound.[80]

Jay McShann's orchestra boasted the last member of the KC saxophone triumvirate. McShann was born and raised in the lower Arkansas River Valley, in Muskogee, Oklahoma, and learned much of his piano technique listening to Earl "Fatha" Hines's weekly Chicago radio broadcasts. As a territory jazzman, McShann moved to Kansas City and formed his own band in 1936, about a year before Count Basie achieved national fame.

79. Williams, "Jazz: What Happened in Kansas City," 174–76 (Jones qtn., 174); Russell, *Jazz Style in Kansas City and the Southwest,* 138–46; Burns, *Jazz,* episode 6: "Swing: The Velocity of Celebration"; Count Basie and His Orchestra, *Basie Swings Standards.*

80. Russell, *Jazz Style in Kansas City and the Southwest,* 147–59; Burns, *Jazz,* episode 6: "Swing: The Velocity of Celebration." Also see Daniels, *Lester Leaps In*.

The last in a line of KC bandleaders, McShann was younger than his predecessors Moten, Page, and Basie. The saxophonist Charlie Parker—known as "Yardbird" or "Bird"—was born in Kansas City in 1920, and was four years younger than McShann, who hired the teenaged prodigy in 1938. Groomed in the Kansas City tradition, Parker worked for McShann for four years and began to experiment with a radical, fast-paced, dissonant (unharmonic) saxophone style. The result was bebop, the next phase of the jazz music evolution that paralleled and ultimately succeeded big band swing music. The historian Williams concludes, Charlie "Bird" Parker "was soon to be recognized as the innovative improviser on whose work the entire 'modernist' movement of the 1940s and 1950s was founded."[81]

As World War II commenced, the great heyday of Kansas City jazz slowly began to fade. Tom Pendergast was in prison, and his political machine gradually fell to pieces. Wartime brought austerity to the old KC nightclub neighborhood between Twelfth and Eighteenth Streets. Bennie Moten's band and the Blue Devils were gone, and Count Basie and his orchestra were now national celebrities. And although Charlie Parker was working for Jay McShann in KC, his mind was on New York City. Parker was instrumental in the development of bebop, but he did not singlehandedly create the subgenre. Standing alongside him were Dizzy Gillespie, Max Roach, Art Blakey, Thelonius Monk, Miles Davis, and many others. As bebop arose in the 1940s, and was followed by cool jazz in the 1950s, the old KC stalwarts Coleman Hawkins and Lester Young were also there, always working innovatively, playing important roles for the rest of their careers. Charlie Parker died young, from drug-related health problems, in 1955. But the legacy of Kansas City jazzmen continued to spread and grow, even as they left the territory and the city along the Missouri and Kaw Rivers.[82]

81. Russell, *Jazz Style in Kansas City and the Southwest,* 179–205; Driggs and Haddick, *Kansas City Jazz from Ragtime to Bebop,* 165–67; Williams, "Jazz: What Happened in Kansas City," 176 (qtn.). For bebop, see Russell, *Jazz Style in Kansas City and the Southwest,* 206–14, and Stanley Crouch, *Kansas City Lightning: The Rise and Times of Charlie Parker* (New York, 2013).
82. Russell, *Jazz Style in Kansas City and the Southwest,* 206–214; Crouch, *Kansas City Lightning;*

EVERY SATURDAY NIGHT

"Come and listen to my story if you will, I'm gonna tell about a gang of fellers down at Nashville," begins Hilo Brown's tribute, "The Grand Ole Opry Song." "First, I'll start with Old Red Foley doing his 'Chattanooga Choo,'" he continues. "We can't forget Hank Williams with his good Lord 'Lovesick Blues.' It's time for Roy Acuff, go to Memphis on his train. Minnie Pearl and Rob Brasfield, with Lazy Jim Day. Turn on your radio, I know that you will wait. Hear Little Jimmy Dickens sing 'Take an Old Cold Tater and Wait.'"

> There'll be guitars and fiddles and banjo pickin' too.
> Bill Monroe singing out them "Old Kentucky Blues."
> Ernest Tubb's number "Two Wrongs Won't Make a Right."
> At the Grand Ole Opry, every Saturday night.

By song's end, Brown also mentions the Opry greats Uncle Dave Macon, Cowboy Copas, Sam and Curt McGee, Hank Snow, Fiddlin' Chubby Wise, Bradley Kinkaid, "Master of Ceremony" Mr. George D. Hay, and several more. Though writers and historians have expended many words recounting the history of the *Grand Ole Opry*, Hilo Brown does it as well as anyone, and he does so in a few stanzas.[83]

Having given Hilo Brown his due, this writer will again tell the sacred story. In 1925, "Judge" George D. Hay (1895–1968) founded the *Barn Dance,* a popular radio show featuring what we today call country music, but which at that time was variously called mountain, old-time, hillbilly and folk music. Hay was known for his tongue-in-cheek Solemn Old Judge character and recurrent use of a steamboat whistle to usher in each *Barn Dance* episode. Hired by National Life Insurance (National Life) to broadcast from Nashville's "clear channel" radio station WSM 650 AM, Judge Hay built a large audience across the Mississippi

Burns, *Jazz,* episode 6: "Swing: The Velocity of Celebration" ("Coda") and episode 7: "Dedicated to Chaos."

83. Jimmy Martin sings Brown's tune on the first track of Nitty Gritty Dirt Band et al., *Will the Circle Be Unbroken,* 1971, United Artists, UAS9801, LP.

Valley, from the Ohio River Valley to the Deep South. In 1927, Hay and National Life changed the name of the *Barn Dance* to the *Grand Ole Opry,* a spoof on WSM's highbrow syndicated broadcasts of the New York Symphony's *Grand Opera.* The new show grew so popular that fans began gathering around WSM's station each week, peering in the studio doors and windows for a look at their favorite performers. This led to moves into different theater venues during the late 1920s and '30s. The growth also led to National Life's development of a modern corporate structure to conduct the business dealings of the *Grand Ole Opry.* Of the *Opry's* phenomenal success Hay said simply, "It has a universal appeal because it is based upon good will and with folk music expresses the heartbeat of a large percentage of Americans who labor for a living."[84]

Ryman Auditorium, in downtown Nashville, Tennessee, is the *Grand Ole Opry's* most famous home. The auditorium was built in 1891 as the Union Gospel Tabernacle with funds from Captain Tom Ryman, a steamboat entrepreneur and Christian convert. Union Gospel's solid oak pews and fine acoustics soon attracted theater entrepreneurs, who remodeled and renamed it Ryman Auditorium. In the early 1940s, National Life Insurance purchased the Ryman and the *Grand Ole Opry* broadcast live there from 1941 to 1974. During this time, Judge Hay and his growing team developed a lively format, much of which is still in use to this day.[85]

George D. Hay was the voice of the *Opry* until he handed the microphone to Roy Acuff, who was succeeded by Red Foley. As emcees, these three men were ringmasters of sorts, shepherding performers on and off the stage while introducing commercial breaks and keeping the show on schedule throughout the three-hour performances. The Ryman's stage held house musicians and amplification equipment, ultimately arranged in front of a folksy

84. Charles K. Wolfe, *A Good-Natured Riot: The Birth of the Grand Ole Opry* (Nashville, Tenn., 1999), 3–25; Malone and Neal, *Country Music USA*, 70–75; Garrison Keillor, "Onward and Upward with the Arts: At the Opry," *New Yorker,* May 6, 1974, p. 47. Spoofs of high culture entertainments can be traced to English and Colonial American performances of the *Beggar's Opera* and the *Threepenny Opera.*

85. Wolfe, *Good-Natured Riot,* 28.

set featuring a red, false-fronted barn with white rail fence; long benches seated the Opry's VIP guests in an unassuming style. There was a constant milling and coming and going of the guests, professional staff, house musicians, *Opry* contract-performers and visiting artists. Because commercials emanated from a separate (adjacent) studio, the performers and theater audience were off-mike during recurrent commercial breaks. And while National Life Insurance was the *Opry's* prime underwriter, a list of important advertisers over the decades includes Prince Albert Tobacco ("in a can"), Martha White Flour, Goo Goo Clusters, Farm Country Sausage, Pet Milk, and many more.[86]

During the 1940s and '50s, Red Foley and subsequent *Opry* emcees dropped the terms "mountain" and "hillbilly," calling *Opry* performers "folk" musicians. As noted above, the term "country music" did not come into wide use until the co-opting of the "folk music" title by more urban, educated, and politicized musicians. There was an inherent conservatism to the *Grand Ole Opry's* gospel and traditional music, and the show's southern demographic no doubt included a preponderance of Democrat segregationists. Yet there were no overt political references in the *Opry's* music or dialog and, until the mid-1960s, the *Opry's* huge working-class audience included a substantial number of Black listeners. During World War II, the *Grand Ole Opry* was simulcast on Armed Forces Radio, and afterwards the *Opry* troupe performed live USO broadcasts in occupied Germany.[87]

Key to the *Opry's* success was a full stable of contract performers and house musicians. These included singing hosts like Foley (1946–54), the house band, a gospel quartet (from the Blue Sky Boys to the Jordanaires to the Four Guys), and country comedians. This core was complemented by the *Grand Ole Opry* members, a cadre of contracted performers who worked

86. Ibid., 245–46; Malone and Neal, *Country Music USA,* 74–5, 95–96; Malone and Stricklin, *Southern Music, American Music,* 94–95; Grand Ole Opry Old Time Radio, 2001, B002PX4MI6, CD. Grand Ole Opry episodes are available at Times Past Old Time Radio, https://otrarchive.blogspot.com/2010/01/grand-ole-opry.html, accessed Dec. 20, 2011. Thanks to Ian Moore for giving me his stash of seventy-two recorded Opry performances. Part of this discussion is based on the author's recollections of live Opry performances.
87. Times Past Old Time Radio, passim; Wolfe, *A Good-Natured Riot,* 11–15, 29.

approximately two dozen shows a year, performing at most two songs per show for union scale wages. Although these artists all boasted hit records, they had chosen the security and prestige of *Opry* membership to complement or replace full-time recording and touring careers. Looking over the *Opry*'s long history, the breadth and depth of this group of *Opry* members is remarkable. An abridged list includes Roy Acuff, Uncle Dave Macon, Hank Snow, Little Jimmy Dickens, Hank Williams, Mother Maybelle Carter and the Carter Family, Jim and Jess McReynolds, Minnie Pearl, Hank Locklin, Stonewall Jackson, Grandpa Jones, George Hamilton IV, Charlie Pride, Skeeter Davis, Bill Anderson, and many, many more. A small, important cadre within the early Opry casts were the Black performers DeForde Bailey, Coley Streeter, the Fisk College Jubilee Singers, and others.[88]

Born in Maynardsville, Tennessee, in 1903, Roy Claxton Acuff aimed to be a professional baseball player before serious illness benched him in 1930. An accomplished singer and fiddler in the mountain style, Acuff formed a string band, the Tennessee Crackerjacks, in 1933, and recorded two smash hit records, "Wabash Cannonball" and "Great Speckled Bird." He first appeared on the *Grand Ole Opry* in 1938, changing the name of his band to the Smoky Mountain Boys and beginning an *Opry* career that lasted more than fifty years. A staid, conservative man, Acuff was also known for hilarious stage antics, balancing his fiddle bow on his nose and performing yo-yo tricks during his set. His band of accomplished string pickers introduced the dobro (an acoustic precursor to electric steel guitars) to the country music repertoire. Beecher Kirby appeared as Bashful Brother Oswald, a dobro-playing Smoky Mountain boy dressed in comic hillbilly attire.[89]

"I'm a plain old country boy, a corn-bread-lovin' country," sang the *Opry*'s Little Jimmy Dickens in his anthem to rural life in Appalachia: "I raise Cain on Saturday, but I go to church on Sunday morning." Little Jimmy Dickens (1920–2010) was born

88. *Grand Ole Opry Old Time Radio,* passim; Times Past Old Time Radio; Wolfe, *Good Natured Riot,* 29; Malone and Neal, *Country Music USA,* 313.
89. Malone and Neal, *Country Music USA,* 188–94, 191.

the thirteenth child of a West Virginia farm family and grew up listening to the *Grand Ole Opry* on the radio. Not quite five feet tall, he began performing as Jimmy the Kid while studying at the University of West Virginia in Morgantown. In 1949, Roy Acuff heard Dickens perform and invited him to join the permanent cast of the *Grand Ole Opry.* During a forty-year career, Dickens recorded a half dozen hit records, including "Country Boy" and "Take an Old Cold Tater and Wait," songs that appealed to post-Depression Americans with their humorous references to down-home cooking and the custom in large families of relegating the worst dinner items to youngest children. *Opry* fans smiled as Dickens sang that if he reached for a chicken drumstick he was "sure to get a lickin'" from his mother: "She always saved two parts for me, but I had to shut my mouth / 'Twas the gizzard, and the North end of a chicken flyin' South!" Never a super star, Little Jimmy Dickens symbolized the talent, professionalism, conviviality, and humility of many members of the *Grand Ole Opry* cast.[90]

Cousin Minnie Pearl was the most famous of the comedians appearing on every *Opry* bill. Calling "How-deeee!" at the top of her lungs as she walked on stage, Cousin Minnie took the *Opry* by storm as the brash, witty, man-chasing spinster from Grinder's Switch, Pearl's fictitious hometown setting for stories about her Uncle Nabob, her boyfriend Hezzie, and her "Brother." Ironically, Cousin Minnie Pearl was also Sarah Ophelia Colley (1912–96), the well-heeled daughter of a wealthy Tennessee lumberman. After studying drama and dance at Nashville's Belmont College, Colley joined a theater company touring the Depression-era South, developing her Cousin Minnie Pearl character as a marketing tool in communities where the troupe was to perform. Executives from WSM heard Colley's routine and recommended her for an audition over the objections of *Opry* managers, who thought audiences would take offense at her hillbilly jokes. In fact, *Opry* fans could take a joke and came to

90. Ibid., 225, 229; Little Jimmy Dickens, *Sixteen Biggest Hits by "Little Jimmy" Dickens,* 2011, Legacy, B000EQ47UO, CD.

love Cousin Minnie's wit, spunk, and fashion sense (a price tag always dangled from Cousin Minnie's straw hat).[91]

During her fifty-six years on the *Opry,* Minnie Pearl delivered five-minute sets composed of one-liners and brief descriptive jokes, sometimes with fellow comic Rod Brasfield as her straight man. For instance, Minnie told how a robber frisked her and then asked, "Are you sure you ain't got any money?" She replied, "Nossir, but if you'll do that again I'll write you a check!" In another story, she states, "It wasn't so long ago I had a chance to marry a feller with fifty thousand dollars. But I couldn't raise the fifty thousand dollars!" Minnie Pearl eventually made the move to television as a regular cast member of *Hee Haw* and *Nashville Now.* Cousin Minnie Pearl stands alongside Lucille Ball as one of the most beloved women comics of twentieth-century American popular culture.[92]

The Alabama country singer Hank Williams (1923–1953) zoomed across the stage of the *Grand Ole Opry* like a meteor, and his end was the same. But far too many words have been expended discussing the chaos Hank Williams's alcoholism caused during his brief 1940s *Grand Ole Opry* stint, and it is important to stress the musical contributions of Williams and his band, the Drifting Cowboys. Hank Williams was born into the kind of southern poverty that crossed racial categories, blending elements of both white and Black folk culture into daily life, religion, and music. As a youth, Williams learned church music from his mother, country music from listening to Jimmy Rodgers records and Roy Acuff and Earnest Tubb on the *Opry,* and blues guitar from his Black mentor, Rufus Payne ("Tee Tot") of Georgiana, Alabama. Williams combined gospel, folk music, hillbilly yodeling, and syncopated rhythm and blues styles to create a honky-tonk music subgenre that helped lead the way towards 1950s rock-and-roll.[93]

91. Malone and Neal, *Country Music USA,* 184–85; Cousin Minnie Pearl, *Country Comedy: Grand Ole Opry Live Classics,* 1967, B000CBRMQW, CD.
92. Cousin Minnie Pearl, *Country Comedy;* Ashby, *With Amusement for All,* 248.
93. Malone and Neal, *Country Music USA,* 239–41. Also see Colin Escott, *Hank Williams: The Biography* (New York 2004).

Hank Williams and the Drifting Cowboys joined the Opry in 1947, and recordings of their performances of "Lovesick Blues" and "Your Cheatin' Heart" are electric. In a 1949 Armed Forces Network *Opry* performance recorded in occupied Germany, thousands of GIs cheer wildly as Red Foley introduces Williams as "our lean and lanky singin' friend" from Alabama. The Drifting Cowboys—a tight, loud, swinging combo of drums, fiddle, standup bass, guitar, and pedal steel—lead Hank into the syncopated call-and-response tune "Move It on Over." During a brief and brilliant career, Hank Williams left nearly three score of recorded songs. He also left a small child, Hank Williams, Jr., who grew up to be a country rock musician with great vocal, instrumental, and composition talent.[94]

The careers of the Carter Family and Bill Monroe and his Bluegrass Boys reflect differing paths taken by the *Opry's* singing string musicians during the middle decades of the twentieth century. The Carters—Alvin, Sara, and Maybelle—clung closely to the traditional harmonized folk and gospel tunes of their southeastern Virginia mountain home throughout their 1927–43 career. The Kentuckian Bill Monroe (1911–96) added radical rhythmic innovations to the same traditional music to create a new genre called bluegrass music. Moreover, Monroe's Bluegrass Boys band constituted a proving ground for a score of talented string musicians and singers, including Earl Scruggs, Jimmy Martin, and Vassar Clements.[95]

During the second half of the twentieth century, the *Grand Ole Opry's* management team entered the emerging television broadcasting field. This began with WSM-TV studio's production of the *Purina Grand Ole Opry* (1955–56) for American Broadcasting Company (ABC); this was a canned studio show, not a live shoot in Ryman Auditorium. Next came the *Pet Milk Grand Ole Opry* (1960–63), hosted by the smooth-talking T.

94. Malone and Neal, *Country Music USA,* 242–43; Malone and Stricklin, *Southern Music, American Music,* 95–97; Hank Williams, "Move It on Over," https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Kbic6huE85I, accessed March 27, 2018; Malone and Neal, *Country Music USA,* 392–93.

95. Ashby, *With Amusement for All,* 212; Malone and Neal, *Country Music USA,* 65–68, 325–30; Monroe and Stricklin, *Southern Music, American Music,* 65–66, 147–48.

Tommy Cutrer, and featuring the steel guitarist Jerry Byrd's solid house band, including Jerry Whitehurst on piano and Jimmy "Spider" Wilson on guitar. The *National Life Grand Ole Opry* (1965) was the last black-and-white *Opry* television studio show, converting to live, colored Ryman Auditorium broadcasts in 1966. *That Good Ole Nashville Music* was filmed in the newly opened Opryland Theater in 1974. And in 1985, the Nashville Network (TNN) began broadcasting live half-hour *Opry* segments.[96]

The greatest controversy in the long history of the *Grand Ole Opry* began in 1968, when National Life announced it would vacate the Ryman Auditorium, replacing the venue with a state-of-the-art theater located in a new theme park—Opryland USA—to be built on a 368-acre tract in Nashville's suburbs. While the news was startling, few disagreed the *Opry* had long outgrown the Ryman and downtown Nashville, where huge crowds of country music fans sometimes lacked adequate parking, hotels, restaurants, and law enforcement. But in 1971, critics saw red when National Life announced plans to *tear down* the Ryman after the 1974 move to Opryland. At this point, numerous government and citizens' groups—the Tennessee Historical Sites Foundation, Nashville City Council, National Trust for Historic Preservation, and Historic Nashville—stepped forward to raise objections.[97] National Life retreated. The move to Opryland took place on schedule, but the Ryman stands today in downtown Nashville as a restored, working theater and National Historic Site.

The controversy over moving the *Grand Ole Opry* is a complex one that fits into the overall context of late 1960s turmoil and debates between traditionalists and modernists both within and outside the country music family. The *New York Times* entered the fray on the side of the Ryman preservationists, and the *New Yorker* magazine sent a young Minnesota writer named Garrison Keillor down south to cover the story in a piece ironically titled, "Onward and Upward with the Arts: At the Opry." Roy Acuff

96. Gaylord Entertainment Company, *Opry Video Classics: Legends,* 1997, 21909-9, DVD.
97. Keillor, "Onward and Upward with the Arts," 51–54.

scolded Keillor (whom he viewed as an outside agitator of sorts), reminding him the Ryman could no longer safely or comfortably serve the *Opry*'s huge fan base. Meanwhile, the singer Dinah Shore, a native Nashvillian, used her syndicated television show to criticize National Life's move. Charges of over-commercialization and inauthenticity came from a few country musicians and began what would become a recurrent pattern of calls for a return to the roots of country music. John Hartford, a rising "newgrass" artist wrote "No One Eats at Linebaugh's Any More," a paean to the *Opry*'s demise that references dying downtown Nashville businesses formerly frequented by *Opry* musicians and fans. "Where can you go to see the country music stars?" Hartford laments. "That's what we come to Nashville for."

> Now the Opry's gone and the streets are bare.
> Ernest Tubb's record shop is dark.
> And the drunks are gone from the Merchant's Hotel
> Everybody's gone to the park.[98]

In a sense, the fight over the *Opry* was rhetorical. National Life owned both the Ryman and *Grand Ole Opry* and could move the *Opry* if it wished, and it did so. Yet this debate reflected heated 1960s disagreements that sprang from an anticapitalist critique popular among some young Americans, especially a small group of northern urban folk musicians. Having wrested away the "folk music" label, they sought to preserve folk "authenticity," as they defined it. This aim became apparent when some of them booed Bob Dylan off the stage at the Newport Folk Festival. As we shall see, this small group lost the battle over the authenticity of folk music. Although American historians remain fascinated by urban protest musicians, in the fields of folk and country music, it was by and large nonpolitical folk and country rockers who won the day.[99]

In 1971, five California hippies known as the Nitty Gritty

98. Ibid., 46, 52; John Hartford, "Nobody Eats at Linebaugh's Anymore," *My Oh My, How the Time Does Fly,* 1997, Flying Fish, FF 440, CD. "The park" is Opryland.
99. Michael Allen, "'I Just want to be a Cosmic Cowboy': Hippies, Cowboy Code, and the Culture of a 'Counter' Culture," *Western Historical Quarterly* 36 (Autumn 2005), 275–99.

Dirt Band worked to replace confrontation with collaboration in Nashville, Tennessee. Managed by William C. McEuen, the Dirt Band was a multi-talented ensemble of amplified vocal and string musicians—Jimmie Fadden, Jeff Hanna, Jim Ibbotson, John McEuen, and Les Thompson. The Dirt Band had successfully ridden the mid-60s folk rock and jug band wave, and their 1970 album *Uncle Charlie and His Dog Teddy* helped shape the emerging country rock music genre.[100] In 1971, the same year tempers were flaring over National Life's plan to tear down the Ryman, the Dirt Band organized a major Nashville recording project that resulted in the classic 3-record United Artists set *Will the Circle Be Unbroken,* known as the *Circle* album.[101]

Because mainstream Nashville musicians had been reluctant to embrace Bob Dylan's and the Byrds' landmark 1968 Nashville country rock recordings, onlookers were shocked when Roy Acuff, under advice from his business partner, met with the Nitty Gritty Dirt Band in 1971. The Dirt Band won over the arch-traditionalist, who agreed to join the *Circle* album recording project. Interviewed by the *Nashville Tennessean* after the *Circle* sessions, Acuff made the obligatory jokes about the band members' long hair and beards before stating, "They are very nice young boys … and they certainly knew what they were doing." With the chagrined Acuff onboard, a star-studded country and bluegrass cast soon joined the project. Jimmy Martin, Mother Maybelle Carter, Merle Travis, Doc Watson, and Earl Scruggs all appear on the *Circle* album, alongside Pete "Bashful" Oswald Kirby and young pickers like Randy and Gary Scruggs, Norman Blake, Junior Huskey, and Vassar Clements.[102]

Will the Circle Be Unbroken is a powerful collection of thirty-seven tracks of classic country, gospel, and bluegrass music. The songs range from the Carter Family title song "Will the Circle

100. For country rock, see ibid., and Zachary J. Lechner, *The South of the Mind: American Imaginings of White Southernness, 1960–1980* (Athens, Ga., 2018), 60–63.

101. Nitty Gritty Dirt Band, *Uncle Charlie and His Dog Teddy,* 1970), Liberty Records, LST 7642, LP; Nitty Gritty Dirt Band et al., *Will the Circle Be Unbroken.*

102. Nitty Gritty Dirt Band et al., *Will the Circle Be Unbroken,* liner notes, including facsimile of Jack Hurst, "Music Forms a New Circle," *Nashville Tennessean,* Aug. 15, 1971. Dylan, the Byrds, and country rock are discussed below.

Be Unbroken," to "Orange Blossom, Special," to three of Hank Williams's songs (including his gospel offering "I Saw the Light"), to Jimmie Driftwood's "Tennessee Stud," and many more. The only nontraditional tune on the entire album is a very brief and symbolic epilog following "Circle"—Randy Scruggs's guitar rendition of Joni Mitchell's "Both Sides Now." "They used nothing but plain country instruments," Acuff recalled, "and the boy who was directing it all [William E. McEuen] seemed to be doing a very good job of putting it all together." Acuff added that he and his colleagues hoped the *Circle* album might "increase the respect between our brand of music and theirs."[103]

All of this brings us back to Hilo Brown's "Grand Ole Opry Song." The Nitty Gritty Dirt Band prominently placed this tune as the lead, side 1, track 1, on the *Circle* album. The purpose was to immediately focus the listener's attention on the *Circle* musicians' respect for the *Opry* and origins of country music. Sung by the legendary Bluegrass Boy Jimmy Martin, with the Dirt Band, Clements, and Huskey as his backup band, the "Grand Ole Opry Song" mirrored *Circle's* blend of tradition with a kind of modernity that was mindful and respectful of the past. Together, young and old country musicians joyfully celebrated the "guitars and fiddles and banjo pickin' of the Grand Ole Opry, every Saturday night."[104]

Three years after the recording of *Will the Circle Be Unbroken,* the *Grand Ole Opry* did move to the Opryland venue and, as these lines are written, the *Opry* has flourished in its Opryland theater more than a decade longer than in the Ryman Auditorium. The modern-day *Opry* format is directly linked to the past, though the show now features a smaller number of longer (thirty-minute) sets by member artists. Downtown, the restored Ryman Auditorium remains a popular historic site and prime country music venue. Meanwhile, the Country Music Hall of Fame built its huge new museum in downtown Nashville, not out at Opryland. While the theme park component of the Opryland venture failed, the Opryland Hotel and *Grand Ole Opry* theater

103. Nitty Gritty Dirt Band et al., *Will the Circle Be Unbroken;* Hurst, "Music Forms a New Circle."
104. Nitty Gritty Dirt Band et al., *Will the Circle Be Unbroken.*

anchor the suburban end of the enterprise, complemented by the historic downtown Nashville attractions. National Life's 1974 move to Opryland can certainly be criticized, yet in retrospect it was not the cataclysm its detractors once claimed. Life went on, and the *Grand Ole Opry* endures. The circle remains unbroken.

Garrison Keillor's rise to notoriety was a direct result of the debate over the *Grand Ole Opry.* Prior to 1974, the *Opry* had been a mysterious subject in urban America, where going to the opera required a taxi, not a plane ticket to Nashville. Cosmopolitans gained a translator in Keillor, who explained low culture and southernisms to *New Yorker* readers in "Onward and Upward with the Arts: At the Opry." Keillor later reminisced that he used his hefty $6,000 *New Yorker* check to take his family on a cross-country train trip and seed his own live radio show, *Prairie Home Companion,* which aired for five decades on National Public Radio. The similarities and differences between the *Grand Ole Opry* and *A Prairie Home Companion* reflect important aspects of the tension between, as well as the synthesis of, high and low culture in modern America.[105]

"I grew up along the Mississippi River upstream from the Cities and spent hours sitting on a bank under the trees watching the river flow over a stretch of shallow rapids," Keillor recalled in 1999. "If you have nothing to do, there's no better place to not do it than beside a river." Gary Edward Keillor, born August 7, 1942, in Anoka, Minnesota, was one of six children of devoutly fundamentalist Scandinavian and Scottish parents. Keillor was a bookish child who aspired to the life of a writer. Yet he simultaneously retained a love for the folk culture of the Mississippi Valley, most notably midwestern speech and ethnic folkways, country and gospel music, folk humor, and storytelling. "I remember my first trip to the [Grand Ole] Opry, driving a night and a day from Minnesota," he recalled. Although the show was sold out, he watched through a large window opened for ventilation on that hot July night. Keillor moved to Minneapolis shortly after a young man named Bob Zimmerman

105. Garrison Keillor, *Lake Wobegon Days* (New York, 1985), vii–x.

left that city for Greenwich Village and a new name, Bob Dylan. Keillor earned a bachelor's degree in English in 1966 from the University of Minnesota, where his deep baritone voice served him as an announcer on the university's Radio K. He became a freelance writer, and on May 6, 1974, his *Grand Ole Opry* article appeared in the *New Yorker*. Then, on July 6, 1974, Keillor aired the first radio episode of *A Prairie Home Companion,* performed live before an audience of twelve people in the Fitzgerald Theater, in Saint Paul, Minnesota. The show aired until 2016.[106]

A Prairie Home Companion's format was modeled after the *Grand Ole Opry.* Weekly Saturday night episodes began with Keillor's unpolished but workmanlike baritone singing the *Opry* star Hank Snow's hit "Hello Love." While the *Opry* featured the long-standing hosts George D. Hay and Red Foley, Keillor's is the only voice of *Prairie Home*. Commercial-free until the early twenty-first century, Keillor's troupe pays tribute to T. Tommy Cutrer's overdrawn 1960s Pet Milk *Grand Ole Opry* commercials with pitches for their own imaginary Powdermilk Biscuits (so delicious they "make shy people get up and do what needs to be done"). While the *Opry* featured the comedy of Minnie Pearl, Rod Brasfield, and others, Keillor's hosting featured humorous asides complemented by group comedy sketches, most notably "Guy Nois, Private Eye," and "Lives of the Cowboys." Both radio shows employed talented house musicians while spotlighting visiting country, gospel, jazz, and blues artists. Interestingly, both shows have provided the grist for movies by the avant-garde director Robert Altman, though one can safely assume Keillor is much more pleased with the results of Altman's *Prairie Home Companion* (2006) than Roy Acuff was with Altman's dark musical *Nashville* (1975).[107]

There are important differences in the two shows. The *Opry* has experimented with companion television formats since the

106. Garrison Keillor, *A Prairie Home Companion 25th Anniversary Collection,* 1999), liner notes, HBP 68910, CD; Keillor, "Onward and Upward with the Arts," 64. *Prairie Home* aired from 1974 to 2016; Keillor took one sabbatical and once briefly moved the show to New York City and changed the format.

107. *Prairie Home Companion 25th Anniversary Collection,* passim. "Hello Love" was the theme song from 1974 to 1987.

1950s, while *Prairie Home* remained solely a radio show. Both shows featured country, bluegrass, and gospel performers, but some of Keillor's guests leaned towards the urban 1960s folk music subgenre. The *Grand Ole Opry*'s comedians were individual performers with brief sets, not sketch actors like on *Prairie Home*. While the *Opry* boasts a huge integrated working- and middle-class audience, *A Prairie Home Companion* found a niche market among educated white middle- and upper-class Americans, and some Europeans. The *Opry* has always relied on commercial sponsorship, but *A Prairie Home Companion* was subsidized by private contributions and public tax monies allotted to National Public Radio (NPR); public university infrastructure houses many of NPR's radio station affiliates. Partisan political references, absent from the *Opry,* were recurrent in *Prairie Home Companion,* where Keillor took weekly potshots at Republicans. Keillor never broadcast on the Armed Forces Network or performed for American troops. Most important, *A Prairie Home Companion* was known for Keillor's weekly monolog about Lake Wobegon, an imaginary upper Mississippi Valley town presented with much more dimension and nuance than Rod Brasfield's Hole-in-the-Wall or Minnie Pearl's Grinder's Switch.

Lake Wobegon, "the town time forgot," is one of the most recent of artist-imagined small towns populating the Mississippi River Valley, from Winesburg to Spoon River to Gopher Prairie to Mayberry. On a scale spanning from skeptical rural realists to romantic agrarians, Lake Wobegon occupies an intermediary position reflecting the conflict between high and low culture on and off Garrison Keillor's microphone. In his book *Lake Wobegon Days* (1985), Keillor provides a historic context for the town that was absent from the first eleven years of radio shows. Originally named New Albion, Lake Wobegon was founded by communalist Anglo-American literati aiming to build a college and foster high culture on the Minnesota prairie. Their spectacular failure in the rugged north country is comical, and their fate is to be displaced by lowly working-class immigrants, Norwegian Lutherans, and German Catholics. Thus, we meet

the ancestors of *Prairie Home Companion* regulars—the Bunsen, Krebsbach, Tollefson, Krueger, Oleson, Berge, and Ingqvist families, and the Norwegian bachelor farmers. In each episode, Keillor tells a tale of the characters' lives and adventures "on the edge of the prairie" in their homes, churches (Lutheran, Sanctified Brethren, and Catholic, the last dubbed Our Lady of Perpetual Responsibility), Chatterbox Café, Bon Marche Beauty Salon, Wally's Sidetrack Tap Tavern, Moonlight Bay Supper Club, and Lake Wobegon High School, home of the fighting Leonards.[108]

"Well, it's been a quiet week in Lake Wobegon," Keillor begins each week's story, though listeners know that "quiet" is not the best way to describe goings-on in the "little town on the edge of the prairie." Keillor's stories are often comic, sometimes serious, or a mix of both. In "Guys on Ice," he describes northern men bonding in their ice fishing houses, where they go "to get away from women"; in "Giant Decoys," Sons of Knute Lodge members prepare for hunting season by constructing fourteen-foot-long fiberglass duck decoys that will "appear life-sized from cruising altitude"; "The Living Flag" recounts several hundred Wobegonians in red, white, and blue baseball caps assembling each July 4 to form a huge human flag. In "Pontoon Boat," Wally volunteers to take a group of visiting Lutheran ministers sailing on Lake Wobegon, only to capsize and unload them into the (four-foot-deep) water. In a reticent tale, Karl Krebsbach quits deer hunting after encountering a doe so trusting and unafraid of humans he is forced to shoot her before his cousins get the chance ("I never went hunting with those jerks again," Karl concludes). Keillor also tells women's stories. One tale explores Cindy Hedlund's midlife crisis and strained relations with her husband and father, and at least two of Keillor's stories are devoted to breast cancer scares as experienced by Irene Bunsen and Myrtle Krebsbach. The monologs vary in length from ten minutes to half an hour; at each story's conclusion Keillor declares, "Well, that's the news from Lake Wobegon, where all

108. Keillor, *Lake Wobegon Days,* 30–110. Keillor's radio monologs are sometimes drawn from *Lake Wobegon Days.*

the women are strong, all the men are good looking, and all the children are above average."[109]

Garrison Keillor is a literary descendant of turn-of-the-century Mississippi Valley rural realists such as Hamlin Garland, Edgar Lee Masters, Sherwood Anderson, Sinclair Lewis, and Willa Cather, but with a romantic turn akin to midwestern local colorists. Frustrated by their region's anti-intellectualism and lack of high culture, some rural realists departed, others remained, and all devoted their art to portrayals of their childhood homes. Though harsh in their depiction of small towns and rural culture, these artists remained nostalgic for the beauties of the natural world, and their populism occasionally waxed romantic for rural worlds lost. In *A Prairie Home Companion,* Keillor gently pokes fun at the local yokels while saving the full force of his sarcasm for religious fundamentalists and social conservatives. Yet at the same time, he shows a strong love of the land (all his stories are organized by seasonal descriptions of weather and the natural world of the rural Midwest) and a love for the folks of whom he makes fun. As host of *Prairie Home,* Keillor carries on the narrator role of *Winesburg*'s George Willard and the Stage Manager in Thornton Wilder's *Our Town.* He even sends Our Lady's Father Emil on an annual tour of Civil War battlefields (like *Our Town*'s Doc Gibbs), and in one episode, *Prairie Home* musicians put a coda on a story by playing the 1992 bluegrass composition "Our Town."[110]

Keillor begins a 1998 monolog discussing "the obligation that we all have to tell stories, which is why God put us here after all, to live rich full lives and then to tell about it. Or better yet, to know other people who have lived rich full lives and then

109. *Prairie Home Companion 25th Anniversary Collection,* disc 1, nos. 1 and 3, disc 2, no. 2, disc 3, nos. 2 and 6; Keillor, *Lake Wobegon Days,* 121–24, 238–39, 205–208, 301.

110. For rural realism and the local color movements, see chapter 4, this work; Mark Schorer, afterword to Hamlin Garland, *Main Traveled Roads: Stories of the Mississippi Valley* (1891; repr. New York, 1962), 281–89, passim; John Lauck, "The Myth of the Midwestern 'Revolt from the Village,'" *MidAmerica* 40 (2013), 39–85; Thornton Wilder, *Our Town* (1939; repr. New York, 1998), 3–4, 20. Wilder was born in Madison, Wisconsin, though *Our Town* is set in rural New England. The song "Our Town" is on *A Prairie Home Companion 25th Anniversary Collection,* disc 4, no. 5.

tell stories about *them*." In "A Summer Night," recalling his early love of stories and desire to be a writer, he takes the listener on a tour of his childhood home, arriving at last on the front porch to tell the story of his cousin Helen Marie's scandalous teenage pregnancy and her rushed marriage to the baby's father, Duane Peterson. The crescendo comes at the Bon Marche Beauty Salon, where the local matrons cast aside their prejudices and supportively gather around the pregnant bride, who has requested a chignon hairdo. In "Hog Slaughter," Keillor evocatively recalls a childhood memory of witnessing the ritualistic slaughtering of pork on his Uncle Raleigh Hochsteter's Minnesota farm. Yet his family's once-strong connection to the land no longer exists. "It's all gone," he laments, "like so much of that life I saw a little bit of when I was a kid." Like any good populist, and like his contemporary and fellow midwesterner John Mellencamp, Keillor mourns the death of the family farm, and folks who "lived off the land, independent on that account, between the ground and God."[111]

Throughout his life and career, Garrison Keillor has kept his gaze on religious folk, whom he both chides and celebrates. In *Lake Wobegon Days* and *Prairie Home Companion*, he often tells stories about Lake Wobegon's rival churches. Keillor revels in juxtaposing staid Lutherans with the Catholic worshippers at Our Lady of Perpetual Responsibility, and he comically compares both with fire-and-brimstone Protestant revivalists. In "Revival," a long passage in *Lake Wobegon Days,* he targets his own fundamentalist brethren's narrow-mindedness mirrored in an annual revival meeting held by "Brother Bob and Sister Verna of the World-Wide Fields of Harvest Ministry of Lincoln, Nebraska." Yet "Revival," like many of Keillor's religious stories, somehow manages to end on a high note—Mrs. Mueller leaves the meeting and soon finds courage and hope for her life on earth. And although Keillor portrays Muriel Krebsbach's teenage

111. *A Prairie Home Companion 25th Anniversary Collection,* disc 4, no. 1; disc. 2, no. 4; disc. 3, no. 4. See, for example, John Mellencamp, "Small Town" and "Jack and Diane," *The Very Best That I Could Do, 1978–1988,* 1997, Mercury Records, B000001EYI CD. Also see chapter 4, this work.

mysticism and religious visions as bizarre, she too "finally settled for a shaft of sunlight that broke momentarily through a hole in one cloud—not a tremendous shaft as in pictures of angels descending to earth, but a shaft nonetheless, which seemed to indicate Hope." Likewise, Cindy Hedlund finds sustenance in the charismatic meetings of "The Secret Lutherans." And while Garrison Keillor stands "between God and earth" in his writing and storytelling, there is no ambivalence in his singing of sacred music. Keillor's baritone complements the Hope Gospel Quartet, a group made up of the *Prairie Home* regulars Kate MacKenzie and Robin and Linda Williams. Their spirited performances and recordings of "The Lord Will Make a Way," "My Rock," and "His Eye is on the Sparrow" seem also to reflect a ray of hope.[112]

"I began my career in a lower bunkbed, using soft colored pencils and a Big Red Indian Chief tablet," Keillor recalls. He eventually inherited a manual Underwood typewriter and fashioned a basement study of sorts underneath the stairs and behind some sheetrock. Keillor's art is powerful because it is personal, and autobiography lies at the base of his prose and storytelling. Thus, we hear his stories about Johnny Tollefson, Lake Wobegon High School's aspiring, moody poet, who wins a Sons of Knute scholarship to study English at Saint Cloud State University. Johnny sees Saint Cloud as a cultural mecca of sorts, for there he meets a (one-week) Writer in Residence, publishes two poems in the school's literary magazine *Cumulus,* courts a fellow English major, drinks vodka sours at the Matador Lounge, and tries to compensate for the fact he does not have a wide range of experiences to write about. Returning home for summer vacation, Johnny verbally jousts with his mom and dad, wrecks their car, and drinks one "beer and a bump" too many with Mr. Buerge at the Sidetrack Tap. Staggering out the door, Johnny falls flat on his face in front of his shocked Aunt Charlotte and Uncle Val, on their way to Brother Bob and Sister Vera's revival

112. Keillor, *Lake Wobegon Days,* 139–40, 147, 205–208, 314–34, 397–412; *A Prairie Home Companion 25th Anniversary Collection,* disc 3, no. 6; *Garrison Keillor and the Hope Gospel Quartet,* 1992, Epic/Sony, B0000028QV, CD. See *The Gospel of Jesus, Read by Garrison Keillor,* 2006, Highbridge, 1598870165, CD.

meeting. One hopes Johnny will one day be rewarded for all his suffering by publishing a story in the *New Yorker*.[113]

Lake Wobegon is Garrison Keillor's Anoka, as Mayberry is Andy Griffith's Mount Airy. Keillor is very much like Sherwood Anderson's George Willard, the young narrator who, at story's end, boards a train and leaves Winesburg behind to become a writer in the city. Yet, while Keillor seemingly could not leave Anoka fast enough, he has always remained there in his mind. Over the past forty years he has married three times and divorced twice, and lived in Denmark and New York City. His brief attempt to shelve the *Prairie Home* format and create a new radio show anchored in New York failed. Keillor stopped hosting *Prairie Home Companion* in 2016, but he continues to work as a writer from his Saint Paul home. "I could write a bold account of myself as a passionate man who rose from humble beginnings to cut a wide swath in the world," Keillor states near the end of *Lake Wobegon Days,* "but I find a truer account in the [Anoka] *Herald Star,* where it says:

> Mr. Gary Keillor visited the home of [his Uncle and Aunt] Al and Florence Crandall on Monday and after lunch returned to St. Paul, where he is currently employed in the radio show business. Mr. Lew Powell also visited, who recently celebrated his ninety-third birthday and is enjoying excellent health. Almost twelve quarts of string beans were picked and some strawberries. Lunch was fried chicken with gravy and creamed peas.[114]

GATORS, CATS, BIG DOGS

Over a decade before Garrison Keillor began to tell his stories of the upper Mississippi River Valley, another storyteller was singing about the lower reaches of the Great Valley. "Memphis, Tennessee," a rock-and-roll song Chuck Berry wrote and first recorded in 1959, tells a tale about love, but not in the way the listener first imagines. After a guitar introduction, the singer

113. *A Prairie Home Companion 25th Anniversary Collection,* disc. 2, no. 4; Keillor, *Lake Wobegon Days,* 334–35, 339–41, 378–97, 418–19, passim.
114. Keillor, *Lake Wobegon Days,* 341.

begins by asking a "long distance operator" to help him make a phone call to Memphis, Tennessee, so that he can talk to "my sweet Marie." Marie has been calling the singer (his uncle took a message) but he does not know her phone number. He does know the approximate location of her home, however, and tells the operator it is on Memphis's "south side, high up on a ridge / Just a half a mile from the Mississippi Bridge." He continues the story, explaining how much he misses Marie "and all the fun we had" until Marie's mother forced them to end their relationship. He sings sadly, "the last time I saw Marie" she was waving him goodbye with "hurry-home drops" trickling down her cheeks.[115]

"Memphis, Tennessee" is not about a meddlesome parent standing in the way of young lovers. At song's end, the listener is surprised to learn that "Marie is only six years old," and the true nature of the tale becomes clear. It seems Marie's mother has separated from the singer, "tore apart our happy home," and is raising Marie by herself in south Memphis. Thus, Chuck Berry's voice is that of a lonesome, estranged father, trying to return a phone call from his child, imploring a telephone operator, "Try to put me through to her in Memphis, Tennessee."[116]

"Memphis, Tennessee," was a hit record for Chuck Berry and a score of other musicians who recorded it, from Johnny Rivers to Bo Diddley to Buck Owens and the Buckaroos. It is a typical late 1950s rock-and-roll song in that it is built on a three-chord, twelve-bar pattern, with sparse, clear instrumentation and compelling syncopated rhythm. It combines rhythm and blues with country music vocal and instrumental stylings. One of the great strengths of "Memphis, Tennessee" is that it is a sad song that is somehow upbeat. The driving rhythm guitar combines with the singer's playful lyrics and his admirable determination to reunite with his daughter to produce hope for a happy ending high up on that Memphis ridge.[117]

Chuck Berry's vision of the ridge overlooking the Mississippi

115. Chuck Berry, "Memphis," *Chuck Berry's Greatest Hits,* 1976, Everest Records, FS-321, LP.
116. Ibid.; Chuck Berry, *Chuck Berry: The Autobiography* (New York, 1987), 161, 335.
117. Verlyn Klinkenborg, "Memphis," *New York Times,* Nov. 1, 2009, https://www.nytimes.com/2009/11/02/opinion/02mon4.html, accessed Jan. 8, 2015.

River conjures up many other Memphis images. Those who know the Chickasaw Bluffs and the city built upon them can imagine Marie's neighborhood. It is no doubt close to the juncture of McLemore and College Streets, where Jim Stewart and Estelle Axton built Stax Records Company in the late 1950s and 1960s. And a few miles to the north, at 706 Union Avenue, lay Sam Phillips's Sun Records studio. Rock-and-roll music evolved throughout the lower Mississippi Valley in the 1950s, and it certainly flourished in Memphis, Tennessee, "high up on a ridge / Just a half a mile from the Mississippi Bridge."

Rock-and-roll ("rock") stands alongside country, blues, gospel, and jazz as one of five genres of exceptional American music. "Rock-and-roll" is folk slang sometimes denoting sexual intercourse. Like its musical cousins, rock-and-roll was born in the Mississippi Valley because that is the region of the United States where African-American culture most thoroughly blended with that of Anglo and Celtic Americans (British Americans). One of the tragic ironies of American history is that Black and white musical forms became integrated in a geographic milieu that was so thoroughly racist and racially segregated.[118]

African-American blues and rhythm and blues and British-American folk, or country music, are the most important components of rock-and-roll, though scholars strongly debate the exact proportions of their contribution. True, gospel and jazz influenced rock-and-roll, and the musical traditions of other ethnic groups (e.g., Cajun and Creole French) were important, but the basis of rock-and-roll remains Black blues and white country music. As we have seen, blues and country were different musical genres that nevertheless shared much in common. Both were created by untrained folk musicians who utilized sparse, coarse instrumentation and three-chord storytelling songs. Musicians often sang about love. Male musicians predominated

118. Malone and Stricklin, *Southern Music, American Music,* 5–6; Joyner, "A Region in Harmony," 36–37. See Michael Allen, "'Just a Half a Mile from the Mississippi Bridge': The Mississippi Valley Origins of Rock and Roll," *Southern Quarterly* 52 (Spring 2015), 99–120. I classify rap or hip-hop music, which arose during a period beyond the scope of this book, as an important subgenre of rock-and-roll music.

and employed, in varying degrees, enthusiasm, improvisation, syncopation, and call and response.[119]

While the Memphis, Tennessee, region became rock-and-roll music's launch pad, the geography of early rock encompasses the entire Mississippi Valley. Bluesmen arose in the Delta, but they shared their music with neighbors and moved to cities, and soon the blues stretched across the Mississippi Valley from Kansas City to Chicago to the crest of the Appalachians. Country music worked its way west from Appalachia to Nashville, on the Cumberland River, and far beyond via radio station WSM's broadcasts of the *Grand Ole Opry.* To the south lay New Orleans, the birthplace of jazz, and home to Fats Domino; the rock guitarist James Burton was born near the Red River in Shreveport, in northwest Louisiana, while the northeastern Louisiana town of Ferriday was home to Jerry Lee Lewis. Saint Louis was Chuck Berry's (and Ike Turner's) home ground, though Berry recorded farther north, at Chess Records in Chicago, near the headwaters of the Illinois. Young Bob Dylan listened to all of this on the radio and phonograph of his Minnesota home in the upper Mississippi River Valley, and so too did Garrison Keillor.

As the 1940s turned into the 1950s, the streams of blues and country music matured and flowed towards their juncture. As noted, the invention of radio and sound recordings revolutionized popular music in the early decades of the twentieth century, and new electrical technology would continue to do so. Bluesmen, who had originally sung and played solo on acoustic guitars, joined with other players and incorporated electric guitars, amplifiers, and microphones into their musical arsenal. This slowly changed rural or country blues into urban rhythm and blues, or simply R & B. Most urban bluesmen were born in the lower Mississippi Valley, and during the World War II years they migrated north to Memphis, Saint Louis, Kansas City, and especially Chicago, the last stop on the Illinois Central Railway.[120]

Black nightclubs from Memphis to Chicago rocked to the

119. Malone and Stricklin, *Southern Music, American Music,* 102–103. See "Black and White Keys" section, above.

sounds of rhythm and blues combos fronted by the Texan Aaron "T-Bone" Walker and a host of Mississippians, including Muddy Waters (McKinley Morganfield, Clarksdale), Willie Dixon (Vicksburg), and Howlin' Wolf (Chester Burnett, West Point). They were later joined by B. B. (Riley "Blues Boy") King (Indianola), Elmore James (Richland), John Lee Hooker (Clarksdale) and many more. Sharply dressed in coats and ties, R & B musicians played amplified guitars, drums, pianos, harmonicas, and standup basses; later variants were electric basses and organs, saxophones, and horns. The R & B sound, according to one historian, "contrasted sharply with the more sullen country blues, born in slavery." Willie Dixon recalled that Muddy Waters "was giving the blues a little pep." In retrospect, it is easy to see that these Black R & B musicians, in their instrumentation and musical style, were creating the prototype for mid-'50s rock-and-roll bands. Although no one will ever find the proverbial "first" rock-and-roll song, early rock songs appear in the repertoires of the urban rhythm and bluesmen.[121]

"Hound Dog," a rhythm and blues song written by Jerry Lieber and Mike Stoller and first recorded by Big Momma Thornton in 1952 (and later by Elvis Presley), is a syncopated, storytelling song based on three chords (I-IV-V) arranged in a twelve-bar call-and-response pattern. It is metaphoric because, of course, the singer is singing to a wayward lover, not a real hound dog. In the song's first four bars, the singer strums the guitar's I chord and scolds his lover, "You ain't nothing but a hound dog, just a' cryin' all the time!" In the next four bars, the singer responds to his or her own words by strumming the IV chord, repeating "You ain't nothing but a hound dog, just a' cryin' all the time!" returning to the I chord on "time!" The final four bars begin with a new chord—the V—and the singer scolding, "You ain't never caught a rabbit," then strumming the IV chord and singing "and

120. David P. Szatmary, *Rockin' in Time: A Social History of Rock and Roll,* 4th ed. (Upper Saddle River, N.J., 2000), 3–6; Malone and Stricklin, *Southern Music, American Music,* 74–76.

121. Szatmary, *Rockin' in Time,* 6–9; Malone and Stricklin, *Southern Music, American Music,* 98–101; John Lee Hooker, *The Real Blues,* 1970, Everest Records, 2089, LP; Don McGlynn, dir., *When the Sun Goes Down: The Howlin' Wolf Story* (Arista, 2003), 82876-56631-9, DVD.

you ain't no friend of mine!" returning to the I chord on "mine!" The singer then starts a new twelve-bar sequence, singing, "Well they said you was high-class, but that was just a lie!" repeating the entire I-IV-V sequence with new lyrics. A twelve-bar guitar solo intervenes, and the song concludes with the same twelve-bar sequence I-IV-V lyric set with which it began. This construction is identical to that of thousands of country blues, R & B, and, later, rock-and-roll songs.[122]

As R & B gelled, country musicians were also forming sharply dressed electric combos and adopting elements of rhythm and blues in their performances. The singers Bob Wills and Ernest Tubb were joined by Webb Pierce, Lefty Frizzel, Hank Thompson and, most importantly, Hank Williams. As discussed earlier, Williams was a poor Alabamian who grew up amidst gospel, hillbilly, and blues musicians. Williams helped blaze the trail towards rock-and-roll when, in 1949, he and his swinging combo, the Drifting Cowboys, sang his composition "Move It on Over" on the stage of the Grand Ole Opry. "Move It on Over" was a twelve-bar, I-IV-V honky-tonk rhythm and blues song built around Williams's hard-driving syncopated guitar chops and a raucous call-and-response vocal that (like "Hound Dog") uses dog symbols to describe romantic strife. Williams sings of coming home to his lover, only to find she has spurned him and locked him out of the house. Forced to sleep in the doghouse, Williams calls to his dog, "Move it on over!" and his bandmates respond, shouting, "Move it on over!" He then calls again, "Move it on over!" to their shouted response, "Move it on over!" At the end of the stanza, Williams sings, "Move over little dog, 'cause the big dog's movin' in!"[123]

All this Black and white musical cross-acculturation occurred in the Mississippi Valley during a time of stark racial segregation and repressive Jim Crow laws. The R & B nightclubs that made

122. Peter Guralnick, *Last Train to Memphis: The Rise of Elvis Presley* (Boston, Mass., 1994), 297–99, 406; Elvis Presley, "Hound Dog," *Elvis' Golden Records,* 1958, RCA, XLPE-1707, LP.

123. Malone and Neal, *Country Music, U.S.A.,* 231–34, 239–43; Malone and Stricklin, *Southern Music, American Music,* 82–86, 95; Hank Williams, "Move It on Over," *Hank Williams Greatest Hits,* 1961, MGM Records, SE 4755-2, LP.

up the so-called chitlin' circuit featured all-Black combos and were patronized solely by Black patrons. Blues and R & B recordings were still called "race records" in some quarters, and many white parents branded them overly sexual and unfit for their children to hear. Honky-tonks and shows like the *Louisiana Hayride* and *Grand Ole Opry* were largely the domain of white folks. Yet something was in the air, literally. Blacks listened to the *Opry* and *Hayride* on radio stations WSM in Nashville and KWKH in Shreveport, Louisiana. Meanwhile, white youths turned their radio dials to the all-night R & B show on WREC and WDIA (Memphis), and the *King Biscuit Hour* (on KFFA, in Helena, Arkansas), while the clear channel WLAC (Nashville) broadcast R & B music across much of the eastern half of the Mississippi Valley.[124]

This was all happening amid hugely consequential political and economic events. Following World War II, the long labors of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) spurred and dovetailed with President Harry Truman's desegregation of the U.S. military and federal courts; in the private sector, America saw Jackie Robinson join the Brooklyn Dodgers and desegregate professional baseball.[125] It is no coincidence that rock-and-roll music was born in the mid-1950s, around the same as the Supreme Court's 1954 decision in *Brown v Board of Education.* Rock-and-roll music was to become a part of a disorderly and unofficial, yet crucial, alliance with the civil rights movement.

Richard Penniman, Fats Domino, and Chuck Berry came to maturity in this exhilarating milieu and were major players in the transition of R & B to rock-and-roll. Penniman, who became famous as Little Richard, was a wild and rhythmic Macon, Georgia, screamer who had grown up in a big, pious Seventh-day Adventist family. Although Little Richard started recording

124. Harvard Sitkoff, *Toward Freedom Land: The Long Struggle for Racial Equality in America* (Lexington, Ky., 2010), 178; Szatmary, *Rockin' in Time,* 15; Ann Malone "Charley Pride," in *Stars of Country: Uncle Dave Macon to Johnny Rodriquez,* ed. Bill C. Malone and Judith McCulloch (Urbana, Ill., 1975), 342–43; Guralnick, *Last Train to Memphis,* 59–60.

125. Taylor Branch, *Parting the Waters: America in the King Years, 1954–63* (New York, 1988), 13, 66–67.

in 1951, he did not strike gold until 1955, when he teamed up with a New Orleans backup band to record "Tutti Frutti," the first in his string of self-composed rock-and-roll classics that includes "Long Tall Sally," "Rip It Up," "Lucille," "Keep a Knockin'" and "Good Golly, Miss Molly." The New Orleans pianist and songwriter Antoine "Fats" Domino, Jr., was as cool and collected as Little Richard was manic, and his music reflects Creole jazz as well as rhythm and blues' influence on early rock-and-roll. Born in the Crescent City in 1928, Fats weighed two hundred twenty pounds and stood five feet, five inches. He was already a seasoned boogie-woogie pianist and popular R & B recording artist when, in 1955, he entered Cosimo Matassa's J & M Studios, at Rampart and Dumaine Streets in New Orleans. There, he laid down his first national hit record, "Ain't It a Shame," followed by a hit re-recording of the singing cowboy Gene Autry's "Blueberry Hill" (1956); in 1957 he released "I'm Walkin'." Domino ultimately sold 65 million records, more than any of the early rockers except Elvis Presley, and reaped substantial royalties when white rock-and-rollers began to re-record his songs.[126]

Upstream in Saint Louis, Chuck Berry was born into a devout middle-class Baptist family in 1926. While stating that Chuck Berry is the single most important early rock-and-roll musician might seem as dangerous as claiming to have discovered the first rock-and-roll song, it is a thesis with strong supporting evidence. The other likely candidate for the honor is Elvis Presley, whose vocal stylings far surpassed those of Berry. But Elvis was not a great guitarist, nor did he write dozens of his own hit songs. Chuck Berry did, and he could dance as well as Elvis (which is saying something). Had Elvis Presley lived to build a 60-year career like Berry, one could make an argument on his behalf. As it stands, Chuck Berry played a huge role—arguably greater than any other single performer—in the birth and growth of rock-and-roll music.

As adept with pen as guitar, Chuck Berry wrote one of the best autobiographies by a rock-and-roller. He relates early childhood

126. Malone and Stricklin, *Southern Music, American Music,* 101–102; Friedlander, *Rock and Roll: A Social History,* 28–30, 36–39.

memories of "pure harmonies of the Baptist hymns … blending with the stirring rhythms of true Baptist soul… Hallelujah!" Berry was armed with an acoustic guitar and *Nick Manoloff's Complete Chord and Harmony Manual for Guitar* when his barber's brother taught him the rudimentary I-IV-V blues progressions and related chord sets. "I determined that by learning rhythm changes and blues progressions, I would be prepared to chord nearly 80 percent of the songs that were played." Coming of age in the 1940s and early '50s, Berry honed musical tastes ranging from Nat King Cole to boogie-woogie, to Muddy Waters and T-Bone Walker blues songs he first heard on a Black East Saint Louis radio station. Berry also loved the jazz big bands of Count Basie, Duke Ellington, and "Tommy Dorsey, whose recording 'Tommy Dorsey's Boogie Woogie' was the tune that launched my determination to produce such music." In addition to gospel, blues, and big band jazz, he was drawn to "country-western music, which was usually called 'hillbilly music.'"[127]

By 1951, Chuck Berry had "buckled down and started taking seriously the task of learning to play the guitar." He joined a trio (soon dubbed the Chuck Berry Combo) and on New Year's Eve 1952 played the Cosmopolitan Club, at Seventeenth and Bond in East Saint Louis, Illinois. Hired back as a regular at "the Cosmo," Chuck began to develop his showman's repertoire of exaggerated facial expressions, guitar posturing, and dance steps, including a duck walk across the stage while simultaneously playing complex guitar leads. This was a time of transition to integrated nightclubs in Illinois, and "sometimes nearly forty percent of the clients were Caucasian." Meanwhile, the "predominantly black audience" members joked about "that black hillbilly at the Cosmo" as Berry sported western bolo ties and began to write songs with a country flavor.[128]

In 1955, "Maybellene," a country song with strong R & B components, made Chuck Berry a national celebrity. Visiting Chicago, Berry met and spoke briefly to his idol, the bluesman Muddy Waters. Waters advised Berry to talk to Leonard Chess,

127. Chuck Berry, *Chuck Berry: The Autobiography* (New York, 1987), 2, 25–26, 42–43, 89.
128. Ibid., 88, 89–90.

co-owner of Chess Records, a pivotal Chicago R & B label then located on Cottage Grove Avenue. After their meeting, Berry drove home to Saint Louis, recorded several songs on his reel-to-reel tape machine, and returned to Chicago. Chess liked "Ida May," a song Berry had refashioned from the Bob Wills country song "Ida Red." "Ida May" was about a guy whose girlfriend has run off in a Cadillac and so he chases her in his "V 8 Ford." Chess producers changed Ida May's name to Maybellene. The song charted at number five, and Chuck Berry became the first Black rock-and-roll musician to score a national hit (Little Richard and Fats Domino would soon follow). During his 1955-66 work at Chess Records, Chuck Berry recorded and charted some of the most beloved songs in the rock-and-roll repertory—"Sweet Little Sixteen," "Carol," "You Can't Catch Me," "Johnny B. Goode," "Brown-Eyed Handsome Man," "No Particular Place to Go," "Teenage Wedding," "Memphis," "Promised Land," "Come On," "Around and Around," "School Days," "Rock-and-Roll Music," and the mischievously titled "Roll Over, Beethoven (and Tell Tchaikovsky the News)."[129]

Chuck Berry may be the most significant of the early rockers, yet it was Elvis Presley and Bill Haley who in 1954 scored the first number one national rock-and-roll hit records. Although Berry's "Sweet Little Sixteen," rose to number two in 1958, he never reached number one until 1972 (with the novelty tune "My Ding-a-Ling"). Why? The stark reason is white racism. We have seen how R & B was disparaged as race music. There was great prejudice against R & B in the white community, where parents did not want their teenaged children listening to it. This kind of prejudice had huge market implications, yet the market also provided a solution. Young white rockabilly musicians like Elvis Presley, Carl Perkins, Jerry Lee Lewis, and others would clear the pathway that Berry, Penniman, Domino, and other Black rockers soon followed.

The famous statement by Sam Phillips, found of Sun Records, "If I could find a white man who had the Negro sound and the

129. Ibid., 97–103, 334–37.

Negro feel, I could make a billion dollars" should be examined with care and in historical context. Too often Phillips's words are used to support simplistic tales of how the white man co-opted the Black man's music and grew rich from the theft.[130] Sam Phillips was born in 1923 in Florence, Alabama, near the Muscle Shoals of the Tennessee River. There he developed an early love for country blues and rhythm and blues music. The son of sharecroppers, Phillips also developed a social conscience that reflected the emergent civil rights movement. "What if I had been born black?" he asked. "I felt from the very beginning the total inequity of man's inhumanity to his brother … *some day I would act on my feelings, I would show them on an individual, one-to-one basis."* As a young radio disc jockey at WLAY and WREC, Phillips broadcast R & B across the mid-South, and in 1950 he established Memphis Recording Service (Sun Records) at 706 Union Avenue. "Negro artists in the South who wanted to make a record just had no place to go," he recalled. "I set up a studio just to make records with some of those great Negro artists."[131]

Thus, Sun Records filled the early 1950s geographic void between New Orleans's J & M Studio and Chess Records in Chicago. Sam Phillips recorded Howlin' Wolf, Rufus Thomas, B. B. King, James Cotton, Ike Turner, the Prisonaires (a close-harmony quartet of incarcerated Tennessee State Prison inmates) and other Black R & B musicians. While Philips no doubt had a strong economic incentive, he also loved the music, and both motives caused him to ponder how he could make this music accessible to the mass audience of white Americans. The answer was to forge a transitional and marketable white musical subgenre, but in the southern, segregationist environment that surrounded Phillips, this was a dangerous ambition.

130. Phillips quote in Szatzmary, 32. For the view that whites took the blues from Blacks and that it is unethical for whites to perform Black music, see Ralph J. Gleason, "Can White People Sing the Blues?" *Jazz and Pop* 7 (November 1968), 28–29, and Lomax, *The Land Where the Blues Began,* 347. A summary and rebuttal is Eric Felten, "De Gustibus," *Wall Street Journal,* Jan. 28, 2010. See also Rebecca Solnit, "One Nation under Elvis," *Orion Magazine,* n.d., https://www.orionmagazine.org/article/one-nation-under-elvis, accessed April 3, 2018.

131. Phillips quotes in Guralnick, *Last Train to Memphis,* 5, 60. Emphasis in original.

Nevertheless, he began to seek out young white singers grounded in both country and R & B music. These singers' styles are the genesis of the terms "rockabilly," "hillbilly cat," and "bop cat"—slang denoting white musicians with strong ties to both country and R & B. Joel Williamson writes, "Sam began with blacks and moved on to whites. What he did with whites was informed by what he had done with blacks."[132]

Reminiscing about Elvis Presley, the Sun Records artist Conway Twitty (Harold Lloyd Jenkins) enthusiastically recalled, "It was Elvis and no one else. He was the one. Nothing like it, period. He bowled people over. He changed the whole damn world."[133] There is much truth to this, yet any scholar attempting to understand Elvis Presley must work without the singer's own thoughts on the subject. Presley seemed almost purposefully inarticulate in discussing his music and its origins; in countless interviews, he politely and quickly glossed over his answers to questions about his musical roots. Elvis Presley loved making rock-and-roll music, but he did not want to talk about it, much less intellectualize it.

Presley's background was like that of Sam Phillips, though he was even poorer. Born in 1935 to Vernon and Gladys Presley in a two-room house in East Tupelo, Mississippi (his twin brother Jesse was stillborn), Elvis's social status was not unlike that of Black sharecroppers and his Black Tupelo neighbors. Their worlds overlapped, even in segregationist Mississippi, and Elvis (like Hank Williams and Chuck Berry) grew up in a world of intersecting gospel, blues, and country musical styles. His parents bought him a guitar for his eleventh birthday, and W. A. Zuber, a Black Tupelo physician, recalled that Elvis used to "go around with quartets and to Negro 'sanctified' meetings." Elvis himself recalled attending "colored churches when I was a kid," though this surely was not the Presleys' usual Sunday routine. Elvis and Gladys's world had been disrupted when Vernon was convicted of forging a check and sent to the Parchman Prison Farm. The stigma of the conviction followed the family around

132. Williamson, *Elvis Presley,* 139–40, 142.
133. Twitty quoted in Ashby, *With Amusement for All,* 338.

Tupelo for years, and they sought a new start. In 1948, heavily in debt, the Presleys moved across the state line to a government housing project in Memphis. They brought Elvis's guitar with them.[134]

The story of Elvis Presley's devotion to his struggling parents, his Hume High School days, love of Beale Street clothing shops and nightlife, his truck driving job, and the fateful 1954 day when he walked into the Sun Records studio has been told many times. Elvis's struggle and rise to fame mirrors the great American story, but it features a Memphis hillbilly cat making records instead of young Ben Franklin first walking into Market Square in Philadelphia, or young Abraham Lincoln reading borrowed books by the light of a stone fireplace in Illinois. Elvis's story is equally powerful. Guralnick writes that Sam Phillips believed he had found in Elvis Presley a young man who shared with him "a secret, almost subversive attraction not to just black music but to black culture." Phillips knew they would have to proceed very carefully, but "the lack of prejudice on the part of Elvis Presley had to be one of the biggest things that could have ever happened to us, though. It was almost subversive, sneaking around through the music." With Presley's persona and music, Phillips states, "I went out into this no-man's-land, and I knocked the shit out of the color line."[135]

"That's All Right, Mama," Elvis Presley's first Sun recording, marks the beginning of rock-and-roll music. It is not the first rock-and-roll song, nor is Bill Haley and the Comets' "Rock Around the Clock," also recorded in 1954. And there is no comparison of the two. Haley had learned the country music side of the rock quotient well, but he did not quite understand R & B syncopation. Elvis understood it perfectly, and "That's All Right, Mama" exudes the R & B and country fusion. Conway Twitty was right, "Elvis was the one." And although Sam Phillips sold all

134. Guralnick, *Last Train to Memphis,* 426 (qtn.); Williamson, 65–107.

135. Guralnick, *Last Train to Memphis,* 134. For Elvis and race, see ibid., 29, and Williamson, *Elvis Presley: A Southern Life,* 206, 208. Bill Kenny stated in the August 1957 issue of *Jet Magazine,* "To Elvis, people are people, regardless of race, color, or creed" (quoted in Guralnick, *Last Train to Memphis,* 426).

his rights to record Elvis Presley to RCA Records in 1955, he had by that time built a stable of Sun bop cats—including Twitty—to carry on his and Elvis's work.

Carl Perkins was one of Phillips's stars. Like all the rockabillies, Perkins was born far down the social ladder and spent his formative years among the Black and white sharecroppers and townsfolk of Tiptonville, in northwest Tennessee's Delta country. Young Carl picked both cotton and the guitar until his parents moved the family to Jackson, Tennessee, where he and his brothers formed a country combo and performed on radio and in local dance halls. After hearing Elvis Presley's rockabilly cover of Bill Monroe's "Blue Moon of Kentucky" on the radio, the Perkins brothers drove to Memphis and Sun Records. There, Sam Phillips recorded Carl's composition "Blue Suede Shoes," which skyrocketed to the top of the 1956 country, R & B, and pop music charts.[136]

Johnny Cash grew up on the Arkansas side of the Mississippi, and in 1950 quit picking cotton to serve four years in the United States Air Force. An aspiring musician, Cash met Elvis Presley when he moved to Memphis in 1954, but he recalled, "I never spoke with him about Sun Records or any other connection into the music business. I wanted to make it on my own devices, and that's how I set about doing it." After several phone calls failed to arouse Sam Phillips's interest, "I just went down to the Memphis Recording Service one morning before anyone arrived for work and sat on the step and waited." When Phillips appeared, Cash stood up, introduced himself, and said, "Mr. Phillips, sir, if you listen to me you'll be glad you did." "Well, I like to hear a boy with confidence," Sam replied. "Come on in."[137]

Cash's Sun recordings—"Hey, Porter," "Folsom Prison Blues," "I Walk the Line," "Cry, Cry, Cry," "Home of the Blues," "Big River," and others—lean heavily towards the country side of early rock-and-roll music. But there is strong syncopation, supplied by what Cash and others called the boom-chicka-boom down-beat and back-beat of guitars, standup bass, and drums. Cash played an

136. Ashby, *With Amusement for All,* 337–38.
137. Johnny Cash, *Cash: The Autobiography* (New York, 1997), 73, 75, 95–97.

amplified (via a microphone, known as "miked") acoustic six-string guitar supported by the Tennessee Two, the bassist Marshall Grant and the guitarist Luther Monroe Perkins. When Cash added the drummer W. S. Holland, the Tennessee Two became the Tennessee Three. And later, after he hired Carl Perkins as his feature guitarist and side vocalist, Johnny Cash boasted one of the tightest rockabilly combos in show business.[138]

From 1954 to 1957, Sam Phillips recorded the most enduring of the rockabillies—Presley, Perkins, and Cash, alongside Twitty, Roy Orbison, Charlie Rich, and Jerry Lee Lewis. All these men possessed great talent, but the prize for flamboyant showmanship (and volatility) goes to Lewis. Bill Malone describes Jerry Lee Lewis as a young man who "often acted as if he had stepped out of the pages of Wilbur J. Cash's *The Mind of the South,* the prototypical ambivalent southerner embodying hedonistic and puritanical traits." Jerry Lee spent his youth in Ferriday, Louisiana (directly across the Mississippi from Natchez), in a devout Assembly of God family. While his cousins Jimmy Lee Swaggart and Mickey Gilley respectively sang gospel and country music, Jerry Lee sang both, and filled in the bill with rock-and-roll. He also brought a hard-driving piano style to the rock-and-roll arsenal, rivaling Fats Domino, and outplaying even Little Richard.[139]

Jerry Lee Lewis arrived at Sun Records after a brief stint studying for the ministry in a Waxahachie, Texas, Bible school, and Johnny Cash recalls, "We had to listen to a few sermons in the dressing room." He never stopped preaching, though it was not the Lord's gospel Jerry Lee was shouting about in "Whole Lot of Shakin' Goin' On," "Great Balls of Fire," "Teenage Confidential," "What I'd Say," and "Breathless." In between hit records he did a lot of drinking and courted many women. He was "a genuine wild man," Cash states, and "I knew what an outrageous person he could be, how unpredictable." Yet even Cash was surprised when Lewis married his thirteen-year-old

138. Ibid., 75–77, 109.
139. Malone and Stricklin, *Southern Music, American Music,* 104–105.

second cousin, Myra Gail. Their wedding, which the news media used to portray the tawdriest stereotypes about poor white southerners, halted Lewis's career, but only temporarily.[140]

It is tempting to say, metaphorically, that rock-and-roll rose and fell around Sun Records, but we already know that is not true. The Mississippi Valley produced rock-and-roll musicians north and south of Memphis, and they in turn quickly spread the music from coast to coast. Born to Oklahoman parents in Albert Lea, Minnesota, Eddie Cochran recorded the rock staples "Summertime Blues," "Come on Everybody," and "Nervous Breakdown" before he died in a car crash in London. James Burton, of Shreveport, Louisiana, became a pivotal rock-and-roll lead guitarist after starting his career as a teenager in the *Louisiana Hayride* radio show's house band. Burton soon took his Fender Telecaster and sharp, loud, staccato ("chicken pickin'") sound to California and a job as Ricky Nelson's sideman in live performances and the weekly television series *The Adventures of Ozzie and Harriet.* In 1965, when the Rolling Stones invited Howlin' Wolf to join them on the popular U.S. television show *Shindig,* the lead guitarist in the house band backing Wolf, the Shindogs, was James Burton. In 1969, Elvis Presley hired Burton as his lead guitarist and band leader, a job he kept until Elvis's 1977 death.[141]

Meanwhile, women added their voices to the rockabilly sound. The Georgian Brenda Lee's growling vocals on "Bigelow 6-200," "Rock the Bop," "Ring-a-My-Phone," "Sweet Nothin's," and "Dynamite" showed that, as Malone states, there were some "good old girls" who shared the R & B skills of the hillbilly cats. The Virginian Janis Martin was no Brenda Lee, but she successfully made the transition from country to rockabilly and recorded at RCA at the same time as Elvis Presley. The Oklahoman Wanda Jackson could growl just as seductively as Lee, but her best-selling records, "Let's Have a Party" and "Fujiyama Mama" (a wicked metaphoric likening of female

140. Cash, *Cash,* 91.
141. Eddie Cochran, *Eddie Cochran,* 1971, United Artists Records, UAS 9959, LP, liner notes; Malone and Neal, *Country Music, U.S.A.,* 203, 291.

sexuality to the atom bomb), never ranked higher than 30 on the Billboard charts. Rock-and-roll music, like its country, blues, and R & B progenitors, remained an overwhelmingly male genre. And while the record-buying public had embraced Black male rock-and-roll performers, the full acceptance of women rockers lay years in the future.[142]

The story of the Kentuckians Phil and Don Everly—the Everly Brothers—provides a coda to the early rock-and-roll biographies. Unlike the other rockabillies, the Everlys were born to musician parents, Ike and Margaret Everly, who raised them in the country music business. Reaching adolescence at mid-century, Phil and Don were drawn to emergent rock-and-roll, which they blended into their country music style. The Everlys brought precise, two-part hillbilly harmonies into rock-and-roll, rhythmically driven by twin miked acoustic, steel-stringed Gibson guitars. They also added important love ballads to the rockabilly repertoire. In their love songs "Dream" and "Devoted to You," Phil and Don Everly position their harmonies atop the I-VI (minor)-IV-V rock ballad variant to beautiful effect. Their cover of Little Richard's hard-rocking "Lucille" startles the listener when the twelve-bar R & B instrumental introduction is followed by the Everlys wailing of the name "Lucille" for six full counts. The effect is a haunting vocalized equivalent of the sound of bagpipes.[143]

"Bird Dog," 1958's number one song, written for the Everlys by Boudleaux Bryant, showcases the brothers' adherence to traditional rock forms with important variations. "Bird Dog" reminds us of the dog metaphors we heard in Elvis Presley's "Hound Dog" and Hank Williams's "Move It on Over," and the fact that dogs loom large in the southern imagination. Here, the "bird dog" is a romantic rival trying to steal away the singer's lover, who is referred to in wonderful aviary slang terms, "chick,"

142. Malone and Neal, *Country Music, U.S.A.,*250; Wanda Jackson, *Wanda Jackson: Queen of Rockabilly,* 2000, Ace Records, CDCHD 776, CD, liner notes. The best overview is Robert K. Oermann and Mary A. Bufwack, "Rockabilly Women," *Journal of Country Music* 8 (May 1979), 65–94.

143. Friedlander, *Rock and Roll: A Social History,* 56–57; Everly Brothers, "Lucille," *The Very Best of the Everly Brothers,* 1964, Warner Brother Records, WS 1554, LP.

"quail," "dove," and of course "bird." In the song's three main stanzas (all in traditional twelve-bar I-IV-V form) Phil and Don, in harmony, call out their complaints about the bird dog rival and Don responds to the call alone. For example, Phil and Don call, "…when he jokes my honey," and Don responds, "He's a dog," and then they call, "His jokin' ain't so funny," to which Don responds, "What a dog." Or they call, "…when he sings to my gal," and Don responds, "What a howl," and then they call, "To me he's just a wolf dog," and Don responds, "On the prowl." The variation in "Bird Dog" is a bridge—two linked eight-bar IV-I-V stanzas that take the place of the usual guitar solo. "Hey, bird dog, get away from my quail," the brothers warn in harmony, responding together, "Hey, bird dog you're on the wrong trail," and then, coming down from the V chord, they sing, "Bird dog, you better leave my lovey-dove alone." They repeat the bridge with new lyrics, sing a new twelve-bar stanza, and the song ends with the bridge: "Hey, bird dog, get away from my chick / Hey, bird dog, you better get away quick / Bird dog, you better find a chicken little of your own."[144]

The span between the birth and decline of classic rock-and-roll music is so short it cannot really be called an era. Beginning in 1954 with "That's All Right, Mama," traditional rock had already begun to wane by the time of "Bird Dog." In retrospect, we can reiterate that rock-and-roll music was born in the Mississippi Valley and was a distillation of that region's blues and country music genres. True, rock-and-roll almost immediately went upriver and branched across America, from New York and Philadelphia to Los Angeles. But it began with Mississippi Valley musicians, from Fats Domino and Chuck Berry to Elvis Presley and the Everly Brothers. Rock-and-roll was thus biracial music, born from the intermixture of Black and white musical forms. Reflecting on this intermixing in the otherwise segregationist society of his youth, Chuck Berry recalled, "More than once I later heard it said of black males: 'Them boys are born with rhythm.' Maybe it's true but I came to find out, so were white

144. "Bird Dog," *Very Best of the Everly Brothers*. See "Bird Dog," https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=US49tQbYsg0, accessed July 19, 2015.

boys. I just didn't know then, as the two kinds of boys never had occasion to harmonize."[145]

Thanks to Chuck Berry and many others, the two musical worlds did harmonize, and they did so at the exact time the United States was embroiled in the civil rights revolution. Rock-and-roll was not political music. Rock-and-rollers were much more interested in singing about girls (and, occasionally, cars) than politics. Yet rock-and-roll was born because, despite overt racism and segregation, Black and white musical forms had already integrated. Rock-and-roll was a product of that cultural integration, and it served as a huge symbol of the change that was moving across America. Rock-and-roll music showed that turbulent change could also be joyous, and that folks could dance to it.

Why did traditional rock-and-roll rise and decline so quickly? There are several reasons, but first we must stress that traditional rock-and-roll did not die or go away in the late 1950s. It remained simmering on the back burner and would return to the American music scene again (and again). But it did temporarily decline in popularity, and one of the reasons was conscription and military service by rockers. The most famous GI was Elvis himself, drafted in 1958 to serve with a tank company in Germany. The Everly Brothers joined the U.S. Marine Corps Reserves in 1961, and although (like Elvis) their service time was brief, it slowed their career momentum.[146]

Meanwhile, a handful of the rockabillies succumbed to alcohol, drugs, and crime. Carl Perkins and Gene Vincent were known for their hard-drinking lifestyles, and Johnny Cash developed a taste for amphetamines and depressants in both liquid and pill form. Chuck Berry had begun to build his criminal résumé as a teenager in reform school; as an adult, he added federal convictions for tax evasion and carrying a (female) minor across a state line, and he served two more prison sentences. Jerry Lee Lewis had married his second cousin Myra *before* he carried her over a state line, but the scandal set his career back for a

145. Berry, *Autobiography,* 2.
146. Guralnick, *Last Train to Memphis,* 461–62.

decade. Later, Elvis Presley somehow remained above the fray, hosting his teenaged fiancée Priscilla Beaulieu at his Memphis home until she reached marriageable age. Elvis's fellow RCA Records recording artist Janis Martin had a different yet related problem. The recording company cancelled its contract with the "unmarried" seventeen year-old when she became pregnant by her husband, whom she had secretly married at age fifteen.[147]

Rather than falling into the devil's ways, Richard Penniman did the opposite. In 1957, just as he was riding high on the record charts, Little Richard experienced an apocalyptic visitation from God and promptly enrolled in Oakwood College in Huntsville, Alabama, to study Seventh-day Adventist theology. After earning a BA, preaching, and recording gospel music (and beginning to embrace his homosexuality), Little Richard returned to sing unadulterated rock-and-roll music in 1964.[148]

Automobile and airplane crashes also took their toll on the rockabillies. As noted, Eddie Cochran died in a London car crash, while Gene Vincent, riding in the same car, was severely injured. Carl Perkins was hospitalized after an auto accident that occurred at the exact time his song "Blue Suede Shoes" had soared to number one; Perkins never regained his career momentum. The most famous rock-and-roll death was the result of an airplane accident. On February 3, 1959, a plane carrying the Texas bop cat Buddy Holly (alongside Richie Valens and J. P. "Big Bopper" Richardson) crashed near Clear Lake, Iowa. The folk singer Don McLean later sang about Buddy Holly's death, lyrically describing it as "the day the music died."[149]

Finally, rock-and-roll's decline was a product of the music business and market forces. Sam Phillips was right—there was a lot of money to be made from rock-and-roll. The enormous popularity of Elvis Presley and the white rockabillies opened the eyes of heavily capitalized northeastern music producers,

147. Cash, *Cash*, 96–97, 140–47; Berry, *Autobiography,* 57–72, 199–218, 271–93; Guralnick, *Careless Love: The Unmaking of Elvis Presley* (Boston, Mass., 1999), 140–47; Oermann and Bufwack, "Rockabilly Women," 73.

148. "Little Richard," *Rolling Stone Encyclopedia of Rock and Roll,* 332–33.

149. Friedlander, *Rock and Roll,* 38–39; Don McLean, "American Pie," *American Pie,* 1971, United Artists, UAS 29285, LP. McLean's song tells the story of the early history of rock music.

who naturally sought an even bigger market. They soon reached this market with a product more palatable to the masses—rock performers who were not as threatening to mainstream American racial, social, and sexual mores as the rhythm and bluesmen and rockabillies.[150]

Thus, record companies began to promote uncontroversial singers like Pat Boone, Fabian, Frankie Avalon, Bobbie Rydell, Chubby Checker, and others, watering down the rock-and-roll genre to the point that it only indirectly resembled the traditional form. Excepting Boone, none of the those listed called the Mississippi Valley home. Elvis Presley's canny manager, Colonel Tom Parker, also took part in this devaluation. When Elvis returned from the army, Parker contracted him to make Hollywood movies that, despite a promising start, soon came to feature mediocre scripts and songs that veered far away from Elvis's rockabilly roots.[151]

Meanwhile, the Philadelphia television host Dick Clark appeared on the scene and furthered the downward spiral. Initially, Clark had played a crucial role promoting traditional rock-and-roll on his show *American Bandstand.* Chuck Berry, Little Richard, Jerry Lee Lewis, Fats Domino, Johnny Cash, Carl Perkins, and the Everly Brothers all appeared on *Bandstand.* Yet Clark spent the late '50s and early '60s undoing the rock genre with the likes of Fabian, Avalon, Rydell, and Checker, all of whom were born and raised in Philadelphia, where he filmed his show. Dick Clark was never formally charged with taking payola—bribes from record companies to promote particular artists—but other rock DJs were implicated, and the 1959-60 payola scandals contributed to the decline of rock music.[152]

In the meantime, the original rock-and-rollers looked for work wherever they could find it. Conway Twitty, Charlie Rich, Johnny Cash, and Brenda Lee followed the road to Nashville

150. Szatmary, *Rockin' in Time,* 22–25.

151. Ibid., 57; Williamson, *Elvis Presley,* 197. For Colonel Tom Parker, Elvis's movie career, and the watering down of Elvis's music see Guralnick, *Careless Love,* 123–4, 134, 171, and chapter 6, this work.

152. Szatmary, *Rockin' in Time,* 54–60.

and successful careers as country musicians. Wanda Jackson, like Little Richard, found God and gospel music. In between carousing, car wrecks, and legal dustups, Carl Perkins, Chuck Berry, and Jerry Lee Lewis joined a handful of rhythm and bluesmen (including John Lee Hooker) who found enthusiastic audiences in Europe, especially England.[153] With most of the original rockers in the military, jail, Nashville, or England, traditional rock-and-roll withered. Sam Phillips's 1961 sale of Sun Records seemed, on the surface, to be the final nail in American rock's coffin.

Of course, nothing could be further from the truth. There were already forces in play that would spark a mid-1960s rock-and-roll revival. Rock's return germinated simultaneously in England, California, Detroit, Muscle Shoals, and Memphis.

As American rock-and-rollers toured England, they cultivated a devout following of teenagers and young adults. Some of these youngsters began to play traditional rock music in bands with fanciful names—the Beatles, Rolling Stones, Animals, Yardbirds, Kinks, Who, Them, and the Nashville Teens. They formed the epicenter of the British Invasion that shook America in 1964, introducing a new wave of American teenagers to the British Beat—a variant of traditional mid-1950s American rock-and-roll music. A quick look at the initial long play albums of the Beatles and Rolling Stones reveals more than a dozen songs written by Chuck Berry, Fats Domino, Bobby Troup, Buddy Holly, Rufus Thomas, and Carl Perkins. The Animals' *House of the Rising Sun* debut album, for example, was titled after the traditional New Orleans ballad first recorded by the bluesman Lead Belly and, later, Bob Dylan. Album tracks include songs written by Ray Charles, Chuck Berry, Fats Domino, and John Lee Hooker.[154]

153. Berry, *Autobiography,* 221–22.

154. Friedlander, *Rock and Roll: A Social History,* 76–84, 102–106; The Beatles, *The Beatles Second Album,* 1964, Capitol Records, T 2080, LP; Beatles, *Something New,* 1964, Capitol Records, ST 2108, LP; Beatles, *Beatles '65,* 1965, Capitol Records, T 2228, LP; The Rolling Stones, *England's Newest Hitmakers: The Rolling Stones,* 1964, London Records, PS 375, LP; The Animals, *House of the Rising Sun,* 1964, MGM Records, E 4264, LP. The Rolling Stones borrowed their name from a Muddy Waters song.

The liner notes to the *House of the Rising Sun* reveal the awe the Animals—Eric Burdon, Alan Price, John Steel, Chas Chandler, and Hilton Valentine—held for the history and culture of America's Mississippi River Valley. Biographical information for each member of the group includes categories about Biggest Break, Biggest Influence, and Professional Ambition. The Animals make constant proud references to their English tours with Chuck Berry and Jerry Lee Lewis, and their list of musical heroes includes premier American folk, blues, and jazz artists: James Brown, Bob Dylan, Ray Charles, John Lee Hooker, Dinah Washington, Etta James, Lionel Hampton, and Thelonius Monk. The singer Eric Burdon states that his most thrilling professional experience to date has been "working with Chuck Berry, Carl Perkins … and meeting John Lee Hooker." When asked their professional ambition, the Animals unanimously agree with Burdon: They wanted to "tour [the] States by car and meet U.S. Blues men on their own ground." These young Englishmen's great goal was to visit the sacred ground of the lower Mississippi Valley.[155]

Immediately prior to the 1964 arrival of the Beatles, traditional American rock-and-roll music was again beginning to percolate. On the West Coast, the "surf rockers" Dick Dale and the Deltones and the Ventures begat California's Surfaris, Trashmen, Champs, and the Beach Boys. The Beach Boys' 1963 rock anthem "Surfin' USA" was, quite simply, a Californized rendition of Chuck Berry's "Sweet Little Sixteen." Back in Detroit, Michigan, a town that had for three decades seen waves of Black and white immigration from the lower Mississippi Valley, Barry Gordy's Motown Record Corporation was serving up a sweetened rhythm and blues variant called Motown and mainstreaming it to a huge national audience. A harder-edged rock subgenre, dubbed soul music, emerged simultaneously in and around Muscle Shoals, Alabama, and Memphis, Tennessee.[156]

The early story of rock-and-roll music thus ends where it began, in the lower Mississippi Valley. In 1959, in Sam Phillips's

155. Animals, *House of the Rising Sun,* liner notes.
156. Friedlander, *Rock and Roll,* 73; Szatmary, *Rockin' in Time,* 126–28.

old hometown, Rick Hall helped form the Florence Alabama Music Enterprises (FAME) record company, which he soon moved across the Tennessee River to Muscle Shoals, Alabama. There, grounded by the Muscle Shoals Rhythm Section, a tight house band of white rockers, FAME produced a string of early and mid-1960s soul music hits by Wilson Pickett, Otis Redding, Joe Tex, Etta James, and Percy Sledge, alongside country and southern rock records by Jerry Reed, Bobby Gentry, the Gatlin Brothers, and, much later, the bands Alabama and Lynyrd Skynyrd.[157]

And back in Memphis, Jim Stewart and Estelle Axton's Satellite Records became Stax Records. As discussed, Stax began its rise as Soulsville U.S.A., thanks in part to royalties from successful recordings by Rufus and Carla Thomas. A wonderful picture of Rufus Thomas adorns the cover of the 1994 paperback reprint of Peter Guralnick's *Sweet Soul Music.* Thomas, who was described alternately as "the world's oldest teenager" and "the Funkiest man alive," is dressed in dark creased slacks, Hawaiian shirt, and a straw pork pie hat. Behind him is a little bare-chested boy in jeans. On a sweltering Memphis day, Rufus Thomas's sunglasses shield his eyes from the glare. Thomas and the boy stand proudly beneath the old Capitol Theater marquee proclaiming, "Soulsville U.S.A." Rufus Thomas is looking north, in the direction of downtown Memphis and Sun Records. To his west is U.S. Highway 61, the Great River Road, and farther west, lie the Mississippi River and the Mississippi Bridge.

THE DIRECTION HOME

"Mr. Dylan is a cypher, a shape-shifter … swapping various personae down the years, beginning with the original transformation from plain-old Robert Zimmerman," observes the poet and critic David Yezzi. He continues, "Mr. Dylan's public pronouncements, such as the bizarre, tail-swallowing sentences heard in Martin Scorsese's documentary *No Direction Home*

157. Guralnick, *Sweet Soul Music,* 177–212.

(2005), are larded with indirection (either conscious or un-) and duly charm and mystify his fans." Mark Spoelstra, a 1960s Greenwich Village friend, recalls that Dylan "was able to adopt a kind of theater about himself. Actually, the very first time that I met him he was really acting in a way." The songwriter and singer Joni Mitchell is less kind in her assessment of Dylan: "Everything about Bob is a deception."[158]

Excusing Mitchell's remark as a sort of theater in its own right, we are left with the problem of studying Bob Dylan and his role in twentieth-century American history. Dylan obviously enjoyed creating an enigmatic and inscrutable persona. Making abstruse remarks and pronouncements to reporters whom he thought unhip was one of his pleasures in life. There is, however, a way to look at Bob Dylan and reach truthful conclusions about his life and music. While it is not the only way to analyze Dylan, it is important and revealing. The method is based on the fact that Bob Dylan is very much a creation of the Mississippi River Valley. "The Mississippi River, the bloodstream of the blues … starts from up in my neck of the woods," Dylan writes. "I was never too far away from any of it. It was my place in the universe, always felt it was in my blood." The impact of the Great Valley on Bob Dylan begins with his Minnesota youth and young adulthood and flows much further downstream.[159]

All of Bob Dylan's music is rooted in American musical genres—country, blues, gospel, jazz, and rock—that were born in the Mississippi River Valley. Moreover, during important junctures of his career, Dylan created artful and significant music in cities along the upper and lower Mississippi, Tennessee, and Cumberland Rivers. Although he spent much of his early career in New York, the Mississippi Valley always exerted a pull. This began in 1959, when he moved from his hometown of Hibbing

158. David Yezzi, "Poet, Prophet, and a Puzzle: He Inspires Idolatry among Fans, but the Intellectuals Miss Bob Dylan's True Significance," *Wall Street Journal,* May 14–15, 2011, C5 (Mitchell qtn.); Martin Scorsese, *No Direction Home: Bob Dylan,* 2 episodes (New York, 2005), DVD, episode 1 (Spoelstra qtn.).

159. Bob Dylan, *Chronicles, Volume One* (New York, 2004), 240–41 (qtn.). David Pichaske makes a related argument, focusing on the upper Mississippi Valley only, in his *Song of the North Country: A Midwest Framework to the Songs of Bob Dylan* (New York, 2010), passim.

to Minneapolis. There, he changed his name from Zimmerman to Dylan and learned about folk music in university district coffeehouses and bookstores, and through the record collections of Twin Cities folk aficionados. Much later, when he became a Christian, Dylan headed to Muscle Shoals, Alabama, where he recorded *Slow Train Coming* (1979), the first of his religious albums (*Saved,* also recorded in Muscle Shoals, followed in 1980). When he wrote his autobiography, *Chronicles,* in 2004, Dylan chose to spotlight his 1989 stay in New Orleans, where he worked with Daniel Lanois to produce the album *Oh Mercy.* However, the most important of Bob Dylan's Mississippi Valley recording sessions occurred years before Muscle Shoals and New Orleans. In 1969, Bob Dylan's *Nashville Skyline* album signaled both an end to a tumultuous era of American protest and the beginning of a transformational subgenre of American music known as country rock.[160]

Robert Allen Zimmerman was born to Jewish parents, Abram (Abe) and Beatrice (Beatty) Zimmerman, in Duluth, Minnesota, in 1941. Although Abe lost his job in Duluth after contracting polio, both Abe's and Beatty's families had ample means, and Bob grew up in a stable middle-class home. In 1946, the Zimmermans, including Bob's younger brother David, moved from Duluth to Hibbing to be closer to family members. His father helped run a family electronic appliance store. Located about seventy-five miles northwest of Duluth on the Minnesota iron ore range, Hibbing was a prosperous mining town. "The world I grew up in was … still mostly gravel roads, marshlands, hills of ice, skylines of trees on the outskirts of town, thick forests, pristine lakes large and small, iron mine pits, trains and one-lane highways," Dylan recounts in *Chronicles.* He describes the climate of the upper Mississippi Valley: "Winters ten below with a twenty below wind-chill factor were common, thawing spring and hot, steamy summers—penetrating sun and balmy weather where temperatures rose over one hundred degrees… There were glorious autumns as well."[161]

160. Dylan, *Chronicles,* 179–221, 237–58. *Nashville Skyline* is discussed below.
161. Quotes from Dylan, *Chronicles,* 231–32. The best biography is Robert Shelton, *No Direction*

Dylan and his family settled into small town life at their 2425 Seventh Avenue home, surrounded by relatives and friends. Although Dylan recalls the narrow and provincial side of small town life, most of his Hibbing memories are good ones. He writes of ice hockey, swimming, shooting BB guns and 22s, fishing, and watching "big screen drive-in movies" and "dirt track stock car racing." "Television was coming in too," and Bob liked comedies and westerns. There were traveling circuses, and he saw "one of the last blackface minstrel shows." Dylan vividly remembers accompanying his mother dressed "in my little white cowboy boots and cowboy hat" to hear President Harry Truman speak in Duluth. "The upper Midwest was an extremely volatile, politically active area," and the progressive views of the "Farmer Labor Party" (Democrats) dominated.[162]

There was music in Hibbing. The Dylan family had a mahogany radio console with a 78 rpm (revolutions per minute) turntable, and one of Dylan's first musical memories is listening to a gospel record. Later, he spent evenings searching for radio stations from across the Mississippi Valley. Because he was born in 1941, he began to listen to music a few years before rock-and-roll, when big band jazz, blues, country music, and gospel filled the airwaves. Dylan's tastes were eclectic, ranging from Johnny Ray to Muddy Waters. He listened to the *Grand Ole Opry* and became a big fan of Hank Williams (he also liked Webb Pierce and Red Foley). There was a piano in the Zimmerman home, and Bob's and David's mother and aunt gave them rudimentary lessons. Bob also studied the Nick Manoloff guitar chord book (the same one Chuck Berry used in Saint Louis a few years earlier). Dylan progressed on guitar, piano, and harmonica using records, the radio, and live performances as his guide. He writes, "Nationally known country-western stars played at the Memorial Auditorium" in Hibbing, and the Buddy Rich big band appeared at the local high school.[163]

Home: The Life and Music of Bob Dylan (New York, 1986), not to be confused with the Martin Scorsese documentary of the same title. See also Sean Wilentz, *Bob Dylan in America* (New York, 2010).

162. Dylan, *Chronicles,* 230–34. For Dylan and Hibbing, see Shelton, *No Direction Home,* 21–61.

Bob Dylan was about fourteen years old when rock-and-roll music appeared on the scene. He became a devotee of Elvis Presley and Little Richard, and he traveled Highway 61 to see Buddy Holly perform at the Duluth Armory. Dylan joined Hibbing friends in forming rock-and-roll bands they named the Shadow Blasters and Golden Chords; they rehearsed in their parents' garages and performed for local dances. Although Dylan enjoyed and would soon focus all his energy upon folk music, his musical tastes at the time he graduated from high school included each of the indigenous American musical genres interwoven with mainstream ("popular" or "pop") music. He was drawn to country and gospel music; he had fronted rock-and-roll garage bands; and he even briefly performed with the North Dakota singer Bobby Vee. In retrospect, his subsequent two-decade journey from folk to rock to country and gospel music is a product of his youthful music passions. "I always knew there was a bigger world out there but the one I was in at the time was all right, too," he reflects. In 1959, following his high school graduation, Bob Dylan was ready to leave Hibbing for the Twin Cities.[164]

Dylan's route to Minneapolis was Highway 61, the great river road. "Highway 61, the main thoroughfare of the country blues," he writes in the *Chronicles,* "begins about where I came from … Duluth to be exact. I always felt that I'd started on it, always had been on it and could go anywhere on it, even down into the deep Delta country. It was the same road, full of the same contradictions, the same one-horse towns, the same spiritual ancestors."[165]

"I rode in on a Greyhound bus," Bob Dylan recalls, noting that "in Minneapolis … I felt liberated and gone, never meaning

163. Shelton, *No Direction Home,* 21–61; Dylan, *Chronicles,* 95–96, 188, 234 (qtn.); Scorsese, *No Direction Home,* episode 1.

164. Dylan, *Chronicles,* 232 (qtn.), 234; Scorsese, *No Direction Home,* episode 1. Dylan saw Buddy Holly perform three days before Holly died in a Clear Lake, Iowa, plane crash; see Pichaske, *Song of the North Country,* 34.

165. Dylan, *Chronicles,* 240–41, and Pichaske, *Song of the North Country,* 34. See Colleen J. Sheehy and Thomas Swiss, eds., *Highway 61 Revisited: Bob Dylan's Road from Minnesota to the World* (Minneapolis, Minn., 2009).

to go back." He spent the summer at his older cousin Chucky's fraternity house on University Avenue and enrolled at the University of Minnesota for the fall semester. However, Dylan never attended classes. The university district along the Mississippi River—called Dinkytown by UM students—held much more attraction to him than a college education. The University of Minnesota was a large liberal arts school and had fostered a counterculture of sorts. Dylan had no prior experience with bohemians and beatniks other than the writings of the beat poet Jack Kerouac. "I suppose what I was looking for was what I had read about in [Kerouac's] *On the Road*—looking for the great city, looking for the speed and sound of it."[166]

Renting a room over Gray's Drugstore in Dinkytown, Dylan put his love of rock-and-roll music on the back burner and dove into his new life as a folk musician. The late 1950s marked the third decade of the great urban folk music revival that had begun during the New Deal years. As we have seen, *Grand Ole Opry* musicians still used the term "folk music," but the urban folk revival encompassed Anglo- and Celtic-American ballads and African-American spirituals and blues as well as mountain ("hillbilly") music. The movement was driven by educated musicians, folklorists, and collectors, many of them operating out of the New Deal's Federal Music Project, the Smithsonian Institution, and the Library of Congress. Alan Lomax, Charles Seeger, the Weavers (including Pete Seeger, Ruth Alice "Ronnie" Gilbert, Lee Hays, and Burl Ives), Odetta, Theodore Bikel, and John Jacob Niles were noted folklorists or urban folk musicians. Moreover, a new generation of urban folk music scholars and practitioners such as Alan Lomax, Jr., the New Lost City Ramblers (including John Cohen and Mike Seeger), Joan Baez, Maria Muldar, and the commercially successful Kingston Trio were appearing on the scene. While in Dinkytown, Bob Dylan became a disciple and practitioner of this brand of folk music.[167]

166. Dylan, *Chronicles,* 234–36. For Dylan in Minneapolis see Shelton, *No Direction Home,* 62–86.
167. Shelton, *No Direction Home,* 62–86; Dylan, *Chronicles* 237–39. For the urban folk revival, see Bill C. Malone and David Stricklin, *Southern Music, American Music,* rev. ed. (Lexington, Ky., 2003); 80–81, 145–46; Bill Malone and Jocelyn R. Neal, *Country Music USA,* 3d ed. (Austin,

Dylan traded in his electric guitar for a double-O Martin acoustic (five years later he would strap on an electric guitar once more) and began to study and perform. "I had no other cares or interests besides folk music. I scheduled my life around it." He frequented and sang at the Ten O'Clock Scholar and Bastille coffee shops and the Purple Onion pizza parlor. He began to learn Delta blues music because it "was connected to early rock and roll and I liked it because it was older than Muddy [Waters] and [Howlin'] Wolf." The world of folk music seemed like a "parallel universe" to Dylan, a "reality of a more brilliant dimension, "with more archaic principles and values: one where actions and virtues were old style … [with] Stagger Lees, Pretty Pollys, and John Henrys… It was all there and it was clear—ideal and God-fearing… Folk music was all I needed to exist." He also changed his name from Bob Zimmerman to Bob Dylan. Although many writers have tried to explain his motives for choosing that name (a desire to avoid anti-Semitism and respect for the poet Dylan Thomas are most commonly cited), Bob Dylan has, typically, provided little help in their search. In 2005, he said he could not remember why he chose the name Dylan.[168]

While working his way through record shops and the record collections of Dinkytown acquaintances, Bob Dylan discovered Woody Guthrie, the Oklahoma populist folk singer. Guthrie's acoustic guitar style, coarse voice, and repertory of traditional and self-composed songs captured Dylan's imagination and consumed his work for over a year. "I was stunned," he writes. Guthrie's music "made me want to gasp" with its "poetic and tough and rhythmic" style. "For me it was an epiphany." He listened over and over again to Guthrie's compositions "Jesus Christ," "Pretty Boy Floyd," "Hard Travelin'," "Talkin' Dust Bowl Blues," "Grand Coulee Dam," "This Land Is Your Land," and more. He also read Guthrie's autobiography *Bound for Glory,* which

Texas, 2010), 130; Peter Gough, *Sounds of the New Deal: The Federal Music Project in the West* (Urbana, Ill., 2015), passim.

168. Dylan, *Chronicles,* 234–43 (qtns., 235–36, 240). In *Chronicles,* 78–79, Dylan provides a circuitous narrative description of his name change, while in Scorsese, *No Direction Home,* episode 1, he says he cannot remember why he changed his name.

superseded *On the Road* in his imagination. Then, "it was time for me to get out of Minneapolis … New York City was the place I wanted to be and one snowy morning around daybreak … with only a few rags in a suitcase and a guitar and harmonica rack, I stood on the edge of town and hitchhiked east to find Woody Guthrie.[169]

In the history of American music, the story of Bob Dylan's hitchhiking trip to and residence in New York City's Greenwich Village is as evocative as stories of Bessie Smith's Chattanooga upbringing and path to her first blues recording, Louis Armstrong riding the Illinois Central to join Joe Oliver in Chicago, Count Basie forming his own orchestra in Kansas City, Hank Williams stepping onto the stage of Nashville's *Grand Ole Opry,* and Elvis Presley walking into the Sun Records studio in Memphis. There are many stories about Dylan among the beatniks and folkies of Greenwich Village. Some of those stories are true. Dylan did visit and sing for Woody Guthrie, who was slowly dying of Huntington's disease in a New York hospital. He did become a semiprofessional houseguest, sleeping on friends' couches and floors until moving in with his girlfriend, Suze Rotolo. He did pore over friends' book and record collections, gaining an impressive knowledge of poetry, philosophy, art, history, and music. He did frequent the New York Public Library, reading nineteenth-century microfilmed newspapers "to see what daily life was like" around the time of the Civil War and to learn the "godawful truth … that would be the all-encompassing template behind everything that I would write." And he did meet, and so impressed, John Hammond, the same man who had brought Count Basie and Billie Holiday into national prominence, that Hammond helped him secure a recording contract with Columbia Records for his first album, *Bob Dylan* (1962).[170]

169. Dylan, *Chronicles,* 243–44, 257. For Woody Guthrie, see Malone and Stricklin, *Southern Music, American Music,* 81, and Malone and Neal, *Country Music USA*, 130–32.

170. *Chronicles,* 84–86, 258–64 (qtn., 86); Scorsese, *No Direction Home,* episode 1. For Dylan in Greenwich Village to the time of his Columbia Records deal, see Shelton, *No Direction Home,* 87–113.

In Greenwich Village, Bob Dylan was an outsider, surrounded by established folkies like the New Lost City Ramblers, Dave Van Ronk, Ramblin' Jack Elliot, Joan Baez, and others. These musicians' views confirmed an opinion he had formed in Minneapolis after meeting the folk music collector Jon Pankake. Dylan concluded that many insiders were "folk snobs" with unreasonable demands for purity in folk music. For example, they advocated solely acoustic instrumentation and eschewed all electric guitars and drums (though they would abide vocal microphones and the miking of instruments at performance venues). The professional folklorists among them argued that only "traditional" songs with anonymous authorship—not composed tunes—were "authentic." However, urban revivalists made an exception for composed "topical" songs that addressed current societal problems. Purists like Alan Lomax believed that only Blacks should perform blues music, and that it was unethical for whites to do so.[171]

Urban folk revivalists fervently opposed what they considered the commercialization of folk music. Marketing to a mass audience, they believed, would water down folk authenticity. John Cohen of the New Lost City Ramblers proudly states that the Ramblers represented "*integrity,* or standing for something authentic or real in music." The Ramblers "lived in the pure, clear light of non-commercial, long-playing, and *short-selling* Folkways [Records]." These purists, Dylan recalls, "looked down on anything that smelled of commerciality and were vocal about it: groups like The Brothers Four, Chad Mitchell Trio, Journeymen, Highwaymen—the folk snobs considered them exploiters of a sacred thing." Other successful groups that aroused suspicions were the Kingston Trio, Smothers Brothers, New Christie Minstrels, and their *Hootenanny* television show counterparts. Even Peter, Paul, and Mary were suspect. Dylan did not like commercialized folk music either, and he acknowledged there were "snobs" in both camps. But he was much more tolerant than the purists. "I tried to keep everything in perspective."[172]

171. Dylan, *Chronicles,* 253; Scorsese, *No Direction Home,* episode 1. For Lomax's aversion to white bluesmen, see above, and Shelton, *No Direction Home,* 301.

What Dylan slowly learned was that the anticommercialism of urban folk revivalists was based, in part, on Marxism. During its 1930s beginnings, the urban folk revival included members of the Communist Party. The New Deal agencies in which the folk revival percolated were peppered with Communists. Charles Seeger (Federal Music Project) and his son Pete both belonged to the Communist Party; Woody Guthrie never joined, but worked and traveled with many who did; Lee Hays of Seeger's group the Weavers was a Communist Party member. Leftist musicians had come to see folklore as emblematic of the proletarian culture. They composed topical songs—also dubbed protest music—depicting the laboring class's struggles against capitalism and the righteousness of the workers' cause.[173]

As Stalinist atrocities and the failure of Soviet communism became common knowledge, the U.S. Communist Party declined. By the late 1950s and early '60s, aging New Deal leftists who were still active sought new life in the emergent American civil rights, free speech, and antiwar movements. They enjoyed a sort of martyrdom for having been targeted by the House Un-American Activities Committee and anti-Communists like Joe McCarthy. A new left was arising, accompanied by a new folk music revival. The old leftists saw themselves as mentors to the young radicals and folkies, some of whom saw themselves as inheritors of the old radical traditions. Although never stated explicitly, old and new leftists alike yearned for a cultural leader and figurehead—a new Woody Guthrie—to sing topical songs on behalf of the movement. In this yearning, they were joined by some mainstream liberals and influential journalists and radio and television commentators.[174]

By 1963, Bob Dylan seemed the perfect heir to Woody Guthrie.

172. Dylan, *Chronicles,* 253; John Cohen in Scorsese, *No Direction Home,* episode 1, emphasis in original (Cohen obviously saw some irony in his reflection). Pete Seeger and Woody Guthrie staged the first Hootenanny gathering in Seattle in 1940.

173. Gough, *Sounds of the New Deal,* 6–7, 19–21, 28, 227 n60. For protest music, see Malone and David Stricklin, *Southern Music, American Music,* 80–81.

174. Shelton, *No Direction Home,* 159–200; Scorsese, *No Direction Home,* episodes 1 and 2. A pathbreaking overview of historical writing about the old American left is John Earl Haynes and Harvey Klehr, *In Denial: Historians and Communism* (San Francisco, Calif., 2003).

His guitar playing and vocal style were in important ways modeled after Guthrie. He had inherited a strong populist bent from his family and from the Minnesota Farmer Labor Party culture in which he grew up.[175] His girlfriend, Suze Rotolo (whose parents were Communists), was active in "the movement." He had written or would soon write some of the most important protest songs in American history—"Talkin' John Birch Society Blues" (1962), "Blowin' in the Wind" (1963), "The Lonesome Death of Hattie Carroll" (1963), "Masters of War" (1963), "When the Ship Comes In" (1964), "Only a Pawn in Their Game" (1964), "With God on Our Side" (1964), and of course "The Times, They Are A-Changin'" (1964). Pete Seeger and others obviously saw Dylan as a torchbearer of the radical cause, and the national news media began to report on the charismatic young folksinger. Dylan traveled with Seeger to Mississippi to sing for civil rights workers, and he appeared on stage during the 1963 March on Washington organized by Bayard Rustin and Philip Randolph. The program featured an array of civil rights leaders and liberal activists, including Doctor Martin Luther King, Jr.[176]

Although on the surface Bob Dylan appeared willing to take on this role of youth protest leader, there was another side to Dylan that was essentially apolitical and even antipolitical. "I didn't know Pete Seeger was a Communist," he recalls in the Scorsese documentary, "and it wouldn't have made any difference to me anyway. I didn't think of people in those terms." He continues, "To be on the side of people who are struggling, doesn't necessarily mean you're political." Dave Van Ronk, once an ardent leftist, explains,

> He was thought of as being … a man of the left and, in a very general way he was. But he wasn't interested in, you know, the true nature of the Soviet Union, or any of that crap. We thought he was hopelessly politically naïve, but in retrospect he may have been more politically sophisticated than we were.

175. Pichaske, *Song of the North Country,* 199–247.
176. Scorsese, *No Direction Home,* episodes 1 and 2. A good overview is Peter Wood, "Eternal Protest: Bob Dylan's Lasting Rage," *Academic Questions* 28 (Fall 2015), 313–21.

Significantly, Bob Dylan had by late 1963 come to believe members of the left were exploiting him, using his fame and music towards their own political ends. "I was sick of the way my lyrics had been extrapolated, their meanings subverted into polemics," he recalled. "I never wanted to be a prophet or a savior."[177]

All of this came to a head in two famous, or rather infamous, incidents—Dylan's December 1963 Emergency Civil Liberties Committee (ECLC) awards banquet speech and his 1965 performance at the Newport (Rhode Island) Folk Festival. The ECLC was a group of aging left wingers, many of whose claim to fame was that they had refused to testify when subpoenaed by the House Un-American Activities Committee and federal courts. As a result, some were blacklisted and lost their jobs. They held an annual banquet to present their Tom Paine Award to promising and likeminded individuals. The resplendent trappings of the Manhattan Hotel Americana venue and formal evening attire worn by the 1400 attendees mirrored the affluence and embourgeoisement of ECLC members. The irony of a leftist event being staged in such a manner did not escape Bob Dylan, who drank heavily before taking the stage that fateful evening.[178]

Dressed in jeans and a suede jacket, Dylan began his rambling, offensive, and at times incoherent speech by making jokes about the age and appearance of the audience members, chiding, "It's not an old people's world." Recalling the March on Washington, he sarcastically noted that the coats and ties worn by Black civil rights leaders on stage were not typical of ordinary Black dress. Later, he incoherently spoke of similarities he shared with Lee Harvey Oswald, who had assassinated John F. Kennedy a mere three weeks prior. By the time Dylan left the stage, offended audience members were booing and hissing him.[179]

177. Scorsese, *No Direction Home,* episodes 1 and 2 (Seeger, "people who are struggling," and Van Ronk qtns.); Dylan, *Chronicles,* 120 (polemics qtn.); Yezzi, "Poet, Prophet, and a Puzzle" (prophet qtn.). In a fascinating revelation, Dylan states he avoided arguing politics with Van Ronk and others because "I had a primitive way of looking at things and I liked County Fair politics. My favorite politician was Arizona Senator Barry Goldwater, who reminded me of Tom Mix, and there wasn't any way to explain that to anybody." *Chronicles,* 283.

178. Shelton, *No Direction Home,* 200–205.

However, at the very beginning of his remarks, and before his descent into drunken meandering, Bob Dylan had enjoyed a moment of clarity. His opening line of thought would soon evolve into the song "My Back Pages" (1964), which characterized protest and radical politics as vain and senseless pursuits. "It took me a long time to get young," he said to the ECLC members. Then he offered an example of the wisdom that had come with his newly won "youth":

> There's no black and white, left and right to me anymore. There's only up and down, and down is very close to the ground, and I'm trying to go up without thinking about anything trivial such as politics.

In "My Back Pages," Dylan would refer to his flirtation with protest music as a mistaken venture, singing, "I was so much older then, I'm younger than that now."[180]

Surprisingly, the ECLC speech did not immediately end Dylan's association with left-wing activists and folkies, though it was a pivot. He soon wrote a letter of apology to the ECLC, expressing respect for their past struggles but ending, "I do not apologize for being me nor any part of me." He continued to appear at the annual Newport Folk Festival, an important East Coast gathering of folk revivalists, and he began a romance with Joan Baez, the iconic folksinger and peace activist. Baez, however, grew frustrated with Dylan's refusal to use his music and status to oppose the Vietnam War, which was becoming the new left's cause célèbre.[181]

Meanwhile, Dylan began to move back in the direction of electric blues and rock-and-roll, developing a music subgenre known as folk-rock.[182] His last overtly topical album, *The Times They Are A-Changin'* (1963) was followed by an LP entitled

179. Ibid.
180. Ibid.; Bob Dylan, "My Back Pages," *Bob Dylan's Greatest Hits Volume II,* 1971, Columbia, KG31120, LP.
181. Shelton, *No Direction Home: The Life and Music of Bob Dylan,* 205; Scorsese, *No Direction Home,* episode 2. Baez and Dylan in Scorsese, *No Direction Home,* episode 2.
182. Paul Nelson, "Folk Rock," in *The Rolling Stone Illustrated History of Rock and Roll,* ed. Kim Miller (New York, 1976), 216–21.

Another Side of Bob Dylan (1964). On his subsequent albums, *Bringing It All Back Home* (1965) and *Highway 61 Revisited* (1965), Dylan played electric guitar and fronted a rock-and-roll ensemble. He sang only his own songs, some of which featured inscrutable, poetic lyrics. His 45-rpm folk-rock recording "Like a Rolling Stone" became a huge 1965 hit record and captured the imaginations of young people across America and Europe. Asked by a reporter if he would be attending at a Vietnam War protest, Dylan responded, "I'll be busy tonight."[183]

There is some intriguing film footage of the 1964 Newport Folk Festival. On a small stage with a sign announcing a "Topical Folksong Workshop," Bob Dylan is singing "Hey, Mr. Tambourine Man," a song with mysterious and fanciful lyrics about the singer's quest for truth and contentment. Pete Seeger is sitting in a chair directly behind Dylan, listening attentively. He is looking only slightly uncomfortable with the fact that "Mr. Tambourine Man" is in no way, shape, or form a topical folksong. In 1965, "Hey, Mr. Tambourine Man" would become a number one 45-rpm hit record for the Byrds, a group that sang a score of Dylan songs as they helped shape the new folk-rock subgenre. That same year, Bob Dylan was back at Newport, appearing on the main stage in the festival finale. His performance shocked Seeger and other urban folk revivalists.[184]

The 1965 Newport Folk Festival took place during a time when America was awash in turmoil over President Lyndon Johnson's Vietnam War policy, the rise of Black power and feminist movements, and an emergent hippie counterculture replete with hallucinogenic drugs and folk-rock music. Dylan told only a few individuals that he planned to perform a hard-driving folk-rock set at Newport. The core of his backup group was the Paul Butterfield Blues Band, a dynamic amplified ensemble that had been working with Dylan on "Like a Rolling

183. Scorsese, *No Direction Home,* episode 2. Selected songs from the above albums are also on *Bob Dylan's Greatest Hits,* 1967, Columbia KCS 9463/KCL 2663, LP, and *Bob Dylan's Greatest Hits Volume II*.

184. Scorsese, *No Direction Home,* episode 2. The best account of Dylan at Newport in 1965 is Shelton, *No Direction Home,* 301–304.

Stone" and the *Highway 61 Revisited* recording sessions. Dylan and his band were slated for a one-hour set, but it lasted only about fifteen minutes. They began with "Like A Rolling Stone" and, the singer Maria Muldar recalls, about a third of the audience began to boo them. Although some applauded, purists felt betrayed and shouted, "Get rid of the band!" "Sell-out!" and "This is a folk festival!" Before leaving the stage, Dylan sang "I Ain't Gonna Work on Maggie's Farm No More," a song with lyrics that represented his departure from folk music snobbery:

> I ain't gonna work on Maggie's farm no more.
> Well, I try my best to be just like I am.
> But everybody wants you to be just like them.
> They say sing while you slave, and I just get bored.
> I ain't gonna work on Maggie's farm no more.

Amid both catcalls and applause, the emcee Peter Yarrow (of Peter, Paul, and Mary) implored Bob Dylan to return for a solo, acoustic "encore." He complied, singing "Mr. Tambourine Man" to quiet down the audience. The words to his second and final song, however, brought the meaning of the occasion back home: "Strike another match, go start anew," he sang before leaving the stage, "And it's all over now, Baby Blue."[185]

Backstage, "Mr. Tambourine Man" had not in any way quieted down Pete Seeger, who had brought his aged father Charles to the concert. Seeger was furious, and tales about him threatening to chop the main stage public address electric cords are true. He remembers, "I was frantic… I said … 'Goddamn it, it's terrible. You can't understand it. If I had an axe, I'd chop the mic cable right now.'" Seeger, however, had no axe and did not chop anything. Maria Muldar remembers, "All the old leftist protest singing factions were horrified. 'This is pop music! This isn't folk music!'" Bob Dylan himself was surprised at the ferocity of the reaction, but he had made his choice. Years later, his poet friend Allen Ginsberg summarized this transition in Dylan's career,

185. Shelton, *No Direction Home,* 301–304; Scorsese, *No Direction Home,* episode 2 (Muldar qtn.); "Like a Rolling Stone," *Bob Dylan's Greatest Hits;* "I Don't Wanna Work on Maggie's Farm No More" and "It's All Over Now, Baby Blue," *Bob Dylan's Greatest Hits Volume II.*

relating how he had served notice that "he was not a political poet and nobody's left wing servant … and astonished and pissed everybody off by not being a nice trained seal."[186]

After Dylan left Newport, he continued to tour with a new backup band called the Hawks (soon to be dubbed simply The Band). Their concerts opened with a solo acoustic set followed by a folk-rock set. Admiring crowds were always peppered with hecklers, both in America and Europe, which proved irritating to Dylan. After a 1966 motorcycle accident sidelined him, he gave up touring for eight years. He continued to record, but was looking for another pivot and a new musical direction. Around him, the unrest and violence of mid-1960s America continued to escalate. "In a few years' time a shit storm would be unleashed," he reflects in the *Chronicles.* "Things would begin to burn … the road out would be treacherous, and I didn't know where it would lead but I followed it anyway."[187]

The "road out" began with his marriage to Sara (Shirley Noznisky) Lownds and their move from New York City to Woodstock, in rural upstate New York. Sara soon gave birth to the first of four children they conceived during their twelve-year marriage. A musical turn also accompanied married life in the country. Dylan recorded *Blonde on Blonde* (1966), his double album masterpiece, in Nashville, Tennessee. There he made important connections, including working with the producer Bob Johnston and solidifying his friendship with Johnny Cash, whom he had met at Newport in 1964. Dylan's musical temperament began to mellow in this environment, and he rekindled an old passion for country music. The acoustic, country stylings of *John Wesley Harding* (1967), an album produced by Johnston in Nashville, set the stage for a dedicated country music recording.[188]

As we have seen, the sounds of country music are interwoven

186. Shelton, *No Direction Home,* 301–304 (qtns.); Scorsese, *No Direction Home,* episode 2.

187. Scorsese, *No Direction Home,* episode 2; Dylan, *Chronicles,* 292. The author of this book attended a concert at the Seattle Coliseum in 1965 where Dylan was both booed and cheered.

188. Shelton, *No Direction Home,* 380–83; Peter Doggett, *Are You Ready for the Country: Elvis, Dylan, Parsons, and the Roots of Country Rock* (New York, 2000), 20–28.

into Bob Dylan's memories of growing up in Hibbing, Minnesota. When he first heard Hank Williams on the weekly *Grand Ole Opry* radio show,

> the sound of his voice went through me like an electric rod and I managed to get a hold of a few of his 78s—"Baby, We're Really in Love" and "Honky Tonkin'" and "Lost Highway"—and I played them endlessly… Even at a young age, I identified fully with him.

When Dylan learned of Williams's 1953 death, "It was like a great tree had fallen. . . . I knew, though, that his voice would never drop out of sight or fade away—a voice like a beautiful horn."[189]

One of Bob Dylan's interesting idiosyncrasies, to this day, is the way he dresses to perform on stage. Those who have seen him in concert since the 1970s know his love of yoked western jackets, boots, bolo and ribbon ties (hand-tied), and stylized western hats. Bob Dylan's stage costumes are a modern variant of the fancy outfits worn by Hank Williams and country western singing stars popular during Bob Dylan's Mississippi Valley youth.[190]

In the late 1960s, having played a major role in creating the folk-rock subgenre, Bob Dylan joined the Byrds, the First National Band (with Michael Nesmith), Linda Ronstadt, Emmylou Harris, and like-minded musicians to develop country rock, an important new subgenre of country music.[191] Dylan's *Nashville Skyline* (1969) album differed from the Byrds' breakout *Sweetheart of the Rodeo* (1968) country rock LP (also recorded in Nashville) in that it did not cover any country standards (Dylan wrote all of the songs himself) nor employ vocal harmonies,

189. Dylan, *Chronicles,* 95–96.

190. The last time this writer saw Dylan perform he was wearing a stylized nineteenth-century U.S. Army cavalry uniform, complete with boots, black-striped pants, western tie, and a small sombrero.

191. For country rock, see Doggett, *Are You Ready for the Country,* passim; Malone and Stricklin, *Southern Music, American Music*, 142–44; Malone and Neal, *Country Music USA,* 386–88, 392–94; Paul Nelson, "Folk Rock," 216–21; Sid Griffin, "Southern Comfort: The Byrds' Country Years," *Mojo Collections* (Spring 2002), 79–85; Allen, "I Just Want to Be a Cosmic Cowboy," 275–99; Michael Allen, *Rodeo Cowboys in the North American Imagination* (Reno, Nev., 1998), 136–39, 162–63; Lechner, *The South of the Mind,* 55–85.

banjo, or fiddle. Produced by Bob Johnston, *Nashville Skyline* featured some of Nashville's top studio musicians, including the guitarists Norman Blake and Charlie Daniels. Dylan recalls he was "hoping [Johnston would] bring in Charlie Daniels … I felt our histories were somewhat similar," and Daniels remembers Dylan as a dedicated family man who was friendly and supportive in the studio. Dylan "didn't use the cookie cutter method of recording over and over again, overdubbing, composite vocals, and absolute perfection," Daniels writes. "Bob never belabored the point." Johnston, the producer, expressed his own unique opinion about Dylan's artistic method:

> I believe in giving credit where credit's due. I don't think Dylan had a lot to do with it. I think God, instead of touching him on the shoulder, he kicked him in the ass. Really… He can't help what he's doing. I mean he's got the Holy Spirit about him, you can look at him and tell that.[192]

Nashville Skyline is made up of ten lean, melodic country songs. Eight of them are love songs, and only one of those eight ("I Threw It All Away") is about lost love. "Nashville Skyline Rag" is an instrumental, featuring Daniels's James Burton-like "chicken pickin'" guitar licks. "To Be Alone with You," is a rock-and-roll song, but the other tracks combine elements of both rock and country. "Lay, Lady, Lay," a ballad with a memorable pedal steel guitar accompaniment, became a hit single record. The album's other famous song is its first cut, "Girl from the North Country," a haunting duet Dylan sings with Johnny Cash. The album cover features Dylan holding an acoustic six-string guitar and tipping his western-style hat to the viewer. He is smiling—only the second time he had smiled on an album cover. Thirty-five years later, Dylan reflected on *Nashville Skyline* with typical understatement. "I quickly recorded what appeared to be a country-western record, and made sure it sounded pretty

192. The Byrds, *Sweetheart of the Rodeo,* 1968, Columbia Records, CS 9670, LP; Dylan, *Chronicles,* 122, 136 (qtn.); Charlie Daniels, *Ain't No Rag: Freedom, Family, and the Flag* (Washington, D.C., 2003), 142 (qtns.); Johnston in Scorsese, *No Direction Home,* episode 2. Dylan and Cash do harmonize on "Girl from the North Country."

bridled and housebroken," he writes. "The music press didn't know what to make of it. I used a different voice, too. People scratched their heads."[193]

The record-buying public did not scratch their heads. They bought so many LPs that *Nashville Skyline* rose to number three on the Billboard chart and brought Dylan his first platinum (best-selling) album award. More important, *Nashville Skyline* fueled the country rock surge that shaped American popular music for a decade and country music for more than a generation. Country rock marked an important overall shift in American culture as well as American music. As the 1970s approached, the violence and polarization of the '60s slowly began to recede. "The link between radical politics and rock music which had flowered between 1965 and 1969 had effectively vanished," the music historian Peter Doggett writes. "Revolutionary zeal" and "collective radicalism" were replaced with "a purely individual search for 'freedom' and 'self-expression.'" Rock-and-roll music—which had in five short years traveled from the Beatles' "I Want to Hold Your Hand" to Jimi Hendrix's dissonant rendering of the "Star Spangled Banner"—finally began to mellow and return to its roots. Bob Dylan helped lead the way.[194]

A group of talented musicians, many with Mississippi Valley connections, joined Dylan and the Byrds in the country rock movement: Linda Ronstadt and her backup band, the Eagles; Credence Clearwater Revival; Rick Nelson and the Stone Canyon Band; the Flying Burrito Brothers; Gram Parsons and Emmylou Harris; Commander Cody and the Lost Planet Airmen; Mason Proffit; Asleep at the Wheel; the Nitty Gritty Dirt Band; and Jimmy Buffet and the Coral Reefer Band. The Grateful Dead contributed their countrified *Workingman's Dead* (1970) LP and begat Bay Area country rockers, the New Riders of the Purple Sage. Poco, a hard-driving country rock band formed

193. Bob Dylan, *Nashville Skyline,* 1969), Columbia Records, KCS9825, LP; Dylan, *Chronicles,* 122. An interesting analysis of Dylan's midwestern accent on *Nashville Skyline* is in Pichaske, *Song of the North Country,* 98–99, 102. Previously, Dylan had smiled only on the *John Wesley Harding* (1967) cover, though he displays the tiniest hint of a smile on *The Freewheelin' Bob Dylan* (1962).

194. Doggett, *Are You Ready for the Country,* 157, 164, 336.

by former members of Buffalo Springfield, recorded "Pickin' up the Pieces" (1969), a song whose title and lyrics mirrored the changes taking place in America and American music. Soon, a group of Texans and southern rock "outlaws"—notably Willy Nelson, Waylon Jennings, Jessi Colter, Hank Williams, Jr., and David Allan Coe—lent their impressive country music credentials to country rock. Indeed, for more than a generation, country rock lay at the core of country music, carried on by a line of musicians that includes but is in no way limited to Tanya Tucker, Alan Jackson, Dwight Yoakum, Pam Tillis, Lucinda Williams, Garth Brooks, and Brad Paisley.[195]

Although he would continue to record country and folk-rock music, Bob Dylan, as always, experimented with new projects, locales, and genres. He moved to Malibu, California, then back to New York, and he bought and regularly visited his 100-acre farm on the Crow River (a tributary of the Mississippi) near Hanover, Minnesota. He returned to touring and is still performing (without audience hecklers) at live concert venues. As noted, ten years after recording *Nashville Skyline* on the Cumberland River, Dylan was in Muscle Shoals on the Tennessee, working on the first of two dedicated Christian music LPs. A decade after that, he traveled to New Orleans on the Mississippi to make a record with the noted producer Daniel Lanois. And he has produced much more music in a career that at this writing includes thirty-six studio LP records and more than thirty million albums sold in America alone. Recently, Dylan turned to Frank Sinatra's jazz and pop repertoire in his *Shadows in the Night* (2015) LP. In 2009,

195. Classic country rock albums are the Byrds, *Sweetheart of the Rodeo;* the Byrds, *Ballad of Easy Rider,* 1969, Columbia Records, CS 9942, LP; Flying Burrito Brothers, *Close Up the Honky Tonks: The Best of the Flying Burrito Brothers, 1968–72,* 1972, A&M, SP-363, LP; Nitty Gritty Dirt Band, *Dirt, Silver, and Gold,* 1976, United Artists, UA-LA670-L3, LP; Poco, *The Very Best of Poco,* [1969] 1999, Epic, EK 6573, CD; Mason Proffit, *Bareback Rider,* 1973, Warner Brothers, BS 2704, LP; Linda Ronstadt, *Hand Sown and Home Grown,* 1971, Capitol Records, ST 208, LP; Credence Clearwater Revival, *The Royal Albert Hall Concert,* [1970] 1980, Fantasy, MPF 4501, LP; Gram Parsons [with Emmylou Harris], *Sacred Hearts and Fallen Angels: The Gram Parsons Anthology,* 2001, Rhino, R2 76780, 2 CDs; Waylon Jennings [with Willy Nelson, Hank Williams, Jr., and Jessi Colter] *Nashville Rebel,* 2006, RCA/Legacy, UPC: 828768964026, 4 CDs; Dwight Yoakum, *If There Was a Way,* 1990, Reprise, 9 26344-2, CD; Brad Paisley, *American Saturday Night,* 2009, Arista, 88697-47352-2, CD.

he made a Christmas album. Could any of his bohemian Dinkytown or Greenwich Village friends have ever imagined they might one day hear Bob Dylan singing "Here Comes Santa Claus," "Silver Bells," "Little Drummer Boy," and "O Come, All Ye Faithful"?[196]

Dylan's biographers have often used road images to describe his life, emphasizing his constant searching and homelessness. Dylan himself has provided much grist for the homeless mill. "I was born very far from where I'm supposed to be, and so I'm on my way home," he declares at the outset of Scorsese's documentary. Scorsese's movie title, *No Direction Home,* is taken from the title of the 1985 Robert Shelton biography, which is drawn from one of Dylan's best-known songs, "Like a Rolling Stone." Yet Dylan is not singing about himself in "Like a Rolling Stone." He is scolding a former lover who has fallen on hard times: "How does it feel?" he asks her. "How does it feel? / To be on your own / With no direction home / A complete unknown / Like a rolling stone?"[197]

Bob Dylan has a home. It is the Mississippi Valley. As we have seen, he was born in Duluth, raised in Hibbing, and became a professional musician in Minneapolis, on the banks of the Mississippi, "the bloodstream of the blues … my place in the universe." As a young man, Dylan traveled Highway 61, "the main thoroughfare of the country blues," and recalls, "I always felt that I'd started on it, always had been on it and could go anywhere on it." Although Dylan left the Mississippi Valley to live elsewhere, he refreshes his spirit on his Crow River farm, and at critical points in his life has gravitated to Nashville, Muscle Shoals, and New Orleans to record music. And everywhere he has gone during an eventful career, Bob Dylan has brought the Mississippi Valley with him through his performance of the indigenous music—blues, country, rock, jazz, and gospel—rooted in the soil of the Great Valley.[198]

196. Pichaske, *Song of the North Country,* 12, 60, 170; Bob Dylan, *Christmas in the Heart,* 2009, Columbia, 88697573231, CD. Dylan was awarded the 2016 Nobel Prize in Literature. He did not attend the ceremony.

197. Scorsese, *No Direction Home,* episode 1.

"You create out of your own experiences," Dylan once told the journalist Robert Hilburn, and in *Song of the North Country,* David Pichaske expands on that thought: "Dylan's experiences growing up in Minnesota shaped, and thus explain, much of his work, from actual subject matter through speech and style to conscious and unconscious habits of thought and perception." I agree, but I expand Pichaske's idea to include all the Mississippi Valley, not just the upper half. The culture of the American heartland, north and south, helped shape Bob Dylan.[199]

Bob Dylan wrote his *Chronicles* with no linear or chronological organization. The book's form is free, and it is not until its ending (the last sixty of nearly three hundred pages) that the reader learns about Dylan's beginnings, his family tree, Duluth birth and early childhood, and growing up in Hibbing with its "swimming holes and fishing ponds, sledding … Fourth of July fireworks, tree houses—a witches' brew of pastimes." Very near the end, he recounts a conversation with his early manager, Lou Grossman, in which they discussed Roger Maris, the legendary early 1960s New York Yankees slugger. Maris was a native of Hibbing, Minnesota, and "on some level I guess I took pride in being from the same town," Dylan explains. "There were other Minnesotans, too, that I felt akin to." He points to the aviator Charles Lindbergh, from Little Falls; F. Scott Fitzgerald, author *The Great Gatsby,* from Saint Paul; Sinclair Lewis, author of *Main Street* and *Elmer Gantry* and "the master of absolute realism" from Sauk Center; and Eddie Cochran, "one of the early rock and roll geniuses who was from Albert Lee, Minnesota":

> Native sons—adventurers, prophets, writers, and musicians. They were all from the North Country. Each one followed their own vision… Each one of them would have understood what my inarticulate dreams were about. I felt like I was one of them or all of them put together.[200]

198. Dylan, *Chronicles,* 240–42.
199. Pichaske, *Song of the North Country,* 4. See also Sheehy and Thomas, *Highway 61 Revisited: Bob Dylan's Road from Minnnesota to the World.*
200. Dylan, *Chronicles,* 291–92.

EPILOG: THE MYSTERY BELOW

I must get a job on the river again. Lead a river rat's vagrant life…
John Hartford, *Headin' Down Into the Mystery Below*[1]

The subtitle to Dick Bissell's memoir *My Life on the Mississippi, or Why I Am Not Mark Twain* is too delicious to pass up. As we have seen, Bissell was from Dubuque, Iowa, a Harvard graduate who spent much of his life towboating, houseboating, writing a Broadway musical about his family's pajama factory, and writing fiction and nonfiction books about the Mississippi Valley. In the first chapter of *My Life on the Mississippi,* he explains, "Because I myself write books about the Mississippi River, because I used to be a pilot on the Mississippi River and hold a pilot's license today, the critics for twenty-three years have been calling me 'a modern Mark Twain.' Now is that fair?" He continues, quoting several reviews of his towboat novels *A Stretch on the River* (1950) and *High Water* (1954) that gush, "…not since Mark Twain…," "…in the tradition of Mark Twain…," and "…takes its place with Mark Twain," etc., etc. Innocently wandering into the grocery store in a neighboring town, Bissell is confronted by the store lady, who says "Say—I seen you someplace in the paper already. Ain't you that modern Mark Twain from over at Dubuque?"[2]

1. John Hartford, *Headin' Down into the Mystery Below,* 1978, Flying Fish Records, FF-063, LP, liner notes.
2. Richard Bissell, *My Life on the Mississippi, or Why I am not Mark Twain* (Boston, 1973), 5–6, passim. See Richard Bissell, *A Stretch on the River: A Novel of Adventure on a Mississippi River Towboat* (1950; repr. Saint Paul, Minn., 1987) and *High Water: A Novel of Adventure on a Mississippi River Towboat* (1954; repr. Saint Paul, Minn., 1987). Minnesota Historical Society Press added the identical subtitle to both 1987 reprints. See also Richard Bissell Induction

Any artist or writer who tackles a Mississippi theme is vulnerable to the "modern Mark Twain" reference, mainly due to journalists looking for a quick lead and an early end to their day's work. Yet this cliché did not faze another "modern-day Mark Twain," John Hartford, a Grammy Award–winning singer, songwriter, instrumentalist, and licensed western rivers towboat pilot. Born in Saint Louis in 1937, Hartford had as his fourth-grade teacher Miss Ruth Ferris, who introduced him to the world of river history. "I was a pretty bad boy, but she called my bluff / With her great big collection of steamboat stuff," he later sang in his tune "Miss Ferris." A parallel interest in folk, country, and bluegrass music led to a musical career that skyrocketed in 1967 when Glenn Campbell charted at number one with Hartford's composition "Gentle on My Mind." Hartford next helped pioneer an important experimental bluegrass music subgenre dubbed newgrass. Yet throughout this time, Hartford also worked as a deckhand, mate, and towboat pilot, shipping on diesel towboats on the Ohio, Cumberland, Tennessee, and Mississippi Rivers. He was especially drawn to the Illinois River, where he used his record royalties to restore and sail the steam-powered *Julia Belle Swain* as an overnight excursion and showboat.[3]

John Hartford carried on Richard Bissell's work. While Bissell's novels *High Water* and *A Stretch on the River* are the only literature to accurately, and evocatively, tell the story of modern diesel towboatmen, Hartford is the only musician to tell that story on sound recordings. That Bissell and he stand alone is remarkable, because, by all rights, the towboatmen who crew the nation's western rivers fleet ought to belong to the elite group of modern American folk heroes that includes truck drivers,

File, and chapter 6 and 7, this work, for a discussion of *The Pajama Game* and Bissell's houseboating experiences.

3. John Hartford Induction File, National Rivers Hall of Fame, National Rivers Museum, Dubuque, Iowa; "Hartford Artifacts Donated to Pott Library," *Waterways Journal* 123 (August 17, 2009), 13. Quote from John Hartford's "Miss Ferris" in *Headin' Down into the Mystery Below*, 1978, Flying Fish Records, FF-063, LP. For Ferris, see chapter 3, this work; for Hartford and newgrass, see chapter 8. Hartford's steamboat photo albums are in the John Hartford Collection, Herman T. Potts Inland Rivers Transportation Library, Saint Louis Mercantile Library, University of Missouri, Saint Louis.

NASCAR drivers, SEC football players, astronauts, rodeo cowboys and cowgirls, and military commandoes. Yet they do not. Think, for example, of all the popular songs written about truck drivers. Why not diesel towboatmen? Perhaps modern rivermen are literally and figuratively invisible, removed from the shore ("the bank," as they call it) for weeks and months at a time, sailing in a river world largely unknown to their landlocked countrymen. Two of Hartford's record albums give the Mississippi towboatmen their due.

John Hartford recorded the Grammy-winning *Mark Twang* on the Flying Fish folk label in Nashville in 1976. He wrote all the songs and is the only musician on the album: singing, playing each acoustic instrument (fiddle, banjo, and guitar), making percussive mouth noises (akin to the traditional Black patting juba form), and performing the primary percussion by clogging (tap dancing) with his feet on an amplified floorboard. Unlike dedicated truck driver–song performers (e.g., Dave Dudley, Red Sovine, Dick Curless, Red Simpson, and Dale Watson), Hartford includes non-towboat songs and sings about steamboats, but his spotlight is on diesel towboatmen.[4]

"Skippin' in the Mississippi Dew" introduces the set in a minimalist style, with vocal, fiddle, and clogging. Recalling his early days as a towboat deckhand, Hartford sings, "It used to be spring, I'd ship on the river / 35 days on a Valley Line boat" and paints a romantic portrait of towboating in the "Mississippi dew." The song "Let Him Go On, Mama" is a tribute to "an engineer over on the Ohio River / Runnin' in the Pittsburgh trade." Hartford tells of an old fellow who worked on towboats throughout the middle decades of the twentieth century and still walks "down to the fleet" in the morning and cooks up a "pot of gumbo" on Friday night. "Long Hot Summer's Day" is a memorable tune in which Hartford sings, plays banjo, and clogs a

4. John Hartford, *Mark Twang,* 1976, Flying Fish Records, No.020, LP. Patting juba and tap dancing are discussed in chapter 2, this work. For tap dancing, see Brian Seibert, *What the Eye Hears* (New York, 2015). The only comparable recording about rivermen—Cathy Barton and Dave Para's *Living on the River*—is cited above and in chapter 2, this work. Barton and Para sing about presteam and steamboat men, not diesel towboatmen.

syncopated rhythm. The song tells of a riverman's workday, with a chorus that references the traditional towboat schedule of one month on, and a half month off: "For every day I work on the Illinois River / get a half a day off with pay / A towboat makin' up barges / on a long hot summer's day." On the *Mark Twang* album jacket is a dedication to the late towboat man Bob Burtnett of Chillicothe, Illinois, who "will be missed by all of his friends up and down the Illinois, Mississippi, Ohio, and Tennessee rivers. A move is under way to name a navigation light after him on the Illinois River."[5]

Following *Mark Twang* in 1978 was *Headin' Down into the Mystery Below,* also produced by Michael Melford on Flying Fish Records. Hartford wrote all the songs and plays all instruments, but he adds a small vocal ensemble (including Jeannie Seeley) for backup, harmony, and a call-and-response sequence. As on *Mark Twang,* Hartford dances the percussion, wearing running shoes with metal taps on a "3/4″ 4′ x 8′ sheet of new Grade A unfinished plywood" with a "piano pickup" (microphone) attached. "Miss Ferris" sets the tone on track one, as Hartford recalls his childhood discovery of the river world. When he sings, "I started readin' the *Waterways Journal* and all / following Captain Fred Way and C. W. Stoll," he is referring to a well-known towboat industry magazine and two venerated captains and river historians.[6]

In *Headin' Down into the Mystery Below,* Hartford devotes two songs to the difficulties of towboat piloting. "In Plain View of Town" is about a pilot running barges aground and the embarrassment he feels trying to push them off with an audience of locals following his every move. "Kentucky Pool" is set on the lower Tennessee River in southwest Kentucky, where a lock and dam have turned the river into a lake. The listener hears a tale of woe from a pilot running on a dark, rainy night. The pilot has unknowingly turned his towboat around; he thinks he is heading upstream when he is instead going down. "Kentucky pool made a fool out of me," he laments. Near song's end, Hartford dubs

5. Hartford, *Mark Twang.*
6. Hartford, *Headin' Down into the Mystery Below.* Clogging quote is on album jacket.

in a live recorded marine radio track with the actual voice of a confused towboat pilot lost at night querying a nearby pilot, who cannot contain his amusement at the other's plight. The first pilot at last concludes, "I'll catch you on the one whistle, Cap," using river slang that denotes the side of the other's tow he will pass in going downstream.[7]

Although *Mark Twang* won a Grammy, *Headin' Down into the Mystery Below* is Hartford's most significant telling of the towboatmen's story. This is largely because of two powerful songs. The title song, *Headin' Down into the Mystery Below,* is discussed at the end of this epilog. "On Christmas Eve" is set "on the lower Mississippi / Full moon tonight / Where the Spanish moss hangs from the trees / Down in Louisiana, on Christmas Eve." The song tells a story common among career diesel towboatmen. Towboats run day and night, three hundred sixty-five days a year. They may tie up for Christmas, but only if they happen to be at the port of destination; otherwise, they sail towards that destination. In this tale, Hartford recalls his feelings in finding himself hundreds of miles away from home on a sacred holiday. He reflects on the motivations that led him to seek a career on the river, and his conclusions are ambiguous. "That muddy water, never quite comes clear," he sings, "When I try to explain, give a reason why I'm down here." And he asks a question: "Ain't you got no family? / No place to be? / Out on the river, on Christmas Eve."[8]

Hartford's short poem on the album jacket of *Headin' Down into the Mystery Below* provides a less melancholy coda:

> I must get a job on the river again Lead a river rat's vagrant life Paintin' stairs, movin' chairs Sleep on deck sometimes Stories heard on the Lazy Bench Fixin' the search lite's arc Carryin' coffee up to the old man Stumblin' in the dark.[9]

7. Ibid.
8. Ibid.
9. Ibid. The "lazy bench" is a small seating area in the pilothouse where off-duty crewmen often congregate, especially after supper.

The author of the book you are reading is not a "modern-day Mark Twain," but he did have a life on the Mississippi.

I was born in 1950 and raised in the town of Ellensburg, where the foothills of the Cascade Mountains turn into the semiarid plains of eastern Washington State. If, during my youth, I ever saw a Columbia River towboat pushing barges, I do not remember it. All my early knowledge of the eastern United States, especially the history of the American Revolution and early Mississippi Valley frontier, came from wonderful Walt Disney television shows and movies. To a boy growing up on the Columbia Plateau in the 1950s, Disney movies provided a view of a green Mississippi Valley world of deciduous mountain forests and prairies, home to Daniel Boone, Davy Crockett, Big Mike Fink, Jim Bowie, and Johnny Shiloh. Much of Disney's classic *Old Yeller* was filmed east of the 98th meridian, and the opening scene to *Davy Crockett and the River Pirates,* with a sweeping vista of the Ohio River, made a big impression on me. Walt Disney movies showed me that, twelve hundred miles away, there was a humid world that teemed with exotic things called fireflies and turtles and alligators and was alive with stories from American history. I yearned to see the Mississippi Valley and learn more about its history.

One summer, the Ellensburg Public Library sponsored a program in which children were to read books about the different states of the union. We were given black-and-white maps of the United States, and each time we read a book about a state, the librarian would give us a colored sticker of that state to paste onto the map. It was like a jigsaw puzzle. I filled in the map that summer, and I vividly recall sticking Minnesota, Wisconsin, Illinois, Tennessee, and all the Mississippi Valley states onto the map in contrasting blues, greens, reds, and yellows.

As a teenager, I continued my study with library books and schoolwork. When I graduated from Ellensburg High School in 1968, I joined the U.S. Marine Corps and, returning from Vietnam, I was given GI Bill benefits and the economic means to become a professional student. As a history major, I learned about the Mississippi Valley at Central Washington State College

(my senior thesis was "The Federalists and the West, 1783–1803") and the University of Montana (my MA thesis was "The Confederation Congress and the Creation of the First American Western Policy, 1783–87"). During my first year in Missoula, Montana, I decided it was time I saw the Mississippi River. I hitchhiked east in 1975 and crossed the river on I-80 at Davenport, Iowa, the same place where Jack Kerouac had first viewed his "beloved Mississippi" three decades earlier.[10] Hitching into Illinois, I was stopped by a state policeman who informed me I was breaking the law; then he did me a huge favor by pointing me back to Iowa via Moline. I found myself walking on a road marked with green signs decorated with steamboat steering wheels and the designation "U.S. Highway 61: The Great River Road." I had somehow managed to find my way into the heart of the Promised Land.

We Americans have always liked to move around. The Pilgrims crossed the Atlantic, Boone and his pioneer brethren crossed the Appalachians, and the Forty-niners, Mormons, and Oregon Trail trekkers crossed the Great Plains. When Americans could no longer travel due west, they began to traverse the country aboard railroad trains and, later, to drive the back roads in automobiles. Jack Kerouac drove U.S. Highway 6, and he was succeeded by hippies in VW buses, traveling the two-lanes in the spirit of Peter Fonda's and Dennis Hopper's *Easy Rider.* All these Americans—from the Pilgrims to the hippies—were looking for America.

In Muscatine, Iowa, I teamed up with a runaway teenager named Billy, and we hitched Highway 61 south. We slept in the brush on the Missouri state line, and I saw my first firefly, another sign of Zion. Billy's family caught up with him in Hannibal, and I caught a ride to Memphis with two guys from Macalester College who were on a graduation trip to New Orleans. I took the Greyhound bus back to Montana and learned about a wondrous thing called a bus pass. The cost was just $165.00 for thirty days; you got on the bus and rode anywhere in

10. Jack Kerouac, *On the Road* (1955; repr. New York, 1958), 14. See chapter 4, this work.

North America you wanted to go. Included in the price was the ambience of Greyhound bus depots and their staffs and clientele. It was a low culture Eurail pass.

The next summer, I came east on the Greyhound across lower Canada, entering the United States via Thunder Bay, Ontario. I followed Highway 61 along Lake Superior to Duluth, Bob Dylan's birthplace. On that trip, I traveled 61 from the Twin Cities to Saint Louis, combining the bus with hitchhiking when I wanted to visit off-route locales. Later, I figured out there are alternate Great River Roads that are not numbered 61, and that the Wisconsin and Illinois roads are a lot closer to the river than those on the Minnesota, Iowa, and Missouri side. In Wabasha, Minnesota, I slept under a picnic table (I had no tent) at the river park, swam in the Mississippi for the first time, and walked to Wisconsin on the steep-arched highway bridge. In Dubuque, Iowa, there was a cable car to the hilltop and an old river hotel (and what appeared to be a lively prostitution trade). By the time I got to Canton, Missouri, I had perfected the arts of picnic table camping and waiting in laundromats with only a swimsuit for cover. Canton also had a car ferry crossing to Illinois, and for $1.80 Captain Allen Blackmore took me on two round trips. That whetted my appetite to travel *on* the river as well as drive alongside it.

In 1977, after earning an MA degree in history from the University of Montana, I headed east again on the Greyhound bus. I had begun to savor the four- to five-hour transition that slowly takes place in the Dakotas around the 98th meridian, when the Great Plains change into the lower Missouri and Mississippi Valleys. Hitchhiking near Bagley, Minnesota, I mistakenly left my bus pass in a woman's car, retrieved it, but then failed to catch a ride to the Mississippi headwaters at Lake Itasca. Although the fall colors were spectacular, I had to see the Delta, and so I headed south (not until five years later did I finally see the headwaters). On the Continental Trailways bus from Saint Louis to New Orleans, a talkative driver told me many stories, some of which might have been (mostly) true. I learned about kudzu (which grows a "foot a night"), panthers,

wild hogs, gator tail stew, and water moccasins. Hitching on the Arkansas side, I caught a ride with an eighty-eight-year-old man named London England Tillman. He had a brother named Paris France Tillman, and they had grown up in northwest Tennessee, near Reelfoot Lake. London took me across the Greenville, Mississippi, bridge, and I saw the Mississippians' Winterville Mounds. I was at last in the Delta blues country. I crossed the river again to pick up the Greyhound in Helena, Arkansas.

My three-year career as a Mississippi towboatman began in jail in Helena, but it's not as bad as it sounds. I met a fireman who introduced me to his brother, a policeman and Vietnam veteran. This guy was a real entrepreneur. In addition to his police job, he subcontracted appliance delivery for Sears and Roebuck and ran a downtown business security service (I helped him check alley door locks that night). He and his brother were also students in an automotive repair program at the local community college. He took me there, and it turned out all the other students were also military vets, drawing monthly GI Bill checks while keeping their day jobs. On week nights, they used the college shop to work on their own cars and feast from huge deep-fat fryers they had constructed for fish fries that accompanied each "class." That is where I ate my first catfish.

I told the policeman I needed a shower and a place to stay, and he told me I could stay in the holding tank at the jail. He seemed to think I would be perfectly safe, so I spent the night there (in retrospect, it was a bad decision that turned out okay). In the Helena jail, I talked to a guy who worked off and on as a deckhand on lower Mississippi River towboats. I asked him how I could get a job, and he told me there were nearly two dozen towboat companies downriver in Greenville, and that if I went around knocking on doors someone might hire me. To my amazement, he was right. I went to work for Valley Towing as a deckhand on the M/V *Ole Miss* in late spring of 1978.

As a far westerner, I had a lot to learn about inland rivers navigation. To begin, "towboat" is a misnomer because the boats actually *push* barges in front of them. Twin-screw, internal combustion engine, diesel-powered river craft evolved in the

middle decades of the twentieth century as the Army Corps of Engineers built elaborate locks and dams on the western rivers to ensure year-round navigation depths. Towboats vary in size from 600-700–horsepower harbor tugs to huge 10,000-horsepower boats that can push twenty, thirty, or more loaded barges upstream against the strong current of the lower Mississippi River. The boats I worked on ranged from 1800 to 3500 horsepower and pushed up to ten barge tows of gasoline, petroleum, hot oil (asphalt), and anhydrous ammonia (for making fertilizer).[11]

The largest of my crews were twelve men; I worked with only two women, both of whom were cooks. My smallest crew was six men. Everyone but the cooks worked six hours on and six off each day for a month and then took two weeks off before restarting the cycle; cooks designed their own daily schedules but also worked thirty days on, fifteen off. All of us thus spent eight months on the boat and four months on the bank each year (in a thirty-year career, that would be twenty years on the boat, ten years on the bank). The crew was divided into ranks. A captain and pilot did the navigating, engineers maintained the engines and boat infrastructure, and the mates and their deck crews "made tow"—connecting barges together with steel wires and hand winches, constructing huge cargo units to push to market destinations. The cook fed the crew three times a day and left out midnight snacks.

I started on the river as a nonunion deckhand in Greenville earning $1,200 a month plus 10 percent "vacation pay"; I finished as a Seafarer's International Union (SIU) cook working out of the port of Saint Louis for $2,000 a month plus 10 percent vacation pay. When on the boat, I spent next to nothing, so this was a lot

11. For towboat technology evolution, see Charles Edwin Ward File, National Rivers Hall of Fame, National Rivers Museum, Dubuque, Iowa; George P. Parkinson, Jr., and Brooks F. McCabe, Jr., "Charles Ward and the *James V. Rumsey:* Regional Innovation in Steam Technology on the Western Rivers," *West Virginia History* 39 (January–April 1978), 143–80; Michael C. Robinson, *History of Navigation of the Ohio River Basin,* National Waterways Study NWS-83-5 (Washington, D.C., 1983), 28–33. In the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, development of Z-drive propulsion units further improved towboat power and efficiency.

of money in the late '70s and early '80s. My union classification was "utility tankerman," which meant that I was a cook licensed to work as a deckhand and oil tankerman (loading and unloading petroleum products). In fact, I was the world's worst deckhand and tankerman, and my captains all had the sense to keep me in the galley, where I showed promise. On my Valley Towing Company (Greenville) job, we worked the lower Mississippi River, mainly between Memphis and Baton Rouge. But my National Marine Service (Saint Louis) job took me up and down most of the western rivers—to the head of navigation on the upper Mississippi, up the Saint Croix as far as Stillwater, Minnesota, to Joliet on the Illinois River, Monroe, Louisiana, on the Ouachita, Catoosa, Oklahoma, on the Arkansas River, and across the Louisiana bayous and Gulf of Mexico on the Intracoastal Waterway, from Mobile, Alabama, to Galveston Bay. I was blessed to begin my career on a converted steamboat (the *Ole Miss*), and during my three years on western rivers I worked aboard the M/Vs (Motor Vessels) *City of Greenville, Mama Lere, National Enterprise, National Glory, National Gateway,* and *National Progress.*

It is hard to generalize about life aboard a towboat, but I will give it a try. It is both a good life and a bad life. The racket of diesel engine noise was, for me, disturbing, and I never got used to it; river men jokingly call twin General Motors (GM) towboat engines "Screamin' Jimmies." I wore ear muffs when moving through the engine room and around the boat, but some men at that time just slowly lost some of their hearing. Making conversation around all that noise (and with folks who could not hear well) was difficult; so too was deciphering marine radio banter. Television reception (by antenna on the galley TV) was often bad. It was okay when we tied up in port and when sailing near towns. But a bend in the river could change everything in the course of one television show and, when combined with engine noise, made watching TV on a towboat a finely honed skill. There was a lot of staring at the screen and guesswork about what was going on.

Yet the head of the tow, often a hundred yards from the bow

of the boat, was amazingly quiet and peaceful. Leaning or sitting back against a barge bulkhead, and out of the captain's sight, deckhands sometimes took their breaks there, talking and staring out at the shore (and smoking marijuana). It was so quiet on the head of the tow I could sometimes hear cicadas chirping ashore. The stern, though noisy, was a good place too. While engineers took their breaks sitting on a crate astride a port or starboard engine room hatch, cooks often took their breaks on the stern. I have good memories of evenings spent sitting there on a plastic milk crate, watching the wheel wash (propeller turbulence) and huge red sunsets and full moons that were pumpkin orange (a cook, Nan Hodges, told me these were "hog killing moons"). Below Memphis, and between Natchez and Baton Rouge, the lower Mississippi was a huge, swampy wilderness. We saw ducks and geese and hundreds of deer grazing and drinking along the flood plain; at one point, far off in the distance, shone the lights of Louisiana's Angola prison. Further south lay the bayous and the Gulf Coast. I recall pushing tows across the Mississippi Sound and Galveston Bay as the sun set over the Caribbean Sea.

But the smell of ammonia and hot oil, combined with engine noise, was sickening. And twelve-hour workdays, scheduled six hours on, six off, were rough, because five and a half hours was the most sleep anyone could possibly get in one installment. And there was overtime. I once worked thirty-six hours without sleep, building tow and running locks on the Arkansas River, while somehow cooking and serving a Thanksgiving dinner.

However, I will never forget that Arkansas Thanksgiving and, as I look back, there are many good memories. Pushing hot oil from Dubuque, Iowa, to Saint Paul (Pine Bend), Minnesota, one summer, we found ourselves in a world of summer cabins, fishing camps, houseboats, and water skiers. I also loved the Illinois River around Marseilles and Starved Rock, with bald eagles perched in trees along the bank, watching our progress in between their fishing jaunts. I spent the afternoon of July 4, 1978, eating barbecue and swimming with fellow boatmen in a Memphis slip, diving off the bow of *Mama Lere.* To the south,

pushing petroleum from Houston to Baton Rouge by way of Houma and Morgan City, I watched some remarkable television shows around five o'clock in the morning, with Black musicians decked out in full cowboy regalia singing country and blues songs in French (that was an eye- and ear-opener for a Pacific northwesterner). With our boat laid up with a twisted propeller at a Brusly, Louisiana, shipyard, I found a joint that served as hunting camp, boat launch, café, honky-tonk, and the local chapter of the Moose Lodge. There was not a sign in sight advertising any of these services. One day, I was sitting at the bar and a guy came in carrying a chicken he had accidentally run over with his truck in the driveway. The cook dressed the bird and threw it in the gumbo pot.

Meanwhile, on my days off, I lived at Shorty's Boardinghouse in Greenville and, later, the Gateway and Baltimore hotels in Saint Louis. The latter two ranked several notches above flophouses and were patronized by an all-male clientele of rivermen, railroaders, and truck drivers. The only women there were strippers (in the Baltimore hotel bar) and prostitutes, riding the elevators late at night. Coming back to my room late from a movie or a Cardinals or Blues game, I encountered them, dead tired, returning to their rooms after their night's work.

I met all kinds of folks on the river, some beloved characters, and some fools whom I never want to see again (ever), and many men who fell in between those extremes. In Greenville, there was a relief mate nicknamed Choker whose great pride was his cockfighting hobby. Once, he opened his duffel bag to show me some cockfighting spurs and pictures of his roosters and I noticed that all he had brought with him for a thirty-day trip was a toothbrush, one extra t-shirt and a pair of underwear, and a loaded pistol. Choker's roosters were beautiful. Then there was Captain J, who succeeded in running me off my first cooking job on the *City of Greenville* because he did not believe that men should be towboat cooks (boat companies were sharply divided between those who used only men cooks and those who hired only women). As part of his strategy, Captain J ate only one of my meals and then lived off white bread, canned meat, and canned

peaches three times a day for a week. The first mate and engineer soon joined him; the last straw for the mate was when I served spaghetti, a dish he told me he had never eaten and never would.

Fleety and Nan were Greenville cooks on the *Mamma Lere,* stoic islands of forbearance amid the profane, all-male crew. Andy Robitschek, an oil tankerman, grew up in Kenya with missionary parents and was dubbed the "redheaded African"; Andy was a rodeo bull rider and sometime undergraduate at Murray State (Kentucky). Steve, the first mate on the *Ole Miss* was a redneck hipster who nicknamed me "Daddy Rabbit." Dave Miller of Memphis was the *Mamma Lere's* "hippie captain," a seasoned, second-generation riverman who played guitar in the wheelhouse and introduced me to John Hartford's *Mark Twang*.

When I went to work for National Marine in Saint Louis, I found a mix of old-line Mississippi Valley pilots, engineers, and cooks working alongside union deckhands, many of whom came from eastern port cities (where they lacked the seniority to secure lucrative deep-sea berths). There, I worked about a dozen thirty-day trips on small, 1800-horsepower boats with crews of six. A deckhand on the *National Enterprise* who wanted to be called "Chief" claimed to be both part Apache Indian and a Green Beret Vietnam veteran. In fact, he was a pathological liar who stole our money and jewelry before being caught red-handed carrying a sea bag full of life vests off the boat! Referring to Chief, Captain Red noted, "that son of a bitch must be a hundred years old—he'd have to be a hundred to do everything he claims he done." On the *National Glory,* Captain B was a Marine Corps Korean War veteran who encouraged returning deckhands to bring him a magnum of Jack Daniels, which he could finish off in a couple of days (Coast Guard regulations forbid alcohol and other drugs on towboats). Because of D, an ammonia tech (tankerman) on the *National Glory,* cooks were forced to keep two bottles of vanilla extract on hand, one for cooking and one for D's personal use.

Then there were the young deckhands. Shipping aboard the *National Enterprise,* Keith (named "Brillo" for his long hair) and Alan aimed, respectively, to become an engineer and a pilot.

Wade ("Country") showed me that the thickest southern accents on the river can come from southern Illinois (Elizabethtown). He called me "Cook," stressing the flat oo (*nobody* on the river ever called me "Cookie"). Wade had never tasted cheesecake before I served it up one day topped with canned cherry pie filling, after which he became a great admirer of what he called "Cook's Cherry Cheese Pie." Mike was a worthless Saint Louis deckhand who lasted only two trips because he could not wake up when called for watch; Mike introduced me to Van Halen and wrote me a bad check when he quit National Marine on Christmas Day 1979. Leo McConaghy was an eighteen-year-old south Boston deckhand just out of the SIU training school. Presiding over the *National Enterprise*'s menagerie was Captain Roy Pharr, a south Alabamian who loved early '60s folk music (Brothers Four and Peter, Paul, and Mary) and read the poetry of Rod McKuen. Roy's relief was a pilot named Pee Wee, who was a little too nervous to be pushing ammonia barges.

As cook, I lacked rank but possessed clout. The galley was our boat's living room, and I was the social director. A well-fed crew is good for business, and the company allowed me to order any and all the groceries I wanted. Captain J's critique notwithstanding, I was a good cook, especially considering I was a northwesterner who had to learn how to prepare Mississippi Valley (including Cajun) dishes. On Mondays I served roast pork, Wednesday was chicken and dumplings, Friday was fried catfish, Saturday was steak dinner, and on Sunday we always ate fried chicken. Other hearty entrées were interwoven into that menu. Per towboat tradition, I served a big dinner at noon, while the evening supper consisted of leftovers with fresh bread (yeast rolls, biscuits, or cornbread) and a new entrée. I was known for my supper entrées, catering to the young deckhands' love of Italian food, including pizza, Mexican dishes, deli fare, and even chow mein. At Christmas, I served smoked turkey alongside a big traditional roasted bird, and decked the galley with wreaths, tree lights, and holiday decor. As John Hartford sang, being "out on the river, on Christmas Eve" is bittersweet. I hope that, out on the

river right now, there are a few boatmen who remember a good Christmas spent in one of my galleys.

Segregation was coming to an end when I worked on the river. Jose, a Puerto Rican SIU deckhand from New York City, was the first Black employee of National Marine. The union also shipped a Pakistani deckhand whom we called Jimmy because no one could pronounce his name (Jimmy used a lot of hot sauce on that Thanksgiving turkey). First Mate Floyd on the *National Progress* was Mexican American (as was Chief), and A. J. Rosenthahl, for whom I served as relief cook on the *National Progress,* was the son of a French Cajun mother and Jewish father. In his corner pantry closet, A. J. had tacked a sign above the canned vegetables—The Wailing Wall. Cajuns were ubiquitous; many had earned their pilot's licenses as teenagers. They spoke strongly accented Cajun English. Women were few and far between, and, perusing the pages of a recent issue of *Waterways Journal*, I still see an overwhelmingly male workforce. Indeed, when people ask me today why I quit working on boats, I tell them it was in part because I got tired of spending two thirds of my time with a bunch of men.

But I never got over working on the river. Typing these words forty-one years later, I am still not over it. When I shipped for National Marine, commuting by air to get on a boat in Saint Paul, or Memphis, or Little Rock, I walked through air terminals with a swagger, vain about the fact that I was no lowly landsman. I bragged that I worked on the *river,* not on the *bank.* Choker, in a rare moment of introspection, once said to me, "Now, you tell someone you work in a factory or you're a butcher, and that don't mean nothin'. But you tell them that you're a *towboatman* and, well, that's got a ring to it." Joseph Conrad was a little more literary than Choker. Reflecting on his years as a merchant sailor, Conrad wrote, "Wasn't that the best time, that time when we were young at sea; young and had nothing, excepting hard knocks—and sometimes a chance to feel your strength."[12]

About the same time that Conrad shipped as a merchant

12. Conrad quoted in Bissell, *My Life on the Mississippi,* 232.

seaman, Mark Twain reminisced about his steamboat days in *Life on the Mississippi:* "If I have seemed to love my subject, it is no surprising thing, for I loved the profession far better than any I have followed since, and I took measureless pride in it." And seven decades after Twain, Dick Bissell reflected on his towboating in a passage that begins with a thought similar to Choker's: "Why don't plumbers … exult in their craft like this? And carpenters?" Bissell's answer: "The river is dark and mysterious, but it's your baby, you know it like a poem. You're the big cheese, it's all up to you. It's a real pilot house, real coal barges, and you're The Man."

> Why did I go on the river? … I went on the river because I liked boats all my life and I liked the river and I had already been a deckhand on the river and deep sea and I liked the smell of engine rooms and I loved those big steel barges and I liked river people and I liked the talk… I liked to cuss the company and hang around in saloons with other rivermen and our girls and act tough. I actually liked to go ashore in the yawl with the mate and flounder around in the brush and the mud in the middle of the night getting a line onto a cottonwood tree. I liked to feel that I was romantic, hard-boiled, hard-working, and a hard case.[13]

Two decades after Bissell wrote these lines, John Hartford recorded "Headin' Down into the Mystery Below" on the record album of the same title. Hartford's performance is typically lean; he does the singing to the accompaniment of only his banjo and foot-clogging rhythm. He sets the stage for the song's story. We are on a towboat in the early morning, heading downstream. "When the sun burns the fog, the hills come out, like a slowly developin' photograph," he sings. "The hills and sky repeat themselves / in a 6 o'clock river of glass." Staring into the waters that flow beneath his boat, Hartford sees "the ghost of a lumber raft" and the "endless names and faces and the souls of men / who worked on the river." He reflects, as he does in so many of his songs, on what it is that has compelled him to be a boatman:

13. Mark Twain, *Life on the Mississippi* (1883; repr. New York, 2001), 79–80; Bissell, *My Life on the Mississippi,* 222, 232–33. Bissell also notes that river work exempted him from the draft.

"Well, I tried to understand why I love the river / Tried to understand why I love to sing," he states. "Seems like if I could understand the river / Maybe I could understand most anything." Of course, he cannot answer the question. As in the song "On Christmas Eve," he cannot precisely articulate his passion for river life. And so, in the tradition of all great river songwriters, Hartford surrenders to the river's downstream current:

> Out here the water's deep and swift We're paddling in the flow
> Headin' down out of the mystery above Headin' down into the mystery below.[14]

As they aged, Dick Bissell and John Hartford both spent their lives much closer to the river than Mark Twain did in his older years. Twain wrote his sister Pamela in 1864, "I have never *once* thought of returning home to go on the river again"; as soon as he achieved notoriety, he moved to upstate New York, and then Connecticut, where he died in 1910. After his own stint in Connecticut, Dick Bissell returned to Dubuque, Iowa, where he died along the upper Mississippi in 1977. John Hartford built a home overlooking the Cumberland River in Nashville and lived and worked there until he succumbed to cancer in 2001. Neither Twain, nor Bissell, nor Hartford chose to give up their artistic careers to return to full-time riverboating. They traded working on boats for creating literature and music about boats. "Every couple of weeks or so I, too, dream I am back on the river," Bissell recalled jokingly. "Anyway, I have a grand time and when I wake up I am at home and the old lady is here and so is old dog Tray and that's the way I like it."[15]

I left the river in 1981, wrote a doctoral dissertation about Ohio and Mississippi flatboatmen, and somehow managed to become a college professor. I retired my SIU book in 1981, but was able to continue paying dues on it with the option of reactivation. I was married with three kids and wanted to be able to ship on a towboat if we ever needed the money. But in 1991,

14. Hartford, *Headin' Down into the Mystery Below.*
15. Bissell, *My Life on the Mississippi,* 229, 235.

I earned tenure at the University of Washington, Tacoma, and I stopped paying my SIU dues. That was a hard thing to do.

I return to the Mississippi River every year, usually in the fall, to volunteer for the Community of Christ at the Joseph Smith Historic Site in Nauvoo, Illinois. During the evenings, I sit on the porch, read the *Waterways Journal* (including the Help Wanted ads), and watch the big red sun descend across the horizon. I can see the towboats churning up and down the Mississippi, pushing their loads. I look for the cook on the stern, sitting on a milk crate.

NOTE ON SOURCES AND ABRIDGED BIBLIOGRAPHY

This book is multidisciplinary, with chapters about the history, economics, politics, folklore, popular culture, arts, movies, and music of the Mississippi Valley. The large scope of secondary literature used precludes an unabridged bibliography. The best place to identify sources is in the notes themselves. For this reason, I have used footnotes rather than endnotes.

What follows is a list of essential works for students and scholars of the Mississippi Valley. A few are primary sources, but most are secondary. If I have somehow neglected to list an important source, I beg the author's forgiveness.

Readers will note that I cite many older works that some might (unkindly) label "outdated." I believe that while the work of past scholars might carry some misperceptions and dated points of view, we should not throw out the baby with the bath water. The present generation of scholars does not have a monopoly on historical truth.

Thus, the works cited below come from multigenerational authors who help us to better understand the Mississippi Valley. These works are, in my opinion, the "greatest hits" in the literature of the Mississippi Valley.

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Finally, I am vain enough to eschew alphabetical order and end with some of my own work. These are cited in the book's footnotes alongside additional river-related articles I have published.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Photo by Jill Carnell Danseco

Michael Allen, Professor Emeritus of History at the University of Washington, Tacoma, was born and raised in Ellensburg, Washington, and graduated from Ellensburg High School in 1968. After service as a U.S. Marine Corps artilleryman in Vietnam (1969–70), he worked as a Mississippi River deckhand, oil tankerman, and cook. He earned his BA, MA, and PhD in history from, respectively, Central Washington State College, University of Montana, and University of Washington, Seattle. He has published eight books and taught at Tennessee Technological University, Deep Springs College, Eastern Montana College, and University of Washington, Tacoma. Michael Allen has three adult children—Jim, Davy, and Caroline—and lives in Ellensburg. In 1997, he helped found the Ellensburg Rodeo Hall of Fame Association, and he currently

helps create museum displays at the Western Culture and Arts Center in Ellensburg.