

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 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’ beaux) 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 Bissell, *7½ 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 Varsoviennne," 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 cavalymen. 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; Guralnick, *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-stripped 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 Gualnick 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.; Gualnick, *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. Gualnick, *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 *Odyssey*) 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 portrayals 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/tomsawyer/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 Schaub 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 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 Rafelson, also in a lull after helping produce *Easy Rider* (1969) and directing the acclaimed *Five Easy Pieces* (1970). To play opposite Field, Rafelson 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 "pistol" 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 Rafelson, dir., *Stay Hungry* (1976; repr. MGM, 2004), DVD, special features.

84. *Stay Hungry*, Bob Rafelson 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 southerners and is reflected in the movies' settings, musical scores, language and accents, food, and other folkways. Southerners 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, southerners are populated by archetypal 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. Southerners 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 Piggott, 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 southernness). 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 southerners 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 southerners, 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 mamma.” 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 southerners. 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 portrayals 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 McCoy*s (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. Lil’ 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 "cement 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 Whitlege (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 southerners, 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 Dillard, *The Dillard: 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 says 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.tagrwc.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.