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Walking into the Light: Ideology and The Hollywood Classroom

By

Robert Christopher Nellis   ©

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research in partial fulfillment

of the requirements for the degree of Master of Education

in

Social and Cultural Context of Education

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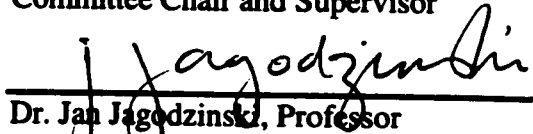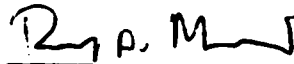
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Dedication

Dedicated to Joyce Elaine Chaykoski, my partner, companion, and friend.

ABSTRACT

Walking into the Light: Ideology and The Hollywood Classroom (1) analyzes 25 Hollywood films depicting educational phenomena and (2) identifies the ideological character of the individual films, their sub-genre categories, and the entire sample.

Methodologically, the study is situated within (1) Critical Social Science (CSS) and (2) Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA); as well, (3) it applies the depth hermeneutics of John B. Thompson's Tripartite Approach.

The thesis divides the films into six categories: (1) the classroom Western (depicting schools saved from lawlessness); (2) pictures of privilege (featuring British public or American private schools); (3) the teen comedy; (4) the teen drama; (5) the adult comedy; and (6) love letters to me (sentimental epistles of the teaching profession). The study finds that the overall ideological character of the pictures is liberal and that this is best explained by Antonio Gramsci's conception of hegemony. The project concludes by presenting possibilities for action.

Acknowledgement

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Introduction

Introduction

The cinema has come to occupy a significant space in the North American cultural landscape. Every weekend, millions flock to theatres to purchase their popcorn and tickets. What news do people receive at the outset of each new week? Why reports and rankings of the foregoing weekend's box office receipts, of course. If that is not enough, there are also video and DVD rentals in addition to movies on television most every night.

North Americans, it seems, love stories, and many come from the movies. Colleagues talk about these yarns and tales at the water cooler, hear about them on the radio, read them debated them in print. The influence of the screen narrative is everywhere. However, what about the stories beyond the screen? What tales are told, if not between the lines, beyond the screen? These questions allude to the subject of my thesis.

The submerged narrative of film is a topic rarely broached, especially in pictures depicting education and educational phenomena. Given the influence of the medium, this lack is rather astonishing. The impact of such representations has been linked to misfortune, as in the case of the Columbine massacre, especially when combined with nescience. Regardless, it is unwise to remain naive concerning such a pervasive feature of the cultural vista. Furthermore, there are certain advantages, such as audience empowerment, parental monitoring, curricular application, academic exploration, administrative reflection, and policy integration, to learning about such secluded elements.

This thesis beckons questions respecting not only the ideological character of specific films, but also the sample's composite character and farther-reaching implications. Consequently, I progress through precursory factors, investigation of the data and subsequent deliberations to examine 25 Hollywood films about education for their ideological character.

General Statement of the Problem

A thousand bottles, all with messages rolled tightly up and inserted into their slender necks come washing ashore. Some who care to may delicately fish the paper out, or others as they may be inclined smash them upon a seaside stone to obtain the inner script. Nevertheless, how many more simply walk by, perhaps acknowledging their presence but then continue about their business.

It is similar with the many films released each year depicting education and educationally related phenomena. Researchers have not really examined what these movies are saying. Viewers are not reading the hidden, inner messages, not exploring their ideological implications and character, and this is a serious problem, for reasons I shall indicate to follow.

"I come from a broken home and I'm poor. I've seen the same fucking movies as you," says a student to newly minted teacher Louanne Johnson in *Dangerous Minds* (1995). So what are the assumptions here? What do the student's categories of self-ascription mean, what does he mean by broken home, what does he mean by poor—and so what? Additionally, of special interest to this thesis, what movies is he talking about? What background information is he assuming Johnson has from the films, these

apparently predetermining social texts they are expected to share as a reference point? What is being affirmed, negated? What is the student demanding so he can be effectively taught by Johnson?

Many may think they know what Hollywood films are about and may be so confident in the assertion that they consider the question beneath their attention. This thesis explores these assumptions; shines light on these everyday cultural artifacts. I intend to walk along the beach and rather than simply kick the washed-up bottles back into the surf, explore them carefully. I, in some cases, carefully wrest the note from its erstwhile sea-bound chamber, in others smash the vessel into a thousand pieces, sending the casing aloft in as many directions to encounter and engage the message. There is something important there, and to ask not is to learn not, to keep the truth beached and disregarded like so much litter.

Relevant Background Material

There is a saying that what we do not know will not hurt us. Consequently, some may think that those things with the capacity to hurt are precisely those things they do not want to know about. If only matters were that simple—a thorn in the foot denied still needs a bandage. The truth hurts, whether it is known or not: reality can smart regardless of the appearance.

The Platonic discrepancy between appearance and reality is described by Socrates in the *Republic* (Osborne, 1992). The simile of the cave begins with people shackled in the said cavern. Their vision is obscured such that they can only see images cast upon the wall, the mere appearances they assume to be reality. At one point, a man

escapes and makes his way blindingly from the darkened depths into the light beyond. By the sunlight, this philosopher comes to apprehend reality, a reality so strange and rendered stranger by the disillusionment of his telling that his tales are scoffed as fantastical (Plato, 1955).

While few (it is hoped) are chained in the darkness of caves today, transfixed upon campfire-cast flickers dancing on the wall, it is difficult to deny the preponderance of a phenomenon strangely similar. Every week, multitudes purchase tickets to find their seats in darkened theatres to apprehend, without the encumbrance of chains even, the flickering images cast upon the theatre screen. So many of, in fact, flock to the comforting darkness that the cinema has grown into a multi-billion dollar industry. Indeed, the influence of the medium and the business is enormous.

April 20th, 1999 began much like any other morning for Jane Eastman;[1] she planned to get up, have breakfast, and go to school. Notwithstanding, this day was going to turn out decidedly different. Two other students, Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold, had plans that would mark indelibly that day, not just for Jane, but for everyone across the country, the state of Colorado, the city of Boulder, Jefferson County Public Schools, and especially the students, parents, and staff of Columbine high school. That day, Harris and Klebold killed 12 fellow students and 1 teacher. Observers will never know exactly what motivated them or went through their minds, although theories abound. It is known that they were members of the so-called "Trenchcoat Mafia" a group at the school said to wear black, listen to gothic and industrial music, and speak German to each other

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[1] This is a fictitious name, out of respect.

(Dube, Muller, & The Associated Press, December 17, 2000). What is notable for this thesis, is the name of their group and chosen attire: the long dark trenchcoats. The group is said to have found inspiration for the garment from a dream sequence in the film *The Basketball Diaries* (1995) in which the protagonist enters his classroom dressed in long trenchcoat, and armed with a shotgun, opens fire (Woliver, 2001).

Again, commentators do not know exactly what went through the shooters' minds, but it is evident that a film had some correlation with the event and was potentially a causal factor among many. More clearly, however, this brief analysis also shows how little is understood of cinema and its messages and how important it is to understand them, either inherently as a note in a bottle or contextually, in congress with viewer engagement.

In this thesis, I understand ideology as "Shared ideas, perceptions, values, and beliefs through which members of a society interpret history and contemporary social events and which shape their expectations and wishes for the future" (Marchak, 1998, p. 3). Thus as a starting point, I treat ideology as the most global repository of significant meaning to be gleaned as a unit from the films and film viewing events and provides a valuable perspective into the functioning of hegemony. The category most immediately provides shape to explore meaning for films at the sociological level. It is for these reasons that I engage ideology as my site for a critical hermeneutic engagement with the films through Thompson's critical treatment of ideology, leading indirectly through Marx to the Gramscian analysis.

When shoppers go to the grocery store to purchase food, the boxes they take down from the shelves are not black or white. They are adorned with marketing brands and labels, but are also trimmed with a list of ingredients, and sometimes consumers even benefit by reading them (not always a good idea, especially if one wants to retain an appetite). It is generally a good idea to know what people are ingesting into their bodies through food products.

This reasoning similarly applies to cultural products. It is a good idea to understand what viewers are ingesting into their minds. Now, the ideological character of a film is not necessarily as compositionally laid out as the list of ingredients on a box of *Corn Flakes*™. Indeed, sometimes the character is determined as much by the person, place, time, and purpose of the film-viewing event. Still, persons should make the effort to read the box.

Significance of the Study

Only sparing work on the ideology of Hollywood films about education has hitherto been done. Indeed, there is a gap in previous research. Moreover, it is a breach beckoning to be filled. Students, parents, teachers, academics, educational administrators, and policy makers all gain in my result not only a space of relevance and need, but real answers to pressing questions.

The previous literature on intersections between Hollywood film and education performs a hymn of muted contestation. The work done that has dealt with educational content and depictions tends to show that these depictions mirror existing debates within the field. What are the relative benefits of pedagogical styles, dangers? Is the site of

struggle personal & individual, or structural? This research and its implications will be more deeply inspected in Chapter 1, Review of the Literature.

A genuinely critical position is not explored. The studies seem to negotiate the space around equilibrium. A meta-education eye view is not really taken, and the ideological character of Hollywood films about the field is not addressed. Likewise, contextual considerations of engagement are not addressed. The contexts of study are not discussed and therefore assumed either irrelevant or invisible. My study steps outside the education parameters and explores ideology with an awareness of research context and engagement.

It is important to investigate the ideological character of the films for a variety of roles and reasons. Practical implications are emergent for students, parents, teachers, academics, administrators, and policy makers alike. Students watch more movies than anyone else; witness the preponderance of youth oriented films each year. As they line up to buy their tickets, they can have a clearer idea of what else they are being sold. Parents, naturally concerned for their children, want to know where their offspring are at 10:00 P.M., and that extends to where their minds are. Additionally, parents will be able to learn what unstated messages they themselves receive about the institution where they send their children for six hours a day. The increasing curricular integration of Hollywood films render the thesis of interest to teachers, who certainly want to know where a film's ideology converges with their teaching goals and where it may secretly diverge or undermine them. Academics appreciate that the study of popular culture has been one of the fastest growing disciplines of the past 30 years. This study exemplifies the formation of ideological character for popular culture products at the site of

individual construction. Such work on educational representation yields new and largely uncharted findings. Administrators are frequently looking for new and innovative ideas to shape their practice, and the studies of such models in these films provide intriguing test cases for evaluation. Finally, policy makers want to know what people, their constituents, are concerned about. Without making any preliminary claims of directionality, the results of my thesis at least give an indication of what scripts, both literally and figuratively, are selling.

Research Questions

This project, and indeed its context, is informed by situation in the sociology of education (SE). The discipline approaches pedagogy not simply as a learning system, but as a social system. In this regard, education becomes a site of (but not necessarily limited to) politics, power, social stratification, and identity formation. The significance of the study is shaped and framed by SE as well as its research questions ranging from the field of political ideologies for individual films, the overall character of the sample, and questions that cast focus beyond the specific limitations of the project. Queries present themselves related to the ideological ascriptions of the films. What range of ideologies is present and reflected? What kinds of sub-divisions emerge within the sample, and how do they fall into place with the represented ideologies? What are the relationships between the different sub-divides and ideological sortings established by me? Questions carry forward into the realm of overall findings. What is the overall ideological character of all the films in my sample? How is this result best explained? What alternative explanations are further suggested by the finding? Which alternative

explanations are most compelling and why? Finally, certain questions inspired after the findings are posed. What further investigations are laid forth by such findings? What is the best method for this type of study?

Chapter Overview

The most fruitful questions often yield more questions themselves than answers. Nonetheless, before getting to that point there are some answers to be forwarded. The overall structure of the procedure passes through stages of preliminary considerations, presentation of the individual ideological considerations, and then finally some generative speculations. To paraphrase Winnie the Pooh trying to figure out the best place to start, why not where we are (Milne, 1996)? The Introduction includes a general statement of the problem, some discussion of the studies' significance, background material, research questions, and (of course) a chapter overview.

Part I: Starting Points covers the literature review and research method. Chapter 1, Review of the Literature, includes a discussion of previous work and an interpretive summary of the current state of knowledge concerning educational representations in film. The review delineates films about education as fields for interpretive disputation, though without a truly critical bent or discussion of ideology. Chapter 2, Research Method, features a theoretical discussion of the methodology, an elucidation of the method, and a clarification of the particular research techniques. The chapter reveals an enfolding configuration of Critical Social Science (CSS), Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), and the depth hermeneutics of Thompson's (1990) Tripartite Approach.

Part II, The Findings, is the largest and most substantive section. Each chapter presents a discussion of the films, their ideological character, and situation it their social/historical/political/aesthetic context. Chapter 3, There's a New Sheriff in Town: Liberal Social Policy and Conservative Responses in the Classroom Western, features films that depict an outside teacher entering an inner-city school: a narrative structure and character type remarkably confluent with the typical Hollywood Western. Chapter 4, Pictures of Privilege: Toward a Liberal Aristocracy, introduce movies set either in British public or American private schools. The pictures reveal an ironic theme of democratic/aristocratic convergence. Chapter 5, The Teen Comedy, as the title suggests, are comedies aimed a youth demographic, which, but for one major exception, largely treat no serious social problems. Chapter 6, The Teen Drama and Cinema of Omission, features dramas with youth protagonists that depict the experiences of typical young people—unless they happen to be Black (or as the American S.S. discourse writes, African American)! Chapter 7, Tenuous Advances, Conservative Frustration and the Clinton Double Take: Patterns in the Adult Comedy, are funny films with adult protagonists that respond in various ways to 1990s liberalism in America. Finally, Chapter 8, Love Letters to Me, features sentimental portraits lauding the highest ideals of the teaching profession that unintentionally open the alembic of cultural politics.

Part III: Summative Explorations concludes an overview of the entire project as well as a discussion of the studies' limitations, leading to implications for future research and practice. Chapter 9, Discussion, summarizes and synthesizes my findings and then applies Thompson's (1990) Tripartite Approach to yield an overall ideological ascription for the 25 films.

Lastly, the Conclusion reviews and reflects upon the entire work. It presents explanations and engages the overall result through a loupe of Critical Social Science. The chapter, and indeed the thesis, closes with implications for social change, ways to let the generated knowledge of the work guide practice.

Conclusion

This thesis interrogates 25 Hollywood films about education for their ideological character. This is something that has not been, and really is not, typically done in the education field, a surprising note given the ascendancy of the medium. This continued neglect is linked to past tragedy and admonishes of the future. In general, it is bad practice to overlook the implications of what is ingested, daily, weekly, monthly, yearly, and indeed as generations pass to the next. Practitioners can find real use for such knowledge. My examination poses questions spanning the ideological character of individual films, the movies' overall ideological character, and further implications of these findings. Through these questions, I proceed through prefatory considerations, explorations of the findings, and subsequent meditations. Indeed, this thesis charts and completes exploration well beyond the apparent story on the screen and forges into the territory of the hidden narrative beyond the screen.

Part I: Starting Points

Chapter 1: Review of the Literature

In the dominant perspectives of contemporary cultural studies, people do not simply receive passively the world of culture around them. Rather, people are involved in a process of construction. Meaning is built, and as they do not passively receive meaning from the artifacts of culture, the world does not passively yield itself to the meaning making of the audience. Contemporary cultural studies holds that people interact with the world around them in a process of mutual meaning construction. Certainly, this assertion extends itself to the world of popular culture. People interact with books, television shows, recorded music, radio, and films to construct meanings. However, these constructions occur within the contexts in which the people and the cultural material are embedded. Such constructed meanings often become part of the background context for constructions. These further constructions come to be associated with prevailing ideas in a culture, which come to form the foundation for the issues within a discipline. This process applies within the field of education as well.

This review of the literature has found that images of education uncovered in Hollywood films reflect and further broaden discussion of issues within the discipline, especially concerning debates between the pedagogical styles of progressivism and traditionalism. This review will first provide a brief, general overview of research in education in film in order to establish the broader field surrounding these debates. One

clear omission within this body of research is any discussion of the ideological character of Hollywood films dealing with educational phenomena.

General Overview

A body of research literature does exist that directly addresses the subject of representations in Hollywood films made about the institution of Education. Some studies focus on representations of teachers (Barone et al., 1995; Bauer, 1998; Burbach & Figgins, 1993; Dalton, 1995; Epstein et al., 1991; Farhi, 1999). Others examine how films influence peoples' perceptions of teachers (Thomsen, 1993). Some study portrayals of principals (Burbach & Figgins, 1991; Glanz, 1997, 1998). Still other pieces discuss particular films (Houck, 1996). One study found analyses the representation of social dynamics in schools (Schwartz, 1985).

Research on other, related areas has been done as well. Some research discusses the representation of cultures of violence (Beck, 1997; see also Mathews, 1994). However, the settings examined only occasionally intersect with educational institutions. Some research discusses the representations of certain social/cultural groups in film. Examples are African Americans (Bourne, 1990; Gill, 1986; Jones, 1993; Patton, 1995; Pierson, 1997; Simpson, 1990), American Indians (Prats, 1998; Walton, 1993; Vrasidas, 1997), Latinos (Aiex, 1986), people with disabilities (Byrd & Elliot, 1988; Greenbaum, 1996; Safran, 1998), people with HIV/AIDS (Aitken & Dey, 1998), and racial minorities in general (Spigner, 1991). However, these studies do not specifically focus on representations limited to educational settings.

There is some research on Hollywood depictions of related social institutions. The institutions are only indirectly or tenuously related to Education: "cyborg" toys (Lucek, 1996), political analysis of *Star Wars* (Wilkins, 1985), the rehabilitation of deviant members of society (Peritz, 1998), sport (Crawford, 1988). A significant amount of research on the representation of youth in film exists. Some focuses on adolescent rebellion (Briley, 1997). Other research addresses male victimization and abuse (Mathews, 1994; see also Beck, 1997). In addition, a variety of other topics is addressed, such as precocious youth (Pearl, 1985), shopping malls as a part of youth culture (Montgomery, 1992), and teenage sexuality (Giroux, 1996, 1997). There is research on depictions of other professions in film. Examples include Engineering (Vaughan, 1990), Journalism (Ehrlich, 1997), and Librarianship (Raish, 1998).

There is a significant amount of research on the use of Hollywood films as pedagogical tools. However, this work concerns teaching and learning, pedagogical approaches, rather than sociological implications. These studies addressed a number of academic subject areas: African American History (Adjaye, 1999), Anti-Ageist Education (Fisher, 1992), Anti-Drug Education (Poyntz, 1997), Biology (Edwards, 1997), English (Gavin, 1996; Mackey, 1999), general (Considine, 1984), Linguistics (Thomas, 1994), Science (Borgwald & Schreiner, 1994), and Sociology (Burton, 1988). In addition, some research discusses the *representation in film* of certain educational content areas: Environmental and Development Education (Murphy, 1993), Mathematics (Reinhold, 1997), and Sex Education (Whatley, 1988).

Still other work addresses films at a more general level. Some research examined children's' response to films – for example, films by Disney (Giroux, 1995), films

concerning juvenile delinquency (Snyder, 1991; Snyder, 1995), or films depicting

people with mental or cognitive handicaps (Bauer et al., 1985). Some research discussed

theoretical implications of films: analyzing psychological assumptions in Bernardo

Bertolucci's films (Hausmann, 1998), Jungian symbolism in *The Black Hole* (Roth,

1986), and films as mediations on political communication (Combs, 1984).

Real-World Issues

Some literature is helpful by way of providing excellent filmography. Ruth M.

Goldstein and Edith Zornow (1980) present such a study on screen images of youth. The

researchers found both types and stereotypes of youth representations, as well as

nuanced individual representations. The strength of Goldstein and Zarnow's work is in

the detailed synopses and descriptions of a very large number of films about education.

A shortcoming certainly could be that this strength becomes its shortcoming by allowing

for too little in the way of a discernable central thesis. However, this researcher's project

will certainly find significant value in their work as a resource for the films under

discussion. At the same time, however the project will endeavor to be not so purely

descriptive.

Much work, however, captures an effective snapshot of the terrain of educational

representation in film, while apparently not paying close enough attention to the

underlying formations giving rise to this topography. Mary Dalton (1999) argued that

Rob Edelman gave a compelling overview of teachers, good and bad, and discussed the

tension between the two. Dalton's criticism, however, was that Edelman did not

examine the "political tensions in these films between the forces of social conformity

and opposition, compelling tensions beneath the celluloid surface representing the poles cited by the Critical Theorists as a 'dialectic of culture'" (p. 20). The debate here was between surface discussion of the images portrayed on film and the deeper implications of the character's relationships. The relationships of particular interest to Dalton were those concerning the student and teacher – arguably, the crux of the pedagogical encounter. The strength is the classification and categorization of teachers in the films. The shortcoming would seem to be an absence of analysis toward the crucial educational relationship of teacher-student. This project will maintain both an awareness of the representational surface terrain as well as the deeper geological factors of the filmic educational landscapes. An effort will be made to avoid such limited foci of analysis.

Some research effectively challenges received notions of the "good teacher." Mary Dalton (1999) discussed William Ayers' Study of images of teachers and teaching in film in "A Teacher Ain't Nothin' But a Hero: Teachers and Teaching in Film." Dalton found examples of many types of teachers, ranging from bad to good. The shortcoming of the bad teacher was that he or she gave up on their students. The virtue of the good teacher was that he (Dalton made special note that most of the examples of good teachers found were typically male) is that he sees good in the students – at least in those students that have some good worth salvaging within them. The good teacher then becomes a separator of the wheat from the chafe. He separates the salvageable student from the dross. Ayers went on to argue a vision of the good teacher who is good because of their recognition of the student's knowledge and their mutual participation toward struggle and broader emancipation. Therefore, the debate within Ayers' piece was between the visions of the good teacher separating, like the God of Judgement Day, the

worthy students from the unworthy and the good teacher who recognizes the worth of all student experience. It is a strength of this research that it made this distinction between the good and bad teacher on the front of student worth-recognition. A shortcoming, however, would be the subjectivity of the piece. This researcher learns from Ayers' piece the value of questioning received notions of the "good teacher." However, this project will try to balance subjectivity with objectivity to arrive at a space of continued critical awareness.

Some research in this area has applied a cultural studies approach to generate knowledge on which to influence professional practice. For example, Jeffrey Glanz (1997) studied images of principals in television and film. Glanz found that, notwithstanding some positive images, "principals, for the most part have been portrayed unfavorably in film and on television as insecure autocrats, petty bureaucrats, and classic buffoons" (p. 296). The debate in this research is between the generally negative portrayals of principals and the reality to which the depictions may be alluding. This is a careful and thoughtful article, which did acknowledge that there might be *some* truth in the representations. Glanz used this acknowledgement to spur a discussion of professional practice, resulting in the suggestion that principals adopt an "ethic of caring." This piece showed that a cultural studies perspective could yield knowledge on which to base modification of practice. This thesis will benefit by adopting a similar tact. However, the researcher will be careful to supplement Glanz' approach with an interrogation of the ideological underpinnings of the both the films themselves and the researcher's interpretations.

Some researchers interpreted filmic images of teachers to mirror broad debates in education. Specifically, these debates were those between traditional (content-centered) and non-traditional (student-centered) pedagogies, and how they relate to power structures in schools. Diane Barone, Maria Meyerson, and Marla Mallette (1995) studied images of teachers in children's literature, television, and film. Teachers, who were innovative, non-traditional, and child-centered, such as Robin Williams' character in *Dead Poets Society*, and Edward James Almos' character in *Stand and Deliver*, were most often portrayed favorably. However, Barone et al. argued that "teachers who teach in traditional classrooms" (p. 260) were typically represented negatively. The character "Ditto" from *Teachers* and Mr. Hand from *Fast Times at Ridgemont High* were presented as examples. In *Teachers*, "Ditto" had in fact died at the front of the class behind his newspaper, and it took several days before any of his students noticed. Non-traditional teachers, however, found themselves in precarious situations. "Teachers who are sympathetic to students and create classrooms that support students in their learning are putting themselves into risky situations in school settings" (p. 267). The authors interpreted these film images as evidence for a debate between pedagogies and school power structures. Student centered pedagogy squared off on one side - and a "teacher centered" pedagogy on the other, with them both facing off against school power structures. Barone et al. acknowledged that this pedagogical debate may be a false dichotomy, "in reality teachers are more complex in their manner than the labels 'traditional' and 'non-traditional' imply" (p. 260). However, the author's *position* with respect to the debate was revealed as it related to the formal institution of the school. Innovative teachers were "reprimanded or fired for their dedication to the true meaning

of education" (p. 267). Presumably, traditional teachers and school authorities were against the "true meaning of education." Regardless, the article did provide a helpful examination of different types of teacher representations. That images in films can be seen as venues for real-life debates in schooling is interesting to the present project. It is anticipated that the thesis will similarly find parallels with real life educational debates, notably concerning race, sex, religion, and social stratification. It has been said that fiction is a lie that is the truth. The project here is to not only to sort out the lie from the truth, but to sort out the researcher's *position* from the truth as well.

Some research has examined the subject matter from a critical feminist position. Dale M. Bauer (1998) studied the representations of teachers in films, and argued that they increasingly were sexually charged. "This filmic sexualized pedagogy has supplanted an interest in the social politics of classrooms (so present in the 80s films about teaching and social change), a paradigm shift – from social politics to the politics of style – that is part and parcel of the Clinton era" (p. 316). The central debate Bauer identified was that images of teaching seemed to reflect shifts in political thinking rather than teachers' realities and personal commitments. Bauer's thorough and scholarly contemplation adopted a feminist perspective from within humanistic English Literature and Women's Studies perspectives. Bauer's discussion links a critical awareness to real-world political changes. This critical moment is something that will be of value to the present thesis. The researcher will examine film content, and then analyze the content (and broader contexts) for the ideological character. However, it will be important to remain aware of the researcher's own ideological inclinations or sympathies.

Other researchers uncovered excellent overviews of educational images in film. These overviews seemed to acknowledge some correspondence between the filmed image and social reality. However, they seemed more anxious to acknowledge images of which they approved than those of which they disapproved. Harold J. Burbach and Margo A. Figgins (1993) examined themes in the images of teachers in movies. They uncovered a variety of such images, both positive and negative. These authors argued that such images are influential in shaping public opinion, including the opinions of prospective teachers. The article became problematic in its treatment of the negative images, however. Although they provided a helpful catalogue of movie teachers, but they did not engage a satisfactory discussion of negative depictions. Such an overview and helpful categorizations benefit the present thesis by providing a starting point. The researcher will be watchful, however, to consider all images, including those that are unfavorable to the profession, or to any other values of the researcher.

Other research takes a more contemporary popular culture approach, combined with a critical perspective. Mary M. Dalton (1999) studied teachers and teaching in Hollywood films. Dalton wrote, "The social curriculum of Hollywood implicit in popular films is based on individual rather than collective action and relies on that carefully plotted action rather than meaningful struggle to ensure the ultimate outcome leaving educational institutions, which represent the larger status quo, intact and in power" (p. 2). The debate concerns struggle between these two forces. "…Real movie writers and directors are torn between realizing their artistic or political vision and producing a 'product' that studios know how to market and audiences find familiar enough to buy…the teacher in the movies is idealized enough to inspire viewers and

manageable enough to leave the status quo intact" (p. 17). The overall strength of Dalton's work is the focus on its popular culture perspective. Dalton viewed the interaction between the texts and the public's reception of them. An additional strength is the way Dalton blended this popular culture approach with curriculum theory. The work's shortcoming is its subjectivity. Dalton's analysis is embedded with the author's own apparent political views (though this is not necessarily a negative). The current project will employ a similar practice, in terms of applying broad-based perspectives. However, the researcher will endeavor to control for both one's own ideological assumptions and how they may underpin the analysis.

The first major section of Dalton's (1999) work examined a "stock character" found in virtually all movies about education. The Hollywood model of the "good" teacher is, "is an outsider who is usually not well-liked by other teachers...gets involved with students on a personal level, learns from those students, and does not usually fare very well with administrators" (pp. 14-15). Dalton reasoned that these good teachers remain isolated. They positively influence their students, but affect no mass or lasting change. The debate here concerns a number of questions. Why are these teachers politically ineffective? This is an excellent query, and comprises the strength of the piece. However, Dalton could have explored further reasons. Why is there is no effective organization of people working for change? Do people remain divided, and therefore conquered? The current project will certainly learn from Dalton's practice of examining the unstated political implications of the film representations. However, the researcher will be careful to ask further, what are the implications of *those* implications?

Dalton (1999) studied the films according to curriculum theory, using Dwayne

Huebner's contributions as a framework. The second major section of Dalton's book

applied Huebner's aesthetic-ethical-political value frameworks to the "good" teachers

uncovered in the films. Dalton wrote:

> Emancipatory promises or moments' are made manifest by the aesthetic-ethical-
>
> political language of "good" teachers presented on screen...This pocket of utopia
>
> arising in the connective space between the (good) teacher and student satisfies
>
> the audience's need to maintain hope for a better world...[however] the
>
> dominant ideology of social conformity is never threatened. (p. 49)

The debate here concerns a tension between deep structural emancipation and surface

individual success. The strength of the section is the integration of curriculum theory

with the film analysis. Again, however, Dalton made no statement of ideological

underpinnings. Dalton's work here applies to the current project in the way it drew

analysis within educational discourse. However, an effort will be made to make explicit

the researcher's analysis of the readings' ideologies.

Dalton (1999) found film content integration with another aspect of Huebner's

theory. Chapter 3 examined the technical-scientific value frameworks of "bad" teachers

in the movies. Dalton found that these teachers were typically portrayed as one-

dimensional foils for the good teachers and as representatives of oppressive authority.

Again, the recurring debated emerged: individual encounters with oppression versus the

overall war against oppression, which never seems to be fought. The strength of this

section is in the way Dalton extended Huebner's categories of analysis, and integrated them in the film findings. However, the shortcoming is that Dalton did not explore the oppressive structures that the bad teachers represented. The current project certainly takes note of Dalton's consistency of vision, but will avoid not fully exploring the implications.

Dalton (1999) went on to supplements Huebner's categories of analysis with a discussion of gender. A feminist perspective was employed with narrative analysis in order to uncover divided constructions of women teachers in film. In Chapter 4 "Divided Lives: The Public Work and Private Pathos of Women Teachers in the Movies," Dalton found that images of women teachers were forced into a dichotomous split between public and private life, which would mirror similar imposed constructions off the screen. The debate is between this finding and uncovered realities garnered through feminist narrative research. The strength of the discussion is in the integration of this qualitative field research with Huebner's model in application to the study. The work does possess shortcomings, however. The analysis tends to see power as only "one way" (top-down): it ignores, chooses not to recognize, or denies any existence of power for women – as teacher *or* administrators. The analysis also focuses on the idea of teachers as oppressed. Is this the case even for male teachers? Certain categories seem to imply oppression: woman and teacher, while certain categories imply power: male and administrator. When these categories are mixed, which status carries the day? The current project does learn the value of applying and integrating various approaches. An effort will be made to be aware of limitations of each, however. The present analysis will attempt to cast a

wider net, as with these questions concerning the experiences of administrators and males.

Finally, Dalton (1999) found that critical pedagogy was never represented in the films. The concluding chapter studied student voices, or the absence of them. While good teachers did help students overcome some of the institutional obstacles in the school, truly critical pedagogy was not undertaken. Dalton found that students experienced a pervasive meaninglessness in school, and that this was not structurally challenged. The debate concerns two types of interventions: a "Band-Aid" solution versus deep structural change. The strength of Dalton's chapter is that it incorporates the discussion of film content with new pedagogical theory, here critical pedagogy. The shortcoming, however, is its assumption of meaninglessness of the school experiences of students. Of course, the debate on this level could be on three fronts: Dalton's analysis of the film content, film content itself, and the theoretical underpinnings of critical pedagogy. What is learned from this work for the purpose of the present project is the value of incorporating new pedagogical theory into the analysis. However, the researcher will make his position known clearly.

Conclusion

This literature review concludes that representations of educational phenomena in Hollywood films mirror broader debates within education. An overview of the field of education and film has been presented, and helped to establish the breadth of this area. Within that broader focus, direct studies of education in film tended to focus more often on school personnel, such as teachers and principals. Other research focused on related

phenomena to education in film, related social institutions, the images of other professions, the use of film as a pedagogical tool, and more general, theoretical discussions of film. Many educational issues have been uncovered in this examination. The issues ranged from professional perceptions to conflicts between pedagogical styles, to structural difficulties within education, to the debate between short-term individual change versus long-term structural reform. As pointed out, these issues mirrored real-life issues in education. An analysis of these findings concludes that education is constructed as a point of conflict. Good teachers try to humanize the process, but do so, however, at certain political risk. Good teachers are generally seen to help the students. However, structural difficulties with public education are rarely addressed and certainly never vanquished. This analysis sees filmic education as being similar to real world education. It assumes certain things: good teachers, bad teachers, and structural difficulties. A theme in the research has been that these filmic constructions reinforce prevailing ideas about the field - namely, the idea that education is a largely functional institution. This is a good analysis, but it in turn will be analyzed as well. Cultural studies, here, holds that people construct meaning from popular culture. For this perspective, multiple sites of meaning making are considered. This project will endeavor to interrogate such. Specifically, the research does not address the ideological character of the films, whether taken from a perspective of the ideology simply being read off the texts or through a process of context situated reader construction.

Chapter 2: Research Method

Research literature in the area of educational phenomena in Hollywood films tends to reflect broader debates within the discipline, however there is a dearth of work examining the ideological character of these movies. The thesis studies this element. Here, I lay out in systematic form my research method for uncovering this element, in order to render the thesis clearer to the reader. First, I examine the methodological perspective informing this research. Second, I discuss the specific method to be used. Third, I present the specific technique by which I apply the method and thereby carry out the research.

The findings of this study will be analyzed for their ideological character. The methodology has three dimensions. First, I situate the project in Critical Social Science (CSS). Second, within that rubric, I locate the work within Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). Finally, from a perspective of depth hermeneutics, this project employs Thompson's Tripartite Approach to study 25 films. With respect to methodology, the depth hermeneutics perspective of John B. Thompson (1990) will be used because of its acknowledgement that meaning is constructed on deep, multiple bases. The method will be Thompson's Tripartite Approach, which studies multiple bases of popular culture meaning construction, as this is considered the best way to interrogate ideological messages. Concerning technique, 25 broadly representative films about education will be examined.

Methodology

Meaning is not just constructed on one dimension. Popular culture theory, which is distinguished from mass culture theory, sees meaning of mass culture products constructed in the interactive space between the audience and the product. Previous readings constructed by the audience member become part of the embedded context which the person uses as a toolbox to facilitate further constructions. The study of this meaning must be directed at that space of construction. The construction involves multiple bases and is even involved in the construction of self- identity. This project will be informed by CSS, CDA, and John B. Thompson's (1990) depth hermeneutics, which is a perspective that seeks understanding and interpretation far beneath the surface in order to interrogate those deeper multiple bases.

The methodological starting point and framework within which this project is situated is Critical Social Science. CSS is distinguished from the other two main social science research approaches: Positivist Social Science (PSS) and Interpretive Social Science (ISS). PSS is the orientation most closely linked with social science's roots in the methods and assumptions of natural science, an "organized method for combining deductive logic with precise empirical observations of individual behavior in order to discover and confirm a set of probabilistic causal laws that can be used to predict general patterns of human activity" (Neuman, 2000, p. 66). Not occupied with the objective focus of PSS, ISS is situated at the other end of the methodological spectrum. It is "the systematic analysis of socially meaningful action through the direct detailed

observation of people in natural settings in order to arrive at understandings and interpretations of how people create and maintain their social worlds" (p. 71). CSS combines and extends some of the elements of these two approaches. Like PSS, the critical perspective holds that there is objective reality, waiting, as it were, to be discovered. CSS is similar to the interpretive paradigm in that they share the idea that people construct and engage their own understandings of the world. However, Critical Social Science departs from both PSS's view of the social world as static and ISS's value neutrality. For CSS, the social world is in continuous flux, and ideas about, and practices within, it are amenable to value considerations. Some are good; some are bad; some are right; some are wrong. W. Lawrence Neuman defines CSS as a "critical process of inquiry that goes beyond surface illusions to uncover the real structures in the material world in order to help people change conditions and build a better world for themselves" (2000, p. 76).

Neuman explains PSS, ISS, and CSS through a framework of eight fundamental social science questions:

1) Why should one conduct social scientific research?

2) What is the fundamental nature of social reality?

3) What is the basic nature of human beings?

4) What is the relationship between science and common sense?

5) What constitutes an explanation or theory of social reality?

6) How does one determine whether an explanation is true or false?

7) What does good evidence or factual information look like?

8) When do sociopolitical values enter into science?

(2000)

The answers to these questions, for CSS, are illustrated in the following table:

Table 3.1   Neuman's Eight Questions Applied to Critical Social Science

Social Science Question	CSS Response
1) Why should one conduct social scientific research?	To smash myths and empower people to change society radically
2) What is the fundamental nature of social reality?	Conflict filled and governed by hidden underlying structures
3) What is the basic nature of human beings?	Creative, adaptive people with unrealized potential, trapped by illusion and exploitation
4) What is the relationship between science and common sense?	False beliefs that hide power and objective conditions
5) What constitutes an explanation or theory of social reality?	A critique that reveals true conditions and helps people see the way to a better world
6) How does one determine whether an explanation is true or false?	Supplies people with tools needed to change the world

| 7) What does good evidence or factual information look like? | Is informed by a theory that unveils illusions |
| 8) When do sociopolitical values enter into science? | All science must begin with a value position; some positions are right, some are wrong |

Source: Neuman, 2000, p. 85

From within this approach of CSS, the thesis follows Critical Discourse Analysis. CDA is a means of analyzing the discourses of late modernity using some of its fundamental narratives as a starting point. The assumption here is that diverse discourses, although distinct, share certain homologies, namely that they are structured engagements, which reflect and reproduce shortcomings of power distribution both in specific cases and in general. CDA uses Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFA) to highlight symbolic interchanges within discourses and provide for analysis.

CDA uncovers ways that discursive practices illustrate power relationships, distribution, and struggles. Chouliarki and Fairclough write by way of example "interpreting texts ideologically is not part of understandings of texts but a part of explanations, in that it involves locating texts in social practice partly by reference to the theoretical category of ideology" (1999, pp. 67-68). Explanation, here, becomes the germ for critique.

The research agenda for CDA is based upon an open engagement across disciplines to locate and apply a suitable variety of tools, problems, perspectives, constructions, and categories to address problems of late modernity. The authors organize this toolbox into binaries of colonization/appropriation, globalization/localization, reflexivity/ideology, identity/difference and two concerns that permeate all the above categories: power and hybridity (p. 93.)

Rom Harré, in *The Philosophies of Science: An Introductory Survey*, discussed some of the philosophies of this central discipline. The original edition of his book included six chapters, which linked to crucial epochal points in the history of science's development. However, in 1984 Harre published a new edition that included an important new chapter. The complete original edition concerned what might be called views of science *in* society. These views assumed in one way or another that science operated *within* society as a relatively autonomous force. The new seventh chapter, "Science and Society" situated the discipline not simply as an independently operating element in society--if society were considered at all. The new section situates science, as the title implies, conjunct with society. Science is posited as a social activity, one intimately linked with its social context. Science and society are now seen as intermingled and generating ever further symbiotic manifestations.

Science, here, is a discourse in its own social sphere. It has its own inner dynamic and operational logic. Nevertheless, Harre discussed several social imperatives that drive the enterprise, and reaffirmed that according to this view, science is not an autonomous activity free from social considerations.

I apply the same logic here to the study of culture and cultural products. It is not an autonomous force somehow separate from its social context. As with Harre's new seventh chapter, culture becomes conjunct with society.

Mass culture theory must first be distinguished from popular culture theory. Strinati (1995) describes mass culture theory is described as tending

> to see the audience as a passive, supine, undemanding, vulnerable, manipulable, exploitable and sentimental mass, resistant to intellectual challenge and stimulation, easy prey to consumerism and advertising and the dreams and fantasies they have to sell, unconsciously afflicted with bad taste, and robotic in its devotion to the repetitive formulas of mass culture. (p. 48)

Strinati further asks, "Can the view that the audience for popular culture is an undifferentiated mass of passive consumers any longer be sustained? To answer these questions adequately we need to see audiences consists socially and culturally differentiated, and to recognize that cultural taste is socially constructed" (p. 49). Indeed, the main difference between mass culture theory and popular culture theory is to be found in the space of engagement between audience and product. Mass culture theory sees meaning directly transferred to the audience. Popular culture theory maintains that meaning is constructed in an interactive process *between* the product and the audience. A rebuttal is that this is simply the traditional model of both art and engagement with the world. There is the meaning out there of something that is true. It is the role of the person to simply receive this meaning. Moreover, the receiver does this either correctly or incorrectly -- the measure of which is, are they receiving the *preferred*

meaning? However, it is a fundamental tenant of post-structuralism, arguably one of the most influential movements in intellectual work of the post WWII period, that the truth of this preferred meaning is not as necessarily central as its proponents would argue. Moreover, that center represents a particular cultural space, for example middle-class European males. The preferred meaning of a text is the meaning they construct. However, what about meanings constructed by people occupying other spaces: woman, African, working class? The popular culture perspective finds itself linked to this tradition. It allows other meanings to be constructed out of interactions with the products of culture and the different cultural spaces of different readers.

Popular culture meaning constructions build up to be like a giant on whose shoulders the reader views all new encounters for cultural interaction:

> Films transcode the discourses (the forms, figures, and representations) of social life into cinematic narratives. Rather than reflect a reality external to the film medium, films execute transfer from one discursive field to another. Consequently, films themselves become part of that broader cultural system of representations that construct social reality. That construction occurs in part through the internalization of representations. (Ryan and Kellner, 1988, p. 12-13)

Films become part of a dialectical process of meaning construction. As discussed above, the social context of the reader helps shape their construction of the meaning of the film. However, that constructed film meaning becomes internalized within the viewer to become part of the viewers context. This modified context shapes further constructions both of new films to be encountered and the social world of the individual.

A rebuttal concerns the agency of the individual in question. What about that person's will? Is it to be assumed that the person, and that person's mind, passively is drawn along a dialectical movement with every new encounter? Do they not have the ability to transcend in their perception the unrelenting engagement with his new experiences? As discussed above, is its not a tenet of popular culture theory to argue against the mass culture theory's view of a passive receiver of information? Yes, this is the case. However, the view of the audience member in the popular culture perspective is still fundamentally different from that of the mass culture theory. As will be recalled, the mass culture theory audience member simply passively receives prescribed meaning. The audience member of this pop culture perspective rather is being engaged in meaning construction. The reader's agency is not so much compromise as his repertoire of reference tools is broadly expanded through his never-ending exposure to new material.

Much research in the area of popular culture suggests that meaning be interrogated at the space between the text and the context of people's engagement with it. In *Understanding Popular Culture*, John Fiske (1989) asserted that popular culture is create at the intersection between the cultural products brought to market by capitalism and people's everyday life. Fiske claims that in this context these products present an ironic dual view. Firstly, their preferred meanings are revealed as flawed; and secondly, other meanings are exposed to the gaze of the audience. Fiske wrote:

> The commodities produced and distributed by the culture industries that are
>
> made into popular culture are those that get out of control, and become
>
> undisciplined... there indiscipline is the indiscipline of everyday life, it is

familiar because it is an inescapable element of popular experience in a

hierarchical power-structured society. (p. 104)

Fiske also wrote that the reader must "focus on the deep structure of the text in the ways

that ideological, psychoanalytic analyses and his structural or semiotic analyses have

proved so effective and incisive in recent scholarship" (p. 105). In popular culture

meaning construction, there is a necessary intertextuality between the text and the

reader. Mary Dalton (1999) wrote:

> Texts never exist separate from context. When a reader engages, interrogates, a
>
> text, the act is never separated from that reader's own lived experience or from
>
> the other (and possibly competing) texts that reader has engaged. The text is
>
> incorporated into the reader's everyday life at the same time the reader's
>
> everyday life becomes part of the construction of the text. (p. 11)

The objects of popular culture become involved in an interaction with society. The

reader who wishes to explore the ideological dimension of these objects must explore

the deeper aspects of this interaction. A rebuttal is if the meaning produced is a result of

the interaction between the reader, the readers background, and the text, than how can it

be sorted out to which party this ideological aspect would be attributed? If a particular

ideological meaning is ascribed, perhaps it belongs more to the reader, or the reader's

social milieu than the text under examination. This is very true, and will not be disputed

here. The reason is this multiple site configuration is the source of the meaning, and

from a social scientific perspective becomes, in fact, the object of inquiry. The interaction of text with society is exactly what is being studied here.

Multiple sites are even configured to construct self-meaning. In "Working-Class Identity and Celluloid Fantasies in the Electronic Age," Stanley Aronowitz (1989) writes "Individual and collective identities are constructed on three sites: 1. the biologically given characteristics which we bring to every social interaction; 2. givens that are often covered over by social relations, family, school; and 3. the technological sensorium that we call mass or popular culture (p.197). These areas combine to form a complete integrated space for meaning constructions -- not only for incoming information, but also for the subject of the reader himself. A rebuttal is that this view ignores any conception of an essential self. Certainly, it is a long-standing, even common sense, idea that people's self identities are simply linked to a variety of social and biological realities. However, it is a post-structuralist view to argue against the idea of an essential nature. Rather, meaning of the world is continually constructed in each reader's engagement with it. In this sense, the world is created in the act of meaning construction. The meaning is neither right nor wrong, in reference to any essential nature then. Another response is that there may be an essential nature - some truth of the world out there in the world waiting to be apprehended either correctly or incorrectly. However, at the level of self-identity, certainly a person may think of themselves anyway they wish. A person may ascribe for themselves a self-identity of membership in some particular group. Other members of the group may or may not accept that person's claim to membership. However, the subject's self concept would still remain a

matter of personal conscience. Therefore, identity is another object of meaning construction at this space of engagement, indebted to the reader's multiple contexts.

This project will be informed by a methodology that recognizes both the internal and external interpretive contexts of the films. The research will follow the theoretical framework and practical application of John B. Thompson (1990). Thompson's approach broadly follows that of hermeneutics. Specifically, it assumes that "the study of symbolic forms is fundamentally and inescapably a matter of understanding and interpretation" (p. 274). In the social scientific application of hermeneutics, it is recognized that both the objects and subjects of inquiry are themselves already embedded in pre-interpreted contexts. For example, a person *works*. However, what are the pre-interpreted meanings of *work*? Therefore, the starting point of this research is the interpretation of everyday life, or "doxa," "an interpretation of the opinions, beliefs, and understandings which are held and shared by the individuals who comprise the social world" (279).

However, Thompson's depth hermeneutics moves beyond this starting point to explore its broader constructive context. The approach goes on to explore social-historical analysis, formal or discursive analysis, and interpretation/re-interpretation. Moreover, Thompson divides the social-historical analysis into 5 fields: spatio-temporal settings, fields of interaction, social institutions, social structure, and technical media of transmission. He also divides formal or discursive analysis into 5 fields: semiotic analysis, conversation analysis, syntactic analysis, narrative analysis, and argumentative analysis. Thompson is interested in both people's everyday understandings and interpretations, and the pre-interpreted contexts in which they exist. Thus, research will

not only focus on the researcher's interpretations of the films, but also on the pre-interpreted structures and conditions that produce and compliment them - the deeper understandings and interpretations informing and making possible the experience of the film-viewing event. Many elements constitute and produce the film and the viewing, both externally and internally. "Symbolic forms are meaningful constructs which are interpreted and understood by the individuals who produce and receive them, but they are *also* meaningful constructs which are structured in definite ways and which are embedded in specific social and historical conditions" (280). A film presents conventions germane both to the form itself and to people's understandings of it because of the myriad interplay of pre-interpretations and interpretations. Therefore, this research defines the meanings and conventions of the films themselves; the pre-interpreted meanings brought to bear by the researcher, and the pre-interpreted context facilitating the entire process. These understandings serve the purpose of making for a more fully considered, comprehensive, and cohesive reading.

John B. Thompson's (1990) depth hermeneutics guides this research, as it allows for the probing of deep sites of meaning construction. Popular culture theory, as opposed to mass culture theory, envisions the meaning of products of mass culture to be constructed by the audience for the products in question. Given that people construct meaning with these products, the meanings themselves become part of their contextual references for new meaning constructions. It is at this space of construction that the study of meaning must occur. Moreover, this space includes multiple aspects. Therefore, this study focuses on these multiple dimensions.

Method (Design I)

These multi dimensions will be the source for analysis to investigate the films' ideological underpinnings. Some writers call for critical reception, engagement, and pedagogy to combat broader social injustice and ideologies that may support it. This ideology is not often east to apprehend. This study employs Thompson's (1990) Tripartite Approach, which is a method that examines broad bases of mass culture, holding that this is the best way learn the messages' ideological character.

Some writers advocate for critical awareness of ideology as a first step to battle injustice. Paulo Freire and Henry A. Giroux, (1989), among others, have called for a critical integration of and engagement with popular culture and pedagogy to formulate truly critical practices. These practices should include:

> Engaging schools not merely as instructional sites, but also as cultural sites, as
> social forms that introduce students to particular ways of life and in doing so
> often marginalize and exclude the voices, the histories, and experiences of those
> groups who by virtue of their class, race, ethnicity, and gender are not part of the
> dominant classes. (p. ix)

Freire and Giroux also write, "This means that educators need to educate students to view schools as places that not only produce subjects but also subjectivities and that learning is not merely about the acquisition of knowledge but also about the production of social practices which provide students with a sense of place, identity, worth, and value" (p. ix). They would see schools and popular culture as sites for of ideological

legitimization and reproduction. Moreover, the ideology in question does not represent the students best interests. Certainly, a response would be that schools are agencies of society. Society may have underpinnings that could be called ideology. However, in a democratic society the effects of this ideology apply equally to everyone. Students should devote their time and energy to mastering this situation rather than trying to find fault with it. However, the authors would likely reply that society is not as democratic as their detractors would maintain. Rather, it represents an interplay of power relationships favoring a few rather than the many. Therefore, any ideological underpinnings in support if this society would be such that the majority would do well to be at least critically aware of.

It is not as simple as it may appear to learn of a text's ideology. Mimi White (1989), quoted David Morley concerning "the ideological problematic" (p. 194). This refers to the many things that a text may present. "The problematic is importantly defined in the negative -- as those questions or issues which cannot (easily) be put within a particular problematic -- and in the positive as that set of questions or issues which constitute the dominant or preferred 'themes' of a programme" (p. 194). The text, whether it is school or popular culture, is not as simple as it appears at first glance. Many factors must be considered in order to interrogate the ideological dimension. A detracting viewpoint is that some grounding must be maintained with respect to fixed meaning. Otherwise, all discourse would do is spiral into infinite relativity. However, this project is not advocating anything of that sort. Rather, this project is advocating a truth claim. It is simply asserting that the truth claims already made may require a deeper and more sophisticated analysis.

Thompson's (1990) methodology will be applied in such a way as to provide a broad analytical base to interpret both the films' meanings and ideological characters. The model uses what is called a Tripartite Approach. The first of the three aspects of this approach concerns the production and transmission or diffusion of the object (the film). This is examined through social-historical analysis and interpretation of doxa. It studies the social-historical situations and arrangements by which the production and transmission or diffusion is achieved. The second object domain is construction of the media message. This examines the structure of the messages through formal or discursive analysis. The third aspect is reception and appropriation. Again, social-historical analysis and interpretation of doxa are employed to see how people receive, make sense of, and incorporate these messages into their lives. These areas are not examined in strictly discrete fashion. Rather, a comprehensive approach to the study of mass communication requires the capacity to relate the results of these differing analyses to one another, showing how the various aspects feed into and shed light on each other. The effect of this tripartite approach is that it leads to an interpretation of the ideological character of the media messages.

> Rather than assuming that the ideological character of media messages can be read off the messages themselves (an assumption [Thompson called] the fallacy of internalism), we can draw upon the analysis of all three aspects of mass communication – production/transmission, construction, reception/appropriation – in order to interpret the ideological character of media messages. (p. 306)

The following model of inquiry will be employed to determine and maintain direction

for the research:

Figure 2.1 Thompson's Tripartite Approach

Production and ⟶ Social-historical analysis
transmission or diffusion   and interpretation of doxa

Tripartite   Construction ⟶ Formal or discursive   Interpretation of
approach   analysis   ideological character
                                                        of media messages

Reception and ⟶ Social-historical analysis
appropriation   and interpretation of doxa
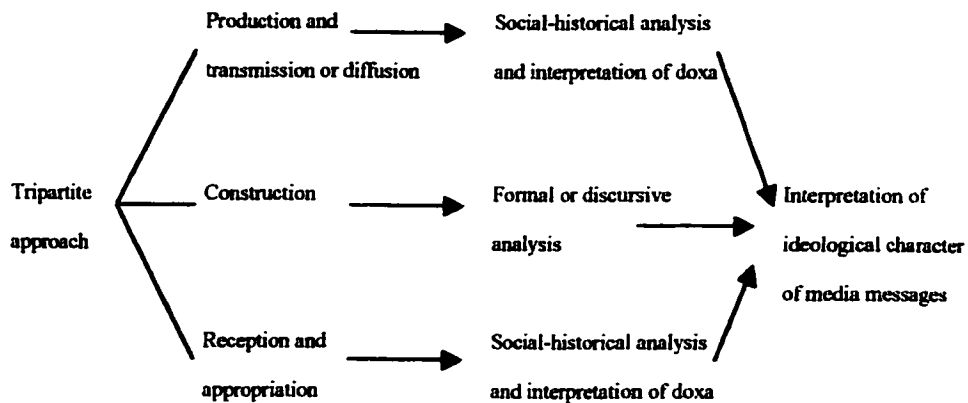
(307)

At this point, I must add an important caveat. Properly speaking, Thompson's

(1990) approach applies reception analysis; the model explores *audience* reception and

meaning making of texts. That is not what I have done in this project. The audience I've

interrogated is simply an attendance of one—namely, the researcher. Audience

examination is an important direction for further research and one that would more

correctly be reception work. Here, I have employed the benefits of Thompson's model

and in that sense practiced an application of the approach. However, my employment of

the method was one that explored the researcher's individual engagement.

This thesis uses the Tripartite Approach developed by Thompson (1990) as a

method examining three main bases to uncover a film's ideological dimension. Paulo

Freire and Henry A. Giroux (1989), among others, have argued for the importance of critical awareness of the ideological underpinnings of school and culture. Writers have pointed out the evasiveness of these underpinnings, however. Their study must involve multiple dimensions of the films, or the popular culture objects in question.

Technique and Sampling (Design II)

Thompson's (1990) Tripartite Approach of Depth Hermeneutics was applied to a study of films about school. Twenty-five films were studied that encompassed a variety of circumstances within the school-movie genre. Data was then be carefully gathered about the films, and formally organized. The researcher viewed the movies at home on videocassette. The viewing was carried out with the aim of uncovering the sex, race, religion, and social stratification of the movies' central characters. Finally, data on the filmic school was collected. Thus, 25 broadly representative films were carefully studied for relevant data.

A wide-ranging sample of 25 films about education was studied. A list of the 25 films is as follows:

1. *Blackboard Jungle*

2. *Election*

3. *Goodbye Mr. Chips*[2]

4. *High School Confidential*

5. *High School High*

---

[2] This is not technically a Hollywood film, but it is important and influential enough to justify inclusion.

6. *Mr. Holland's Opus*

7. *Music of the Heart*

8. *Rushmore*

9. *Tom Brown's School Days*[3]

10. *Fast Times at Ridgemont High*

11. *Stand and Deliver*

12. *Taps*

13. *Dead Poets Society*

14. *Lean on Me*

15. *Teachers*

16. *The Substitute*

17. *Dangerous Minds*

18. *The Basketball Diaries*

19. *Heathers*

20. *To Sir with Love*[4]

21. *The Breakfast Club*

22. *She's All That*

23. *Kindergarten Cop*

24. *Jack*

25. *The Principal*

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[3] See footnote 1

[4] See footnote 1

This sample encompassed significant variety. It represented a range of films from the 1930s to the 1990s; comedies and dramas; critically acclaimed films and those that were notably without critical acclaim; films with both male and female lead characters; stories told from the teacher's and the student's perspectives; and settings from a range spanning the inner city to the suburbs, public school to private school. The list even included parodies of the school genre itself. Many of the films were those repeatedly encountered in the research literature, and were chosen for that reason. Alternatively, some were not often discussed – and they were chosen for that reason as well. Others, such as Rushmore, were chosen because of strong personal interest to the researcher.

The films were viewed on videocassette at the researcher's place of residence. They were all viewed in this manner for both convenience and consistency. Therefore, the viewing took place in private, quiet surroundings. Interruptions were minimal, and the researcher was able to rewind the cassettes in order to review segments or details. Data was collected uniformly for all the films, and collected in a notebook.

Therefore, twenty-five relevant movies were thoroughly viewed for pertinent features. The films covered a variety of situations within school-type movies. Information on the films was collected and organized. The viewing of the films took place at the researcher's place of residence on videocassette.

In summary, the methodology of depth hermeneutics, bracketed within CSS and CDA, informed this application of Thompson's (1990) Tripartite Approach as it helped this project study and analyze the ideological character of 25 films concerning education. Depth hermeneutics was used because it recognized that meaning is constructed far below the surface in an integrated myriad of sites. Moreover,

Thompson's Tripartite Approach recognized in a very helpful manner the multiple sites of meaning construction. This methodology and method was applied to 25 films depicting a diverse array of experiences in the educational sphere. This integrated system of methodology and method was used as a framework to analyze the ideological character of the messages generated by these films.

Part II: The Findings

Chapter 3: There's a New Sheriff in Town:

Liberal Social Policy and Conservative Responses in the Classroom Western

Introduction

The last chapter explored at length Thompson's (1990) Tripartite Approach. I explored in-depth each of the elements of the approach, and stated that the production and transmission of media messages in the Hollywood film is a highly complex and collaborative profit making enterprise, undertaken by people who are aware of this fact. Moreover, the profit-making imperative is considered a generally accepted parameter within which this type of art is made. I applied the five elements of formal or discursive analysis to the construction of media messages in these films. I also established my own situation within specific social-historical circumstances toward my engagement with these films. Therefore, the general context of this study has been established, and I shall read the films from a contextual and self-informed position. I have undertaken this preliminary work to prepare for the multi-perspective readings inherent in Thompson's Tripartite Approach.

Now that the preliminary elements of the approach are addressed, I consider the pre-textual engagement phase of this study complete. This chapter undertakes four main steps. First, I give a brief discussion of the ideologies to be used in the analysis of the films. Second, I discuss some features of the Western as a film genre and why that genre relates to some films about education. Third, I make the case in general terms why the

characteristics of the Western are found in some films about education. Finally, I present

the six films in this category, and explain why they conform to the Western model,

discussing what ideology reflects their character. Additionally, I present further reason

to support, and explain causally, the films' ideological classifications.

Ideology

Because the preliminary work is done, this chapter begins with the main

enterprise of the Tripartite Approach, the interpretation of the ideological character of

the messages associated with these films. I apply ideological readings from a variety of

perspectives, in order to eliminate an unnecessarily narrow reading. I establish the

ideological positions at the outset so that both the readers and I refer to similar

categories. In this and subsequent chapters, I use an operational definition of ideology

by P. M. Marchak (1988), who shares a similar taxonomy with Roger Gibbins and

Loleen Youngman in *Mindscapes: Political Ideologies towards the 21st Century* (1996).

Marchak asserts that ideology is the "Shared ideas, perceptions, values, and beliefs

through which members of a society interpret history and contemporary social events

and which shape their expectations and wishes for the future" (p. 3). I use a variety of

political ideological positions for analysis including socialism, classical/neo-liberalism,

contemporary liberalism, classical conservatism, neo-conservatism, and other ideologies

as the material and situations may require. I choose these ideologies because they are

the more dominant examples today. However, I also leave open the possibility of using

less well-known approaches as not to restrict my work to an unnecessarily finite set.

Socialism is an ideology that calls for the dismantling of current economic and social relations. "Socialists perceive capitalism as a system where a ruling class extracts wealth from a subordinate class (or classes), sells products made by labor, and uses the profits to invest in more properties and new technologies which displace or further enslave labor" (Marchak, 1988, p. 7). Alternatively, classical/neo-liberalism advocates the unrestricted market within which free choosing individuals may engage in activities oriented toward serving their self-interest. The classical/neo-liberal view regards "the absolutely free market being key to social development" (p. 6). Contemporary liberalism on the other hand would temper this laissez faire perspective with a Welfare State aimed at leveling the playing field and equalizing opportunity for each new generation of free choosing and acting individuals. "The [contemporary] liberal view is that equality of opportunity is sufficient [as societies' social ideal], and that such equality is largely achieved within the present social system" (pp. 6-7).

Differing from the liberal ideologies is classical conservatism, which was itself a precursor to nineteenth century liberalism, and saw society composed of natural classes with the dominant class maintaining a custodial relationship to society and holding itself responsible to maintain a vision of social good through their superiority and benevolence as opposed to a free market in which all have the opportunity, theoretically, to achieve the higher levels of society.

The chief difference between conservatism and liberalism is in their respective views of society: conservatives viewing it as an organic whole within which individuals have assigned places; liberals as a collection of individuals each

striving for personal goals. Thus true conservatives should be concerned with the

collective moral fabric as well as the permanence of a dominant class. (p. 8)

Neo-conservatism returns to some of the free market principles of classical

liberalism, except that it is also aligned with some culturally conservative ideas.

> This label is now in common usage, together with the label "the new right" to
>
> refer to a somewhat contradictory set of beliefs which combine advocacy of
>
> minimal government, establishment of a completely free market, extreme
>
> individualism; and strong, centralized government, controlled markets, and
>
> special concern for major economic corporations in the international market-
>
> place. (p. 9)

The Historical Continuity between the Western and the Classroom Western

I have discussed and defined the five main ideologies I use to analyze the 25

films in this thesis: socialism, classical/neo-liberalism, contemporary liberalism,

classical conservatism, and neo-conservatism. I have undertaken this in order to

establish a frame of reference for the reader. What follows is the analytic phase.

The films demonstrate there are certain patterns among them, which help clarify

the emerging inner shape of the overall group. I have subdivided the 25 films in order to

make explicit these patterns. This subdivision into patterns renders more clearly the

ideological character of the films. I did not choose the films to provide representation

across these or any categories. Rather, I discovered the groupings only after viewing and

reflecting upon the sample as a whole. The following categories are listed so the reader

can anticipate the further direction of this thesis. "Pictures of Privilege" are movies that are set in American private or British public schools. "The Teen Comedy," as the name of the category suggests, is comedies in which the protagonist of the story is a teenager. Likewise, "The Teen Drama" group consists of films, which are dramas and feature a teenaged main character. "It's a Mad, Mad, Mad World" are comedies "driven" by adult protagonists. Finally, "Love Letters to Me" is the category of inspirational or sentimental films in which the main character is a teacher and generally confirms a very positive message about the ideals of the profession. In order to explicate their meanings in detail, chapter is devoted to each of the above categories.

This chapter underlines the ideological character of the films in it and explain the pattern of my first category – "The Classroom Western." This group of films is named as such because it makes clearer their ideological nature. The Western is a rigid genre that extols the virtues of liberalism (a point I argue later in this section), and liberalism is the ideology of some of the films in this group. First, I discuss some features and patterns of the Western genre in general, and show why it is liberal. Then I discuss ways in which some of these features and patterns are transported into films taking place in educational settings, making note of the differences between the Western and the Classroom Western.

In the annals of American cinema, there is perhaps no more uniquely American genre than the Western. This genre represents a major tradition in the discipline of film studies. It's elements and it's audience's engagement with it have evolved dramatically through the history of cinema (Cook, 1996). Through the early adventures of Hop-Along Cassidy to the sweeping panoramas of John Ford to the deconstructionist anti-Westerns

of Sergio Leone, however, films of this type present a well-established set of worldviews and expectations. The world can be a very dangerous place, and this danger- -in a hostile, isolated environment--necessitates a need for characters to stand on their own, to be self-reliant. These qualities account for the liberalism of the genre.

Certainly, this liberal view of the world applies to representations of the natural environment. Often, Westerns feature a town, a hamlet of civilization ensconced within a surrounding hostile desert. Wander off alone on foot into it and you can easily not return. Of course, there are also dangers in coming to the town, whether on horseback, stagecoach, or train. While en route you're quite likely to be held up by a vicious gang. Most sacred tenets of American society are threatened at this point, specifically those toward private property, personal safety, and the "sanctity of women." Those who right these wrongs are often awarded the highest mantles of citizenship. In John Ford's (1962) *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance*, people are routinely robbed, beaten, and threatened by Valance (Lee Marvin) and his gang. Ransom Stoddard (James Stewart) is thought to have gunned him down and thus make travel to and from the town (not to mention life in the town) safe again. Consequently, he eventually becomes a United States senator.

The Western brings with it a stable (no pun intended) of regularly occurring character types: the hero, the lady, the sidekick, the town boss/wealthy rancher, the outlaw or villain, and the assembled members of the gang. These characters are typical types found in Westerns, however, not necessarily in all Westerns. Next, I give an example of each type from the school films to draw similarities between these two types of films. Due to want of space, I just mention the education correspondent here, but then discuss the film in detail in the section of this chapter assigned to it.

The "hero" is often an outsider to the civilized people of the town. He, and the hero generally is a "he," often rides in from the wilderness to find the townspeople terrorized by the villain. The hero is in some ways almost like the villain, in that they both use similar tactics, namely violence, although the hero tends not to use violence until it is absolutely necessary, and then only to save the weak or those unwilling to defend themselves. Richard Dadier, the new teacher in *Blackboard Jungle* (1955), is an example of this type of hero.

The "lady," like the hero, does not exactly belong with the peaceful people of the town. In Westerns, there are typically three types of women: tomboys, wives, and prostitutes. The lady is typically closer to the third of these, although prostitution is not typically made explicit - they are women who work in the saloons. Some may argue that characters like Miss Kitty from *Gunsmoke* are certainly not prostitutes; however, if you dress provocatively, hang around a saloon all day, never drinking, and have a bedroom upstairs, it might be assumed that in the privacy of the bedroom, "the lady is a tramp." Another character from *Blackboard Jungle*, Miss Panucci, flaunts her sexuality by wearing tight dresses, despite warnings against the practice; eventually, a student attempts to sexually assault her – clearly this the student's responsibility and not hers, by the symbolic character type of the lady is illustrated through the element of sexual provocation.

The "sidekick" is a mythic character type found across cultures, from Lakshman of the *Ramayana*, Sancho Panza from *Don Quixote*, and most any character played by Gabby Hayes in Hollywood Westerns. The sidekick is generally a male, to the male hero, but unlike the hero in some films he does not find or even seek female

companionship at the end of the film. In fact, the sidekick is *like* "a female companion" to the hero during his bachelor days. He takes care of the hero, protects him, and is completely loyal and dutiful to him. Jake Phillips, played by Louis Gossett Jr., in *The Principal* (1987) is an example of the loyal and protective sidekick.

The "town boss/wealthy rancher" is another character type typically found in Hollywood Westerns. This character is generally wealthy and powerful, and characteristically evil. He is not a hands-on fighting man, but rather hires an outlaw or gang to do his bidding. He generally wants to keep and maintain control of resources in the town and surrounding environments. An example of this type of character is Boss Hogg in the popular television show *The Dukes of Hazzard*, which is a Western set in a contemporary period. In the education films, the corrupt principal Claude Rolle, played by Ernie Hudson, in *The Substitute* (1996) is a similar figure.

The "outlaw" or "villain" is the main person with which the hero does battle. He complements the hero in that where the hero is generous the outlaw is selfish, where the hero is good, the outlaw is evil; where the hero is kind, the outlaw is cruel – the hero wears a white hat; the outlaw a black one. However, it should also be noted that despite these differences there is an important similarity between the hero and the outlaw. They are both men of action, men of violence. The outlaw uses violence as part of his standard *modus operandi* but the hero only uses violence when he is pushed to the point that there is no other alternative. Jack Palance is the villain or outlaw to Alan Ladd in *Shane*. Sometimes the outlaw may be accompanied by a "gang." Artie West, played by Vic Morrow, in *Blackboard Jungle* is an excellent example of the villain in the education films. Characterizations within the gang are not typically fleshed out in detail. The gang

can be counted on to be ruthless and cruel, and indeed cowardly if individual members are separated from their associates. Individually, they may have low moral character, and taken together they are dangerous and often terrify the town, as in *Fist Full of Dollars*. The gang in *The Substitute*, KOD, illustrates this element.

The stories in Hollywood Westerns frequently follow a typical narrative pattern and usually involve the above characters. The story usually starts with a town of good people terrorized and intimidated by some evil force, say a greedy land baron, a ruthless outlaw, or a vicious gang that rides into town every so often to tear up the streets. This general state of lawlessness continues with the townspeople intimidated and on the verge of certain disaster, until literally, a stranger rides into town. This lone, mysterious newcomer is the hero. At first, he is likely feared and mistrusted by the townspeople, and he typically just wants to mind his own business. However, there is an initial confrontation between the hero and the elements of evil. The confrontation may or may not be with the villain, but may in fact be with a lower member of his gang, who goes running off in shame back to the lair to report the arrival of this intruder. The hero slowly befriends some brave members of the town, and eventually the townspeople try to press the hero to protect them, to deliver them from the force of evil in their midst. However, the main villain or the baron is at this point also generally sending for reinforcements, and the stage is slowly being set for a final conflict. Eventually, the hero faces off against his greatly outnumbering opponents, and at some point in the conflict, things look very bad for him, but some of the townspeople come to his defense. Eventually, the meek townspeople learn to stand up on their own and take their town back, driving the villains from their midst. As the town is transformed, the hero certainly

has the opportunity to stay on, but chooses not to. He cannot. He is not a man of civilization, but a man of the wilderness, and in the end, he must leave the town he has reluctantly saved, and he rides off into sunset. It is the narrative of strong individuals overcoming adversity that shapes the Western as a liberal script.

The Western Rides Into the Classroom

Some of the films in this thesis conform to the patterns of a Hollywood Western, so much so that I characterize them as "The Classroom Western." This comparison helps clarify the ideological character of the films, provides a template to understand each film, and helps identify patterns across the films.

Blackboard Jungle (1955) is the most seminal movie of "The Classroom Western." Ideologically contemporary liberal, it established the tradition of an outside teacher coming into a chaotic world, and slowly winning over the trust of the students just there to learn, to the point of being able to take the classroom back from the vicious gang members that run the classroom and the school into lawlessness. *High School Confidential* (1958) makes more explicit the theme of lawfulness versus lawlessness. In this case, the protagonist is in fact a lawman who enters the "town" to clean it up. Additionally, this film presents the first difference between the Western and the Classroom Western: some of the Classroom Western films, like *High School Confidential*, are not ideologically liberal, but rather neo-conservative.

In *The Principal* (1987), I skip three decades to a film as reactionary as *Blackboard Jungle* (1955) was progressive. In *The Principal*, the protagonist also has his life threatened. However, rather than facing the gang pedagogically, he must resort to

violence himself. In a similar period, *Lean on Me* (1989) is a biographical film of New Jersey principal Joe Clark. The film postures itself as an inspirational story about turning schools around is in fact just as conservative as *The Principal*. Both films are neo-conservative in ideology.

In the 1990s, *Dangerous Minds* (1995) represents another shift in patterns. Being ideologically contemporary liberal, *Dangerous Minds* is a return to the politically and ideologically progressive ideas of *Blackboard Jungle*. The difference this time is that the stranger riding into town is a female; she possesses most characteristics traditionally associated with the male hero, such as being a person of violence – the point is made early on in the film that she is an ex-marine. However, *The Substitute* (1996) shifts the pattern back toward exploitation when the stranger riding into town is in fact not a teacher at all, but rather an out of work mercenary. He has no educational qualifications whatsoever, and his mercenary pals forge his credentials. In this neo-conservative film, the stranger encounters the classic town boss, in the guise of a crooked African American principal.

However, there is another way beside the inclusion of neo-conservative films in which a break in the analogy emerges between the Western and the Classroom Western. At the end of a Western, the hero often rides off alone into the sunset. This is typically not the case in the Classroom Western, in which the hero generally stays on at the school. This is the case in four of the films: *Blackboard Jungle* (1955), *The Principal* (1987), *Lean on Me* (1989), and *Dangerous Minds* (1995). The two films, in which the hero does not stay on, possess good explanations. *High School Confidential* (1958) features a hero who is neither a teacher, principal or student – he is an undercover police

officer. *The Substitute* (1996) features a hero who, far from being a teacher, is a mercenary soldier; he leaves for the next adventure. This departure suggests that he may try to clean up other schools in his travels. I explore the differences between the Western and the Classroom Western in the conclusion of this chapter.

The Classroom Western and American Educational Problems

There are common elements to the Western genre: basic features, character types, and story pattern. There are enough similarities between the Western as a genre and some of the films to be labeled Classroom Westerns. While the Western is ideologically liberal, the Classroom Western appears predominantly neo-conservative. Often it does not have the hero ride off into the sunset in the end. In the following analysis, I discuss the connection between the Classroom Western and socially conservative elements played out in the American media and concerning schools in *Blackboard Jungle* (1955), *High School Confidential* (1958), *The Principal* (1987), *Lean on Me* (1989), *Dangerous Minds* (1995), and *The Substitute* (1996).

The Films

BLACKBOARD JUNGLE (1955)

Directed by Richard Brooks

Written by Evan Hunter (novel), Richard Brooks

Cast:

Glenn Ford .... Richard Dadier   Louis Calhern .... Jim Murdock
Anne Francis .... Anne Dadier

Margaret Hayes .... Lois Judby Hammond	Sidney Poitier .... Gregory W. Miller
John Hoyt .... Mr. Warneke	Vic Morrow .... Artie West
Richard Kiley .... Joshua Y. Edwards	Dan Terranova .... Belazi
Emile Meyer .... Mr. Halloran	Rafael Campos .... Pete V. Morales
Warner Anderson .... Dr. Bradley	Paul Mazursky .... Emmanuel Stoker
Basil Ruysdael .... Professor A.R. Kraal	Horace McMahon .... Detective

Richard Dadier is a newly married war veteran. Having recently completed his

teacher training on the GI Bill, he arrives to begin work as the new English teacher at
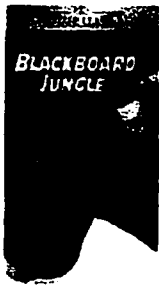
North Manual High School. He soon learns that his training has ill

prepared him for the harsh realities of teaching in a tough inner city school.

Staff and students alike are intimidated and terrorized by a vicious gang.

Soon the gang and its ringleader, Artie West, takes its threat beyond the

classroom and endangers Dadier not only out in the community, but even at his own

home. Eventually, Dadier must win over the good students who are there to learn, with

his progressive pedagogy and earnest sincerity. As the showdown reaches its potentially

fatal conclusion, the good students (like the meek citizens of a Western town) unite to

drive the vicious gang from their midst.

The ideological character of *Blackboard Jungle* (1955) is liberal. It acknowledges

certain social problems such as poverty and crime, and even seems to offer suggestions of

ways to deal with these problems, such as progressive pedagogy. However, the apparent

explanation for these social problems presented in the film is noticeably absent in critique

of the prevailing social order. North Manual High and indeed its surrounding

neighborhood is a very harsh environment replete with concrete, bars, and crime – most

of which is committed by students of the school. Artie West and his gang assault a truck

driver, steal the truck, and assault teachers from the school. Dadier tries a variety of techniques to reach the students. He has the students "deconstruct" a cartoon, *Jack and the Beanstalk*, according to their own experiences. He has them tell their own stories with a tape recorder. However, nothing he tries really seems to work. Dadier seeks out advice from his former Professor Kraal on how to deal with these types of problems. He locates his erstwhile mentor at a school, which is the mirror image of North Manual. Here, the students happily study Latin, music, and science in modern, fully equipped classrooms and labs looking out onto lush, spacious, fields. Dadier laments, "University didn't train them [teachers] for this generation." Thus, the explanation posited by the film is revealed – it's generational! They conclude that conventional social institutions have been eroded. There is no more church or home life. The father had left for war; the mother went to work in the defense plant. These causes make for an interesting contrast with Dadier the character himself. He is a war veteran. The war first provides the cause and then the cure (through Dadier) for these social problems. In this new social milieu, Dadier and Professor Kraal conclude that gang leaders come to take the place of parents; therefore, rather than being at home the children are running wild in the streets.

The reason for this film's ideological character can be found in the causes it presents for the social problems in the film. Dadier and the Professor blame the social effects of the war (presumably WW II) for juvenile delinquency. They envision a breakdown of the family unit as being responsible for children becoming criminals. Parents were otherwise occupied with the national crisis, and therefore children were left unsupervised only to fall under the influence of some criminal element. To the makers of this film, juvenile delinquency is seen as a blemish upon the complexion of post-war

peace, stability, and prosperity. The film acknowledges the problem, and makes an effort

at explaining it. However, the film fails to recognize poverty as a cause or even a

correlation of juvenile delinquency. After all, there was no crime at the posh school

where Dadier and Kraal implicated the war generation for the failings of the next. The

parents are not apparently involved in any remedies to the problem of delinquency.

Rather, the solutions are left to caring and innovative teachers like Dadier. The solution

to this problem, a bi-product of the war is to be found in another bi-product of the war –

an optimism and faith in social institutions of the State. This is the contemporary

progressive liberal moment. The film sees no major structural problems in society. It sees

only a slight anomaly in the continual betterment of American society, which is fixed

with a little GI can-do within the limits of recognized social institutions.

HIGH SCHOOL CONFIDENTIAL (1958)

Directed by Jack Arnold

Written by Robert Blees (also story), Lewis Meltzer

Cast:

Russ Tamblyn .... Tony Baker
Jan Sterling .... Arlene Williams
John Drew Barrymore .... J. I. Coleridge
Mamie Van Doren .... Gwen Dulaine
Diane Jergens .... Joan Staples
Ray Anthony .... Bix

Jerry Lee Lewis .... Himself
Jackie Coogan .... Mr. A
Charles Chaplin Jr. .... Quinn
Lyle Talbot .... William Remington Kane
William Wellman Jr. .... Wheeler-Dealer
Michael Landon .... Steve Bentley

A new kid, Tony Baker, arrives at Santo Bello High School. Santo Bello, our Western town, is an apparently lawless place overrun with rock and roll, drag racing, drug use, and beat poetry. With his brash confidence and hip language ("What's up Dadio?"), modeled after writers like Allan Ginsberg and Jack Kerouac, he immediately begins to stir things up. In fact, Baker wastes no time in making connections and shopping around for drugs. However, the audience soon learns that he is an undercover law enforcement officer. He is the Western Marshall who enters the town to clean it up. After some episodes of danger, beat poetry, and the horrors of drug use, Baker breaks up the local narcotics ring, and Santo Bello can return to its homeostatic peace.

The ideology of this film is classical/neo-liberal. Where *Blackboard Jungle* was concerned with a benevolent, progressive, social institution of public education to solve social problems, *High School Confidential* (1958) depicts a different social institution. This film is concerned with social problems from a law and order perspective. Santo Bello High School is a prosperous, ivy covered school of virtually all White kids, most of whom drive expensive looking cars. In fact, the comment is made at one point that the kids all come from good homes. The homes don't get much better than that of Joan Staples, the burgeoning drug addict who seems to otherwise have it all. Her parents are wealthy and she lives in a beautiful house. There is a scene depicting Tony Baker arriving to pick up Diane. Mr. and Mrs. Staples are in the midst of their beautiful home, surrounded by luxury, but with no real clue as to what their daughter is doing. There is a telling moment of irony in the scene, as they begin to discuss the drug problem at Santo

Bello. Mr. and Mrs. Staples are sitting down to relax with some cocktails, and Mr.

Staple comments that he, "can't figure out where these kids get these ideas." The film

compares the alcohol use of the parents with the drug use of the children in order to

suggest that there are similarities between the two, and that the children get the idea to

take their drug from their parents' use of their drug - alcohol. This moment is

thematically similar to the patterns in *Blackboard Jungle* (1955). There the cause of

juvenile delinquency was parental neglect, but there was a justifiable cause: the parents

neglected their children only because they were busy with the war effort. The parents

were serving the broader society, and consequently their children fell into crime. It is

because the parents were serving society that society picks up the pieces of that effort. A

progressive contemporary liberal institution, public education, steps in to help the

children (or try).

The thematic similarity between the two films is striking in both cases: the

parents are responsible for the problems of the youth. In *High School Confidential*

(1958), however, there is no "greater public good" such as war to have drawn away the

attention of the parents. Rather, the film shows that while the parents are sipping

martinis in luxury and decadence, the children turn to drugs. Neglect is of a different

kind defined by the social context. Furthermore, in *High School Confidential* the first

level of social intervention for the children comes from the agencies of public law and

order. The imperatives behind the intervention are the moral outrage and even panic.

The first level of intervention comes not from the school but from the police, and not

from a benevolent public institution devoted to advancing public good through the

development of human potential, but from a public institution devoted to protecting

private interests. The school-based intervention of *Blackboard Jungle* (1955) is

positive, in that it is geared toward building on people's potential. The law enforcement-

based intervention of *High School Confidential* is negative, in that it is geared toward

restricting people's activity. The intervention of *High School Confidential* involves a

less-intense custodial commitment from the State than does the intervention in the

liberal *Blackboard Jungle*. Individuals are held more directly accountable for their

actions. For these reasons, the ideological character of *High School Confidential* is neo-

conservative.

High School Confidential's (1958) is neo-conservatism 1950s style, a period

when authorities feared youth culture. To some in American society at that time, youth

culture was a confusing, strange, and terrorizing array of rock and roll, comic books,

drag racing, sex, and violence, all to be intersected with juvenile delinquency. Both

these films acknowledge some degree of juvenile delinquency in American society.

However, the explanation for the differences in the two films can be found in an

examination of the intended audience and purpose of the movies.

The theatrical trailers for *Blackboard Jungle* (1955) featured *Rock around the

Clock* by Bill Haley and the Comets - a rock and roll song. It may seem that the

inclusion of such a song is intended to appeal to youth – most adults of that time would

hardly be listening to rock and roll. However, that conclusion would be misleading. The

film is marketed and ostensibly informed by a sort of public service mission:

propaganda. The evidence for this claim is found in the fact that the film so pointedly

presents solutions, such as progressive pedagogy, to the social problems depicted. *High School Confidential* (1958), however, presents no such solutions. The only intervention it presents is direct law enforcement and appeal to order through force. At the end of *Blackboard Jungle*, Artie West, the ringleader of the gang, is escorted to the office to be turned in to the police, but this is only after many attempts by Dadier to reach Artie pedagogically. *High School Confidential* presents criminals committing crime, and then being led away to face punishment by the State – this is the resolution to the stories' conflict - this is the return to the homeostatic balance of children respecting their parents and teachers, working hard in school, and generally moving toward their fulfillment of the American dream.

The film is also intended to thrill kids and alarm parents. The opening scene depicts Jerry Lee Lewis playing for an assembled group of teenagers from the back of a truck adjacent to the school. This scene is certainly not to benefit the parents, nor are the scenes of Tony Baker's "aunt" (played by Mamie Van Doren) trying to seduce him from a haze of loneliness induced suburban desire. These are the scenes that get the thrill seeker through the box office door and into the theater seats, but of course these scenes also terrorize Eisenhower–era parents, worried about comic books, rock and roll, and whatever other trouble their kids may be getting into. *High School Confidential* does not present solutions to social problems, rather it presents the problems in a very lascivious manner, and leaves the practitioners accountable for their own folly. The film addresses social fears in a reactionary way that defines it as neo-conservative rather than liberal. There is an irony at play in *High School Confidential* (1958). The film also appeals to

desire and lasciviousness in order to profit from the box office while sending a

conflicting message that condemns desire as a punishable offence.

THE PRINCIPAL (1987

Directed by Christopher Cain

Written by Frank Deese

Cast:

James Belushi.... Rick Latimer	Martin Pistone.... Security Guard
Rae Dawn Chong.... Hilary Orozco	Thomas Ryan.... Robert Darcy
J.J. Cohen.... White Zac	Sharon Thomas .... Kimberly
Terry Coleman.... Student	Joan Valderrama.... Secretary
Peter Fitzsimmons.... Buddy	Jacob Vargas.... Arturo Diego
Joe Flood.... Terhune	John Allen Vick.... Frank Valdis
Louis Gossett Jr..... Jake Phillips	Danny Williams .... Dangerous Danny
Rick Hamilton.... Mr. Harkley	David Williams .... Gang Student
Reggie Johnson.... Jojo	Troy Winbush.... Baby Emile
Danny Kovacs.... Substitute Teacher	Michael Wright .... Victor Duncan
Yuri Lane.... Lance Woodbury	
Kelly Jo Minter.... Treena Lester	
Esai Morales.... Raymi Rojas	

Rick Latimer is a washed up middle-class high school teacher whose personal

life is in shambles. The film begins as he beats up his ex-wife's boyfriend

in a jealous rage. As punishment, Latimer's superiors send him to assume

principalship duties at the worst school in the district. This questionable

criterion in Latimer's selection for an educational leadership role proves to

be ironically fortuitous. Brandel High is old and a cesspool of violence and drugs.

Belushi becomes like a new sheriff in a Western town who rides[5] in to clean it up. While

at Brandel, he must resort to the violent practices that got him sent there in the first

place. Not only is the school threatened by a vicious gang, but Latimer's life is

threatened as well. He is forced to face the gang in a final showdown throughout the

corridors of Brandel—and wield his baseball bat to save both his life and the school.

The Principal (1987) is neo-conservative. The film is replete with depictions of

social problems. Brandel High is run down and spattered with graffiti. It is fenced from

its desolate neighborhood to create a space as barren, abandoned, and streaming with

concrete as that surrounding it. Brandel is an economically poor school in an

economically poor area. The student body is predominantly African-American and

Latino with very few White students, and is undergoing infiltration by a gang. The

school has a proud history—notably in the guise of it's football team—and was the pride

of the community. *The Principal* is sketchy in any explanation for these problems.

Because explicit evidence is lacking, I look to an important character from film, Jake

Phillips.

Played by Louis Gossett Jr., Phillips was an African-American football hero

during the school's glory days. He was heading toward a brilliant future, and wanted to

be a teacher until a football injury prevented him from finishing college. He returned to

his alma mater still with a desire to serve his community but because he could not be a

teacher, he became a security guard. The fortunes of Brandel, and indeed of the whole

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[5] Ironically, Latimer actually does ride in—on a motorcycle!

community, lay back there on the college football field with Phillips. The decline of the school traveled parallel with that of the Gossett character.

The film does not discuss or critique why Phillips the student should be sidelined with Phillips the athlete. I interpret that Phillips had gone to college on a sports scholarship. His having to withdraw due to his inability to play football indicates that he had no other way to finance his education. That Philips had the opportunity to go to college despite his economic limitations is a testimony to contemporary liberalism; that he had to withdraw when he could no longer provide the school with his athletic services is a filmic testimony to contemporary liberalism's failings. Therefore, buried within the text is a critique of contemporary liberalism.

It is also interesting to note the role of Caucasian Americans in the social problem configuration of the film. Caucasian Americans provide both the most current and identifiable threat to social order, as well as the threat's solution. The leader of the gang attempting to infiltrate the school is a Caucasian with the unsubtle name, White Zac. Where is the reprieve to White Zac's threat to be found? Well, in the guise of the new Caucasian principal, and title character of the film, Rick Latimer.

Jake Phillips' inability to pursue his education after he can no longer provide athletic services is an indictment of racial stratification in American society. I assume it was a Caucasian controlled university from which Phillips had to resign. The university had no use for Phillips' mind, only his body—thus he had to quit when he could no longer play football. This turn of events indirectly caused the downfall of Brandel, as linked with the downfall of Phillips. To further underscore the Caucasian implication in

the decline of Brandel, the leader of its newest threat is the obviously named White Zac. When Latimer defeats Whit Zac's gang members[6], the evil is driven from the town and the audience understands that Brandel is back on the path to it's former glory.

The film represents further conservative attitudes because the ethnic community of Brandel is not saving itself. As Brandel's decline was linked symbolically with the decline of one man, Jake Phillips, Brandel's ascent was linked symbolically with the heroic struggle of one man, the Caucasian Western hero Rick Latimer. The film gently critiques Caucasian involvement and implication in African American social problems, but it depicts Caucasian involvement as being the savior from these problems.

The roots of *The Principal*'s (1987) neo-conservative ideology are found in the long and painful history of Black/White relations in the U.S. That history is well established, and well known, and for that reason, I do not delve into it here. However, it is clearly true that African Americans are greatly over-represented in the economically disadvantaged levels of a country that declares itself the paragon of equal opportunity. That Blacks as a group are over-represented at these lower levels is not under debate, what to do about this condition is. The removal of barriers to Black advancement, such as by making university education affordable[7], is an intervention securely within the contemporary liberal tradition. Such interventions are not depicted in *The Principal*. Rather, while acknowledging Caucasian implication in social problems facing African

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[6] In an additional example of the Caucasian interest only the physical aspect of African Americans, the member of White Zac's gang who Latimer battles are African American. The gang leader is Caucasian, while the foot soldiers are African American—a racial division of labor.

[7] This intervention assumes a direct causal relation between educational advancement and economic advancement. The more education you get, the more money you'll make. This assumption is an essential idea informing progressive liberal educational policy in the post-war period.

Americans, *The Principal* depicts a member of the privileged class rescuing the

members of the underprivileged class from these challenges. This benevolent

affirmation of a ruling group combined with the film's critique of liberalism illustrates

the conservative character shift in *The Principal.*

LEAN ON ME (1989)

Directed by John G. Avildsen

Written by Michael Schiffer

Cast:

Morgan Freeman .... Joe Clark
Beverly Todd .... Ms. Levias
Robert Guillaume .... Dr. Frank Napier
Alan North .... Mayor Don Bottman
Lynne Thigpen .... Leonna Barrett
Robin Bartlett .... Mrs. Elliott
Michael Beach .... Mr. Darnell
Ethan Phillips .... Mr. Rosenberg
Karina Arroyave .... Maria

Ivonne Coll .... Mrs. Santos
Regina Taylor .... Mrs. Carter
Sandra Reaves-Phillips .... Mrs. Powers
Sloane Shelton .... Mrs. Hamilton
Jermaine 'Huggy' Hopkins .... Thomas Sams
Karen Malina White .... Kaneesha Carter

"I am the HNIC," (Avildsen, J. G., et al., 1989) which as *Lean on Me* (1989)
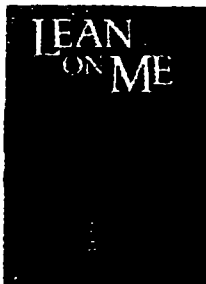
declares means "head Nigger in charge." Based on a true account,

Lean on Me is the story of Joe Clark, the self proclaimed HNIC, a

temperamental and politicized African-American teacher and

principal. Clark is brought in by school board authorities, like a

Western marshal, as a last resort to clean up Eastside High School. Eastside, a school at

which he had taught 20 years earlier, has descended into disarray of violence and drugs.

His explosive and authoritarian leadership finds him increasingly alienated from his staff, the school administration, and even some parents. However, the film does depict Clark's style producing positive results for the school. Those he has alienated in the process conspire to have Clark terminated, but his loyal students come to the rescue, revealing his successes at Eastside, and Clark's career as well as the school are saved.

Indeed, the HNIC is rescued by the meek townsfolk he has saved. What is telling ideologically is whom he is saved from. *Lean on Me* (1989) is neo-conservative, and the villain who tries to engineer Clark's downfall[8] is Leonna Barrett. Barrett is a much-empowered African-American mother in the community, with a strong voice and firm awareness of her democratic rights. She feels that Clark is not adequately responsive to public needs, and objects to his monomaniacal, authoritarian style. At a public meeting with parents, Clark regales the group in a style very similar to a Christian revival. This interpretation of his style at the meeting is supported by Barrett's retort that they are "not in church." Moreover, Clark announces at one point that "This is not a damn democracy." Consequently, Barrett exercises her democratic right to make her voice heard among public decision-makers and is therefore painted as the film's villain.

The neo-conservative character of *Lean on Me* (1989) can be observed as the swing of a political pendulum. It swings one way until the force propelling it can no longer sustain that direction and then it swings the other way, seemingly just as far in the opposite direction. Both *Blackboard Jungle* (1955) and *Lean on Me* deal with the issues

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[8] Clark's downfall is attempted by applying political pressure to the mayor. The dynamic here is reminiscent of the Pharisees pressuring Pilate from the New Testament.

of crime and ineffectiveness in schools. *Blackboard Jungle* proposed as a package of liberal reforms, most notably progressive pedagogy, which privileges the student's individual experience and downplays authoritarian relations. In *Lean on Me* however, schools of the 1980s are presented as being even worse than they had been in the time of *Blackboard Jungle*. *Lean on Me* finds school problems still in existence and perhaps even exacerbated, it slights its former position; it blames what had come before. Therefore, *Lean on Me* suggests that if the school democracy of *Blackboard Jungle* didn't work, then school authoritarianism must the answer. This motion picture is also a snapshot—a still from one moment in the pendulum's swing[9].

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[9] A literal pendulum vacillates between two ever-diminishing extremes until it comes to rest in the center. However, is the pendulum of my analogy moving toward a balanced resting spot in the middle between neo-liberalism and neo-conservatism? An argument that it is would comprise a structural functionalist position, but that is not a view either presented by the film or argued by this researcher. Therefore, like the pendulum about to change directions due to unsustainable momentum, this distinction illustrates the limit of my pendulum analogy's force.

DANGEROUS MINDS (1995)

Directed by John N. Smith

Written by Ronald Bass, LouAnne Johnson (book *My Posse Don't Do Homework*),
Elaine May (uncredited)
Cast:

Michelle Pfeiffer .... Louanne Johnson
George Dzundza .... Hal Griffith
Courtney B. Vance .... Mr. George
Grandey
Robin Bartlett .... Ms. Carla Nichols
Beatrice Winde .... Mary Benton
John Neville .... Waiter
Lorraine Toussaint .... Irene Roberts
Renoly Santiago .... Raul Sanchero

Wade Dominguez .... Emilio Ramirez
Idina Harris .... Callie Roberts
Marcello Thedford .... Cornelius Bates
Roberto Álvarez .... Gusmaro Rivera
Richard Grant .... Durrell Benton
Marisela Gonzales .... Angela
Toni Nichelle Buzhardt .... Nikki

Dangerous Minds (1995) continues the tradition initiated in *Blackboard Jungle* (1955) of having an outsider riding in, like the Western hero, to straighten out a lawless town. It provides a variation to the Classroom Western by making the hero a woman. The protagonist is a young woman who admittedly possesses many of the characteristics of the traditional male hero. Most notably, she is a person trained in and ready to use violence, the arts of war. Louanne Johnson happens to be an ex-Marine, and she wastes no time in gaining the students' attention with an impromptu martial arts lesson. Johnson takes on the task of teaching "Academy" students at Parkmont high school.
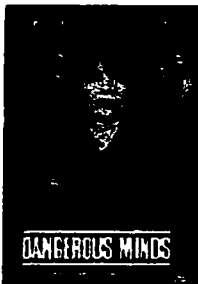
Academy students are bussed in from the inner city and provide Johnson with a variety of pedagogical and disciplinary challenges. The film's heroine inspires the students by introducing them to the lyrics of Bob Dylan and then challenging them to explore poetry and literature further, specifically the poetry of Dylan Thomas. A

student's murder causes Johnson to reexamine her future in the teaching profession, but eventually the students convince her to continue and stay on at the school.

The film obviously sets itself in the tradition of *Blackboard Jungle* (1955), and it contains similar elements: the middle class teacher, the tough inner city students, and the inspirational message reaffirming a commitment to public education. However, one of the clearest signs of the connection to that tradition of films comes from one of the students, who declares in an extra-textual moment "I come from a broken home and I'm poor. I've seen the same fucking movies as you."

Like *Blackboard Jungle* (1955), *Dangerous Minds* (1995) is contemporary liberal. The film depicts a committed public school teacher overcoming the odds to inspire a group of underprivileged students to take advantage of the benefits available to them in the institution of public education. Education fulfills their individual potentials: And Louanne Johnson "respects" her students. Like the protagonists in *Blackboard Jungle* and *The Principal* (1987), she is a White, middle class "savior." In her classroom, she opens doors for her students by engaging them at the level of what she takes to be their culture.

Notwithstanding, this incident reveals that while Johnson tries to introduce the students to literature through the lyrics of Bob Dylan, Dylan remains part of the culture of White baby boomers, and not likely that of Black and Hispanic students from inner city Los Angeles. Therefore, she is not using the student's culture as a bridge to mainstream educational culture. Rather, she is using a more accessible instance of White culture as a bridge to more esoteric White culture, the poetry of Dylan Thomas. The fact

that Bob Dylan, born Robert Zimmerman, took the stage name "Dylan" as an homage to his literary hero--Dylan Thomas-- merely confirms that Dylan (the songwriter) and Thomas (the poet) are connected on a continuum within the same culture, and not a cross cultural bridge.

Interestingly, however, the antagonist in this film takes the form of a Western town boss within the school. The town boss, ironically, in the guise of African-American principal Mr. George Grandey, an agent of the very public institution the film would valorize. Grandey is officious, a man who plays by the book. Although Black, he represents the culture of the middle class, White, culture. With his impeccable suits and upward mobility, Grandey is more White than Johnson (played by Michelle Pfeiffer), a "White" woman. Johnson represents a feminist rejoinder to a tradition of patriarchal domination as she encounters resistance from her male principal. Moreover, Grandey provides variation to the traditional pattern of domination through his African-American status. The White male dominator becomes Black, but the power relations remain virtually unchanged. Additionally, Grandey (Like the African principal Claude Rolle in *The Substitute* (1996)) is seen as indifferent to the plight of "his" own people

Grandey insists that people knock before entering his office, as Johnson (humiliatingly) learns. Grandey is both literally and figuratively keeping doors closed. Moreover, the film shows that Grandey's closed door policy indirectly leads to the death of one of the students. A young man from the school whom a local gangster wants to kill goes to Grandey's office for help, but is sent away for not knocking. The student then leaves the school and is immediately killed by his pursuer. The female Johnson is

obviously distraught by this turn of events, a failing of the public education system. With some convincing by the students, however, she chooses to remain at Parkmont High School, and thereby reaffirms hope for public education and confirms the film's contemporary liberal ideology[10].

Dangerous Minds' (1995) contemporary liberalism is related to the neo-conservatism of *The Principal* (1987) and *Lean on Me* (1989). These three films address a perceived shortcoming in the post-war dream of public education and progressive pedagogy observed in *Blackboard Jungle* (1955). That film posited the "education dream" as a solution to juvenile delinquency. Thirty years later, juvenile delinquency is still a problem in American schools. All three of these films recognize that fact, but address it differently. In *The Principal* and *Lean on Me,* juvenile delinquency continues despite (if not exacerbated by) liberal progressive pedagogy. *Dangerous Minds,* however, recognizes some shortcomings of public education, evidenced by the unsympathetic Mr. Grandey. Additionally, this example of a poor Black leader hints at conservatism. If Grandey is all that can be expected of liberalized African American mobility, then Blacks must deserve their traditional lower status, so that reasoning suggests. Nevertheless, the institution of public education is never really questioned in the film.

What is questioned is conservative pedagogy. Grandey personifies traditional pedagogy with his reliance on authoritarian social relations. However, Johnson practices

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[10] The pattern of a teacher seriously considering leaving the profession averted by student influence also appears in *To Sir, with Love* (1967).

progressive pedagogy, as she attempts to reach the students in their own language, and

explore their perceptions of the world. In some ways, it shares many of the liberal

assumptions of some earlier films. *High School Confidential* (1958) also treats language

as a palpable manifestation of generational and social gaps. The student's "beat"

language (e.g. "What's up Dadio") is a major vehicle in the film for illustrating the

unique culture of rebellion. This feature is also present in *Blackboard Jungle* (1955), in

which the leader of the gang, West, refers to Dadier as "Dadio." In *Dangerous Minds*

(1995), Johnson's progressive pedagogy is seen to save public education, and therefore

reaffirm the ideology behind it, contemporary liberalism.

THE SUBSTITUTE (1996)

Directed by Robert Mandel

Written by Roy Frumkes, Alan Ormsby, Rocco Simonelli

Cast:

Tom Berenger .... Shale	Sharron Corley .... Jerome Brown
Raymond Cruz .... Joey Six	Vincent Laresca .... Rodriguez
William Forsythe .... Hollan	Maurice Compte .... Tay
Luis Guzmán .... Rem	Marc Anthony .... Juan Lacas
Richard Brooks .... Wellman	Ernie Hudson .... Principal Claude Rolle
Ana Azcuy .... TV Announcer	Beau Weaver .... Janus Showreel
Diane Venora .... Jane Hetzko	Narrator
Glenn Plummer .... Mr. Darrell Sherman	Cliff De Young .... Matt Wolfson

In *The Substitute* (1996), a Western hero again enters the lawless town cast as a

tough high school classroom. This time, the hero is technically not a teacher at all.

Rather, he is an unemployed mercenary soldier posing as a teacher. Shale strongly

suspects that the recent attack and injury of his girlfriend, the teacher whom he is

replacing as a substitute at the school, is not merely a random act of

violence. Rather, Shale suspects that the attack is somehow caused by

her gang member students at Columbus Senior High School.

Therefore, he passes as a substitute teacher to investigate the matter

further. While there, Shale wins the students over with his tough, no-nonsense (CIA-

trained?) pedagogy, and in the process uncovers a drug ring involving local mobsters

and the high school principal. This repeats a common theme as in *Dangerous Minds*

(1995) where an African-American principal assuming the Western character-type the

town boss. As with Mr. Grandey, *The Substitute's* Claude Rolle is a member of a new

Black middle class unconcerned about "their" children or inadequate to the task of

saving them without White interventions. Shale crushes the drug ring, and then becomes

the Western hero who rides off into the sunset. While the typical Western hero rides off

into the sunset at the end of the film, Shale is the only Classroom Western hero in this

study to do so. It suggests that he may similarly clean up other schools in the future.

The Substitute (1996) is neo-conservative. Alfred North Whitehead said that the

history of western philosophy is a footnote to Plato. Similarly, *High School Confidential*

(1958), *The Principal* (1987), *Lean on Me* (1989), *Dangerous Minds* (1995), and now

The Substitute have all been a footnote to the first and most influential film of the

Classroom Western category, *Blackboard Jungle* (1955). All these films have dealt first

with the issue of delinquency in schools. All films have featured a lone Western-style

hero ride into the school, which is constructed like a lawless Western town, and drive

the gang out by one means or another. However, *The Substitute* highlights and links at

least three intertextual references to *Blackboard Jungle*. First, the director of *Blackboard*

Jungle, Richard Brooks, has a cameo appearance in *Substitute* as Wellman. Second,

there is a fight scene in the school library, which is a reference to a famous library fight

scene in *Blackboard Jungle[11]*. Third, at one point in the film while away from the

school, the gang leader Juan Lucas says to Shale "you're in my classroom now"

(Bakalar, S., et al., 1996). This is a line uttered by the gang leader Artie West in a

similar scene in

Blackboard Jungle.

However, like, *High School Confidential* (1958), *The Principal* (1987), and *Lean*

on Me (1989), *The Substitute* (1996) is neo-conservative because of the solutions the

film provides for the problems of juvenile delinquency. As mentioned above, Shale

straightens the school out, including it's corrupt principal Claude Rolle, with guerilla

warfare tactics. The film does depict a liberal teacher, Mr. Darrell Sherman, who openly

declares his dislike of traditional pedagogy. However, while far from leading to a

turnaround in the school, Sherman's naive idealism leads only to his own murder. No,

the solution to school problems is clearly not liberal public education. Not only is the

principal in league with the gang, but the savior is as far removed from the public school

system as can be imagined. This rescuer has no formal training as a teacher. In fact,

Shale has his mercenary friends forge his qualifications. He instructs his colleague to

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[11] The library fight scene from *Blackboard Jungle* is well known and referenced elsewhere. *High School High* (1996) does an obvious parody of the scene, which I discuss in the "It's a Mad, Mad, Mad World" chapter of this thesis.

give him "solid academic credentials," suggesting that he obviously did not have these to begin with. Teacher education is not needed, military training is!

The Substitute (1996), like the two neo-conservative films from the 1980s, *The Principal* and *Lean on Me*, share this conservative ideology for similar reasons. All these films are conservative responses to the continuing problem of delinquency in American schools. However, unlike *Dangerous Minds* (1995), these films have given up hope on progressive liberal practices, most notably, progressive pedagogy. As indicated above,

The Principal, and *Lean on Me* were released during the 1980s. During this period in the United States, Republican presidents occupied the White House[12], and a conservative ethos prevailed throughout the land—both politically and culturally. It was a time of general prosperity for many in America, and the nation's political culture underwent a newly found patriotism—albeit patriotism tempered with troubling historical facts. Lee Greenwood's hit Country & Western song *God Bless the USA* not only became a theme for Ronald Reagan's campaign appearances, but remains a cultural mantra of conservatism as well. During this time of patriotic fervor, one specter of the recent past seemed to haunt the new consciousness—America's military loss in Vietnam. The event became symbolic of a perspective that blamed liberal bureaucracy for America's failings.

Some crystallizing cultural examples of the "Western" sentiment resonate in other films connecting the Classroom Western to broader social struggles: the *First*

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[12] Ronald Reagan (1981-1989) and George Bush (1989-1993).

Blood films starring Sylvester Stallone, *The Missing in Action*, films starring Chuck Norris, and the vast array of both series' imitators. All these films share certain narrative characteristics:

1. America did not lose the war because of its brave fighting men.

2. Rather, America lost the war because liberals in Washington lacked the fortitude to fight it properly and support the troops who surely could have won the war otherwise.

3. Consequently, untold numbers of American POW's had to be left behind upon retreat.

4. In the 1980s, a lone soldier or a ragtag band of misfits travel to Vietnam, and bring the POW's home.

5. Consequently, without liberal bureaucratic interference, these brave and resourceful Americans symbolically win the war, and thereby restore *honor* to the nation, coinciding with 1980s "New Patriotism."

The Substitute (1996) owes part of its ideological character to that tradition. Tom Berenger, who plays Shale, had a famous role as the murderous sergeant in Oliver Stone's Academy Award winning *Platoon* (1986). Although *Platoon* was not a New Patriotic film like the *First Blood* or *The Missing in Action* films, but rather one critical of war, it presented Berenger with what is arguably his signature role. He has not experienced that kind of critical success since that film. The character of Shale, like John Rambo from the *First Blood* films is a warrior cast aside by a bureaucratic or political

stroke of the pen. Rather than single-handedly winning the Vietnam War despite inept

and corrupt bureaucrats however, Shale rescues a school from inept and corrupt

bureaucrats.

A character like this re-emerges in the 1990s because the need for the kind of

validation of conservative values it represents likely always appeals to a certain number

of people, and remains a popular perceived solution option for problems associated with

public institutions like the military or public education. This film has spawned an array

of sequels. To date, they include *The Substitute 2: School's Out,* (1998) (TV), *The*

Substitute 3: Winner Takes All, (1999) (TV), and *The Substitute 4: Failure is not an*

Option, (2000).

Americans are forewarned that with a loss of will similar to Vietnam they might

also lose America's schools and the next generation of children. The war at home is also

against liberalism. So the thinking goes, Americans lost the war in Vietnam because

they lost the war at home. The irony in *The Substitute* is that a veteran from the war

abroad must step in to win the war at home.

Conclusion

This chapter has included four main sections. First, I gave a brief discussion of

the ideologies to be used in the analysis: socialism, classical/neo-liberalism,

contemporary liberalism, classical conservatism, and neo-conservatism. Second, I

discussed some features of the Western as a film genre, and reasons for its association

with some films in this thesis. Third, I specifically laid out some of these associations.

Finally, I explored the six films in this category, *Blackboard Jungle* (1955), *High School Confidential* (1958), *The Principal* (1987), *Lean on Me* (1989), *Dangerous Minds* (1995), and *The Substitute* (1996).

Blackboard Jungle (1955) is the most seminal movie of the category. It is ideologically contemporary liberal, and sets the framework for the rest of the films in the Classroom Western grouping. *High School Confidential* (1958) is the first of a point-counterpoint pattern within the category of neo-conservative films. *The Principal* (1987) skips three decades to a film that is also neo-conservative. *Lean on Me* (1989) continues the pattern of neo-conservatism in this autobiographical film. *Dangerous Minds* (1995) is another autobiographical film, but this time represents a return to the liberal perspective. *The Substitute* (1996) rounds the Classroom Western category out with a neo-conservative film that despite it's ideological parting with the liberal *Blackboard Jungle*, bears numerous conscious intertextual references to that film.

The films in the Classroom Western category are largely neo-conservative and mixed with some elements of liberalism in a lesser role or foil. They all deal with the issue of juvenile delinquency in schools and engage the problem according to the Western narrative format of a lone stranger entering a lawless town and driving the gang out to make it safe for peaceful students. This is a very individualistic pattern and accounts for the generally conservative ideology present in the movies. The first film, *Blackboard Jungle* (1955), coincided with the post-war pedagogical orientation toward progressivism and contemporary liberal equalization of opportunity. The other liberal film in the category, *Dangerous Minds* (1995), maintains that tradition by making the

hero a woman—women being certainly one of the major proponents and arguably one of the major beneficiaries of post war equalization policies such as affirmative action. The neo-conservative films, *High School Confidential* (1958), *The Principal* (1987), *Lean on Me* (1989), *The Substitute* (1996), are conservative reactions to the liberal films, and also to the direction of post-war liberal social change.

There is an assumption in post-war educational policy and theory that education is the cure for many if not all social ills. Is there a proliferation of unwanted youth pregnancies? Escalation of drug use? Rise in crime? Economic slump? Education is often cited as the locus of attention and front line in the battle against problems such as poverty and crime.

However, military intervention or not in U. S. Schools, "delinquency" remains a fact. The ways of dealing with this social fact remain at least as diverse in the "real" world as they do in the real virtuality of the film world. Some interventions involve liberalizing social policy, some conservative responses. Certainly though, not all films in educational settings deal with juvenile delinquency. Far from it, some deal with just the opposite types of problems. Many films depict relatively privileged students in elite schools, and these are the films discussed in the next chapter: "Pictures of Privilege."

Chapter 4: Pictures of Privilege: Toward a Liberal Aristocracy

"She was my Rushmore, Max."
"I know. She was mine too."
                    Herman Blume and Max Fischer, on the
                    subject of Miss Rosemary Cross, in *Rushmore*
                    (1998)

Introduction

The Classroom Western included four sections: a discussion of the ideologies to

be used in this thesis; some features of the Western genre; features of The Classroom

Western; and the six films in that category: *Blackboard Jungle* (1955), *High School*

Confidential (1958), *The Principal* (1987), *Lean on Me* (1989), *Dangerous Minds*

(1995), and *The Substitute* (1996).

Blackboard Jungle (1955) was the first Classroom Western, was contemporary

liberal, and established the tone for the five films to follow. *High School Confidential*

(1958) was neo-conservative; *The Principal* (1987) was also neo-conservative, as was

Lean on Me (1989). *Dangerous Minds* (1995) was liberal, and *The Substitute* (1996) was

neo-conservative, but bore numerous intertextual references to *Blackboard Jungle*.

Blackboard Jungle (1955) was linked with post-war progressive pedagogy and

contemporary liberal equalization of opportunity. The other liberal film, *Dangerous*

Minds (1995), continued that pattern notably by it's casting of a woman as the

protagonist. The neo-conservative films, *High School Confidential* (1958), *The Principal*

(1987), *Lean on Me* (1989), *The Substitute* (1996), were reactions to the both the liberal

films and post-war liberal social policies casting public education as the great social equalizer.

This chapter explores some other responses to that post-war idea. "Pictures of Privilege" explores films set either in British public schools or in American private schools. The chapter includes *Goodbye Mr. Chips* (1939) (British), *Tom Brown's School Days* (1951) (British), *Taps* (1981) (American), *Dead Poets Society* (1989) (American), and *Rushmore* (1998) (American). All five movies feature some elements of conservatism and liberalism. Notwithstanding, the British films are essentially conservative and the American films essentially liberal.

All the films depict students at elite, non-government schools. Certainly, these settings strikingly differ from those in The Classroom Western. Those films dealt with poverty and crime, while these deal with the trappings of success. The British films depict conservation of the prevailing elitist order, but with some flavor of liberal reform, to suit the temper of the times. However, the American films, notably *Dead Poets Society* (1989) and *Rushmore* (1998) involve people who have already benefited from liberal equality of opportunity, and now long for a kind of traditional elitism evident in the schools portrayed in the British films. In this respect, by creating the conditions for social mobility, the liberalism evident in the Classroom Western helps implicate this search for a Liberal Aristocracy in the American Pictures of Privilege.

Pictures of Privilege

GOODBYE MR. CHIPS (1939)

Directed by Sam Wood

Written by James Hilton (novel *Goodbye, Mr. Chips!*), R.C. Sherriff, Claudine West, Eric Maschwitz

Cast:

Robert Donat .... Mr. Chipping 'Mr. Chips'
Greer Garson .... Katherine Chipping
Terry Kilburn .... John Colley/Peter Colley I/Peter Colley II/Peter Colley III
John Mills .... Peter Colley (as a young man)
Paul Henreid .... Staefel
Judith Furse .... Flora

Lyn Harding .... Wetherby
Milton Rosmer .... Chatteris
Frederick Leister .... Marsham
Louise Hampton .... Mrs. Wickett
Austin Trevor .... Ralston
David Tree .... Jackson
Edmund Breon .... Colonel Morgan
Jill Furse .... Helen Colley
Scott Sunderland .... Sir John Colley

Charles Chipping fulfills his lifelong dream of becoming a Latin master at

Brookfield school, a venerable English public school with well-established traditions and student lineage. Chipping is shy, and begins his teaching career with a certain degree of stilted awkwardness. This trepidation ends when he meets, falls in love with, and marries the beautiful and outgoing Katherine Ellis. Ellis shows him how to relate to the boys, and consequently he becomes a very popular teacher. Tragically however, Kathryn dies, and "Chips" carries on alone with the lessons she had given him to become a beloved institution at the school. Chips

retires on the eve of WWI, but the retirement is short-lived as he returns to become interim headmaster during that conflict. Soon afterward, Chips confesses satisfaction at the end of his life for having "had" so many children, "thousands of them, all boys."

Goodbye Mr. Chips (1939) is traditional conservative, but with some elements of liberalism. The most clearly conservative element of the film is the way it venerates a genteel, benevolent upper class. Brookfield School, established 1492, boasts among it's alumnae Sir Francis Drake and generation after generation of British upper class, including the Colleys of whom Chips comments "there's always a Colley here." Additionally, the film depicts resistance to some liberal reforms, including new groups of students who gain admission to Brookfield simply because they have the money to pay for it and "modern" pedagogy. Chipping comes to bemoan "modern methods," as being "intensive training," and responsible for making Brookfield a "factory for machine made snobs." Moreover, the new students drive up tuition rates and consequently, "boys who really belong to Brookfield are frozen out." The only boys who had been at Brookfield up to that point were from the traditional upper classes. One of this new class of students, an upstart son of vegetable sellers, learns the true worth of the aristocratic "Boys who really belong to Brookfield" when during the war, Peter Colley, his former classmate and superior officer[13] dies saving his life, if only until he dies himself, illustrating the upper class's paternalistic sense of duty.

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[13] It seems that no matter what kind of education the son of a vegetable seller acquires, he'll still not receive a commission from the British Army.

Nonetheless, the film does also possess some liberal elements. Chips is very much against the war, while all those around him are unreflectively enthusiastic. A visiting officer on a recruiting drive from the Army declares to Chips, "These lads are the officers of tomorrow," to which Chips replies "Let's hope tomorrow never comes." When Chipping's oldest friend from Brookfield, Staefel, a former German teacher who died fighting for the "Saxon Regiment" dies in the war, he asked for prayers for him in chapel, to which students express puzzlement at Chips' "funny ideas."

In addition, feminism is given a positive portrayal in the film. The American woman Chips falls in love with and marries, Katherine Ellis, describes herself as "A strong minded female who rides a bicycle [with one leg on either side!] and wants the vote." After their marriage, the couple "shake things up" at Brookfield. She enters the masters' lounge where they announce "women are not allowed in this room," but they declare this only before she wins them over with her outgoing personality and lively intellect. Indeed, before her death, she does begin to make changes at the school, and it's lamented that she would "bring Brookfield down stone by stone."

The stones remained standing at Brookfield however, but of all the sunsets and dawns they'd seen, they would see at least one more. They would witness the sun set on an era and a way of life in Europe. Prior to World War I, that continent had existed in a diplomatic network of alliances between elites. When these alliances brought the continent into World War I, it signaled the setting sun on that way of life. It set on a traditionally conservative order that beheld the dawn of the more liberal twentieth century. Brookfield is an institution linked historically to the Renaissance. The new

capitalist class of that time made it's own inroads into the aristocratic privileges that came before it. As *Goodbye Mr. Chips* (1939) illustrates, the new "Capitalist Aristocracy" was no more anxious to relinquish it's privilege to the new wave of ascendants than the previous elite had been, thus a strong element of the film's conservatism. Nevertheless, the group represented by Chips had been born of the fifteenth century humanist Renaissance, by the valorization of man. Ironically, it's traditional conservatism finds itself tempered by it's encounter with a liberal respect for the equality of woman, by it's encounter with Katherine Ellis.

TOM BROWN'S SCHOOL DAYS (1951)

Directed by Gordon Parry

Written by Thomas Hughes (novel), Noel Langley

Cast:

Hermione Baddeley .... Harrowell, Sally
Max Bygraves .... Coach Guard
Kathleen Byron .... Mrs. Brown
John Charlesworth .... East
John Howard Davies .... Tom Brown
Francis De Wolff .... Squire Brown
Glyn Dearman .... Arthur
John Forrest .... Flashman

Rachel Gurney .... Mrs. Arthur
James Hayter .... Old Thomas
Michael Hordern .... Wilkes
Robert Newton .... Dr. Arnold
Neil North .... Diggs
Amy Veness .... Mrs. Wixie
Diana Wynyard .... Mrs. Arnol

The film opens as eleven-year-old Tom Brown begins his studies at Rugby school. While there, he encounters many challenges, notably with Flashman, the school bully. Brown soon demonstrates great courage, however, by standing up to Flashman.

Consequently, Brown becomes leader of the younger boys at the school, and as leader,

he determines that they should wage war on their tormentor. Brown's leadership abilities

 are soon noticed, and the headmaster Dr. Arnold gives Tom charge over

another boy, George Arthur, to be his mentor. Soon afterward however,

Tom and his friend East surreptitiously participate in a prohibited cross-

country footrace, and the young protege secretly follows. During the race,

they encounter Flashman and a local farmer fighting over a girl, and Flashman falling

into the cold river. The boys, including George Arthur, attempt to save Flashman, but he

pulls George into the river and flees. The boys return to the school and discover that

George had had serious health problems and because of his fall into the river is seriously

ill. George very nearly dies, and consequently Flashman is expelled from Rugby, thus

allowing Brown and the other boys to continue their school days in peace.

Tom Brown's School Days (1951) is traditional conservative but assumes to be

liberal. To understand this liberal pretence, one must examine the role of reform in the

film. Reform efforts pit themselves against something needing change, and much of the

early part of this film is dedicated to establishing such targets for reform.

Rugby School (an actual English public[14] school) is depicted as being a place of

hardship and misery. In fact, before Tom even arrives, his father cautions him "you will

see a great many blackguard things" there. The exteriors of the school were shot at the

actual location, and depict palatial grounds replete with trees and beautiful architecture.

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[14] Public schools in Britain are the same type of schools that in Canada or the United States would be called private, while private schools in Britain would be called public here.

The inside of the school, however, is another matter. Built of dark, stone caverns with few windows, it resembles a medieval dungeon more than a school. Immediately upon Tom's arrival, the other boys accost him and ask him if he has food, as the film indicates that the students are not given enough to eat. Those with money purchase cakes at a nearby bakery, but most of the boys have no money with them. Alternatively, Flashman is one student who has money for cakes.

Enter Dr. Thomas Arnold, Rugby's new headmaster. Arnold is a reformer, and would change the barbaric practices depicted above. Change often meets resistance, and it is no different in this case. An older master makes a speech against reforms in the lounge, when the forward thinking, reform minded young master Mr. Judd takes issue, and engages his colleague in debate. Later, Dr. Arnold chastises Judd for this matter— while praising the sentiment of his argument, he said that they must honor certain gentlemanly traditions.

Dr. Arnold's rebuke of Judd begs a closer examination. Granted, conditions for the boys are very bad at Rugby. However, it appears self-evident, no matter how bad things were at Rugby or any other public school, it is highly unlikely that the conditions sank any where near those experienced by children of other classes. Notably, they were nowhere near as bad as those experienced by children working in factories, mills, or mines at that time.

Arnold's correction of the liberal Mr. Judd was an appeal to traditional conservative aristocratic values. Judd was cautioned to conduct himself like a gentleman. The only other person at Rugby who did not behave like a gentleman was the

bully Flashman. Flashman was part of the new liberal ascending class—his family was "British East India Company people." That Tom vanquished Flashman with his innate character is seen as a testament to his class of origin—his father was a squire ("a country gentleman; especially, the chief landowner in a district"(Avis et al., 1983, p. 1091)). Tom Brown (a "good" English name) was a member of the traditional aristocracy, while Flashman (whose very name seems to refer to the garish ostentatiousness with which the aristocracy viewed those of new money and position) is a member of the new liberal middle class. Consequently, the film valorizes the traditional elite, and depicts reform through virtuous duty, rather than liberal equalization, while denigrating liberals. In fact, liberals represented by Flashman seem to be what the school needs reforming from.

Tom Brown's School Days (1951) takes place in 1834. Nineteenth century England was a time and place of great social reform. People like John Stuart Mill and Jeremy Bentham actively campaigned for reforms, such as public sanitation, child labor laws, and universal education. Changes such as these and others were a response to the living conditions experienced by workers transplanted to large cities like London as part of the Industrial Revolution. The beneficiaries of these reforms were workers, often children, with little education or political power. Girls and boys often toiled long hours in filthy, disease-ridden conditions. Such circumstances were clearly much worse than in any British public school. Indeed, reform was in the air at this time, and it's cry was to be heard throughout British society—from London ghettos, to Yorkshire coal mines, even to the clarion heights of Rugby school. The reform struggle here was symbolized in

the exchange between Dr. Arnold and Mr. Judd—it's a good thing to talk of reforms, but at Rugby, we'll never question the honor of a gentleman, or the legitimate upper class.

1951, the year of the film's release, was also a time of liberal reform. This post-war period, as discussed in *Blackboard Jungle* (1955), saw America readjusting itself to peace and rebuilding a new society. Britain found itself in a similar situation, perhaps even more so. America had not one war casualty upon its continental soil: not one death, not one destroyed building. Britain's rebuilding was both social and physical, much of its cities having been leveled by German bombs. Liberal reforms shaped the rebuilding. However, while much was destroyed by the ravages of war, while many venerable structures were reduced to heaps of ruble, this was not so for all Britain's frameworks. Notably, its ancient class structure remained stubbornly intact, so this post-war liberal reform took place within the purview of its aristocratic *anciene regime*. A film like *Tom Brown's School Days* (1951), accompanied by its liberal reform within the staid walls of Rugby School, emerges as a reflection of cautious social change.

TAPS (1981)

Directed by Harold Becker

Written by Devery Freeman (novel), Robert Mark Kamen, James Lineberger (adaptation), Darryl Ponicsan

Cast:

George C. Scott .... General Harlan Bache
Timothy Hutton .... Brian Moreland

Ronny Cox .... Colonel Kerby
Sean Penn .... Alex Dwyer
Tom Cruise .... David Shawn

Brendan Ward .... Charlie
Evan Handler .... Edward West
John P. Navin Jr. .... Derek Mellott
Billy Van Zandt .... Bug
Giancarlo Esposito .... J.C. Pierce

Donald Kimmel .... Billy Harris
Tim Wahrer .... John Cooper
Tim Riley .... Hulk
Jeff Rochlin .... Shovel
Rusty Jacobs .... Rusty

The students and staff of Bunker Hill Military Academy share a proud history steeped in tradition, honor, and reverence for their fallen comrades. Their protector-warrior culture faces its most serious threat not from a foreign enemy, but from a collusion between it's board of directors and real estate developers who see more value in the school by tearing it down to use the land for condominiums. The cadet's beloved General Bache suffers a heart attack in a conflict with some local townspeople, and the student leadership believes itself alone to face the crisis. Consequently, the students execute a military take-over of the school property, and wind up in a standoff with the National Guard. The impasse grinds on as the cadets stand for their honor and traditions, and the powers of the State stand for the protection of lives and private property. Tensions arise, leading toward an eventual violent and tragic conflict. Some students are killed, and those who survive are left puzzled as to just what exactly they had been fighting for, as their ideals fall on the sword of pragmatism.

Taps (1981) is liberal, although it would be easy to mistake it for conservative. In fact, the film bridges both of these ideologies and of representatives found literally on either side of the fence surrounding Bunker Hill Academy. The National Guardsmen on one side stand for liberty and the cadets on the other for conservation. My focus in the

film is on the interpretation of the boys' primary pedagogical influence, General Harlan Bache, who is played by George C. Scott. Bache is ironic: hero, or mad? The Bache dynamic in *Taps* plays with what is arguably Scott's signature role is his similarly ironic portrayal of true-life American General George S. Patton, in the film *Patton* (1970). Certainly, any character of a General played by Scott[15] must be associated at some level with Patton and the Battle of the Bulge in World War II. The cadets may be viewed as defending the values of Second World War soldiers against Totalitarianism—here the new Totalitarianism of democratic consumer culture.

The cadets, led by Brian Moreland, are defending what they take to be their traditional values. They believe they are defending virtue, honor, and the integrity of their special warrior class, which they believe misunderstood, in society. Their mentor, and head of the school, General Bache says at one point that their lot is to serve the "caprice of inferior men." In American society, the "inferior" men they serve are democratically

elected leaders, responsible to the citizens of that nation. The U.S military serves the U.S. constitution, and the constitution serves the American people. Bache and his followers are confused about their true role in society.

Through the gaze of Bache and his students, civilians are either undisciplined hooligans or weak bureaucrats. The local townsfolk are in pick-up trucks and t-shirts as they altercate with the impeccably dressed cadets at a ball. The Bunker Hill board of

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[15] He also notably played a mad general in Stanley Kubrick's 1964 film *Dr. Strangelove or how I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb*.

directors clearly falls into the category of Bache's inferior men, as they rule to tear down the academy, as it would be more profitable to build condominiums on the site.

Notwithstanding, the film only *seems* conservative. Those parts of the movie that establish the cadet's motivations for taking over the school are explorations of their perspective, and that perspective is conservative and antagonistic to liberalism. For all the betrayal of Bache's honor by working class townsfolk and by enterprise-oriented board members, Bache and his cadets seem to forget what their honor is supposed to serve. The main value conflict is between the profit-driven decision of the board and the warrior-honor of Bache and his cadets. In American society, profit-making enterprise does not serve the military—the military serves it.

When the viewer of *Taps* (1981) steps back from the perspective of the cadets to engage the bigger picture, the film's liberalism emerges. First, cracks in the cadet's picture appear. Brian Moreland (whose name is a curious play on the cadet's effort to seize "more land") speaks with his father, "a top Master Sergeant, " who describes Bache as "a joke, " who had been repeatedly passed over for promotions. At the height of an armed standoff with the National Guard, Colonal Kerby, the National Guard commander tries at length to negotiate surrender from the boys. Moreland replies that he cannot surrender because he is a soldier, and Kerby retorts, "no," *he* is a soldier, and openly criticizes Bache's teachings as "the worst kind of bullshit there is," adding that he (Kerby) has the same career goal of any real soldier, to stay alive.

At the end of the film, confusion provokes the Guardsmen to storm the campus, with shots being fired from both sides. As indicated above, several cadets are killed—

including Brian Moreland. Afterward, one of the cadets laments, "there must have been something missing in all he [Bache] taught us or this wouldn't have happened." The tragedy was a result of misunderstandings and incompatibilities between ideals and reality. On the surface, the film seems like a conservative championing of traditional military honor. However, when the viewer balances the perspectives on both sides of the fence surrounding Bunker Hill Academy, both figuratively and literally, the idealism of Bache is seen as misguided. The more sober values of Moreland's father and Colonel Kerby are revealed as the most appropriate military values, with those values supporting the values of the broader society, in this case those allowing the enterprise initiative of the board of Bunker Hill. Therefore, *Taps* (1981) is liberal—economically if not also politically and culturally.

The film combines two cultural elements of that time. It's release date (1981) bridges it between two eras—in the space between the Jimmy Carter administration (1977 to 1981) and the Reagan/Bush era (1981 to 1993). In the discussion of The Classroom Western, *The Substitute* (1996), I correlated the latter period with patriotic fervor. The honor-driven calls to arms in *Taps* (1981) appeals to New Patriotic 1980s audiences. Nevertheless, the depiction of the probably mad general Bache as a right-wing nemesis betrays a cultural image that had been present in American popular culture since the early 1960s. After the assassination of John Fitzgerald Kennedy on November 22 1963, an idea emerged with varying levels of legitimacy of right wing conspiracies. Several successful films in the 1970s gave voice to that idea, notable examples being found in two films directed by Allan J. Pakula: *The Parallax View* (1977) and *All the*

President's Men (1976), starring respectively well-known Hollywood liberals Warren

Beatty and Robert Redford. Both movies involve high-level government conspiracies,

with *All the President's Men* based on Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein's true-life

account of the Watergate affair (Watergate being another important contributor to

America's "Under-Culture of Conspiracy"). The view of Bache as an inspiring hero

appeals to the conservative 1980s New Patriotism, while the view of him as a dangerous

madman appeals to the 1970s liberal Under-Culture of Conspiracy. The film stands on

both sides of this ideological divide, of both the 1970s and the 1980s. Yet, with

America's withdrawal from Vietnam in 1973, 1981 was not yet time for the kind of

reactionary conservatism invested in *First Blood, Missing in Action,* and *The Substitute*

(1996). *Taps'* foot remains planted in the liberal 1970s and a transition piece stepping

toward 1990.

DEAD POETS SOCIETY (1989)

Directed by Peter Weir

Written by Tom Schulman

Cast:

Robin Williams.... John Keating	Kurtwood Smith.... Mr. Perry
Robert Sean Leonard.... Neil Perry	James Waterston.... Gerard Pitts
Ethan Hawke.... Todd Abderson	Carla Belver.... Mrs. Perry
Josh Charles.... Knox Everstreet	Leon Pownall.... McAllister
Gale Hansen.... Charles Dalton	George Martin .... Dr. Hager
Dylan Kussman.... Richard Cameron	Joe Aufiery.... Chemistry Teacher
Allelon Ruggiero.... Steven Meeks	Matt Carey.... Hopkins
Norman Lloyd.... Mr. Nolan	

In *Dead Poets Society* (1989), Tom Schulman garnered an Oscar for best original

screenplay. Robin Williams plays John Keating, an alumnus of Welton Academy (an
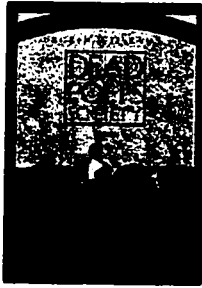
elite New England Prep school for boys) who returns to his alma mater

to accept a teaching position. Students come to Welton to study

Trigonometry, Latin, History, and English. Keating, an English

teacher, practices very unorthodox pedagogy, compared to that of his

generally staid colleagues. He has the boys rip pages out of their poetry text, which

outlines systems of quantitative aesthetic judgement. He challenges them to *carpe deim*

or to "seize the day," and encourages them to engage passionately with poetry. Incensed

by their new teacher, the boys learn that in his student days Keating had belonged to a

secret group, the Dead Poets Society. The boys begin to live their lives by the society's

credo, to "seize the day," and run head-to-head with the traditional, rigid values of

parents, peers, and the school administration. Consequently, one boy commits suicide

and Keating leaves Welton under a cloud of betrayal and controversy. Still, the young

men who remain are changed forever through their personal encounters with literature

and their very special teacher.

Like the other films discussed thus far in Pictures of Privilege, *Goodbye Mr.*

Chips (1939), *Tom Brown's School Days* (1951), and *Taps* (1981), *Dead Poets Society*

(1989) strikes a balance between conservatism and liberalism. The film has many

conservative elements, but in it's very most crucial aspects represent cultural liberalism

and the bohemian romantic impulse of libertarians.

The crux of the story is the suicide of Neil Perry. Unlike most of his classmates,

Neil is the first generation of his family to attend prestigious Welton, and by extension,

the first to belong to that class that does. Neil says, his is "not a rich family like Charlie's," one of his classmates. His father is a businessman who had to fight for every penny of his success. Mr. Perry is the example of the liberal dream—a self-made man, risen from poverty that sends his son to one of the finest schools in the country. As father and son clash, Mr. Perry declares he "didn't have the advantages he [Neil] has," and tells Neil he is going to become a doctor. However, Neil and his father have different visions for his life. Neil loves the theatre, and partly inspired by Keating's lessons, he determines that he is going to be an actor. Mr. Perry is adamant though, and will not entertain Neil's choice whatsoever. Consequently, Neil takes his own life.

The suicide casts a shadow upon Mr. Perry, and the things that he stands for. Being an economic liberal businessman seems to cast liberalism in a poor light. Yet, the father is in fact anti-liberal by not honoring Neil's "choice" to be an actor. Mr. Perry, as well as Mr. Nolan, the head of the school, are forces of conservatism, which is ultimately presented negatively as a barrier to individual freedom.

Dead Poets Society (1989) was released near the end of the 1980s. As discussed above, there were many culturally conservative films in that decade, associated with a New Patriotism emergent at that time. "America" had wounds to heal namely a recent military defeat in Vietnam. By 1989, Ronald Reagan's vice president, George Bush had succeeded to the White House, thus the 1980s New Patriotism entered a more mature phase. America was now ready to move beyond the recent past, and consider its legacy. *Dead Poets Society* takes place in the later 1950s; it harkens back to the twentieth century's golden age for Republicans, the Eisenhower Era. There was no war in South East Asia, no Watergate (although that incident's central player, Richard M. Nixon was

vice president), no Iran-Contra, the economy was good, and Americans were thought to be generally happy and confident in the future.

America is a society founded on a national myth of individual liberty, a society without the rigid class structures of its former colonial master—England. It is ideally a society ruled by its people, not the throne. It is a curious condition when a country with no royalty longs for the royalty of England and the aristocratic culture of a romantic gentry class. Byron, Shelley, and Keats, poets that Keating discussed, were a romantic reaction to the French Revolution. Their open engagement with personal sensory experience also bridged to the libertine orientation of De Sade. Charles Keating (his name is an allusion to the poet John Keats) the poetry teacher had come from a sojourn in England to teach at Welton, and after the suicide returned to that land of Shakespeare, Wordsworth, and the crown—a victim of conservative elements in his homeland. Keating represents a link with a culture of royalty, of aristocracy, and it is the function of this film to establish a uniquely American aristocracy in that late 1980s period of patriotic triumphalism. Moreover, it is a uniquely American "aristocracy" that the film establishes. Among all the poets Keating teaches, it is the nineteenth century American Walt Whitman who centers his curriculum, instituting an American legacy in the English literary canon. This Classless Aristocracy is one fundamentally informed by that most American of ideologies, pragmatism, liberalism, and the transcendental individualism of Thoreau and Emerson. Therefore, *Dead Poets Society* harkens to a British aristocratic culture, but would forge a new one in the process, drawn along distinctively American lines of Pilgrim's Progress of creative reinvention and exceptionality.

RUSHMORE (1998)

Directed by Wes Anderson

Written by Wes Anderson & Owen Wilson

Cast:

Jason Schwartzman .... Max Fischer
Bill Murray .... Herman Blume
Olivia Williams .... Rosemary Cross
Seymour Cassel .... Bert Fischer
Brian Cox .... Dr. Guggenheim
Mason Gamble .... Dirk Calloway
Sara Tanaka .... Margaret Yang
Stephen McCole .... Magnus Buchan

Luke Wilson .... Dr. Peter Flynn
Dipak Pallana .... Mr. Adams
Andrew Wilson .... Coach Beck
Marietta Marich .... Mrs. Guggenheim
Ronnie McCawley .... Ronny Blume
Keith McCawley .... Donny Blume
Hae Joon Lee .... Alex

"He's one of the worst students we have," laments the head of prestigious Rushmore Academy, Dr. Guggenheim. Max Fischer is a 15-year-old scholarship student at Rushmore. He is a boy of modest academic skills, but a dizzying array of organizational, creative, and entrepreneurial abilities. Max befriends a local millionaire, Herman Blume, and a teacher at the school, Rosemary Cross. He soon finds himself in an escalating rivalry for Cross's affections with Blume. The activities of the ensuing dispute eventually lead to Max's expulsion from Rushmore and his estrangement from both the teacher and his friend. He transfers to a public school, and slowly starts rebuilding the damage wreaked by the rivalry. At the end of the film, he brings everyone together for one of his trademark plays, and gets involved with a girl more his own age.

Rushmore (1998) rounds out the pattern within Pictures of Privilege of films that contain elements both conservatism and liberalism. The two British films, *Goodbye Mr.*

Chips (1939), and *Tom Brown's School Days* (1951) contain elements of liberalism, but are fundamentally conservative. All three American movies, *Taps* (1981), *Dead Poets Society* (1989), and here *Rushmore* have elements of conservatism, but are essentially liberal.

Cultural elitism, a conservative characteristic, is a strong undercurrent in *Rushmore* (1998). Rushmore Academy is, after all, "one of the best schools in the country." Both it's students and staff are exemplars of academic excellence. Miss Cross, the first grade teacher, who student Max and Millionaire Blume fall in love with is a graduate of Harvard. Her deceased husband was also a graduate of Harvard, and of Rushmore—although the gender changes the tradition remains.

The lull of cultural superiority is considered more valuable to the characters than even money. Herman Blume is a self-made millionaire, but longs for the kind of personal or social legitimization a Rushmore education provides. The film opens with a shot of a garish family portrait of the Blumes, an attempt by possessors of "new money" to gain an instant aristocratic legacy. Both Blume's sons, unmannered louts, attend Rushmore, as he befriends the cultured Max as a surrogate son. Blume is a major benefactor to the school, and addresses the student body periodically to regale it's students and staff about how much more privileged they are than he had been, revealing an equation of educated aristocracy.

Blume befriends Max under the mistaken assumption that he is the son of a top brain surgeon. Blume wants to "belong" at Rushmore as much as (working-class/petite bourgeois/low status professional) Max. His father is in fact a barber—Max lied about his occupation. Blume falls in love with the intelligent and cultured Miss Cross for a

similar reason. Later in the film, when Blume and Miss Cross become estranged, he

bemoans, "She was my Rushmore, Max," to which Max replies "I know. She was mine

too."

However, *Rushmore* (1998) is fundamentally liberal. The first act concludes with

Max being expelled from his beloved private school, and forced to continue his

education at Grover Cleveland Public High School. The two schools are a study in

contrasts. Where Rushmore is wealthy, homogeneously White, and set in lush pastoral

surroundings, Grover Cleveland is generally poor, racially mixed, and the picture of

decaying starkness set amidst a barren concrete wasteland.

However, it is soon subtly suggested that Grover Cleveland is in fact a good

school. The students are bright and friendly, the teachers caring and competent, and

Max's grades actually start to improve. He makes friends and continues where he had

left off at Rushmore, writing, producing, directing, and performing his own plays. It

becomes clear that "Max" is going to be who Max is "going to be" at whatever school

he is enrolled. The film is honest in it's depiction of the condition of some public

schools, but Grover Cleveland still facilitates opportunity for Max to fulfill his abilities.

This dynamic underlines the liberalism of *Rushmore* (1998).

Like all the films in Pictures of Privilege, *Rushmore* (1998) contains elements of

both conservatism and liberalism. Where the British films were more conservative and

the American films are more liberal, *Rushmore* is no exception. The experience of

Herman Blume is reminiscent of the explanation given above for liberals flirting with

elite culture and explored in relation to *Dead Poets Society* (1989). Where *Dead Poets

Society* was nostalgic for a classless society to forge a space in aristocratic cultural

elitism, Blume and the Rushmore school endeavor to do the same thing in the

contemporary context. Blume is rich, but has an inferiority complex with respect to his

educational standing. In *Dead Poets Society*, America longs for the British civilized life

it broke from in revolution. In *Rushmore*, the elusive, refined, quarry that Max and

Blume seek is personified in the British Rosemary Cross. In 1998, as in the 1989 of

Dead Poets Society, those American films seek that elusive, refined "lady" it left behind

when chasing liberty over 200 years ago. Clearly, the conservative cultural elite may

have found its new self-proclaimed liberal foundation in these films.

Conclusion

This chapter has explored Pictures of Privilege, films set either in British public

schools or American private schools. The five films are *Goodbye Mr. Chips* (1939) and

Tom Brown's School Days (1951) (which are the British films), and the American

movies *Taps* (1981), *Dead Poets Society* (1989), and *Rushmore* (1998). All films

included some elements of both conservatism and liberalism, however, the British films

were primarily conservative and the American ones liberal.

Goodbye Mr. Chips (1939) has elements of liberalism, but they are not enough to

overshadow the film's pervasive conservative stance. *Chips* takes a liberal attitude

toward some issues, including equality for women. However, the film's veneration of

institutions supporting Britain's traditional class structure, notably Brookfield school,

keeps it firmly in conservative territory. A similar analysis can be applied to *Tom

Brown's School Days* (1951). That film does take a favorable position toward nineteenth

century British liberal social reform and even goes so far as to suggest that Rugby

school is on the front line of such reforms. However, the elite school is clearly aligned with existing social inequalities. Moreover, whatever kind of reform Rugby school requires is personified by the middle class, non-land owning Flashman, reinforcing aristocratic disdain for the upwardly mobile classes.

Taps (1981) is liberal, but one must look closely to see through its conservative façade. It apparently honors military virtue as superior to its civilian leadership, given voice by General Bache. Nonetheless, Bache's teachings are shown to be flawed, and the cadets who take over the school misled, thereby reaffirming the liberal values Bache stood against. *Dead Poets Society* (1989) also has many conservative elements, but is certainly liberal. When a student, Neil Perry, commits suicide, two visions are pitted against each other: that of Neil and his culturally elite teacher, Mr. Keating, and that of his self-made businessman father. It is the vision of Neil's father that is shown to be inferior, and freethinking individuality is valorized over conservative control, albeit with Keating's elite culture denigrating Mr. Perry's liberal ascension in the process. Finally, *Rushmore* (1998) continues the pattern of the American liberal film with a strong flavor of conservatism. Like *Dead Poets Society* (1989), this film explores the American search for a British-influenced elite culture it can call it's own—a uniquely American "Liberal Aristocracy."

All five films provide glimpses into British and American Privilege. They all deal with students at elite, non-government schools. These students are in very different circumstances than their counter-parts in the inner-city schools of The Classroom Western. Films in that category also swayed back and forth between liberalism and conservatism, but in very different ways. Conservatism in The Classroom Western

involved reactionary answers to undesired phenomena such as poverty and crime, while conservatism in Pictures of Privilege was concerned with maintaining or establishing the very most preferred phenomena—at least to those in possession of it—elite position. Liberalism in the last chapter was concerned with providing opportunities for individuals to rise from poor circumstances, and arguably by extension to witness the disappearance of those circumstances in general. The liberalism in this chapter meant slightly different things in each of the British and American groups. In the films from the other side of the Atlantic, liberalism meant a moderation of their fundamentally conservative stance, while in the American films, it meant the frame that was used to forge a new, unique "Liberal Conservatism."

Liberalism is often associated with equalization efforts in its representative films—as the solution to social inequity. However, social equality is often a more desirable goal for those below the equality line than those above it. To the earnest students of *Blackboard Jungle* (1955), or the Hispanic pupils of *Dangerous Minds* (1996), liberal equality can be a definite asset. Nevertheless, once a person has reached a state of equality, or even, as in the case of Mr. Blume in *Rushmore* (1998), surpassed equality, that status can lose the sheen it once had. If you are living a different economic life, you may want a different cultural life to go along with it that will distinguish you from the democratic horde. When a person reaches the highest levels of financial success, he or she may long for a higher level of cultural status—witness the Carnegie Halls, the John Paul Getty Museums, and the Guggenheim Museums. In this sense, the equalizing liberalism of the Classroom Western leads to and helps create the conditions that support the subverting liberalism of Pictures of Privilege.

In the absence of a British aristocracy, America has made efforts to recreate the crown and royalty via celebrities. From Kennedy's Camelot, to Elvis Presley as "The King," or even to Madonna as the Queen of Pop, The United States has coronated "liberal" royalty and a meritocratic "Classless" Upper Class. These new Peers need to be educated, and that education takes place in Pictures of Privilege cinematically.

Chapter 5: The Teen Comedy

Introduction

Pictures of Privilege explored films set in either British public schools or American private schools. I examined *Goodbye Mr. Chips* (1939), *Tom Brown's School Days* (1951), *Taps* (1981), *Dead Poets Society* (1989), and *Rushmore* (1998). All five films included elements of conservatism and liberalism. However, the British films (*Goodbye Mr. Chips* and *Tom Brown's School Days*) were primarily conservative and the American movies (*Taps*, *Dead Poets Society*, and *Rushmore*) essentially liberal.

Goodbye Mr. Chips (1939) was liberal regarding equality for women. Nonetheless, the film also criticized upwardly mobile new students to Brookfield school and generally conserves the traditional British social structure. *Tom Brown's School Days* (1951) attempted to situate itself in the tradition of nineteenth century reform in Britain. Nevertheless, the film also reinforced aristocratic disdain for ascending groups. Elite Rugby school continued as a bastion for aristocratic power in British society.

Taps (1981) is liberal, but not obviously. This reading hinges on the interpretation of General Bache, who declares military virtue superior to its civilian leadership. Still, his declarations were revealed as flawed and tragedy ensued. *Dead Poets Society* (1989) also featured conservatism with liberal elements. The suicide of student Neil Perry is the result of conflict between two visions: first of Neil and his cultured teacher, Mr. Keating second his businessman father, Mr. Perry. The father's conservatism was exposed as inferior but liberalism and the aristocratic culture of a romantic gentry class was celebrated. *Rushmore* (1998) also had elements of

conservatism but was essentially liberal. In this film, both working class student and wealthy millionaire alike yearned for the sheen of an elite Rushmore education and the aristocratic cultural legitimization it provided. The experience of millionaire Blume suggested the description given liberal desire for elite culture in *Dead Poets Society*. Both films sought the British aristocratic culture America broke from in the eighteenth century.

The two British films illustrated conserving forces within a society that favored its traditional aristocratic hierarchies. The depictions, though, are imbued with a flavor of liberal reform prevalent in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in which they are set. The three U.S. films represented American societies' fundamental liberal orientation as well as its liberal aristocratic cultural longing.

While the above Hollywood films imply an effort to re-crown a new, uniquely American aristocracy at the intersection of culture and cast through education, the present chapter investigates a different genre, the Teen Comedy. These are films set in an educational setting that feature and are marketed for entertaining teens. The three films selected here, which reveal themes of decadence, conservatism, and nurturing, are *Fast Times at Ridgemont High* (1982), *Heathers* (1989), and *She's All That* (1999).

Analysis demonstrates that *Fast Times at Ridgemont High* (1982) is conservative. It is distinct from The Classroom Western because it presents no crucial social problems, and this helps shape its conservatism. *Heathers* (1989) is a liberal satire that criticizes conservative social antagonisms. *She's All That* (1999) is also a conservative film. The film is based upon the Pygmalion myth of a prosperous man (a king) sponsoring and training a woman of lower, depending on the version of the myth,

either ontological (as a stone statue) or social (as a stone) standing. The film also includes a liberal nurture over nature dimension.

These films differ in the narrative functions of their comedy. *Fast Times at Ridgemont High* (1982) has a quasi-journalistic capacity. Its humor comes from realistic, "Narrato-expositional" representations. These depictions create the background for the film's conservatism. *She's All That* (1999) is based on myth. The mythic purpose is fundamentally consensus generating, and this informs the film's conservative nature.

The comedy of *Heathers* (1989), yet, provides a critical function. As satire, its expectation is to criticize and make ridiculous human conceits through exaggeration. The satirist doesn't typically skewer those without power, but those of puissance. In the United States of 1989, the object of satire becomes the well-entrenched force of conservatism. Additionally, *Heathers* differs from the other two films in another significant way. While all three Teen Comedies depict relatively prosperous settings, *Heathers* is the only one to represent any urgent social problems. *Heathers*, although satirical and even allegorical, depicts school violence—murder and suicide. Accordingly, the Teen Comedies here are chiefly conservative. *Heathers* (1989) is the liberal exception.

The Teen Comedy

FAST TIMES AT RIDGEMONT HIGH (1982)

Directed by Amy Heckerling

Written by Cameron Crowe (also book)

Cast:

Sean Penn .... Jeff Spicoli
Jennifer Jason Leigh .... Stacy Hamilton
Judge Reinhold .... Brad Hamilton
Robert Romanus .... Mike Damone
Brian Backer .... Mark "Rat" Ratner
Phoebe Cates .... Linda Barrett
Ray Walston .... Mr. Hand
Scott Thomson .... Arnold

Vincent Schiavelli .... Mr. Vargas
Amanda Wyss .... Lisa
D.W. Brown .... Ron Johnson
Forest Whitaker .... Charles Jefferson
Kelli Maroney .... Cindy
Tom Nolan .... Dennis Taylor
Blair Ashleigh .... Pat Bernard

Fast Times at Ridgemont High (1982) is an ensemble piece with a tone and structure more documentary in style than classic narrative. Certainly, this is due in large part to the fact that the screenwriter, *Rolling Stone* reporter Cameron Crowe, uses his "non-fiction novel" of the same name as source material for the script. Both the book and film are an examination of middle class high school at a particular place (Southern California) at a particular time (late 1970s/early 1980s). The movie focuses on the adventures and misadventures of a group of Ridgemont High students. Stacy Hamilton and Mark Ratner are two (almost) innocents fumbling toward love and each other. Brad Hamilton is a senior and newly minted single man with a lot to learn in a world bigger than high school and the local mall. Linda Barrett is the engaged, overly mature girl, and Mike Damone is an apparently smooth operator whose true character is slowly revealed. Jeff Spicoli is the good-time surfer/"stoner," and the comedic center of the film. The various story lines weave in and out of each other but generally stand alone.

Fast Times at Ridgemont High (1982) is conservative. Unlike the films of The Classroom Western, there are no serious social problems presented. Unlike some of the

Pictures of Privilege, there is no student tragedy. *Fast Times* is a realistic, at times unflinching, portrait of a generally middle class group.

The film depicts teen sex: masturbation, premature ejaculation, and abortion. These depictions provide a clue to the conservative orientation. The depictions assume an almost cautionary form as they illustrate the pain, humiliation, and tragedy that accrue to those who submit to teenage desire. At the end, the film shows what happens to the various characters after the narrative proper. Stacy Hamilton and Mark Ratner (the romantic-comedy couple) are revealed to be involved in a passionate affair although they still haven't gone all the way.

In keeping with the film's journalistic roots, overt editorializing is underplayed. Events and characters are presented, but the responses and interpretations of the characters are in-text character interpretation, and not necessarily authorial voice. In fact, the issue of intra-textual interpretation becomes important.

"He's been a stone since the third grade!" (Barone, et al., 1995, p. 260). Diane Barone, Maria Meyerson, and Marla Mallette quote a Ridgemont High student on history teacher Mr. Hand to illustrate Mr. Hand's unpopularity. As the authors assert, Hand is a teacher who employs traditional pedagogy and is therefore unpopular with the students. Harold J. Burbach and Margo A. Figgins (1993) discuss Mr. Hand as an example of the adversarial teacher, but played for comic effect (p. 72), as in the exchange in which Spicoli (Sean Penn) arrives late to class. When asked for an answer to a question in class, Spicoli replies "I don't know." Mr. Hand tells him sarcastically that he is so "impressed" with his answer he is going to write it on the board for all the other classes to see. Much to Mr. Hand's chagrin, Spicoli loves the idea.

Notwithstanding, one must consider the source of these intra textual interpretations. I assert Mr. Hand is a good teacher[16]. The night of the school prom, just as Spicoli is about to leave with his friends, stoned, Mr. Hand arrives at Spicoli's house, announcing that he is there to claim the time he figured Spicoli owed him for time wasted in the classroom all year. Instead of smoking up with his friends, Spicoli and Mr. Hand sit down to do school work. This is funny. Moreover, no teacher, parent, or serious student is going to see Mr. Hand as a cruel person for this action. In fact, he's probably doing Spicoli a favor. Mr. Hand, with his traditional pedagogy, does illustrate the conservative nature of *Fast Times at Ridgemont High* (1982).

Recall: "I am the HNIC... head Nigger in charge" declared principal Joe Clark in *Lean on Me* (1989). Both that film and *The Principal* (1987) are Classroom Westerns of a conservative character that feature traditional pedagogy. These films are conservative responses to social problems evident in the times and places they depict—1980s inner-city communities. The middle class Southern California high school depicted in *Fast Times at Ridgemont High* (1982) had no such problems. There are no marauding, violent gangs, no poverty, no life or death struggles. Rather, there are part time jobs at the mall, dating, and cars. Notwithstanding the absence of social problems depicted, there is a "Shopping-Mall Crisis." This absence of problems becomes *the problem*. The conflict drives character motivation. This is a conservative moment, the film's journalistic style conclusion: "these kids today have it so easy." Therefore, the conservative impetus is completed. The kids of Ridgemont High live what appears to be

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[16] There is a long-standing debate between adherents of student centered Progressive and teacher directed Traditional pedagogies. Both approaches have their respective advantages and disadvantages. The fact that Mr. Hand practiced the Traditional method should not automatically render him judged a poor teacher—he is a competent professional who cares about the students' learning.

a decadent lifestyle, which flies in the face of the values of previous generations. Prior cohorts faced challenges ranging from wars in Vietnam, Korea, and Europe to the Great Depression. The values forged through these events stress hard work and self-denial in preparation for possible misfortune.

Fast Times at Ridgemont High (1982) depicts "down-time" in a Jimmy Carter, post-Watergate, post-Vietnam America. The students of Ridgemont High have no war nor major crisis looming. They live in a time and place of relative peace and prosperity, and to the chagrin of an implied conservative observer do not seem to recognize or appreciate this fact.

HEATHERS (1989)

Directed by Michael Lehmann

Written by Daniel Waters

Cast:

Winona Ryder .... Veronica Sawyer	Patrick Labyorteaux .... Ram
Christian Slater .... Jason Dean	Jeremy Applegate .... Peter Dawson
Shannen Doherty .... Heather (Duke)	Jon Shear .... Rodney
Lisanne Falk .... Heather (McNamara)	Carrie Lynn .... Martha
Kim Walker .... Heather Chandler	Dunnstock/Dumptruck
Penelope Milford .... Pauline Fleming	Phill Lewis .... Dennis
Glenn Shadix .... Father Ripper	Renée Estevez .... Betty Finn
Lance Fenton .... Kurt Kelly	John Zarchen .... Country Club Keith

Veronica Sawyer, a teenage girl whose "job is being popular and shit," is ambivalent about her membership in the ultra popular and powerful clique of "Heathers" at Westerburg High School. These four wealthy and beautiful students rule their campus

unmercifully. Veronica comes to find the price she must pay for this popularity too

great, as it requires her to reject childhood friends and perform various acts of cruelty.

 Her frustration and muted anger find a voice in a new boy at school, the

mysterious and danger-tinged Jason Dean. Jason, a reverse femme

fatale[17], "tricks" her into killing the Heathers and disguising the deaths

as suicides. The film builds to a boiler room scene where a discussion

ensues regarding school (and society) and the nature of social antagonism and likely or

unlikely solutions. Jason literally destroys himself with a bomb, as he symbolically

represents inevitable conflicts. This event leaves Veronica to recast society at

Westerburg along more tolerant and egalitarian lines.

Heathers (1989) is a liberal black comedy and satire that skewers conservatism.

When the principal considers granting time off for students to grieve the apparent

suicide of one of the Heathers, he comments, "Damn, I'd be willing to go half a day for

a cheerleader." When discussing rigid scripts of masculinity, Jason Dean commented

that this is Ohio, and "if you don't have a brewsky in your hand you'd might as well be

wearing a dress."

The arrows of critique soon find bigger targets. Jason sees the overall fabric of

society as inconvertibly hostile and the only solution being destruction. He plants a

bomb beneath the school gymnasium (in the previously mentioned boiler room) and

intends to kill everyone in the school when Veronica endeavors to stop him. If he

succeeds, he says people would say, "There is a school that self-destructed, not because

society didn't

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[17] The femme fatale or "spider woman" is a character type in Hollywood film noir who typically tricks a
hapless male with her sexual wiles into committing murder.

care. The school was society." Jason further defends his harsh actions and illustrates his

view of society and its apparently inherent discord: "The only place different social

types can genuinely get together is heaven." The film satirizes other marks, including

hypocritical liberals. However, the main point critiques conservatism.

The role of satire is criticism. It is a variety of comedy with roots as far back as

fifth century BC[18]--"bitter humor that diminishes a person, idea, or institution by

ridiculing it or holding it up to scorn [and] ...is social criticism, deriding hypocrisy,

pretension, and vanity or condemning vice" (Kirszner and Mandell, 1991, p. 996). The

most likely objects of this vitriolic are not the powerless, the weak, or the marginalized.

Rather, the satirist chooses as his quarry figures of stature and influence.

In this regard, *Heathers* (1989) represents the other side of the dynamic

represented by another film of the same year, *Dead Poets Society* (1989). Both films are

liberal, but where *Dead Poets* strove to establish a cultural aristocratic legacy in light of

the prevailing conservative temper, *Heathers* satirizes that temper. The functions of

these films are results of the established stability of conservative forces. *Dead Poets*

sought to further that force, while *Heathers* saw it as grist for the satire mill—a bloated

dirigible that needed some air let out.

In release, *Heathers* (1989) did not do well financially. Given its young

characters, it did not find an audience among adults, nor did it find support among the

youth that were the vehicle for its broader satire. It is unlikely the film would fare any

better today. In this closely post-Columbine[19] period, not many people are prepared to

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[18] Satire is a strain of Old Comedy from the tradition of Classical Greek theatre.
[19] April 20th, 1999, two youths, Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold, shot and killed 12 students and a teacher and then committed suicide at Columbine High School in Littleton, Colorado.

laugh at high school murders. Perhaps nonetheless, this is part of the fate of the satire—

people love the truth as long as its what they want to hear, otherwise, not many are

laughing.

SHE'S ALL THAT (1999)

Directed by Robert Iscove

Written by George Bernard Shaw (from the play *Pygmalion*), R. Lee Fleming Jr.

Cast:

Freddie Prinze Jr. .... Zach Siler
Rachael Leigh Cook .... Laney Boggs
Matthew Lillard .... Brock Hudson
Paul Walker .... Dean Sampson
Jodi Lyn O'Keefe .... Taylor Vaughan
Kevin Pollak .... Wayne Boggs
Anna Paquin .... Mackenzie Siler
Kieran Culkin .... Simon Boggs

Elden Ratliff .... Jesse Jackson
Usher Raymond .... Campus D.J.
Kimberly 'Lil Kim' Jones .... Alex
Gabrielle Union .... Katie
Dule Hill .... Preston
Tamara Mello .... Chandler
Clea DuVall .... Misty

The Pygmalion story is an ancient one involving in various versions a powerful

 and brilliant man who creates a woman and falls in love with her.

She's All That (1999) transplants George Bernard Shaw's *Pygmalion*

to a prosperous southern California high school. *Pygmalion* itself is

based upon the Greek myth of a king and sculptor who crafted a

statue of a beautiful woman. He fell in love with the statue and begged Aphrodite to

bring her to life for him.

In the film, popular student Zach Siler enters a wager with friends that he can

transform the socially awkward Laney Boggs into prom queen by the end of the school

year. Of course, Zach begins to develop serious feelings for Laney, and by the end of the film must make a stand. Will he bow to the expectations of the popular kids that he dump the erstwhile socially inferior Laney? Or will he follow his heart and his creation? In the end, true love carries the day, and Laney makes an inter-textual reference to another Pygmalion film, *Pretty Woman* (1990) (in which wealthy lawyer Richard Gere transforms call girl Julia Roberts). Laney comments that she feels "just like Julia Roberts in *Pretty Woman*—except for that whole hooker thing!"

She's All That (1999) is conservative. Like the Cypriot king Pygmalion from the Greek myth, the erudite Professor Higgins from Shaw's play, the sophisticated lawyer in *Pretty Woman* (1990), or still the popular and prosperous Zach Siler in *She's All That*, the Pygmalion narrative involves a man adopting, introducing, and preparing a woman of lower standing for his world. This is a conservative dynamic. The benevolent and charitable aristocrat sponsors a person of inferior standing into the genteel realm. *She's All That* continues that tradition. However, it is important to note that there is a gentle crosscurrent of liberalism in the film as "nurture" masters "nature." Through sponsored cultivation, Laney achieves social mobility and thus puts to rest assumptions of socio-biological determinism.

Zach is the most popular boy at Harrison High. He has it all: the admiration of his peers, athletic prowess, brilliant scholarship, and family standing. His bedroom dresser is littered with acceptance letters from Yale, Harvard, and other universities, as well as a picture of him at four or five years wearing a Dartmouth University sweatshirt. His busy, "stressed out" father is a graduate of Dartmouth, and personally acquainted with a high-ranking official there, desperately wants his son to attend his alma mater.

Laney is a study in contrast. She is a "marginalized" artist, painting sad pictures of her deceased mother, working part time at Falafel Fairy, and remaining an active member of the Oppressed Prisoners Club. She lacks poise and popularity (but remains one of that curious cinematic female type which asks the audience to accept that just because she wears horn-rimmed glasses in anticipation of a caterpillar-to-butterfly transforming removal that she is not beautiful nonetheless) and is part of a social underclass at school comprised of people who lack some combination of ruthlessness, beauty, poise, and wealth. Her father is a relatively successful small business owner; he owns a pool-cleaning company, but works hands on and has a blue-collar comportment.

While the conservative *Fast Times at Ridgemont High* (1982) is a film with no serious social problems and it depicts a middle class group of high school students involved in typically middle class high school activities, this pattern mutates in *She's All That* (1999) where the main undercurrent emphasizes social difference. *She's All That* also depicts no serious social problems but possesses a focus on social distinctions, which inform relations of privilege and subordination in an ostensibly homogeneous setting. The film examines the bases for some students being regarded socially inferior and functions to question the foundations for such assessments.

At prosperous Harrison High, what is the basis for distinction? It is not race. The group of popular kids is markedly racially heterogeneous. It is not economically based. Although Laney works, her family lives in a beautiful home similar to the quality of other kids' homes. Clues to the ascripted bases of difference are seen in a comment by a jealous former girlfriend of Zach's to Laney, "Isn't your dad my pool man?" Indeed, Laney's father is a pool man, but he remarks that he owns his own business and provides

well for his family, asking rhetorically "What's wrong with that?" What's wrong is

illustrated in his practice of playing along with *Jeopardy*, and habitually answering

incorrectly (This beverage was invented by Dr. Welch as a substitute for wine. What is

artificial wine? The answer is, what is grape juice?). His blue-collar work and lack of

advanced formal education imbue him with a cultural deficit in the eyes of certain

Harrisonites. Therefore, culture becomes the criteria for assigning difference (ironically,

as a painter, Laney is in fact the cultured one at school, and the majority of the popular

kids are the philistines).

In the late 1990s, America was experiencing unprecedented prosperity, albeit

with growing social equality (which goes unrepresented in the films). The economy was

growing every quarter, unemployment was low, and fortunes were being amassed (for

the time being) through dot-com fuelled marketplace euphoria. In a prosperous time

such as this, economic standing was becoming an increasingly unreliable determinant of

difference. What became needed was a new difference to make a difference. The litmus

test, the way to tell the Professor Higgins from the Eliza Doolittles, represented in *She's*

All That (1999) is in the vagaries of culture. This was also a time when cultural wars had

replaced class wars; however, class-based antagonisms were increasing and identity

politics receding.

Conclusion

This chapter has investigated the Teen Comedy, films with a school setting,

comedies that feature and are marketed toward teens. The three films are *Fast Times at*

Ridgemont High (1982), *Heathers* (1989), and *She's All That* (1999). *Fast Times* is

conservative. It differs from the films of The Classroom Western in that it presents no major social problems, and this informs the film's conservative nature. *Heathers* (1989) is a liberal satire that takes dead aim at conservatism and traditional social hierarchies. *She's All That* (1999) is a conservative film based on the Pygmalion story of a successful man "adopting" and sponsoring a woman of lower standing. The film is concerned with the interplay of difference, ascription, and valuation, but also features a liberal nurture over nature element.

All the films take place in relatively prosperous settings, and in this sense, they are similar. The films are all comedies, and in this sense, they are further similar. Still, the ways in which they differ have to do with their narrative functions.

Fast Times at Ridgemont High (1982) is rooted in journalism. Cameron Crowe, the screenwriter, came from a journalistic background as a writer for *Rolling Stone* magazine[20] and based the screenplay on his journalistic book of the same title. The film's comedy comes from the unflinching, often painful situations, manners, and exploits of the characters. The implied editorial stance is highlighted by its situational relation—the gaze depicts kids who don't realize how privileged their lives are.

She's All That (1999) is cast from myth, "a traditional story...usually explaining the origin of natural events and forces, cultural practices, etc." (Avis, et al., 1983, p. 755). The function of myth is explanatory. It is intended to justify some phenomenon that people are familiar with and recognize but do not understand. The role of myth is to promote a functional relation between understandings and the world. Its purpose is to create consensus.

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[20] Crowe's exploits as a young writer for the publication are fictionalized in the 2000 film *Almost Famous*.

Heathers (1989), though, fulfills a different role. As satire, its purpose is to criticize. The film generates its humor in a way similar to *Fast Times at Ridgemont High* (1982). Both films cast light on social reality. Yet, *Heathers* takes the joke one step further. This film exaggerates the social world in such a way as to reveal its blemishes. Its role is to criticize what would otherwise stand with little obstacle; namely the powers that be at any given time and place. In 1989 America, that bloated object for the satirist's pen is conservatism. During this period, the markets were expanding prior to the recession of 1993. The film critiques the arrogance of affluence and indifference to those left out of the boom.

Notwithstanding, there is another difference between *Heathers* (1989) and the two other films. As already noted, all the films depict relatively prosperous settings, but it is only *Fast Times at Ridgemont High* (1982) and *She's All That* (1999) which depict no urgent social problems. *Heathers* (1989), in an admittedly satirical and perhaps allegorical way, depicts school violence. Jason Dean murders several students, disguises the deaths as suicides, very nearly kills the entire student body, and in the end destroys himself.

Therefore, these Teen Comedies are chiefly conservative via decadence. The one liberal exception is *Heathers* (1989). It also differs from the two conservative films, *Fast Times at Ridgemont High* (1982) and *She's All That* (1999) in that it belongs to the critical comedic sub-genre of satire, and it depicts a significant social problem: school violence that was to emerge in its less humorous form: Columbine, Colorado, 1999. All the films', but notably *Heathers'*, foreshadowing of that decadence and indifference highlight a coming crisis in social cohesion.

Chapter 6: The Teen Drama and Cinema of Omission

Introduction

The Teen Comedy featured three films: *Fast Times at Ridgemont High* (1982), *Heathers* (1989), and *She's All That* (1999). *Fast Times* was conservative, yet it differed from the Classroom Western since it presented no serious social problems. *Heathers* (1989) was a liberal satire aimed at conservatism and conventional social hierarchies. *She's All That* (1999) was a conservative movie inspired by the Pygmalion narrative of an accomplished man sponsoring a woman of inferior standing and concerned social difference, mobility, and negotiations between nature and nurture.

Fast Times at Ridgemont High (1982) was grounded in journalism. Screenwriter Cameron Crowe came from a journalistic background and based the film on his non-fiction book of the same title. *Fast Times'* comedy came from its realistic depictions of teen life. Its implied editorial position was informed by a gaze upon young people who did not seem appreciative of how carefree their lives were. *She's All That* (1999) was inspired by myth, the function of which is explanation. Myth justifies some state of the world and promotes cohesion around that justification. The film provided a model or script for social differentiation intersecting with mobility, featuring a liberal nurture over nature element. *Heathers* (1989) was a satire that, like *Fast Times at Ridgemont High* (1982), revealed aspects of the social world. Nevertheless, *Heathers* exaggerated these aspects to reveal flaws. The film critiqued a strain of 1989 American social conservatism.

The Teen Comedies were, indeed, principally conservative. The one liberal film, *Heathers* (1989), differed from the two others in that it was a satire, which gave it a different, more critical, and in the late 1980s consequently liberal imperative. Additionally, unlike the other films *Heathers* explored a serious social problem—school violence. Indeed, these comedies presented no clear, unifying theme between the three discussed. Certainly, this could be due to the fact that the chapter only included three films, which does not provide enough sampling to develop a strong conclusion. Limited sampling effects can also be applied to the two films in The Teen Comedy genre.

While the previous chapter explored comedy, his chapter investigates the Teen Drama. One example is *The Breakfast Club* (1985), a liberal film. It propounds that its characters possess important commonalties, which go beyond their social distinctions. Despite this fact, the film presents a limited picture of American social life. For example, the characters all are White. Each film paints compelling portraits, but does it within very small frames, such as a prosperous suburb and a Catholic school.

The comparatively safe, secure searches for social understanding of *The Breakfast Club* (1985) give way to a harrowing breakdown of personal and community expectations in the next film. *The Basketball Diaries* (1995) which is, however, conservative is a disturbing picture that eventually functions as a cautionary tale against drug use. The film bears considerable similarity to other admonitory films, such as post-War "Mental Hygiene" cinema and the book *Go Ask Alice*. Ironically, this conservative warning against youth alienation became implicated in the controversy surrounding one of alienation's most fatal events, the massacre at Columbine High School. It has been

argued that certain imagery in the film influenced the two students who fatally shot numerous schoolmates that day in Littleton, Colorado (Woliver, 2001).

Both films earnestly contemplate challenges faced by teens. Nevertheless, the question becomes, which teens? Neither film substantially depicts non-White or African American teens. This circumstance highlights a historically ingrained condition, which spans pre-War cinematic segregation to partial or only surface integration. Blacks have traditionally been marginalized in the film world, and when they do appear, it is often in White cinema with a Black face. Moreover, this White perspective saturates the body of Hollywood motion pictures, whether liberal or conservative. Accordingly, these Teen Dramas, *The Breakfast Club* (1985) and *The Basketball Diaries* (1995), while constructed as meditations on universal teen issues, illustrate their own and other films' particularity in a broader "Cinema of Omission."

The Teen Drama

THE BREAKFAST CLUB (1985)

Directed by John Hughes

Written by John Hughes

Cast:

Emilio Estevez .... Andrew Clark
Paul Gleason .... Richard Vernon
Anthony Michael Hall .... Brian Johnson
John Kapelos .... Carl
Judd Nelson .... John Bender
Molly Ringwald .... Claire Standish
Ally Sheedy .... Allison Reynolds

Perry Crawford .... Allison's Father
Mary Christian .... Brian's Sister
Ron Dean .... Andy's Father
Tim Gamble .... Claire's Father
Fran Gargano .... Allison's Mom
Mercedes Hall .... Brian's Mom

Five high school students are thrown together for a daylong detention in the

 library of Shermer High School. An "athlete," a "princess," a "basket

case," a "brain," and a "criminal" at first seem to have very little, if

anything, in common. Despite this, the students slowly come to open

up and realize that they do in fact share many similar difficulties,

feelings, and experiences. In the end, they come together in ways they would not have

imagined previously. Athlete Andrew Clark (Emilio Estevez) recognizes an attraction

for "basket case" and misfit Allison Reynolds (Ally Sheedy); "criminal" (rebel, really)

John Bender (Judd Nelson) connects with "princess" (rich girl) Claire Standish (Molly

Ringwald); and all discern a new respect for "brain" Brian Johnson (Anthony Michael

Hall).

The Breakfast Club (1985) is liberal. The film posits that all people are equal but

begins with a concern for the "tolerance" of difference. The narrative tension and

development is organized around the students' assumptions of distinction between them.

The opening presents the variance in terms the high school social categories: athlete,

princess, basket case, brain, and criminal. Additionally, the audience is given subtle

social and economic evidence for the differences.

The distinctions are presented in the student's mode of transportation arriving at

the school. The athlete is dropped off by his father in a utility-sport vehicle. The brain

arrives with his disheveled, bickering family in a beat-up old car. The criminal is the

only student who does not have a ride to school--he arrives on foot, alone. The princess

is dropped off by her father in an expensive Jaguar. The basket case is also delivered in a

luxury vehicle. There is other evidence of the student's outside lives presented, notably

in the content of their bag lunches. The lunches further substantiate the conclusions drawn from the modes of transportation; however, I do not discuss the meals at length due to shortage of space and the fact that the family cars make the cases quite clearly.

I compose the following sub-textual conclusions about the student's social contexts. The athlete's family is financially secure, but not prosperous. His father is quite involved in the son's life, especially in the area of sports. The brain is not well off financially, and his family has a free flowing, unruly culture. The school janitor, Carl, is on a first name basis with the brain, suggesting some sort of family association. The criminal's family is not well off, and there is violence in the home. The princess comes from a financially secure, prosperous family. They eat gourmet food like sushi, but there is a muted unhappiness in the home. The basket case has a financially well off home as well, but her parents pay little attention to her.

Notwithstanding these variations, the denouement of the story is that despite the characters' dispersal into different social categories, they are all quite similar. The group finds commonality in several areas, notably in the apparently universal youth problem of their parents not understanding them and that difficulties' attendant angst. Indeed, one of the experiences they all share, and one that causes them significant distress, is the fact that their relations with their parents are somewhat strained. Each case is unique, but the overall theme between them is the same. The parents do not recognize and appreciate the youths as individuals, as their own persons. The Breakfast Club is a group of young people; a group of individuals as their parents would need to learn, whose social context also melds them together in perhaps unforeseen ways. There is a reason why their apparently surface differences collapse: these characters are not really that different to

begin with. They have similar problems because they occupy generally the same social

space. The students have several unrecognized similarities as well as assumptions

around that lack of recognition. The remainder of the film concerns their learning about

these assumptions and then the similarities, and that learning process is catalyzed largely

through the activities of one character.

John Bender, the criminal, is the conflict-driving center of the narrative. He is the

rebel. He forces issues and brings them to the surface. Because of this, people respond to

him negatively. Indeed, all the students and even the teacher supervising them detest

Bender—at first. Bender is most at odds with the athlete and princess; they are united in

being members of the school's hierarchically dominant group. They attend the same

parties and consider themselves among the Shermer's "A-list" students.

Bender plays two functions: he is both the divider and the uniter. The criminal

produces a marijuana joint and gets everybody high (pot becomes the great equalizer!).

As Bender and the athlete learn more about each other, their deeper similarities are

revealed, and comments that he thinks their dads should get together some time and go

bowling, illustrating their familial and contextual similarity. This theme of equality

across apparent social differences underscores the film's liberalism.

Indeed, *The Breakfast Club* (1985) does depict equality across a social spectrum.

However, analysis needs now turn to the breadth, or lack thereof, of that spectrum. The

film's gaze is somewhat limited in its range in that does not look beyond this middle

class high school. Shermer High[21] is a nice, modern school set amidst peaceful suburban

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[21] John Hughes films from the 1980s often take place in the fictional location of Shermer, Illinois. This is a fact not without its own intertextual mythology. Kevin Smith's film *Dogma* references the point and incorporates it into its own narrative, as a character travels in search of the elusive, non-existent Detroit suburb.

surroundings. The citizens are generally prosperous and poverty is not depicted as a problem. In many ways, Shermer is quite unremarkable, save one. It is possibly one of the few places in America that is 100% White.

The Breakfast Club (1985) acknowledges no diversity outside its own micro-perspective. The film depicts diversity within a very limited and homogeneous space, but the social variation here is primarily horizontal rather than vertical. Any implied notions of inequality challenged by the film are not terribly serious. In the late nineteenth century, the United States fought a bloody civil war ostensibly over universal equality. In the early twentieth century, the suffragette movement successfully achieved the vote, forging its victory through an equality-focused space of conflict. Post World War II reforms to education and other social policy were driven by struggles for equality, if not of condition at least ideally of opportunity. The contests for equality between representatives of different high school social types one Saturday afternoon in the library of a suburban high school pale in comparison.

The Shermer struggle for equality reflects an idea associated with Reagan's America of the 1980s. This was a time of prosperity for the prosperous, but invisibility for those without. People who stood to benefit most from ostensibly equalizing social policies of the Welfare State were generally the poor. During this time, however, the poor found their needs generated lower priority than the interests of the wealthy or the strategically and ideologically-driven Cold War conflicts in Central America and elsewhere. Reagan's America lived on tree-lined streets and waved to the morning paperboy. America did not live in a depressed rural region or a decaying inner city. The greatest social conflict for young people in that context, and illustrated in *The Breakfast*

Club (1985), concerns White middle class teens feeling misunderstood by their parents, and the degree to which other teens feel this way and recognize it. By this, "universal" equality of limited scope is championed.

THE BASKETBALL DIARIES (1995)

Directed by Scott Kalvert

Written by Jim Carroll (novel), Bryan Goluboff

Cast:

Leonardo DiCaprio .... Jim Carroll
Lorraine Bracco .... Jim's mother
Marilyn Sokol .... Chanting Woman
James Madio .... Pedro
Patrick McGaw .... Neutron
Mark Wahlberg .... Mickey
Roy Cooper .... Father McNulty
Bruno Kirby .... Swifty

Jimmy Papiris .... Iggy
Nick Gaetani .... Referee
Alexander Gaberman .... Bobo
Ben Jorgensen .... Tommy
Josh Mostel .... Counterman
Juliette Lewis .... Diane Moody
Michael Imperioli .... Bobby

This film is based on the true-life account of writer and musician Jim Carroll. Jim is a bright young man, a boy continually writing in his journal, and a talented

basketball player at a Manhattan Catholic school. Nonetheless, the film slowly reveals that his life is descending out of control due to drugs. He and his friends' activities escalate from petty acts of vandalism, to theft, to breaking and entering. Jim is eventually kicked out of both school and his mother's home. At that point, he assumes a horrifying existence as a street kid. His drug use also goes from casual to out-and-out heroin addiction. Through the love of friends and family, and the hard lessons of the world -- he is eventually sent to

jail – he puts his life together. Jim becomes a writer, fulfilling the promise seen in his early journal work.

The Basketball Diaries (1995) is conservative. This is due to many factors, including a pervasive anti-Catholic sentiment that I do not elaborate upon here in the interest of conserving space. Rather, I focus on the film's cautionary function because that is more germane to its narrative.

The film's conservatism becomes ironic considering it has found itself the target of conservative reproach. *The Basketball Diaries* (1995) has been implicated in the Columbine massacre. A fantasy sequence in the film pictures Carroll (Leonardo DiCaprio) striding into his classroom wearing a long overcoat and opening fire with a shot gun. Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold dressed similarly and are said to have been inspired by the film in their fatal actions of April 20th, 1999[22]. Consequently, the film became centrally embroiled in the continuing debate over censorship and correlations between media and violence.

In some respects, *The Basketball Diaries* (1995) bears many similarities to the Academy Award winning Best Picture of 1968, the X-rated *Midnight Cowboy*. Both films are gritty portrayals of Manhattan street life and both have an undercurrent of homosexual prostitution. Additionally in some ways, *The Basketball Diaries* is more properly a film about drugs, than a film about school. Nevertheless, Jim's school life (and descent from it) is important to the narrative, as his fall from promising high school basketball player to street addict portray his losses—both of innocence and opportunity.

The main function of *The Basketball Diaries* (1995) is to provide a cautionary

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[22] *The Matrix* featured similar imagery and is implicated in the event as well.

warning. The insinuated message is "If you do drugs, look what can happen."

Admittedly, the degree to which the events depicted in the film happen, it's probably

good that that message is communicated. The film is not sensationalistic, though, as was

another drug-inspired cautionary film discussed in this study, *High School Confidential*

(1958). *Diaries* is gritty and harrowing rather than titillating. Still, the film is constructed

to stand as a warning to others. The film ends with Carroll presenting a performance art

piece on the negative effects of drugs and the audience (of the film) learning that his

diary goes on to become published[23], fulfilling an American dream of celebrity as the

reward at the end of the hero's journey.

The narrative action takes place much earlier than its 1995 release, likely in the

1970s. *The Basketball Diaries* also shares similarities with another cautionary, diary-

based, book from closer to that period. *Go Ask Alice* (Anonymous, 1971) is a diary of a

teenage girl whose life changes dramatically due to drug use. In that book, nonetheless,

the protagonist dies. Yet, both are anti-drug stories, appealing to factual account.

For approximately 30 years after World War II, countless films were produced to

be shown to high school students on a variety of "health" related topics. This genre

became known as the Mental-Hygiene film. As diverse as these films were in their

subject matter, dealing with dating, making friends, grooming, safe driving, sex,

smoking, drugs, and hygiene, they were remarkably consistent in their message:

conformity to professional middle class cleanliness in body and soul.

The films were mock documentary in style and typically started by showing a

teen doing things the "wrong way." The audience is shown, in squirm-inducing detail,

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[23] In an inter/intratextual loop, the film ends with the publication of the literary work that forms the basis of the film itself, leading to Carroll's remunerative fame.

the negative consequences of the foolhardy behaviors depicted in these films. Often, someone would take the wayward young person aside and explain to them the benefits of doing things the "right way."[24] In the genre's later incarnations, the erstwhile "Mentor-Influenced-Course-Change" pattern was replaced with a narrative more like that of *Go Ask Alice*. The later films, especially those dealing with highway safety, involved tragedy, as the series evolved into a kind of "Dead Teenager Film." They became known for their grisly and fatal depictions of the negative consequences of poor teen choices.

While *The Basketball Diaries* (1995) avoids protagonist fatality, it is ironic that it has become linked with one the worst episodes of teen fatality in memory[25]. The film and its depictions of violence are embedded in a cautionary purpose. The film's conservatism is informed by its cautionary function of promoting social and culturally conservative behavior. *Diaries* is constructed as a warning against teen disenfranchisement and its negative effects. Nonetheless, it became associated with disenfranchised youth and the worst case of its effects to date.

The early Mental-Hygiene films were straightforward examples of mass culture attempting to communicate a message to its audience. By 1995 *The Basketball Diaries*, the media-audience relationship, or at least the understanding of it, had shifted. Gone is the correspondence view of media-to-audience message transfer. What is seen today is a popular culture perspective (Aronowitz, 1989; Dalton, 1999; Fiske, 1989; Ryan and Kellner, 1988; Thompson, 1990), in which media products enter the culture and engage

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[24] In these often Eisenhower Era films, the solutions are "right" in two ways. In addition to being correct, the proper behavior is typically conservative (e.g. "don't have sex").

[25] As mentioned above, this point refers to the massacre at Columbine High School.

a synthetic creation of new contextual meaning. The new amalgam of meaning and context is difficult to apprehend, and in the case of the relationship between violent imagery in *The Basketball Diaries* and Columbine not done so until much too late.

Conclusion

This chapter delved into the Teen Dramas: *The Breakfast Club* (1985) and *The Basketball Diaries* (1995). *The Breakfast Club* is liberal and posits that the students in the film possess certain universal similarities that transcend their apparent social differences. Nevertheless, this group of students, while quite possibly a representative cross section of people in Shermer, Illinois certainly does not represent America and the variety of social differentiation across that nation. *The Basketball Diaries* is conservative. The film is a harrowing cautionary tale warning against the apparent folly of drug use. Linked to the tradition of Mental-Hygiene films and *Go Ask Alice*, it represents a communicative permutation as the film warning against youth alienation became implicated in one of the most famous cases of youth alienation in recent memory.

Both films seriously treat problems facing teens. Both are well made intelligent works. Notwithstanding, both films also have another feature in common. Neither movie significantly depicts non-White or African American characters. As discussed with respect to *The Breakfast Club* (1985), that setting is completely White. This is a curious element in a film dealing with universalities across social difference, especially

considering that race informs arguably the most critical basis of difference in American life.

The Basketball Diaries (1995), while it does depict some Hispanic characters, is overt in the sentiments some of the characters have with respect to race. The character Swifty, played by Bruno Kirby, is generally negative. He is the boys' basketball coach and a provider of dubious adult role modeling. At one point, he offers to pay Jim money to allow him to perform oral sex on him—certainly outside the scope of generally accepted guidance provided by a basketball coach. Although, even before the audience learns directly these negative aspects of Swifty's personality, he provides the boys some other "coachly" advice. At a game against a more prosperous Staten Island school, the boys rob their opposing team's lockers. Afterward, Swifty chastises the group, reminding them of his rule: never steal from an opposing team as long as they're White! The film does posses a positive Black character in the guise of Reggie Porter (Played by Ernie Hudson[26]), but Reggie is a peripheral character, an adult acquaintance and not a teen, nor directly concerned with the central action of the film.

In some respects, the U.S. motion picture market is divided along similar racial lines as the society itself. The history of Blacks in cinema has often been a response to mainstream, arguably White, Hollywood. D. W. Griffith's *The Birth of a Nation* (1915), one of the most seminal and influential films in the canon, is a Civil War epic constructed as a Western and casting the Klu Klux Klan as the cavalry riding in to save the *ante bellum* day by wresting Southern society from, to say the least, undisciplined, lawless, and uncivilized former slaves.

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[26] Ernie Hudson also played the corrupt principal Claude Rolle in the Classroom Western *The Substitute* (1996).

In response to such offensive stereotypes, a genre of "between-the-wars" Black

cinema emerged. After a hiatus, the Blaxploitation film of the 1970s appeared and has

evolved into a modern Black cinema. The new incarnation is led by a generation of

young directors such as John Singleton (*Boyz N The Hood* (1991)). Singleton bridges

today to the 1970s Black Film with his remake (1999) of *Shaft* (1971).

There have been a series of successful Black stars, such as Richard Prior, Eddie

Murphy, and Chris Rock. Still, I argue that the films these actors perform in are not

Black Cinema, but rather an admittedly often-liberal mainstream, but White cinema. If

Black artists and audiences felt sufficiently included by the *Stir Crazy*'s (1980), *Beverly*

Hills Cop's (1984), and *Down to Earth*'s (2001), then a Black genre would not need to

continue struggling to have its voice heard.

The Teen Dramas *The Breakfast Club* (1985) and *The Basketball Diaries* (1995)

are very different films. The first is liberal, the second conservative. Yet, they have

certain similarities. First, they both deal with problems of generally universal concern to

young people. *The Breakfast Club* is about wondering where one fits into the social

world, and *The Basketball Diaries* is about the dangers of drug abuse. Nonetheless, for

the universality of the films' themes their treatments are curiously particular. While the

first film takes place in a prosperous suburban high school and the second in a gritty

urban setting they both are similarly selective. Whether in the library of Shermer High

School or an abandoned New York tenement both films deal with White experience.

Moreover, this White perspective permeates many other films whether liberal or

conservative. For this reason, these Teen Dramas illustrate a broader "Cinema of

Omission" and the absence of non-White, most notably Black, experience in Hollywood motion pictures.

Chapter 7: Tenuous Advances, Conservative Frustration and the Clinton Double Take: Patterns in the Adult Comedy

Introduction

The Teen Drama and Cinema of Omission explored *The Breakfast Club* (1985) and *The Basketball Diaries* (1995). The first film was liberal and depicted students having universal similarities that transcended their evident social differences. *The Basketball Diaries* was conservative, functioning as a cautionary tale against drug use.

Neither film substantially portrayed non-White or African American characters. The milieu of *The Breakfast Club* (1985) was entirely White. The film's theme of locating universal commonalties across social difference occurred within a very restricted sphere. *The Basketball Diaries* (1995) portrayed some Hispanic characters as well as a sympathetic adult Black character, but the story was essentially about White youths.

This pattern of Black omission becomes located within a long history of racial marginalization both off and on the screen in America. It emerges in films either conservative or liberal. In these Teen Dramas, Blacks were practically invisible, whether the focus was a prosperous suburban high school or gritty urban wasteland. Hollywood cinema often deals with White experience. In this sense, *The Breakfast Club* (1985) and *The Basketball Diaries* (1995), two very different films, illustrated a broader "Cinema of Omission."

From these dramas, the focus now turns to comedies in which the protagonists are adults. *Kindergarten Cop* (1990), *Jack* (1996), and *High School High* (1996) are

liberal, while *Election* (1999) has both conservative and liberal elements, but is chiefly conservative. One feature all the films share, however, is that they are in their own ways responses to 1990s liberalism in America.

Kindergarten Cop (1990) addresses sexual politics and gender roles. *Jack* (1996) dramatizes special education issues, and *High School High* (1996) parodies school films, specifically with respect to racial opportunity. *Election* (1999) satirizes teacher/student dynamics as well as the American political process.

These films illustrate a 1990s liberal tendency to celebrate modest victories, while still acknowledging that much work still needs doing. *Kindergarten Cop* (1990) treats increasing gender mobility, *Jack* (1996) advances toward full educational inclusion for exceptional learners, and *High School High* (1996) emphasizes the growing influence of Black culture combined with lagging social and economic opportunity. *Election* (1999) intersects arguably the most salient factor of 1990s American political life: Bill Clinton. This film critiques a view of moral relativism, from a conservative perspective, emerging in response to the Democratic president.

The Adult Comedy

KINDERGARTEN COP (1990)

Directed by Ivan Reitman

Written by Murray Salem (story), Murray Salem , Herschel Weingrod & Timothy Harris

Cast:

Arnold Schwarzenegger .... Detective
John Kimble
Penelope Ann Miller .... Joyce Palmieri
(A.K.A. Rachel Crisp)
Pamela Reed .... Phoebe O'Hara
Linda Hunt .... Miss Schlowski
Richard Tyson .... Cullen Crisp, Sr.
Carroll Baker .... Eleanor Crisp
Cathy Moriarty .... Sylvester's Mother
Joseph Cousins .... Dominic Palmieri
(A.K.A. Cullen Crisp, Jr.)

Christian Cousins .... Dominic Palmieri
(A.K.A. Cullen Crisp, Jr.)
Park Overall .... Samantha's Mother
Jayne Brook .... Mrs. Sullivan (Zach's Mother)
Richard Portnow .... Captain Salazar
Tom Kurlander .... Danny
Alix Koromzay .... Cindy
Betty Lou Henson .... Keisha's Mother

John Kimble is a tough, big city police detective who must travel to a small town in Oregon and contact the former wife and child of a dangerous drug dealer. Kimble and

his partner, a former teacher, do not know the identity of the wife, only that she lives in this particular town. They plan to pose as a couple, with the partner teaching at the local school until they can uncover the wife's identity. Despite their plans, the partner falls ill, and Kimball must assume the teaching duties himself. He eventually locates the wife and wins over the children in his kindergarten class through his pedagogy based on police drills. Subsequently, the dealer arrives in town and tries to kill the wife. Kimble rescues the family and decides to stay on in the community as the kindergarten teacher.

Kindergarten Cop (1990) has elements of conservatism but is essentially liberal. The fact that John Kimble assumes teaching duties, albeit with some initial difficulty, with no formal training, is much like another film in this thesis, *The Substitute* (1996). That film was conservative and featured an out of work mercenary soldier posing as a

teacher. Nevertheless, other persuasive liberal elements in *Kindergarten Cop*

compellingly indicate a liberal orientation.

It is an important part of the story that Kimble is a tough, no-nonsense cop put in

the traditionally female setting of a kindergarten classroom. Despite this, the significant

aspect of Kimble's character that drives the comedic situations is not his status as a

police officer, but his status as a man with attendant masculinity. Kimble is a tough guy

and knows how to handle violent, gun-wielding criminals on the street, but a group of 5-

year old children is another matter. In this sense, the film is about bridging between

genders—the assumptions of masculinity meet and must negotiate the world associated

with femininity.

The film's dynamic reflects the apparently timeless interplay—ranging from love,

hate, trust and misunderstanding, between the sexes. There is a large and well-known

discourse on the history of unequal power relations between the two. This inequality has

been a target of considerable, and continuing, progressive liberal reform. Efforts have

been undertaken to ensure women's suffrage, equality of opportunity in hiring practices,

and earning power.

By the 1990 of *Kindergarten Cop*, some men reactively felt that women had

made many gains, and that these gains upset what they had traditionally understood to

be the bases of relations between the sexes. This was a response to shifting masculine

identities initiated by the liberal transformations of what may be called the women's

movement. No longer were men the traditional, aggressive breadwinners and women the

gentle nurturers. In a new society where women apparently encroached more and more

on traditional male realms--namely work and employment--some men felt they no longer knew where they stood. Consequently, a collection of groups emerged, which may collectively be known as the men's movement.

One notable voice in the men's movement was American poet Robert Bly. His *Iron John: A Book about Men* was both successful and influential. The book spawned seemingly as many weekend retreats for participants to reclaim their manhood through drum rituals in the woods as it did jokes. Bly's message was one of essentialism, a message in which men would search through ritualized archaeology for their latent masculine identities.

Kindergarten Cop (1990) represents a different stripe of masculine resettling. John Kimble bridges the gender divide by getting in touch with his feminine side. Arnold Schwarzenegger, who in the 1980s personified the masculine action hero in films such as *Conan the Barbarian*, *Terminator*, and *Predator*, spent much of the 1990s deconstructing this image, to notably less commercial success, in films such as *The Last Action Hero* and *Junior*, in which he becomes pregnant and spends much of the picture in "drag." This tough male cop who learns the female world of teaching young children is not as easy as imagined illustrates the film's liberal gender resettling.

JACK (1996)

Directed by Francis Ford Coppola

Written by James DeMonaco & Gary Nadeau

Cast:
Robin Williams.... Jack Powell   Diane Lane.... Karen Powell

Jennifer Lopez.... Ms. Marquez   Michael McKean.... Paulie
Brian Kerwin.... Brian Powell   Don Novello.... Bartender
Fran Drescher.... Dolores Durante   Allan Rich.... Dr. Benfante
Bill Cosby.... Mr. Woodruff

Jack is a 10 year-old boy with a rare medical condition that makes him appear four times his age: he looks like a 40-year-old man. His parents try to protect Jack from the world and keep him sheltered in a home-schooled bubble of safety. All this ends though when his parents and tutor decide it best for the boy to attend the local public school. While there, he experiences a variety of typical school and school-related social situations. Soon, Jack's mother loses her nerve and comes to believe it best for her son to return home. In time though, Jack's newfound friends convince the parents that it *is* best for Jack to return and thereby live as normal a life as possible.

In this proudly liberal film, Jack attends Nathaniel Hawthorne Elementary School. While Jack does not exactly bear a scarlet letter, he does possess clear difference from the others. That distinction points to *Jack*'s (1996) theme. The film closely, yet indirectly, speaks to special education issues, being a celebration of harmony, diversity, and liberal opportunity for all.

Jack's tutor Mr. Woodruff, played by Bill Cosby (himself a Doctor of Education and well-known liberal), teaches Jack lessons about Aristotle. The Greek thinker, of course, had been a tutor, himself, to Alexander the Great. At the end of the movie, the audience sees Jack graduating from high school (at that time appearing as a very old man due to his condition) in a setting very reminiscent of a Greek theater, slyly alluding

once again to Mr. Woodruff's lessons of Aristotle and Alexander. Now Jack is the conqueror, having overcome difference and apparent disadvantage to achieve what those in a liberal society have a right to.

Jack and his family live in beautiful Harrison Valley (the same locality as the Teen Comedy *She's All That* (1999)). The environment is gorgeous and lush—a veritable paradise. Additionally, the school is the picture of a progressive place of learning with the walls celebrating art and creativity, and the principal expounding, we have fun here—fun, fun, fun.

Also like in *She's All That* (1999), the school and community are very diverse—both in terms of cultural background and economic standing. Jack's parents are quite well off; his father is an advertising photographer, while his best friend has a single mother who works in a restaurant. His friend, also, is of Italian descent. Jack's tutor, Mr. Woodruff, is Black, and the teacher, Ms. Marquez, (played by Jennifer Lopez), is Hispanic. Harrison Valley and Nathaniel Hawthorne School become sanctuaries of equality, diversity, and opportunity.

The liberalism of *Jack* (1996), especially as it relates to people with special needs, emerges at a time when concerns over educational provision for children with exceptional requirements bubbled to the surface. In the United States, prior to the implementation in 1975 of The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), 90% of children with developmental disabilities were housed in state institutions. The Act, at that time, opened access for over 1,000,000 students to schools and services they had previously been denied. IDEA and the changes it incurred were seen as great

advancement from what had previously been the commonly accepted practice of marginalizing such students.

Yet, for the parents, students, and advocates concerned about special needs education and, specifically, equality of access to education, the fight was far from over. June 4, 1997, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) Amendments of 1997 were legislated as Public Law 105-17. Certainly, there remain advocates seeking further change, but *Jack* (1996) appears at a time, which correlates nicely with the 1997 amendment and some of the efforts leading to it. Thus, the picture highlights a liberal concern with providing universal equality of opportunity.

HIGH SCHOOL HIGH (1996)

Directed by Hart Bochner

Written by David Zucker & Robert LoCash , Pat Proft

Cast:

Jon Lovitz .... Richard Clark
Tia Carrere .... Victoria Chapell
Louise Fletcher .... Evelyn Doyle
Mekhi Phifer .... Griff McReynolds
Malinda Williams .... Natalie Thompson
Guillermo Díaz .... Paco
Lexie Bigham .... Two-Bags
Gil Espinoza .... Alonzo

John Neville .... Thaddeus
Brian Hooks .... Anfemy
Natasha Gregson Wagner .... Julie Rubels
Marco Rodríguez .... DeMarco
Nicholas Worth .... Rhino
Eric Allan Kramer .... Hulk
Lu Elrod .... Miss Wells

This film is a parody of the school-movie genre and sets its sights on several of the films included in this study: *Blackboard Jungle* (1955), *High School Confidential*

(1958), *Stand and Deliver* (1987), and *Lean on Me* (1989). Richard Clark leaves his

 position as history teacher at a posh private academy, headed by his

father, to accept a job teaching at an inner city school. Clark arrives at

Marion Barry[27] High School, which is overrun with violence and crime.

The school is also antagonized by a local gang and its leader, Paco.

Through a series of events, Clark earns the trust of student leader Griff. Together, they

motivate the pupils to improve their school. Clark encourages the students to study for,

and write, the College Entrance Examination. However, Paco switches the results with

failing papers, and the kids are told they have all failed the examination. Consequently,

school morale descends to an all-time low. Clark and the students discover that the

examinations had been switched as part of a conspiracy involving local racketeers and

the school principal. The test scores are restored, and some students graduate, headed

for college. Clark becomes principal of Marion Barry.

High School High (1996) is a liberal parody of school films. It specifically

references the multi-cultural assembly scene and library fight sequence in *Blackboard*

Jungle (1955), the heroin-taking episode from *High School Confidential* (1958), the

examination debacle of *Stand and Deliver* (1987), and the theme of inspiring the

students to celebrate their culture in *Lean on Me* (1989).

The film also parodies some of the conventions of films such as these. As Clark

travels to his new school through gradually poorer neighborhoods, he eventually passes

a green sign declaring he is now in the "Inner city." At one point, Clark also states (with

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[27] This is a humorous reference to the Washington DC mayor arrested on cocaine related charges.

a knowing that draws attention less to the specific content of what he says than to the film convention he exposes) that he is White, "with both parents from the suburbs."

High School High (1996) also spoofs race and racial issues. At Clark's first school, prestigious Wellington Academy, the receptionist answers the telephone: "Wellington Academy, are you White? Hold please." The film also treats Black culture, or at least the White response to it. Clark has his first encounter with Ebonics as he is handing back assignments, confused by the name of one of his students, Anferny—Clark comments, "I thought I copied it down wrong."

Nonetheless, the film becomes most clearly liberal when it satirizes conservative assumptions of education. Clark's father is the head of Wellington Academy and an influential education author. The son learns just how influential his father is when he goes to the poor and crime ridden Marion Barry. One of his new colleagues comments that, "Every teacher in the district uses your father's book," holding up a copy of the prestigious tome "Why Some Children Can't Learn."

High School High's (1996) liberalism is rooted in both aesthetic considerations and social context. The film is quite simply a parody, a spoof of this type of school film. The creators have long been involved in such genre parodies. David Zucker and Pat Proft have been involved, in a variety of capacities, in lampoons of 1970s airplane disaster movies (the *Airplane* series), World War II films (*Top Secret*), and police pictures (The *Naked Gun* series).

High School High (1996) is preliminarily about school, but really concerning

Black schools, and largely relating to Black experience and culture in America. Black

artists have always found an audience among Whites. Artists such as Charlie Parker,

Chuck Berry (at the end of *High School High*, Marion Barry High is renamed Chuck

Berry High), Sly Stone, Prince, LL Cool J are a few to become immensely successful in

crossover markets. By the 1990s, the cultural landscape had become dotted with

"Wiggers," White youths from the suburbs relishingly adopting the comportment and

even outlooks of inner city Blacks, as received through Black artists via MTV and other

sources.

White culture meeting Black culture is a powerful undercurrent in the film. Note

the movie poster (pictured above) featuring the nerdy Jon Lovitz sporting an "Afro,"

replete with pick sticking out the side. In this parodic power balance, Black culture is

honored, the White encounter gently mocked. This balance and this film illustrate some

tentative advances of Blacks and Black culture in American society. This becomes a

liberal moment. Despite this progress, neither the film nor this researcher asserts that

these advances anywhere near counteract long standing power imbalances involving

Blacks in the United States. The racist reference points in the film's humor are realistic:

Marion Barry has a career fair featuring exhibits by fast food outlets. In these ways, the

film reflects both advances made and disparities remaining.

ELECTION (1999)

Directed by Alexander Payne

Written by Tom Perrotta (novel), Alexander Payne & Jim Taylor

Cast:

Matthew Broderick .... Jim McAllister
Reese Witherspoon .... Tracey Flick
Loren Nelson .... Custodian
Chris Klein .... Paul Metzler
Phil Reeves .... Walt Hendricks
Emily Martin .... Girl in Crisis
Jonathan Marion .... Classroom Student
Amy Falcone .... Classroom Student

Mark Harelik .... Dave Novotny
Delaney Driscoll .... Linda Novotny
Molly Hagan .... Diane McAllister
Colleen Camp .... Judith R. Flick
Matt Justesen .... 'Eat Me' Boy
Nick Kenny .... 'Eat Me' Boy's Buddy
Brian Tobin.... Adult Video Actor

Popular and committed teacher Jim McAllister recruits injured football hero Paul Metzler to run for student council president against the over-achieving Tracy Flick.

 McAllister is galled by Flick, who after having had an affair with one of his colleagues got the teacher fired. His problem with the politically ambitious student involves a combination of this resentment and quite likely a certain amount of jealousy. The election campaign escalates when Metzler's sister Tammy joins the race. She garners huge support for critiquing the school electoral process and threatening to abolish student government altogether. After considerable campaign hi-jinx, McAllister tampers the results in favor of Paul. Consequently, McAllister loses his job and his wife, while Flick continues on to further political and life success.

Election (1999) is in turn both conservative and liberal; still, the film is overall conservative. A satire that skews liberal conceits, the film critiques the fancies of the teaching profession, the arrogance of youth, and even contemporary American politics.

The main story centers on the student/teacher relationship. Told from the perspective and narration of McAllister, the events unfold mainly through his viewpoint. The film starts with him explaining how much he loves teaching, how he always wanted to be a teacher, and how satisfied he is with his work and his life. Yet, the audience soon learns that the picture here is not as milquetoast as it appears.

McAllister's narration turns eventually to a former colleague who recounted of Flick that—when aroused her vagina gets so wet. His friend had had an affair with Flick and therefore lost his job. McAllister admitted some faults of his friend but harbored lingering blame for Flick over the episode and its consequences. This animosity becomes the seed of his motivations in the film.

If McAllister upsets the traditional expectations an audience holds of a film teacher, Tracey Flick brings the shifting standard to the role of film student. She is attractive, intelligent, and hardworking. Notwithstanding, beneath that apparently normal surface beats a heart of seething, unbridled political ambition. She is not privileged. Flick's single mother works as waitress. In fact, she represents much of the liberal dream. She is destined to succeed as a result of little more than her natural abilities, hard work, and opportunities reproducing the American dream of schooling and upward individual mobility again.

Despite her casting from a liberal mold though, Flick bears some conservative ideas. She admits feeling sorry for Mr. McAllister, and the reasons for her sympathy are not applicable strictly to him as an individual. Her sorrow for McAllister having to spend his life teaching the same lessons day after day for the rest of his career are applicable to the entire teaching profession. As forces of resentment begin to swirl around the ambitious but remarkably unreflective Flick, she confides herself with the wisdom of her mother: the unsuccessful are always trying to tear down the successful.

Beyond these depictions of the teacher/student dynamic, the film also satirizes American political life in general. Football hero Paul Metzler's sister who threatens to override and quash the entire political process, it is revealed, is a lesbian—a non-traditionally valued special interest anarchist! She sounds like a Republican's nightmare.

When the campaign becomes heated, Flick's ambitions begin to look as though they may be in danger. Consequently, she resorts to some dirty tricks: cheating. Tracey tears down a competitor's posters and discards them in the trash. This type of activity critiques the "moral flexibility" evident in the political landscape of 1999, notably at the executive level. To further solidify the connection between Flick and President Clinton, Tracey graduates from high school and goes on to attend Georgetown University in Washington DC—President Clinton's undergraduate Alma Mater.

In the late 1990s, the American public knew more about politics—or rather knew about politicians—than any other generation had in the history of the nation. In some ways, it probably felt as though it knew way more than it needed—people knew that President Clinton's penis is bent! Clinton's administration, especially the second term,

was marked indelibly with scandal. Whitewater, Chinese espionage, donation-fuelled

overnight visits to the White House, Ken Starr's investigation and subsequent report,

and, of course, Monica Lewinsky[28].

Election (1999) illustrates a shift in US political life. The change involved not

only the kinds of activities a president engaged in but also the kind of partisan responses

he could expect in return. The impeachment hearings crystallized the new political

temper of the 1990s. Many citizens expressed a growing cynicism (which there certainly

had always been a certain amount of, but was now enhanced) in the process. In addition,

the media began to chart new territory in what became news. It is well-known that in the

early 1960s, President Kennedy engaged in extramarital sexual activity, and that the

press corps knew about it but didn't report it—not considering it news worthy. By 1999,

the entire world knew what only the president's sexual partners, friends at the health

club, and doctor knew.

Conclusion

This chapter has investigated the Adult Comedies *Kindergarten Cop* (1990),

Jack (1996), *High School High* (1996), and *Election* (1999). The first three,

Kindergarten Cop, *Jack*, and *High School High* are liberal, while *Election* is at times

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[28] In 1995, 21-year-old White House intern Monika Lewinsky began an affair with President Clinton.
Unknown to her, Linda Tripp taped conversations between Lewinsky and the President suggesting he urge
her to lie under oath. Tripp delivered the tape to Whitewater Independent Counsel Ken Starr, which led to
a further investigation into the possibility of subordination of perjury and obstruction of justice. Clinton
denied both the affair and admonishing Lewinsky to lie. Nevertheless, he eventually admitted to the affair,
but was acquitted, February 12, 1999, by the Senate's impeachment inquiry into those charges.

both conservative and liberal, but mainly conservative. All these films deal with instances and spaces of the liberal experience.

Kindergarten Cop (1990) concerns links between the genders, as masculinity encounters the world of femininity. *Jack* (1996) involves special education issues as a character with exceptional needs pursues equal opportunity. *High School High* (1996) parodies element of school films through treatment of racial issues and conservative presumptions of education. Finally, the conservative *Election* (1999) satirizes the sanctity of teacher/student relationships as well as the most liberal U.S. president since Jimmy Carter.

The social context of these depictions occurs in a climate of tentative liberal advances. The liberalism of *Kindergarten Cop* (1990) is a retort to the changing nature of masculinity in view of progress made by the woman's movement. *Jack* (1996) emerges relatively concurrent with the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) Amendments of 1997 and a general context of hard fought struggles in that movement. *High School High* (1996) spoofs Black culture and the White encounter with it in an atmosphere of restrained advances by Blacks in American society.

Election (1999) is distinguished as a conservative response to an identifiable correlate with these and other such changes: President William Jefferson Clinton's presidency. After championing such liberal causes such as the position of gays in the military, Clinton's second term of office, obviously, was branded by scandal after scandal. Through the impeachment hearings and unparalleled media coverage, the Clinton presidency became itself a text. It redefined political life and became inscribed

with new discourses from both the left and right. One of Clinton's greatest skills was to take the messages from both sides and make them his own, forging a voice, confounding for hard-liners on either side, in the center.

During this time, many liberal filmmakers stepped forth cautiously and celebrated small victories while still acknowledging the work still needed to be done. Conservatives were frustrated by their inability to bring down a president who in their view had clearly transgressed their moral certitudes, and the conservative *Election* (1999) spoke to that by satirizing Clintonian politics. They uttered their message repeatedly, but each time, as Gerry Trudeau in Doonsbury once noted of Ronald Reagan, he went right over their heads and straight to the people. In fact, upon leaving office with another scandal, the Mark Rich pardon debacle, trailing behind him, he had the highest approval rating of any out going president. All this amidst still growing gaps between haves and have-nots. Consequently, The Adult Comedies in this thesis become informed by the three interdependencies of tenuous advances, conservative frustration and the Clinton double take.

Chapter 8: Love Letters to Me

You're Writing Love Letters to Me
1940s American Western Swing tune

Introduction

Tenuous Advances, Conservative Frustration and the Clinton Double Take:

Patterns in the Adult Comedy contemplated *Kindergarten Cop* (1990), *Jack* (1996),

High School High (1996), and *Election* (1999). *Kindergarten Cop*, *Jack*, and *High

School High* were liberal, and *Election* had elements of both conservatism and liberalism

but was chiefly conservative. All the movies dealt with or were responses to liberal

concerns.

Kindergarten Cop (1990) introduced the comportment of masculinity to the

traditionally feminine world of teaching young children. *Jack* (1996) presented a

character with exceptional needs negotiating public school. *High School High* (1996)

parodied school films, assumptions about Black and White culture, and conservative

assumptions about education. Lastly, *Election* (1999) satirized teacher/student

relationships and shifting moral standards in politics.

These films were set against backdrops of tentative liberal advances as well as

the unparalleled controversies and struggles surrounding the Clinton White House. If

Ronald Reagan became known as the Teflon-President because nothing stuck to him,

Clinton took this feature to unprecedented lengths. Therefore, these Adult Comedies

were contextualized by tenuous advances, conservative frustration, and the Clinton

double take.

While the last chapter dealt with renegotiations of a cautiously liberal yet politically ambiguous landscape, Love Letters to Me celebrates often-sentimental portraits, love letters, of the highest ideals of the teaching profession. The letters depict teachers struggling against constraints to do their work and display a general concern with culture. The films are *To Sir, With Love* (1967), *Teachers* (1984), *Stand and Deliver* (1987), *Mr. Holland's Opus* (1995), and *Music of the Heart* (1999).

All the Love Letters are primarily liberal. The first film, which takes its title from an actual letter in the film, signed *To Sir, With Love* (1967), is culturally conservative yet politically liberal. *Teachers* (1984) is liberal but fairly addresses some conservative concerns about public schools. *Stand and Deliver* (1987) is liberal and depicts minorities on both sides of the gate to academic success. *Mr. Holland's Opus* (1995) and *Music of the Heart* (1999) are liberal pictures that address conservative arguments against public funding of the arts and raise questions related to cultural imperialism.

Love Letters to Me

TO SIR, WITH LOVE (1967)

Directed by James Clavell

Written by E.R. Braithwaite, James Clavell

Cast:

Sidney Poitier.... Mark Thackeray	Christian Roberts.... Denham
Judy Geeson.... Pamela Dare	Chris Chittell.... Potter
Suzy Kendall.... Gillian Blanchard	Adrienne Posta.... Moria Joesph
Lulu .... Barbara Pegg	Gareth Robinson.... Tich

Lynne Sue Moon.... Wong
Anthony Villaroel.... Seales
Michael Des Barres.... Williams
Faith Brook.... Grace Evans

Geoffrey Bayldon.... Weston
Patricia Routledge.... Clinty
Edward Burnham.... Florian

Mark Thackeray is an out of work engineer who reluctantly accepts a teaching

post as an interim step until he can secure a job in his field. The posting is in a tough

East End London school. The students there provide much resistance,

and it becomes clear that if Thackeray is going to reach them he is

going to have to try some new strategies. Consequently, he literally

dumps the old book-based curriculum into the trash and replaces it

with dialogues on life. Thackeray's lessons are heavily flavored with the roles of gender

expectation: makeup and lady-like comportment for the girls, boxing and gentlemanly

conduct for the boys. Thackeray and the students slowly come to both respect and even

love each other. In the end, he turns down the offer of an engineering job he had been

seeking to stay on as "Sir."

To Sir, With Love (1967) comprises elements both conservative and liberal.

Culturally, the film is conservative, while politically it is liberal. *Sir* is primarily

concerned with culture, and that fundamentally informs its conservative orientation. It is

the dynamic of having a Black man, Thackeray played by Sidney Poitier[29], as the

standard bearer rendering the picture politically liberal.

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[29] Poitier appeared as a student, Gregory W. Miller, in the Classroom Western *Blackboard Jungle* (1955). By the 1967 of *To Sir, With Love*, Poitier had come full circle and was now the teacher.

North Quay Secondary School is an old, brick edifice whose sturdy, no-nonsense

exterior reflects what happens inside. The school is set amidst industrial decrepitude,

docks, and fruit sellers and shippers. This is a subtle distinction, which sets *Sir* apart

from some Classroom Westerns[30]. *The Principal* (1987), *Lean on Me* (1989), *Dangerous*

Minds (1995), and *The Substitute* (1996) took place in inner city communities. The most

salient features of these settings seemed to be the rampant running of a criminal

underclass. North Quay, however, is a working class school, serving a working class

neighborhood. There is little by way of crime here. The main shortcoming to

Thackeray's cultivated[31] eye is an abhorrent lack of appropriate culture.

Thackeray finds no aspect of the student's rough culture to be above his

improving-efforts. Under the guise of teaching "survival" skills, he instructs them how

to make a fancy salad, dubbed the North Quay salad. Thackeray informs the students

that this is better than a "typical English salad." Notwithstanding, English diners had

certainly been surviving for quite some time on their horridly prosaic greens. The new

salad does take the students beyond their traditional comfort zones. Barbara Pegg,

played by theme singer Lulu, says at one point that she didn't like it anyway.

The culture clashes at North Quay extent to more sticky realms than the dining

table, though. There is an element in the classroom, in the community, and even in the

staff room of racism. Thackeray is an émigré from "British Guyana," but in the eyes of

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[30] The presentation of a middle class teacher entering a tough school is a pattern reminiscent of the Classroom Western.

[31] Poitier's cultivation is reinforced by the evocation his name provides of Victorian novelist William Thackeray.

some, he's more "Guyana" than "British." One of the students, Denham, refers to Thackeray as "Old Chimney Sweep," alluding to his blackness. Nonetheless, people generally defer to Thackeray, due to the respect and trust he had won from the students. Additionally, he is after all "Sir," a teacher. Not all Blacks in the community receive the same deference though. A Black student, Seales, experiences tragedy when his mother dies. The event is made worse when none of the students at school plan to attend the funeral, due to parental and community influence.

Nevertheless, Thackeray brings solution these cultural crises. His resolution lies very simply in strict adherence to the comportment of gender prescriptions. The boys are to be gentlemen, and the girls are to be young ladies. Most of his lessons center on this, and the implied sexual dynamic of the roles come to charge a submerged curriculum of mate identification, selection, and love. Eventually, Pamela Dare (Judy Geeson) develops an infatuation with North Quay's prototypical gentleman—Mr. Mark Thackeray—Sir, with love.

Therefore, *To Sir, With Love* (1967) is culturally conservative. It reinforces traditional gender roles and seems to denigrate working class culture for a more middle class variant. Despite this, the film also becomes liberal because it is a Black man bringing these conservative incursions.

Race was an explosive issue in 1967. In America, the Civil Rights Movement had been dividing the country as it made historic advances against centuries old injustice. *To Sir, With Love* (1967) is a British film and takes place in England. Still, the force and power of the race crisis struck such a chord among liberals the world over that

the Black Mark Thackeray, Sir, was a powerful symbol from even across the Atlantic Ocean.

Additionally, the image of a Black man being the bearer of "appropriate," pedagogically conducive culture is a further, ironic liberal twist. The 1950s and 1960s were times of progressive educational reform. Education was going to forge a new society, equal, and without poverty. The strategy centered on universal opportunity to succeed in school.

Why did some people, some groups of people, consistently underachieve in school? Cultural Deprivation Theory contended that certain homes and even whole communities were culturally deprived (Friedman, 1967) and that this deprivation accounted for children's lack of educational success. The answer was simple: interventions were required to boost or improve the culture of such children and thereby enhance their opportunity for educational and consequently life success.

These culturally disadvantaged groupings were remarkably correlative with race. The culturally adequate communities were often White, while the culturally deprived communities Black. Therefore, it becomes a politically liberal irony in *To Sir, With Love* (1967) when the Black Mark Thackeray brings cultural enrichment to White North Quay[32].

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[32] There were other culturally informed members on staff at North Quay, such as Clinty, the White female art teacher. Notwithstanding, she lacked either the pedagogical skill or commitment of Thackeray to reach the students, saying she "is really an artist. Teaching pays the bills."

TEACHERS (1984)

Directed by Arthur Hiller

Written by W.R. McKinney

Cast:

Nick Nolte .... Alex
JoBeth Williams .... Lisa
Judd Hirsch .... Roger
Ralph Macchio .... Eddie
Allen Garfield .... Rosenberg
Lee Grant .... Doctor Burke
Richard Mulligan .... Herbert
Royal Dano .... Ditto

William Schallert .... Horn
Art Metrano .... Troy
Laura Dern .... Diane
Crispin Glover .... Danny
Morgan Freeman .... Lewis
Madeleine Sherwood .... Grace
Steven Hill .... Sloan

Alex is a long time teacher at working class John F. Kennedy High School, a

teacher whose proverbial wheels have been spinning for some time. He

was at one time, as champion of a remedial reading program, considered a

bright and promising young educator, but lately he seems to be going

nowhere. He has lost his spark of pride for the profession and is quite

possibly approaching burnout. This begins to change when a former

student, attorney Lisa, returns to take depositions for a litigation in which a former

student is suing the school for letting him graduate without being able to read. The suit

has the administration very concerned and Alex figures he will just toe the line in his

deposition, not implicating the school and its policies. Several events occur, though, to

reinforce for Alex just how bad things are among some at the school—things ranging

from incompetence to abuse, to borderline corruption. Alex begins to question his complacency, and soon the administration tries to get rid of him as they begin to suspect his shaky support. Alex decides to remain though, and affirms his resolve to fight the administration as he proudly declares his identity as a teacher.

Teachers (1984) is liberal, but it is a tough liberalism—even so tough that some liberals might not want to hear its message. Indeed, the film starts as a catalogue of conservative nightmares about public education. Nonetheless, Teachers does eventually slyly assert its liberalism.

The conservative nightmare is played for both laughs and dramatic impact, and it covers just about every aspect of school life. One of the teachers, Ditto, is to say the least uninspiring. He goes from being practically a walking corpse to an actual corpse sitting in front of his class. Students are so used to his lifeless nature that it takes some time before anyone notices.

There are apathetic parents. When Alex challenges a student's mother, "Don't you care about your kid's education?" She replies, "Isn't that your job?" In addition, there is a corrupt union. The union representative depicted is a fool who would have assisted in the selling out of Alex when the administration wanted to oust him, saying, "You'll get no trouble from the union," while clearly bad teachers, such as one who impregnated a student, are protected. The vision depicted here is one of insanity.

In fact, insanity is an explicit theme in the film. There is the school psychologist who has a nervous breakdown in the middle of a busy office. A connection emerges between insanity and teaching. A psychiatric patient, Herbert, escapes from his handlers

and poses as a teacher in a pattern reminiscent of untrained individuals teaching in other films: *The Substitute* (1996) and *Kindergarten Cop* (1990).

It is through these moments of insanity that *Teachers'* (1984) liberalism emerges. At John F. Kennedy High, the crazy teachers are the best teachers. The psychotic Herbert becomes the innocent rube who sees things most sanely. He challenges "insane" practices, such as Ditto saying it was not his job to teach a student to read.

Herbert and Alex recognize a mutual affinity. When the men in the white coats eventually come to take Herbert away, he and Alex share a moment as they salute each other. Besides being the two best teachers in the school, they share something else in common—the theme of insanity. At the very end of the film, after Alex has asserted that he is going to stay on no matter what, he is told, "You're crazy," to which he replies, "Of course, I'm a teacher."

Just prior to that denouement, the film's authorial voice is asserted in a speech given by Alex, addressing his vice principal who had just unsuccessfully tried to get rid of him. In a message that maintains a liberal education mission of providing equal opportunity for all, Alex asserts: "The damn school wasn't built for us, Roger. It wasn't built for your lawyers, your unions, and all your other institutions. It was built for the kids. They're not here for us. We're here for them."

An important note needs to be made about the student who graduated from J.F.K. who could not read. He would be the victim of the movie and the person in whose interest any conservative critiques of public education were made. The plaintiff does not go to court and expose any problems at the school as lawyer Lisa would prefer. Rather,

he "cashes out, " taking a financial settlement rather than addressing any structural difficulties in the system. Additionally, and most importantly, the former student's name is John Calvin. John Calvin, of course, is also the name of the French-born theologian famously invoked by Max Weber in *The Protestant Work Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* as the inspiration for chains of events leading to the development of both capitalism and England's early advanced position within it. Symbolically, this student short-changed by the system does not represent student interests at all, but rather the interests of capitalism. Referring back to Alex's speech, this becomes one of the "institutions" that the teachers are not there to serve in place of students.

In the 1984 of *Teachers*, America was in the middle of the Reagan Era. This conservative time engendered conservative reexaminations of social institutions and their assumptions. On the heels of Reagan firing striking air traffic controllers, the political mood toward organized labor, including teachers had taken a turn for the ungenerous—if not outright hostile. In such a political climate, *Teachers*, and its liberalism ambiguously disguised as conservative reaction represents a sly vision against the grain of the time.

STAND AND DELIVER (1987)

Directed by Ramón Menéndez

Written by Ramón Menéndez & Tom Musca

Cast:

Edward James Olmos .... Jaime
Escalante
Estelle Harris .... Secretary
Mark Phelan .... Cop
Virginia Paris .... Raquel Ortega
Mark Eliot .... Tito
Adelaida Álvarez .... Sexy Girl
Will Gotay .... Pancho
Patrick Baca .... Javier

Ingrid Oliu .... Lupe
Carmen Argenziano .... Molina
Richard Martinez .... Heavy Metal Boy
Mark Everett .... Heavy Metal Boy
Tyde Kierney .... Joe Goodell
Rosanna DeSoto .... Fabiola Escalante
Bodie Olmos .... Fernando Escalante
Andy Garcia .... Ramirez
Rif Hutton .... Pearson

Jaime Escalante is a Hispanic man who had formerly worked as an engineer in California's technology industry. Unsatisfied, he makes a personal choice to become a

mathematics teacher. Soon, he decides to teach calculus to Hispanic youth in his inner city school. Using rigorous but unconventional pedagogy, he teaches the students so well that they are accused of cheating by the National Testing Service after having done extremely well on a standardized test. Insulted, the students retake the test and thereby win back the honor of their school, their community, and themselves.

Stand and Deliver (1987) is liberal. The film depicts minority (here Hispanic) youths overcoming the negative expectations of others to achieve academic success. It is noteworthy that much of those negative expectations come from minority gatekeepers who had themselves succeeded due to liberal opportunity. The movie paints these advantagees of such opportunity as turning conservative once they succeed. This element, rather than detracting from the liberal theme, highlights the progressive "saviorhood" of the hero, Escalante.

Garfield High School is a place of mixed but mostly Hispanic studentship. It is housed in a relatively modern building, but the environment is economically

disadvantaged and suffers from crime and gangs. It is into this milieu that Escalante enters to proclaim mathematics as the great equalizer. He inspires his students to learn the subject with the promise of future social mobility.

The head of Escalante's math department, Hispanic woman Raquel Ortega, chastises him for deluding the students with unrealistic dreams. Highly educated and accomplished herself, she is referred to as "Doctor." She explicitly has low expectations of the students.

The pattern of Escalante and his class encountering resistance from minority officials continues with the two officials from the National Testing Service who suspect the students of cheating. Both gentlemen are referred to as "Doctor." The first is African American and the second Hispanic. Played by Andy Garcia, Ramirez indicates he strongly resents Escalante's suggestion of racism for questioning the test results. Ramirez replies that, after all, he came from the same "hood." The rejoinder does little to dispel the suspicion of racism.

The 1987 of *Stand and Deliver* was in the midst of the Reagan Era, a time of cuts to social programs utilized by minorities such as Hispanics. This shift in political priorities coincided, however, with an enhanced expression of cultural pride among minority groups. *Stand and Deliver* is unique though. Galvanized by the conservative attitudes of the time and witnessed with African Americans in the Black cinema[33] discussed in The Teen Drama, this film represents a cinematic assertion of cultural pride and liberal opportunity. Other films in this thesis, such as *Blackboard Jungle* (1955) and *Dangerous Minds* (1995) have also asserted cultural pride and liberal opportunity. *The*

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[33] John Singleton's *Boyz N the Hood* (1991) explicitly critiqued Reagan/Bush.

Principal (1987) and *The Substitute* (1996) depicted minority pride but were politically conservative. Only another conservative film, *Lean on Me* (1989), celebrated minority cultural pride in a film in which the savior is not White, but a member of the minority community represented.

MR. HOLLAND'S OPUS (1995)

Directed by Stephen Herek

Written by Patrick Sheane Duncan

Cast:

Richard Dreyfuss .... Glenn Holland
Glenne Headly .... Iris Holland
Jay Thomas .... Bill Meister
Olympia Dukakis .... Principal Jacobs
William H. Macy .... Vice Principal Wolters
Alicia Witt .... Gertrude Lang
Terrence Dashon Howard .... Louis Russ
Damon Whitaker .... Bobby Tidd

Jean Louisa Kelly .... Rowena Morgan
Alexandra Boyd .... Sarah Olmstead
Nicholas John Renner .... Cole at 6 Years Old
Joseph Anderson .... Cole at 15 Years Old
Anthony Natale .... Cole at 28 Years Old
Joanna Gleason .... Adult Gertrude
Beth Maitland .... Deaf School Principal

Glenn Holland loves music. After having worked many years as a professional musician, he accepts a position as a schoolteacher in order to gain some stability for his family. Holland establishes himself as a caring and effective teacher, helping numerous students overcome personal challenges. In time though, he learns that his young son is deaf. Being a musician and lover of music, this becomes a source of conflict and estrangement between the two. Later, Holland is tempted to return to a professional music career when he encounters a talented student who could pave the way. Holland chooses to stay with

his job and family though but eventually learns that his teaching position will be cut, forcing retirement. In a grand public ceremony, Holland receives accolades and recognition from former students, colleagues, and in a move that draws the loose ends from his life together—his son.

Mr. Holland's Opus (1995) is liberal. The film is a glowing allegorical endorsement of the challenges and ideals of teaching. Sociologically and politically, it is a dramatization of issues related to State funding. In general, the issue involves funding and support of education but intersects with that of funding to the arts.

The crucial event in the film related to these matters is the cutting of Holland's position. The protagonist has a long history of conflict with the less than open-minded vice principal Wolters. However, the tough but fair liberal principal Jacobs acts a go-between and buffer for the two. She believes in Holland and what he is doing. After Jacobs retires though, Wolters takes over the school and consequently does nothing to prevent Glenn's ousting. Holland notes that Jacobs would have fought the cut, but as the liberal leadership departs, more conservative heads prevail.

The funding reductions are not across the board, as some departments remain intact. Holland's friend throughout the movie is football coach Bill Meister, whose position remains. Holland comments to him that if the football program were ever cut, that would really be the end of western civilization.

Holland's remark sarcastically underlines the film's authorial position. The debate becomes, from a funding and allocation perspective, a matter of educational priorities. The conservative argument is that all things being equal, art funding is not a

priority compared to the core subjects. In a time of fiscal restraint, Language Arts, Mathematics, and Science must take precedence. The arts such as drama, painting, and music must step aside and assume the status of superfluity.

The non-essentiality of the arts argument is critiqued by Holland's statement to Meister. If music is cut and football not, then a cultural priority is indicated and the non-essentiality argument breaks down. If many students learning to play a musical instrument is non-essential, then how essential is a few students throwing around a ball?

Aside from the long standing divide between conservatives and liberals on degree of State involvement in anything (conservatives generally wanting less and liberals more), this issue points to a deeper topic. Debates related to arts funding often seem initially to concern essentiality/non-essentiality, but often soon get to a matter of cultural taste. In *Mr. Holland's Opus* (1995) football is chosen over music, and the tastes of the funding allocators are revealed.

Mr. Holland's Opus (1995) becomes illustrative of broader debates concerning State funding of culture. The National Endowment for the Arts was established in 1965 as an independent U. S. federal government agency and is the largest single funder of non-profit arts in the country. This does not mean, nonetheless, that the Endowment operates in a political vacuum. Its funding choices are frequently criticized by citizens and political leaders, most often conservatives.

Controversy over the homoerotic photography of Robert Mapplethorpe or Chris Ofili's elephant dung-splattered painting of the Virgin Mary renew from time to time a seemingly endless debate about the practices of the Endowment in particular and the

question of public funding to arts in general. Arguments of essentiality versus non-

essentiality tend to give way to those concerning perceived decadence. The question of

taste gives way to one of morality. In these ways, the priority struggle in *Mr. Holland's*

Opus (1995) between music and football becomes situated within these broader

liberal/conservative debates about public involvement in the arts.

MUSIC OF THE HEART (1999)

Directed by Wes Craven

Written by Pamela Gray

Cast:

Meryl Streep .... Roberta Guaspari
Cloris Leachman .... Assunta Guaspari
Henry Dinhofer .... Lexi at 5
Michael Angarano .... Nick at 7
Robert Ari .... Supervisor
Aidan Quinn .... Brian Sinclair
Teddy Coluca .... Taxi Driver
Angela Bassett .... Janet Williams

Josh Pais .... Dennis (Rausch)
Barbara Gonzalez .... Janet's Secretary
Jade Yorker .... DeSean at 11
Victoria Gómez .... Lucy at 10
Justine Pierre Edmund .... Bongo Kid
Justin Spaulding .... Naeem Adisa at 9
Zoe Sternbach-Taubman .... Guadalupe
at 9

Music of the Heart (1999) is based on the true story of Roberta Guaspari. A

classically trained musician, she finds herself left with two children by her naval officer

husband. Eventually through an old high school friend, she obtains a job

teaching violin at an inner city school in a dangerous neighborhood.

Guaspari is a tough and demanding teacher, but after numerous struggles

and emotional difficulties, she establishes herself as a veritable institution

in the school. Both students, and parents on their children's behalf, yearn to be in her

class despite the rigorous discipline required. Eventually, the school board decides to cut her funding, and the program is thrown into jeopardy. Consequently, she and her supporters mobilize to arrange a benefit concert. After much preparation, the concert is a great success and the program saved.

Music of the Heart (1999) is liberal. Elements of the context of its production, notably concerning the director, lend to its liberalism. Additionally, the film shares certain similarities with the last picture discussed, *Mr. Holland's Opus* (1995). The two are not without their differences, but those that there are tend to reinforce *Music*'s liberalism from yet another perspective.

Music of the Heart (1999) is directed by Wes Craven, himself a liberal. Although he is primarily known as creator of horror films such as the *Nightmare on Elm Street* and *Scream* series', few people are aware that he was in fact a teacher himself early in his career.

One feature of the Bill Clinton presidency was his reaching out to forge ties with diverse groups. One group that welcomed the president openly was Hollywood liberals such as Steven Spielberg, Alec Baldwin, and Barbara Streisand. Craven was also a supporter of the liberal president, taking advantage of three hours of private access in Clinton's last days of office to shoot a documentary film for the Clinton Presidential Library.

Like *Mr. Holland's Opus* (1995), this film is about a music teacher and deals with the issue of funding cuts to arts education. Additionally, both pictures feature White middle class protagonists, but unlike *Opus*, *Music of the Heart* (1999) returns to a

familiar pattern in this thesis of White middle class saviors entering the inner city: *Blackboard Jungle* (1955), *The Principal* (1987), *Dangerous Minds* (1995), *The Substitute* (1996), and *High School High* (1996). *Music* retains its liberalism partly by making that White middle class savior a divorced single mother. Additionally, the intelligent and competent principal of the school, Janet Williams, is a Black woman.

The issue of public funding to arts education as discussed in *Mr. Holland's Opus* (1995) reemerges here. Guaspari finds her program cut, with it seen as a low educational priority. One issue, nevertheless, that is distinct from *Opus* is that of a White teacher providing elite White culture to poor, read Black, students. The issue skirts close to what critics may call a kind of domestic cultural imperialism, assuming Black culture inferior and in necessity of replacement by superior European culture.

The practice is addressed by Principal Joe Clark in *Lean on Me* (1989), as he derides a teacher for her "missionary zeal in teaching Mozart." Clark later has the school song rearranged along the ethnic tastes of the community, as an assertion of cultural pride. Such declarations feature in other films of this thesis in the forms of murals and/or music: *The Principal* (1987), *Dangerous Minds* (1995), *The Substitute* (1996). The accusation is even made by a parent, but disregarded, in *Music of the Heart* (1999) that Guaspari is advancing what amounts to cultural imperialism. No, in the assumptions of this film, the music is seen not to come from Europe, from White culture, or from domination. In this film, as the title suggests, the music, it is assumed, comes only from the heart.

Conclusion

Love Letters to Me are sentimental portraits of teaching that extol the ideal virtues of the profession. They depict teachers doing their best work in light of often opposing circumstances. The Letters discussed here are *To Sir, With Love* (1967), *Teachers* (1984), *Stand and Deliver* (1987), *Mr. Holland's Opus* (1995), and *Music of the Heart* (1999).

All five of these films are predominantly liberal. *To Sir, With Love* (1967) is culturally conservative for promoting traditional gender roles and the superiority of middle class culture, but politically liberal for portraying a Black man as the provider of this culture. *Teachers* (1984) is liberal without rose-colored glasses. It generously depicts conservative critiques of public school, but the movie asserts its liberalism through the commitment of the protagonists to public education. *Stand and Deliver* (1987) is liberal for its depiction of minority youths achieving success despite the low expectations of those, often minorities themselves, in power. *Mr. Holland's Opus* (1995) is a liberal endorsement of teaching that also speaks to conservative arguments against public funding of the arts. *Music of the Heart* (1999) is another liberal film about a music teacher. Made by a noted liberal director, its focus is more toward the enrichment of inner city culture with elite White culture.

There are two patterns within these findings. First, all the teachers must struggle against opposition to practice their ideal pedagogy. This opposition does not come, as in other films, from vicious gangs, criminals, or the students at all. In Love Letters to Me,

the antagonism generally emanates from the administration, at either the level of the government, school board, or principal's office. Second, these films tend to be largely about culture. These teachers struggle against resistant political powers to promote their cultures of gender, mathematics, and music.

This pattern of cultural transmission is a fundamental tenet of education. Teachers dispatch knowledge, skills, and attitudes to their students, and all these elements are wrapped up in culture. Some of the films address the issues of who the teachers transmitting this culture are, who the students receiving it are, what the nature of the culture being transmitted is, and whether this is a good thing. Generally, the culture being transmitted is considered superior to that of the students. That's the general assumption of education, otherwise, why would we do it?

Opinion differs as to the value of this activity. Some liberals, such as those in support of cultural deprivation theory (as discussed in the 1967 film *To Sir, With Love*), think it a good thing for its potential to equalize the equality of opportunity inherent in education. Some conservatives think it good for its function of promoting and preserving cultural elements they value. Yet, other liberals and those who feel chronically dispossessed in relation to what they consider the mainstream or dominant culture think it bad. They view education as a kind of domestic cultural imperialism, either latently functioning or explicitly directed toward eradicating their cultures.

In the 1990s, the politics of culture and identity had become a dominant force in cultural, intellectual, and political debate. Specifically delineated discourses emerged to define and preserve their own identities as well as explore their relationships, often

described as relationships of oppression, in relation to the dominant, read White European, culture. Black Studies, Queer Studies, Women's studies all emerged, despite their hypotheses of oppression, within a liberal context. The context ironically, but at times not obviously, supported the speaking and eventual institutionalization of these culture/identity voices, which their existence bears testament to. Therefore, cultural politics becomes fundamentally liberal.

In the end, these love letters to me, these exhortations of teaching virtue are many things save uncontested. Sentimental epistles, while acknowledging organizational constraint and a concern with culture, open a Pandora's box of cultural politics. We, as teachers, often love these letters, but must remember that though we read them one way others may discern them another. Nevertheless, a discussion generated by such divergent interpretations can add a valuable postscript.

Part III: Summative Explorations

Chapter 9: Discussion

Introduction

The previous chapter, Love Letters to Me, concluded the findings section of this thesis and will be the subject of restatement further along. Presently, I review all the findings of the thesis, perform a preliminary synthesis, review the methodology, and apply that methodology to the preliminary synthesis, as well as reflect upon the foregoing steps. My review and commentary argues that liberalism has ensconced its dominance by way of public education, cultural pluralism, and globalization. My second part reviews the theses' methodology and applies Thompson's (1990) Tripartite Approach to plead that the composite ideological character of the 25 films is liberal. Lastly, my reflections explain these findings and analysis via Antonio Gramsci's concept of hegemony. Indeed, the overall ideological character of these 25 films about education is liberal, a liberalism that belies an increasing hegemonic potency.

The analysis, thus far, has revealed the films as either liberal or conservative. The liberal pictures divulge a pattern of progressive educational reforms and tensions between elite culture and liberal democratic values. The conservative films have three features: they become pendulum-like reactions to the perceived ineffectuality of the reforms, they emerge as a dialectically mutated conservatism, and they rescript liberal social problems into individual problems. An overall synthesis of the two categories

divulges tensions both within and between them reflecting broader concerns about public education that continually evolve in each new film, each new category, and each new context.

The production and transmission or diffusion phase of Thompson's (1990) Tripartite Approach announces for the 25 films a highly complex and collaborative profit making enterprise undertaken knowingly and with consent by people accepting it as a parameter within which film art is made. The construction analysis admits a reliable semiotic exposition of generally optimistic narrative worlds. The project's reception and appropriation concerns an English Canadian researcher working in a Canadian, non-commercial context with movies on videocassette. In conclusion, the aggregate ideological character of these 25 films is liberal.

Review and Commentary of the Findings

The social world appears to be getting more diverse; and ironically, as it does so, it appears to be getting smaller as well. The following section synthesizes the research findings up to this point, adds a level of meta-commentary, and then tracks the entrenchment of liberalism through public education, into contemporary plurality, and culminating in the border erosions of globalization. I continue to discuss the films in their categories (The Classroom Western, Pictures of Privilege, Teen Comedy, Teen Drama, Adult Comedy, and Love Letters to Me) because they maintain a logical consistency and thematic coherence. At the outset of the project, I indicated I would view these films through a certain lens of expectation. I indicated that possible

ideologies for the films could be socialism, classical/neo-liberalism, contemporary

liberalism, classical conservatism, neo-conservatism, and others. What emerged,

nonetheless, has been a very limited ideological range: only either liberal or

conservative variations. A cursory glance at Table 10.1, presenting all the films in the

order discussed in the thesis, and their ideological ascription, indicates my projection of

the possible scope according to my categories (The Classroom Western, Pictures of

Privilege, Teen Comedy, Teen Drama, Adult Comedy, and Love Letters to Me) erred on

the side of generosity.

Table 10.1   The Films and Variations within their Ideological Ascription

Film	Conservative	Liberal
The Classroom Western		
Blackboard Jungle (1955)		X
High School Confidential (1958)	X	
The Principal (1987)	X	
Lean on Me (1989)	X	
Dangerous Minds (1995)		X
The Substitute (1996)	X	
Pictures of Privilege		
Goodbye Mr. Chips (1939)	X	
Tom Brown's School Days (1951)	X	
Taps (1981)		X

Dead Poets Society (1989)		X
Rushmore (1998)		X
The Teen Comedy		
Fast Times at Ridgemont High (1982)	X	
Heathers (1989)		X
She's All That (1999)	X	
The Teen Drama		
The Breakfast Club (1985)		X
The Basketball Diaries (1995)	X	
The Adult Comedy		
Kindergarten Cop (1990)		X
Jack (1996)		X
High School High (1996)		X
Election (1999)	X	
Love Letters to Me		
To Sir, With Love (1967)		X
Teachers (1984)		X
Stand and Deliver (1987)		X
Mr. Holland's Opus (1995)		X
Music of the Heart (1999)		X

The films were either liberal or conservative. The liberal pictures taken together

disclosed a pattern depicting and reflecting progressive reforms in education and

tensions between elite, conservative culture with the kind of democratic values thought to drive such changes. The conservative films reflected pendulum-like reactions to perceptions of the ineffectuality of liberal reforms, a dialectically modified conservatism (in response to the amendments), and when social problems were addressed, focused on the individual—social problems became recast as personal problems. An overall synthesis of the two fields, liberal and conservative, imparts tensions both within and between the two groupings that reflect broader issues concerning public education that mutually remodel and redefine in each new film, each new category, and each new context, whether in the inner-city or elite academy, in comedy or drama, movies for youth or adults, or in films critical or inspirational.

The liberal films were represented in all genre categories. The liberal Classroom Westerns dealt with reforms toward social reengineering and equalization of opportunity; the Pictures of Privilege depicted tensions between elite culture and what are considered liberal democratic values; the lone Teen Drama factored invisibility; the Teen Comedies were responses to 1980s conservatism; the Adult Comedies fine-tuned the early liberal reforms; and Love Letters to Me exposed liberal conceits of the teaching profession as well as patterns of cultural conservatism within the rubric of social or political liberalism. Taken together, a pattern emerges within the liberal films of reforms negotiating tensions between elite or conservative culture and liberal democratic values.

The conservative films were represented in all categories save Love Letters to Me. The conservative Classroom Westerns were pendulum swing responses to perceptions of the ineffectuality of liberal reforms. The Pictures of Privilege maintained

conservatism with a nod and a wink by integrating liberalism into a modified conservatism. The Teen Comedies presented prosperous youth with no explicit concern for liberal problems. The conservative Teen Drama was concerned with drug use (and related problems), but like the conservative Classroom Western *High School Confidential* (1958) the social problem was recast as a personal problem, not focused on society but the individual. Finally, the Adult Comedy presented a social liberalism skewering political liberalism. All these conservative categories shared a common pendulum response to liberal reforms, emerging as dialectically modified conservatism. When social problems were addressed, they were focused on the individual. They were rescripted as not social problems at all, but personal problems.

The ideological pattern inherent in this analysis registers a ripple, that if it draws the eye to a wider horizon, premonitions a tsunami to cover the world. To the foregoing review of the findings, I add a meta-commentary to situate the analyses in their contexts. In so doing, I uncovered a pattern of slow but sure liberal entrenchment. The films opened with debates about public education, moved to the emergence of plurality, and witnessed development toward a more diverse form of liberalism. I situate this process within a broader enclosure of liberalism, which permits more voices, notwithstanding those that present or advocate any fundamentally different views. Finally, I locate this bracketing-liberalism concerning the globally situated decline of the traditionally liberal nation state toward a more global model, indeed a global-scale plurality that admits a planet of diversity but is blind to the dissenting standpoints.

The Classroom Western

There's a New Sheriff in Town: Liberal Social Policy and Conservative

Responses in the Classroom Western, Chapter 3, featured school films that shared

similarities with Westerns in terms of narrative structure and character types.

Blackboard Jungle (1955) and *Dangerous Minds* (1995) were liberal, while *High School*

Confidential (1958), *The Principal* (1987), *Lean on Me* (1989), and *The Substitute*

(1996) were conservative. All the films involved an outsider, like the hero riding into a

Western town, who entered a dangerous, crime-filled school and "cleaned it up." The

films and their ideologies tracked and reflected American attitudes about the role of

education, especially as it relates to social problems such as poverty and juvenile

delinquency.

The liberal Classroom Westerns intersected with post-war educational reforms.

Blackboard Jungle (1955) provided the seminal blueprint for all the films in the

category and was historically situated at the beginning of the post-war pedagogical

orientation toward progressivism and contemporary liberal equalization of opportunity.

Dangerous Minds (1995) placed a female, albeit a female with masculine characteristics,

as the Richard Dadieresque[34] sheriff to update the story for the effect of post-war

equalization policies such as affirmative action.

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[34] Richard Dadier was the protagonist of *Blackboard Jungle* (1955) and the prototypical Classroom
Western hero.

The conservative Classroom Westerns became pendulum responses to critiques of fruitless liberal reforms. The first such film, and counterpoint to *Blackboard Jungle* (1955) was *High School Confidential* (1958), which featured a Western theme of law and lawlessness in response to the rise of youth culture and a conservative reaction to juvenile delinquency. The title character of *The Principal* (1987) faced a deadly gang to rise as the White savior of an inner city community. *Lean on Me* (1989) depicted a (real life) Black principal in a similar role as the authoritarian rejoinder. Lastly, *The Substitute* (1996) depicted an out of work mercenary fighting a corrupt Black principal and deadly gang. The pendulum dynamic was reinforced there as *The Substitute*, the last Classroom Western in the study, included numerous intertextual references to the liberal *Blackboard Jungle*, the first Classroom Western. The title character was the ultimate authoritarian/conservative response to liberal reforms.

The Classroom Westerns provided insight into the settling in, or end of the honeymoon of, liberalism's great project and vision for the future: public education. The most salient feature through these films was that of decaying infrastructure. The schools had generally fallen into states of decrepitude and disrepair. They became, in addition to the Western "frontier," a wasteland of the Post–War period. As the heroes faced down ruthless gangs, battle also raged on the front of liberal reform and ensuing debate. The party had raged throughout the century and for much of the previous one. Nevertheless, as schools began to crumble, so did the dream and unity of vision. As hangover set in, people started wondering where to go from there.

Pictures of Privilege

Pictures of Privilege: Toward a Liberal Aristocracy, Chapter 4, included films set either in British public or American private schools and were about places of wealth and social privilege. The British *Goodbye Mr. Chips* (1939) and *Tom Brown's School Days* (1951) were conservative, and the American *Taps* (1981), *Dead Poets Society* (1989), and *Rushmore* (1998) were liberal. The two British films, while politically conservative bore elements of social liberalism, while the three American pictures possessed strong undercurrents of elite, cultural conservatism. The aristocratic liberalism of the Hollywood films spoke to an effort in American culture to establish a de facto upper class in its reputedly classless society—to gain back the crown the nation broke from in revolution.

Liberal Pictures of Privilege illustrated tensions between elite culture and liberal democratic values. *Taps* (1981) featured military culture corrected by the liberal political and economic values it sometimes invisibly served at a time of transition from the 1970s to 80s. *Dead Poets Society* (1989) saw liberal aristocratic culture asserted over conservative authoritarianism as America searched for its own forlorn aristocratic culture within a framework of contemporary liberal choice. Finally, *Rushmore* (1998) depicted American opportunity and chutzpah informed by yearnings for aristocratic conservative culture. Both *Poets* and *Rushmore* dealt the American pursuit of the elusive, refined "lady" left behind while chasing its revolutionary liberty.

Pictures of Privilege sustained conservatism by integrating some effects of liberal reforms into a new, mutated version. *Goodbye Mr. Chips* (1939) championed traditional aristocracy and class structures with a nod to liberal reforms (it had a progressive attitude toward women) and bridged the transition of new liberal elements into the traditional elite. Similarly, *Tom Brown's School Days* (1951) saw aristocratic virtue maintained within the rubric of 19th century liberal reform[35].

The Enlightenment era social changes depicted through these films moved profoundly, but it would be a mistake to imagine they did so with nary a backward glance. Here, Class and stratification were the most telling social and cultural categories. Liberalism pensively wiped a tear and looked rearward with a certain degree of sentimentality to its aristocratic pre-history. The time span of these films taken collectively correlated nicely with the rapid and tumultuous social and ideological changes of the 19th and 20th centuries. The view taken through these pictures was one, while admitting certain tensions, which was generally uncritical.

Teen Comedies

The Teen Comedies, Chapter 5, were set in and around school and intended primarily for a youth market. *Fast Times at Ridgemont High* (1982) and *She's All That* (1999) were conservative, and *Heathers* (1989) was liberal. The films all took place in prosperous settings yet differed in their narrative styles and purposes: *Fast Times* was

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[35] A noteworthy aside, the reforming Dr. Arnold whose efforts shaped the background of the story was, in fact, father of English poet and cultural scholar Matthew Arnold.

quasi-journalistic, *She's All That* was neo-mythical, and *Heathers* was a satire. While

the first two films steered clear of urgent social problems, it was only *Heathers* that

addressed serious issues like teen violence and suicide, a problem that would seem to

explode in the decade to follow.

The liberal Teen Comedy found something to laugh at as a response to 1980s

conservatism. *Heathers* (1989) was a satire of suicide and social hierarchies. While

skewering 1980s conservative conceits, it also seemed to anticipate issues related to the

1999 massacre at Columbine High School in Colorado.

The conservative Teen Comedies depicted prosperous youth with no overt

concern for liberal problems (or the problems liberalism would address). *Fast Times at*

Ridgemont High (1982) was a realistic presentation of fortuitous teens, yet informed by

a certain disparagement. *She's All That* (1999) recast the Pygmalion myth in a

prosperous California high school to consider social hierarchies in the affluent (for some

at least) late 1990s.

The Teen Comedies further exemplified a cultural engagement and response with

the history of public schooling. These films examined intersections between student

body and prosperity, with a particular emphasis on one category. "Youth" as is known

today is a relatively new construction, one emphasized and accelerated in development

through the inception and growth of universal education. Suffice it to say, that many 15

to 18 year olds 150 years ago would have been trading their spot at the high school

cafeteria for a stool at a mill, space of floor at a factory, or spot in an elevator

descending into a coal mine. Again, the foci and problems reached through these movies

represented hangovers on the morning after the heady early days of Western public
education.

Teen Dramas

The subject matter of the Teen Drama and Cinema of Omission, Chapter 6, was
similar to the Teen Comedies, except as the title suggests, it concerned dramas. The
chapter's two films, *The Breakfast Club* (1985) and *The Basketball Diaries* (1995), were
liberal and conservative, respectively. Both films treated serious issues, but neither tread
far from the experience of White America. Both pictures omitted views of Black
experience—both on screen and in the wider configuration of social recognition and
prioritization.

The lone liberal Teen Drama, *The Breakfast Club* (1985), implicated invisibility
as a theme. Suburban youths plumbed the depths of homogeneity and
discovered...sameness. The film and its White middle class heroes' quest reflected the
invisibility of disadvantaged groups in Reagan's America.

The conservative Teen Drama was concerned with drug use and related
problems. Like *High School Confidential* (1958), *The Basketball Diaries* (1995)
presented the social problem as a personal problem. It was as a harrowing anti-drug tale,
linked to a long tradition of cautionary film.

The Teen Dramas spoke indirectly through their silence to problems of race in
US society, specifically around a vision of White homogeneity. Whatever the relative
educational, social, or economic conditions of the characters, the movies in this category

painted America as a house, and though large and with many rooms, everywhere one looked, the walls were all the same color, White. This racial sameness hid beneath its unified surface a war for recognition, boiling over from the nation's tortured history of race relations, or indeed, non-relations.

Adult Comedies

Tenuous Advances, Conservative Frustration and the Clinton Double Take: Patterns in the Adult Comedy, Chapter 7, featured comedies with adult protagonists. *Kindergarten Cop* (1990), *Jack* (1996), and *High School High* (1996) were liberal, and *Election* (1999) had both conservative and liberal elements but was principally conservative. All the films were, in their own ways, responses to 1990s American liberalism. Disadvantaged groups celebrated tentative steps forward, while conservatives tried in vain to foil the partial author of the advances: then President Bill Clinton.

The liberal Adult Comedies, like the Classroom Western *Dangerous Minds* (1995), were matters of fine tuning life after early reforms. *Kindergarten Cop* (1990) brought masculinity head on to meet the challenges of femininity and resettle male identity after liberal amelioration for women. *Jack* (1996) gave diversity a harbor of acceptance. It reflected struggles and policy formations undertaken for students with exceptional needs. *High School High* (1996) parodied school films as White culture encountered the rising 1990s influence and market share of Black culture.

Finally, the Adult Comedy presented social liberalism, through its gay-positive stance, but ultimately skewered political liberalism. *Election* (1999) satirized

assumptions such as the untainted virtue of the public school teacher, but did so alongside the appearance of a positive lesbian character. Nonetheless, the liberal tinge turned conservative as the film savaged Clintonesque politics.

The pluralism evident in the Adult Comedies spoke to an organizing liberal orientation. These films espied features on the landscape of multiplicity: sex, race, and class. The Adult comedies treated shifts and resettlements between the growing cacophony of voices rising above the din. The system that allowed this emergence is that of Western democracy, effectively, Western liberal democracy. Pluralism is liberal, and it made its way through a door left open by struggles at the site of social class.

Marx's view of ideology is that it reflects and justifies the dominant class position. Along a certain trajectory, engagements with that account have been expanded by Antonio Gramsci to encounter hegemony, the creation of consent through social institutions. Lately, this tradition has developed into an expanded perspective, and admitted the admission of other sites of domination, such as race, language, gender, sexual orientation. The expanded site of struggle, admirable as any struggle against domination is, left the status and importance of class in some quarters, diminished, in others questioned as having any continuing relevance as a converging site for struggle. The effect was that as people no longer danced with the one who brought them, the escorting carriage waited at the curb outside; forgotten, and Marxism became relegated to a 19th century obscurantist curiosity. As to whether this leaves the dancers, still in euphoric glee with their newfound floor to caper, with no ride home, time will be the evidentiary teller.

Love Letters to Me

Love Letters to Me, the final analytical chapter, provided sentimental portraits of

the teaching profession's highest ideals. *To Sir, With Love* (1967) was culturally

conservative but politically liberal, while *Teachers* (1984), *Stand and Deliver* (1987),

Mr. Holland's Opus (1995), and *Music of the Heart* (1999) were liberal. The teachers in

these films strove against resistant political powers to teach culture, whether of gender,

mathematics, or music. Struggles at the site of cultural transmission and displacement

became, during the 1990s, the subjects of highly charged discourses, many of them

ultimately informed by a context of liberalism.

Love Letters to Me were all liberal films that belied conceits of the teaching

profession and unveiled a pattern of cultural conservatism within explicit social and

political liberalism. The first picture, *To Sir, With Love* (1967), featured a Black teacher

bringing culture to a White working class neighborhood, asserting a culturally

conservative point of view in a politically liberal form. The racial tensions intersecting

with cultural deprivation theory of *Sir* were followed by a Reagan era tale of public

education in crises. *Teachers* (1984) prescribed insanity as a viable, and even favorable,

response. *Stand and Deliver* (1987) brought forth an Hispanic savior who saw the

abilities of kids that gatekeepers, indeed Hispanic gatekeepers, could not apprehend in

an assertion of cultural pride that paved the way for the multiple sociological

perspectives prominent at that time. *Mr. Holland's Opus* (1995) cast a music teacher

confronting personal and professional challenges as a vehicle for debates about funding

to arts education and public arts funding in general. *Music of the Heart* (1999) presented

a demanding music teacher overcoming administrative and political apathy to rescue her program. Here, cultural imperialism was championed alongside debates about arts funding—the character found no shortage of wealthy liberals and artists to help spread the message.

Questions related to the teaching of culture help to powerfully shaped educational discourse. What culture is being taught? Whose culture is it? Whom does it benefit? Whom does it denigrate? Love Letters mapped the intersections between culture, class and race, looking at the power dimension of culture and its transmission. On the surface, the pictures treated cultural transmission as a neutral enterprise, a depiction that writers such as Bourdieu have convincingly disputed. This problem represented a further hangover, but not just of public education. Rather, it spoke to the struggles of plurality that have percolated to the surface of educational and cultural discourse through engagements with class, gender, and race.

All these liberal films involved negotiation at the space of progressive reform. Some treated the forces it would seek to improve, some the conservative elements within its ranks and some the stage of fine-tuning and resettling. An overall comparison and synthesis between the liberal and conservative films admitted tensions both within and between each group that reflected wider patterns concerning public education. The patterns did not so much dialectically mutate as they mutually recast and redefined themselves in each new film, each sub-genre, and each new context of engagement. For the liberal films, the tensions were between elite or conservative culture and the liberal democratic values of post-war reform. The pendulum swings of the conservative films

responded to perceived unavailing liberal reforms and forged new shape as dialectically modified conservatism as well as recast erstwhile social problems as individual, personal ones.

Further Commentary

These films witnessed an unprecedented strengthening and entrenchment of liberalism in public education, Western culture and society, and indeed, across a shrinking globe. The Classroom Westerns tracked the introduction of some preliminary debates in public schooling. Pictures of Privilege showed transitional issues related to the formation of a liberal ethos. The Teen Comedies reared the head of culture into the mix. The Teen Drama animated silent voices within early liberalism. The Adult Comedies showed that this growing pluralism remained within the liberal tradition. Love Letters to Me disclosed that the loftiest assumptions of teaching were bound within liberalism.

Thus, it became clear that through all the conflicts and changes in public education throughout the 20th century, the institution had changed dramatically from its original liberal roots. The more changes, the more evolutions, schooling became something new, and that new incarnation was...liberal. From the earliest conceptions as an instrument of democracy, to one of individual opportunity, to recent manifestations as a vehicle toward cohesive plurality, education in the West has been and remains an institution of liberty. Although education has problems, by the standard of securing the dominant position of liberalism, it constituted a great success.

The emerging pluralism was one that extended itself only to voices willing to sing praise to its bracketing ideology. Liberal plurality, after all, did not extend so far as to welcome voices that seriously, fundamentally, lastingly critiqued its foundation. Indeed, the door is open only to entrants that admit the possibility of slow, sure, even imperceptible co-optation.

This cultural and ideological dynamic coalesced nicely with the nascent era of what may be called capitalist triumphalism. With the ending of the Cold War, and sublimation of the former Soviet Union into the nearly complete network of liberal democracies (although as an admittedly economically junior, tenuously stable member), liberalism has never been less challenged in its domination. Geo-politically, the post 1989 world has seen the undisputed economic, political, social, and cultural concentration of power to the United States.

Ironically, in this time of almost universal distinction for one country, the general status of the nation state as a category is on the wane. That institution, born of the 18th century revolutions, was a fundamental organizing construct for the inscription of individual rights on newly minted citizens to pursue liberty and advance capitalism. The nation state was an important wet nurse, tutor, teacher, and mentor to liberalism. Current conceptions of globalization weaken that erstwhile fixture and its powers; people now become citizens of the world.

Today, liberalism no longer needs the nation state, having grown beyond its nurturing tethers. In the new global context, erstwhile national citizens are scattered into a new plurality beyond national borders, a stationary diaspora. In the *Communist*

Manifesto, Karl Marx beckoned the workers of the world to unite, that they had nothing to lose but their chains; he admonished laborers to dispel their national identities for a global variant and lock that wet nurse of liberalism, the nation state, from the attending chamber. As it has turned out however, it was liberalism itself that heeded those words and smashed national boundaries, or at least crawled underneath, to reconceptualize sovereign citizens as global constituents, and to "unite" through diversity.

Indeed, throughout the 20th century and the two that bracket it, liberalism has strengthened its ideological hold, the evidence of which is witnessed through stacking Chinese boxes of public education, culture, national societies and global proliferation and recombination. This review and commentary of the findings has moved through a synthesis and examination of the film's ideological ascriptions, and divided the liberal and conservative pictures through the six sub-genre categories: The Classroom Western, Pictures of Privilege, Teen Comedy, Teen Drama, Adult Comedy, and Love Letters to Me. I then conducted commentary on the genres themselves, and expanded into the foregoing overall explication, concluding that the films reflected a pattern of liberal entrenchment through plurality into globalization.

Methodology Reviewed and Thompson's (1990) Tripartite Approach Applied to the Preliminary Synthesis

From the preceding summary and preliminary synthesis, I review the three dimensions of the thesis' methodology in order to suitably paint background for the upcoming analysis and reestablish acquaintance with the project's critical orientation.
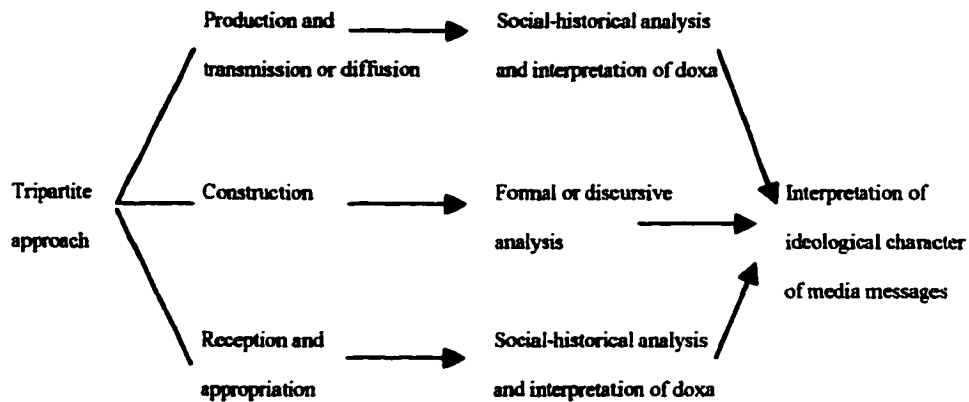
First, the research is situated in Critical Social Science (CSS). Second, the work is located within Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). Thirdly, the project employs John B. Thompson's (1990) Tripartite Approach of depth hermeneutics to study multiple bases of popular culture meaning construction and interrogate ideological messages generated by the films.

CSS is essentially concerned with providing an emancipatory critique of power relations. Defined as a "critical process of inquiry that goes beyond surface illusions to uncover the real structures in the material world in order to help people change conditions and build a better world for themselves" (Neuman, 2000, p. 76), this approach is distinguished from Positivist Social Science (PSS) and Interpretive Social Science (ISS) to inform the overall analysis of the ideologies.

CDA engages contextual ideological readings as explanations of texts. Constructions of late modernity (such as ideology) used for analysis say less about the texts than the broader contexts and their assumptions, "interpreting texts ideologically is not part of understandings of texts but a part of explanations, in that it involves locating texts in social practice partly by reference to the theoretical category of ideology" (Chouliarki & Fairclough, 1999, pp. 67-68). The ideological explanations of the films engendered in the thesis implicate the broader contexts of their production, distribution, and consumption.

Thompson's (1990) Tripartite Approach employs depth hermeneutics toward multiple bases of meaning construction. The model, at its most rudimentary level, is visually represented as follows:

Figure 10.1 Thompson's Tripartite Approach


```
Production and ───────▶  Social-historical analysis
transmission or diffusion  and interpretation of doxa

Tripartite      Construction  ───────▶  Formal or discursive        Interpretation of
approach                                analysis    ───────▶        ideological character
                                                                    of media messages
                Reception and ───────▶  Social-historical analysis
                appropriation            and interpretation of doxa
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(307)

Each of the major means of analysis — social-historical analysis and formal or

discursive analysis — embodies interrelated constituent elements. The social-historical

analyses of Production and transmission or diffusion as well as reception and

appropriation are divided into the 5 fields of spatio-temporal settings, fields of

interaction, social institutions, social structure, and technical media of transmission. The

formal or discursive analysis of the construction phase parses its subject into five

domains of semiotic analysis, conversation analysis, syntactic analysis, narrative

analysis, and argumentative analysis.

Thus far, this chapter has reviewed the thesis findings, performed a preliminary

synthesis, and reviewed the research methodology (Thompson's (1990) Tripartite

Approach). The Thompson model pictures four not necessarily discreet phases, and I

now turn to an application of this methodology to the preliminary synthesis. Production

and transmission or diffusion is a highly complex and collaborative free market

enterprise undertaken by self-determining people aware of this feature and accepting it

as a parameter within which film art is made. The construction of the films consists of a

reliable semiotic exposition of generally optimistic narrative worlds populated by free

choosing individuals able to shape events to achieve their goals. The reception and

appropriation has involved an English Canadian researcher in a Canadian, commercially

disinterested context viewing via marketing-wise less intensive videocassette. Overall,

the collective ideological character of these 25 films is liberal.

Production and Transmission or Diffusion

Thompson defines production and transmission as "the process of producing the

symbolic forms and of transmitting or distributing them via channels of selective

diffusion" (Thompson, 1990, p. 304). He engages this phase with a social-historical

analysis, itself divided into 5 fields: spatio-temporal settings, fields of interaction, social

institutions, social structure, and technical media of transmission. Production and

transmission becomes, under this examination, a highly complex and collaborative profit

making enterprise undertaken by people aware of this fact, and regarding it as a

guideline within which art is (ideally) made.

The films' *spatio-temporal settings* involve production often far away from their

places of exhibition. Most business and post-production is conducted in Hollywood or

London but shooting can take place anywhere in the world—from Vancouver to Vienna.

The films are distributed through sophisticated networks to be shown in theatres, stocked in video rental outlets, or delivered to television transmitters for broadcast and reception to private homes or other places of exhibition.

The movies are situated within *fields of interaction* related to retail marketing spaces. The symbolic forms —"films"—are sold in viewable formats, from video rental outlets. This field of interaction is operationalized through the roles of retailers and consumers. The retailer provides a product for sale, here, the rental agreement for a videocassette.

The *social institutions* of the Hollywood film dynamic are highly coordinated and tread well-worn pathways in relatively consistent ways. There is no single configuration of paths, but a typical arrangement follows. A screenwriter, working alone, produces a script. The script is vetted by agents, directors and producers. The agents and producers orchestrate the business dealings. The director leads the creation of the film, often for an independent film company. The company frequently has financial support from a larger corporation with distribution capabilities. For example, a film may be produced by a smaller concern like Artisan Films in association with a larger established syndicate like Columbia Pictures. Additionally, the production of some films is studio driven, initiated by an executive or market research.

Regarding *social structure,* since the Hollywood film industry is an artistic, communal, and commercial enterprise, a maxim referring to another artistic, communal, and commercial enterprise becomes appropriate: *the one who pays the piper calls the tune.* Hollywood is overwhelmingly driven by the profit motive; it is a highly evolved

capitalist context. Those who play the tune, those who exercise the crucial aesthetic activities are the director, the screenwriter, and the actors. Those who call the tune are typically representatives of commerce. They are executives in charge of production, the people who give projects the all-important "green light"— authorization to commence undertakings — and they can halt the process if activities cease to follow the dictates of this structure. The tune callers ensure that a potential film satisfies certain projected criteria—typically, market research supported assurance that the movie will be profitable.

Therefore, Hollywood executives possess a "collective and durable" asymmetric power differential. All of these players whether film director, screenwriter, actor, or executive, are successful, powerful people in their own right. The distinctions in this context are not exactly comparable to a factory owner and millwright in a nineteenth century industrial setting. All the individuals are typically well educated, relatively empowered, and participating in that milieu because they have been fortunate and talented enough to rise to that level.

The explanation for the structural differential concerns relative privileging of these different types of labor are accorded within the commercial circumstance. The fundamental "bottom line" of the entire operation is related to profit, not aesthetic achievement. If the overall teleological imperative were toward the creation of film, then surely those involved directly with film creation would have the most powerful voice. A non-profit arrangement would likely be different. Nevertheless, the operation is a business, and directly business-oriented labor carries the day.

The *technical media of transmission* are data encoded on magnetic videotape. In this, as with any film viewing format, a mediating technology is required. To view the film, the audience member requires access to a video cassette player and monitor. These, and other, mediating technologies, or Technologies of Reception, all cost money. The viewer pays not only for the right to view the actual copyrighted material of "the film," but also for the technology of reception required to do so. These technologies engender industries of their own rivaling the Hollywood production and distribution industries in size and sophistication. In this way, the film becomes embedded in interdependent commercial configurations that in their turn help drive the filmmaking, dissemination, and consumption industries upon which they rely.

Construction

Thompson writes, "the meaningful objects and expressions which circulate in social fields are also *complex symbolic constructions which display an articulated structure*" (1990, p. 284). The structures are uncovered via formal or discursive inquiry and its five fields of analysis: semiotic, conversation, syntactic, narrative, and argumentative. The construction analysis phase reveals the full and rich applicability of all five fields, especially a reliable semiotic exposition of pervasively optimistic narrative worlds.

Thomson indicates that for the purpose of his model, he would consider *semiotic analysis* "as the study of the relations between the elements which compose a symbolic form or sign, and the relations between these elements and those of a broader system of

which this symbolic form or sign may be part" (1990, p. 285). The semiotic integrity of the films is typically uncontroversial. Depiction for the purpose of narrative engagement is reliable. Characters, settings, and events are as presented in their narrative worlds. When Richard Dadier of *Blackboard Jungle* (1955) enters the halls of North Manual High, the viewer can rest assured that they are not being narratively duped.

Film is a profoundly visual medium. Notwithstanding, character conversation is an important tool of exposition. *Conversation analysis* explores this through both the content and structure of such interactions in the films. The summative encounter between Neil Perry and his father in *Dead Poets Society* (1989) admits much as unstated. Mr. Perry tells Neil that there will be no more acting, and that he going to be a doctor—end of discussion. The unequal power dynamic between the two, Mr. Perry's conservative rigidity, and Neil's liberal frustration are all laid open through the conversational pattern of Mr. Perry's imperative.

With *syntactic analysis*, I examine the syntax of the character's everyday discourse. This is not an exclusive or even necessarily systematic approach, but it can be a rich source of understanding, like one of several provisions in a toolbox. The cultural differences and associated differentials in status and power between support staff and faculty at the Brookfield school of *Goodbye Mr. Chips* (1939) are brought to light through such analysis. Mr. Wicket's proclamation that "things is different now" almost "says" more through syntactical distinction from the Queen's English spoken in the master's lounge than the content of the utterance. Wicket's non-standard use of the verb "to be" avers testimony to his lack of formal education and cultural enrichment in a

consistent and logical coalescence with his position of subordinate power and status at the school, a place built on the foundation of learning and culture as a fundamental component supporting the British middle and upper classes.

Narrative analysis examines some of the patterns, characters, and roles of texts (Thompson, 1990, p. 288). The typical narrative in these films involves, generally, a five step model:

1. A hero desires something

2. Someone or something stands in the hero's way

3. A conflict ensues

4. The hero fulfils his or her desire

5. As a result, some difference is enacted upon the world

The analysis is exemplified in the following table for *Stand and Deliver* (1987):

Table 10.2   Narrative analysis of *Stand and Deliver*

Narrative Analysis Step	Stand and Deliver
1. A hero desires something	Jaime Escalante wishes to teach calculus to his Hispanic students
2. Someone or something stands in the hero's way	Obstacles ranging from the students' study habits, family and community pressures, and low expectations approaching reverse discrimination from school staff and officials from the National Testing Service

	(NTS)
3. A conflict ensues	Conflict culminates in the accusation of cheating from the NTS
4. The hero fulfils his or her desire	The students had learned their calculus well enough to succeed on a retest
5. As a result, some difference is enacted upon the world	The calculus program at Garfield High School is a great success, helping many students and giving the lie to naysayers

The implication of this narrative analysis, typical of all the films, is the presentation of a worldview that, although flawed in ways, presents opportunity for hard working and committed individuals to achieve success. The world is seen as an ultimately just field for competition between free choosing individuals seeking to improve their circumstance. Thompson writes that texts often feature "patterns of inference which lead from one theme or topic to another, in a way that is more or less cogent, more or less implicit. The aim of *argumentative analysis* is to reconstruct and render explicit the patterns of inference which characterize the discourse" (1990, p. 289, emphasis mine). Indeed, analyzing the implicit arguments in film events provide significant insight into the ideological analysis of many of the pictures. Jason Dean, the anti-hero of *Heathers* (1989), remarks concerning bottled water that, "this is Ohio. If you don't have a brewsky in your hand you'd might as well be wearing a dress" and implies a humorous, satiric argument:

1. If you drink bottled water, people in this community will think you are homosexual.

2. This claim is *non-sequiter*.

3. The tone of the statement suggests that your homosexuality would not be greatly esteemed.

4. For jumping to such a conclusion and not esteeming your sexual orientation, the people in the community who would think this are suitable objects for ridicule.

5. The disrespect for your sexual orientation is non-liberal in nature.

6. By association, their non-liberal ideology is similarly ridiculed.

7. This implied argument is generally consistent with most other arguments in the film.

8. Therefore, this film assumes a liberal stance.

Hence, the formal or discursive investigation and its five fields of analysis: semiotic, conversation, syntactic, narrative, and argumentative conclude the construction phase of Thompson's (1990) Tripartite Approach.

Reception and Appropriation

Thompson notes, "these messages are received by individuals, and groups of individuals, who are situated within specific social-historical circumstances, and who employ the resources available to them in order to make sense of the messages received

and to incorporate them into their everyday lives" (1990, p. 304). As with the production

and transmission or diffusion phase, the five fields of social-historical analysis (spatio-

temporal settings, fields of interaction, social institutions, social structure, and technical

media of transmission) are applied. The reception and appropriation occurs with a

Canadian researcher in a Canadian, non-commercial setting via videocassette.

The *spatio-temporal settings* of my reception and appropriation have taken place

at my personal home, an apartment in Edmonton, Alberta, Canada, Monday to Friday

through 2000 and 2001. The *fields of interaction* occurred at retail marketing spaces;

however, I did not view the videos for entertainment but intentionally and carefully

studied them for the elements discussed in the Research Method chapter. The *social*

institutions through which I carried out this work were the Department of Educational

Policy Studies in the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research, University of Alberta.

The *social structures* involved that of this Canadian public university, relatively

removed from the film's commercial sphere of production and distribution. Finally, the

technical media of transmission were videocassettes and a VHS player.

Interpretation of Ideological Character of Media Messages

Each element of the Tripartite Approach alone is insufficient to render a

complete characterization of the text's ideological nature. Thompson writes, "a

comprehensive approach to the study of mass communication requires the capacity to

relate the results of these differing analyses to one another, showing how the various

aspects feed onto and shed light on another" (1990, p. 304). This section undertakes that proposition.

As recalled, the preliminary synthesis indicates tensions both within and between the liberal and conservative pictures, reflecting broader issues concerning public education, in perpetually evolving forms. The production and transmission or diffusion is a highly complex and collaborative profit making endeavor undertaken by people cognizant of this fact and accepting it as a condition by which the films are made. The construction features reliable semiotic depictions of ultimately optimistic narrative worlds. The reception and appropriation involves an English Canadian researcher in a Canadian, non-commercial setting viewing the movies on videocassette. An integration and recombination of the phases interprets the overall ideological character of the 25 films about education as liberal.

The preliminarily identified tensions within and between the liberal and conservative pictures reflect an overall kind of liberal market flexibility. Some films appeal to those of liberal sentiments, some to those of conservative. Ultimately though, audience members of both ideological camps line up to the box office.

This self-preserving market flexibility points to and supports the industry in which the films, liberal and conservative, are produced. As noted, the pictures are produced and transmitted through a sophisticated, coordinated profit making enterprise by a wide range of people conscious and accepting of the system. The pervasive economic imperative of the process becomes internalized, apparently uncritically, by the participants and carries the liberal analysis forward.

The self-determination of the producers and transmitters is also reflected in the typical films' story pattern. The movies are internally constructed with semiotically reliable depictions of optimistic narrative worlds. In such landscapes, whether the particular film is ascribed as liberal or conservative, free choosing agents find opportunity to pursue their goals, and although they necessarily encounter resistance, the characters are justly successful.

The liberal analysis, moreover, is at least not weakened at the level of reception and appropriation, my engagement and reading being apparently disinterested. As a Canadian researcher discussing American or British films in a Canadian, academic setting, with no direct commercial interests, and watching the films on video cassette, I am reasonably distanced from the subject matter. Additionally, the diminished influence of interest and distraction often evident in a theatre through control of space, movement, sound and visual cues do not substantially subtract from the hitherto liberal conclusion.

In many ways, all the films are *liberal* in that they are conservative-and-liberal versus liberal qua liberalism. The real story here lies in the absence of other ideological positions, such as socialist, fascist, or social democrat. Whether conservative or liberal-proper, the ideologies of the 25 films underline and give voice to a liberal view of human nature and attendant view of society. Here, the human being is constituted as a free-choosing individual, perhaps compelled by a utilitarian ethic unfettering action so long as it doesn't willfully harm another. However, since a radical liberal social view contends that "society" may not exist at all, and in any case is subordinated to individual will, agency, and action, the definition of harm becomes conveniently restricted. For

example, discussion of economic exploitation is seriously restricted given that the

conception of free choosing, ambulatory agency renders exploitation non-existent if it

involves affirmative personal choice on the part of participants. The pervasive and

encompassing character of liberalism in this regard, as at least partly evidenced in its

cohesive conglomeration throughout the films becomes impenetrable to competing

views, at least on genuinely competing grounds, and closes off even the imaginative

possibility of alternative notions and likewise alternative modes of social, political,

economic organization such that liberalism permutates like the proverbial water invisible

to the fish. It moves, surrounding all participants, and integrates itself into every corner,

every crevice. It silences effective opposition not *necessarily* by the howl of a bullet or

the heel of a boot, but through the restriction of any possible language, through a lexical

limitation, into a grammatical muting that enables the ideological functioning of a liberal

"totalitarianism."

The above premises taken together underline the general pattern of liberalism,

and accordingly, the overall ideological character of these 25 films is liberal. Effectively,

these pictures engender an ideology of status quo preservation. Some are liberal, some

conservative, but the embedding system is not questioned and certainly not critiqued.

This status quo preservation hints at structural functionalist equilibrium[36]. Structural

functionalism (SF) is a sociological theory that views society as an organistic whole. SF

admits inner tension, regarding it as part of the give and take, development and

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[36] The sociology of Talcott Parsons (1902-1979) advances the concept of equilibrium as a regulating principle of Structural Functionalism.

recombination that makes an organism ultimately healthful and integrated. SF is roughly

and somewhat analogous to the political ideology neo-liberalism (NL) and political

theory utilitarianism (U). NL casts the figure of a radical individual, a nineteenth century

laissez-faire liberal, transplanted to the contemporary market and holding same as the

ultimate measure of justice. U operates under the doctrine of the greatest good being

that which effects the greatest amount of good-ness to the greatest number of

individuals—the person who finds himself on the losing end of that equation today may

have better luck tomorrow—*cest la vie!* The status quo preservation of the 25 films

becomes like a market mechanism, one susceptible to identification and critique, which I

take up in the conclusion of the thesis.

Reflections

Narcissus peered into the spring and reflected (in more ways than one) with great

wonder upon what he beheld. At present, I shall not reflect so long or adoringly as to

have a flower named in my sake, but do acknowledge the extent to which my

deliberation depicts not only the work, but the researcher as well.

Certainly, the most important result of the thesis is my judgment that the overall

character of the 25 films is liberal. This is a departure from much of the previous

research related to film and education, which does not explicitly treat ideology. I posit

Antonio Gramsci's work on hegemony as the most fruitful, but certainly not the only

possible theory of explanation. Some alternative accounts are found in the work of Karl

Marx, Louis Althusser, Theodor Adorno, and Mass Culture Theory. Although, I prefer Gramsci's theory, I also appreciate Marx and to a subsidiary degree, Adorno.

The thesis, while intriguing on its own, suggests the likely benefits of further investigation and exploration of other contexts of construction: other readers, other films, other situations. If such studies are to occur, the researchers may benefit from my observation of the studies' methodological limitations. The original, mainly content oriented focus gave way to an emergent, highly constructive process, the results of which I am generally satisfied with. In the end, I learned many of things, things from results both discovered and eluded.

Results

The most important result is my determination of the overall ideological character of the 25 films as liberal. Although many ascriptions have been made with respect to the ideological character of individual films and patterns within and between the categories, this is the most global and telling outcome concerning these films as a group. It is the result that most directly impresses further discussion.

Previous Research

There is little foregoing research on the matter. Much of the work discussed in the Literature Review concerning depictions of educational phenomena in film was within the framework of the profession. The studies examined depictions of school personnel or subject matter and then often concluded with recommendations on how to

render such future depictions more education-friendly. The research was therefore within the sphere of the discipline and made no material effort to extend itself beyond functional coziness.

If the research has a moment approaching the critical, it concerns how film and popular culture offend education through unsanctioned or unsavory representations. It does not discuss any background elements that may approach explanations of interdependency: how popular culture representations impact educational practice and policy and vice versa. Such discussion casts itself broader than performatory considerations of research lending purely toward professional development. Much knowledge, nevertheless, can have applicability toward such an end while also interrogating background considerations. My thesis fulfills such a dual purpose.

A Theory of Explanation

The best existing theory to explain my result is in the work of Antonio Gramsci (1891-1937). This Italian thinker infused the Marxian tradition with his concept of hegemony (Osborne, 1992). By hegemony, Gramsci referred not to coercive control but to consensual dominion, the "voluntarily" assimilation of the dominant group's worldview (Ransome, 1992). The hegemonic cluster facilitates its control through cultural power, through the institutions of church, school, and press (Osborne, 1992). The dominant group finds in these institutions effective organs to transmit ideas and perspectives, which legitimize its position.

First, the overall liberalism of the 25 films certainly speaks favorably to the dominance of corporate and market interests. The position of power held and executed by the business elite not only within the film industry (as treated in the Discussion chapter) but also over the economic, political, and social fabric of North American societies is the organizational exemplar of the ideology.

Additionally, the dialectical tension between the liberal and conservative films provides the appearance of opposition, affirming a choice (what could be more liberal?) between world views. Still, even on the day only a conservative sun rises, it still sets on a world not fundamentally challenged. The character of the films is illustrated further, not just by the liberal and conservative ideologies represented, but colored by the socialism and other ideologies absent (e.g. radical feminist and anti-racist). What is presented is the appearance of a pragmatic flexibility within a market-friendly framework. Seen thusly, the findings help maintain hegemonic control of a capitalist class through the film industry. Certainly, however, Gramsci's theory of hegemony, if it were to require some modification for my purpose, could withstand an update for the pervasive development and influence of cinema through the latter part of the 20th century since he wrote.

My invocation of Gramsci bears with it a certain embedded tradition that addresses the analysis toward a broader base than class alone. There is a neo-Gramscian discourse that finds itself situated in the field of contemporary cultural studies, rooted in the erstwhile Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies out of the University of Birmingham. Arguably, that tradition's leading exponent, Stuart Hall, broadens focus of

the hegemonic interplay beyond its original grounding in class, notably toward race. This is a well-established and varied discourse that I do not elaborate upon in greater detail here for want of space, but mention it as a logical and useful extension of the Gramscian explanation for its practicality to the contemporary context of mass mediated diversity.

Alternative Explanations

Gramsci's work is genealogically indebted to Karl Marx (1818-1883). Of course, Marx famously and lastingly critiqued 19[th] century liberal society at the level of economic organization. The capitalist class exploits the proletariat by extracting surplus value from its labor. Moreover, this mode of organization asserts itself through all facets of life, including culture. Marx wrote:

> The ideas of the ruling class are, in every age, the ruling ideas: i. e. the class,
> which is the dominant *material* force in society, is at the same time the dominant
> *intellectual* force. The class which has the means of material production at its
> disposal, has control at the same time over the means of mental production, so
> that in consequence the ideas of those who lack the means of mental production
> are, in general, subject to it...the individuals composing the ruling class...rule
> also as thinkers, as producers of ideas, and regulate the production and
> distribution of the ideas of their age. Consequently their ideas are the ruling ideas
> of the age. (Quoted in Strinati, 1995, p. 131)

Culture reflects an ideology supportive of capitalism. Yet, while Marx wrote authoritatively of 19th century industrial conditions, the application of Marxism qua Marxism to the products of late 20th century Hollywood is strictly speculative.

Louis Althusser (1918-1990) reworked Marxism with more emphasis on its structural aspects. For Marx, the infrastructure (economic organization) determines the superstructure (legitimating ideas, ideology). Althusser's contribution is that such ideology requires reproduction through legitimating social institutions, notably school (Strinati, 1995). Althusser envisioned ideology as "an imaginary relation to the Real...the unconscious function of [which] is precisely to structure the individual's development" (Osborne, 1992, p. 171). Notwithstanding his treatment of ideology and schooling (the subject of these films), his work is more directly concerned with education than cinema.

Theodor Adorno (1903-1969) is another Marxian-influenced scholar. His main contribution to thought on concerning popular culture is the idea of the "culture industry." Adorno wrote: "The total effect of the culture industry is one of anti-enlightenment in which...enlightenment, that is the progressive technical domination, becomes mass deception and is turned into a means of fettering consciousness" (Quoted in Brooker, 1998, p. 17). The products of the culture industry are essentially the same, mass produced conformities masked as distinct. Here, the product's use value masks over its exchange value. For example, it is regardless if you enjoy reading the newest best-selling novel; what becomes important is the "cachet" accrued to doing so or the

money spent in the activity. Notwithstanding, the ideological character of the 25 Hollywood films would simply be attributable to the fact that they are Hollywood films—products of the culture industry—their form as "Hollywood films" would determine either their content as individual films or the content of my reception and appropriation. The disregard for the pictures as sufficiently individual entities and the apparent disdain for the constructive capacities of the audience (including mine!) impel me to lay Adorno and his admittedly compelling theory aside.

Finally, Mass Culture Theory as discussed in the Research Method chapter provides another alternative explanation. As indicated, Strinati (1995) describes mass culture theory as,

> [prone] to see the audience as a passive, supine, undemanding, vulnerable, manipulable, exploitable and sentimental mass, resistant to intellectual challenge and stimulation, easy prey to consumerism and advertising and the dreams and fantasies they have to sell, unconsciously afflicted with bad taste, and robotic in its devotion to the repetitive formulas of mass culture. (p. 48)

This view shares some perspectives on the nature of such products with Adorno, but stops short of his Marxian implications. My hesitation to embrace either theory should not be read to understand that I necessarily regard all products as integrated, individuated works of art or their receptions always calculated and determined. Nonetheless, I do not privilege this theory mainly because it apprehends primarily *texts* without regard for social and contextual considerations.

From the field of alternative explanations, Marx, Althusser, Adorno, and Mass

Culture Theory, I find the classical Marxian the most compelling. Each view, from

Althusser's ideological reproduction to Adorno's indictment of commodity fetishization

and Mass Culture Theories' identification of the some of the worst features of mass

distributed cultural products, is not without its virtues.

Some, however, are quick to identify these views' shortcomings. The complaints,

though, need to pay their toll at the bridge of elementary logic before proceeding. It may

be the case that, as they are, the explanations of Marx, Althusser, Adorno, and Mass

Culture Theory are *insufficient* to lay all concerns to rest, but that does not mean the

explanations are *unnecessary*. Necessity does not imply sufficiency nor vice versa.

Inequality and exploitation may be observable distinctly from considerations of social

class, and one may travel quite far down that road without giving that category an

accounting. Sex, race, ethnicity, and sexual orientation are all sites of significant

inequality. They may surface distinctly from class but that does not mean, as radical

liberalism would suggest, that class is either not accountable or even non-existent.

Ideological interrogation leads a long tradition of critical engagement, but that

tradition is not without its shifts toward that which it critiques. Early writers such as

Georg Lukacs and Lucien Goldmann, in addition to Antonio Gramsci have indicted

ideology as a shroud, clouding class interests and perpetuating domination through

mystification. That perspective continues, and is further developed by the thinkers

Theodor Adorno, Adorno and Max Horkheimer, Jurgen Habermas, Louis Althusser,

Nicos Poulantzas, and Pierre Bourdieu. Nevertheless, the debate comes to reveal strains

toward conformity. In response to the foregoing Marxian-inspired views, Karl

Mannheim posits his "sociology of knowledge," whose "ideological function...is in fact

to defuse the whole Marxist conception of ideology, replacing it with the less

contentious conception of a 'world view'" (Eagleton, 1991, p. 109).

Such watering-down of the Marxian position and attendant neutering of the

discussion is further exemplified in recent debates. Contemporary writers pick away at

the determining possibility of ideology to manufacture hegemonic consent. Goran

Therbom's *The Ideology of Power and the Power of Ideology* attempts a contemporary

alignment between the Marxian thesis and contemporary sociological practice

(Abercrombie, Hill, & Turner, 1994, p. 152). Nicholas Abercrombie, Stephen Hill, and

Bryan S. Turner (NHT) write against Therbom: "The drift of our argument is that

Therbom overstates the importance of ideology, an overstatement most prominent in his

view of ideology constructing subjectivities...ideology may or may not have a role in the

formation and maintenance of any economic practices" (p. 165).

The slow, almost imperceptible effect of these considerations is that the whole

discourse moves from a critical stance outside of capitalist liberalism to one immersed

within it. NHT want to keep the self-determining subject alive, not sacrificed on an altar

of ideological determinism. Eventually, such admissions seem to erode, casually at first,

but surely nonetheless, until they "necessitate" the castration of ideology as a force for

masking and reinforcing relations of domination. As this self-determining subject stands

"conqueror" over the other-determining forces of ideology, it becomes only a matter of

time before it asks with vanquishing glee, domination? What domination?

Thus, liberalism comes full circle. That ideology which at first was accused of rendering invisible dominative relations became exposed through critique, engaged in debate, gave ground and took it back as well, until soon the only ground left was its own, having been rendered once again unseen. Originally the object of critique, liberalism's complicity with ongoing domination "disappears"—a further testament to its hegemonic power.

Therefore, the Marxian analysis is the most historically contextualized, flexible, and originally integrated alternative explanation. Additionally, it segues cleanly into Gramsci's view of hegemony and lends itself to his 20th century refinement.

Conclusion

The overall ideological character of these 25 films about education illustrated a burgeoning liberal hegemony. In this chapter, I have demonstrated this conclusion through three main phases. In my Review and Commentary of the Findings, I argued, that in the contemporary period, liberalism has fortified its position through (though not necessarily exhaustively through) public education, national cultures and societies, and globalization. My second section reviewed the project's methodology and applied Thompson's (1990) Tripartite Approach to the preliminary synthesis to argue that the aggregate ideological character of the 25 films was liberal; this thesis provides evidentiary support for the foregoing claim. Finally, my reflections segment explained the findings and analysis by way of Antonio Gramsci's conception of hegemony.

Conclusion

Introduction

In the last chapter, I discussed the overall ideological character of the films and concluded that it is liberal. My synthesis of the original liberal or conservative ascriptions revealed tensions within and between the two categories that reflected more expansive concerns about public schooling via unfolding, dialectical manifestations. The production and transmission or diffusion phase of Thompson's (1990) Tripartite Approach revealed a highly complex and collaborative profit making enterprise mindfully and consensually undertaken by film producers, artists and craftspeople. The construction inquiry disclosed dependable semiotics of primarily reassuring, liberal-friendly worlds. The reception and appropriation by a Canadian researcher in a Canadian, non-commercial setting working with videocassette combined with the two previous phases, categories, and syntheses to affirm the overall liberalism of the film sample.

The present chapter reviews the entire thesis and reflects upon the result as well as its implications, and renders more clearly my exploration and explanation of these phenomena and findings through three levels of theoretical engagement: media (Thompson), political (liberalism), and social (Gramsci). The general liberalism of the films is explained by way of Gramsci's view of hegemony. Additionally, possibilities for emancipation are discussed in the context of Critical Social Science in terms of both enhanced understanding and strategies for action. Knowledge of the implied ideological

character of the films, indeed, alerts an audience to erstwhile invisible problems and simultaneously discloses tools for change.

Review

This first section reviews and summarizes each of the previous nine chapters. The findings of my Literature Review announced films about education as sites of interpretive disputation. Consequently, the Research Method was informed in the first instance by Critical Social Science (CSS), bracketed Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), and applied the depth hermeneutics of Thompson's (1990) Tripartite Approach. The findings section of the thesis began with There's a New Sheriff in Town: Liberal Social Policy and Conservative Responses in the Classroom Western to draw a comparison between certain films about schooling and the Hollywood Western, which paralleled recent history of educational thought and practice. Pictures of Privilege: Toward a Liberal Aristocracy treated tensions between gentility and democracy. The Teen Comedies were at times humorous, sometimes serious, and at other times both. The Teen Drama and Cinema of Omission was noted as much for what it depicted as for what it left out. Tenuous Advances, Conservative Frustration and the Clinton Double Take: Patterns in the Adult Comedy traced responses to liberalism in 1990s America. The final chapter of findings, Love Letters to Me, explored professional ideals unknowingly folded into cultural politics. Lastly, my Discussion chapter characterized the overall ideological pattern of the films as liberal.

My Discussion chapter argued the overall ideological character of the 25 films to be liberal. The films' individual findings of either liberal or conservative ideology yielded to a preliminary analyses casting the aggregate liberal pictures to represent a pattern of progressive educational reforms and tensions between elite culture and liberal democratic values. The conservative films were assembled as pendulum-like reactions to perceived ineffectuality of reforms and mutated into a conservatism that rescripted liberal social problems into individual, personal quandaries. An amalgam of the two groups revealed tensions both within and between as well as continually evolving manifestations that reflected wider concerns about public education.

My reading of Thompson's (1990) Tripartite Approach against the findings and this preliminary synthesis involved four phases. The production and transmission or diffusion aspect unveiled a highly complex and collaborative profit making enterprise conducted knowingly and with consent by individuals accepting this context as a criterion within which films were made. The construction inquiry made known reliable semiotic exposition that depicted generally optimistic, liberal-conducive narrative worlds. The reception and appropriation cycle concerned a Canadian researcher in a Canadian, non-commercial setting viewing and working with videocassette, controlling contextual interference. The final, summative synthesis involving reading the films' individual ascriptions sorted into their sub-genre categories, the preliminary synthesis of the Discussion chapter, and the application of three elements of Thompson's Approach consequently divulged the sum ideological character of the 25 movies as liberal.

A Man Has Got to Know His Limitations

The heading of this section comes from Clint Eastwood's character "Dirty" Harry Callahan in the film *Magnum Force*. Harry posited it an act of prudence to, if not acknowledge, at least be aware of the precincts enclosing one's virtue. This section takes up Harry's implied admonition, and explores some of the thesis' limitations. My first subsection considers that the project would certainly benefit from further investigation. Methodological limitations emanate from my early, circumscribed appreciation of the qualitative, critical research process. Thirdly, and by way of personal discoveries, I delve into some features I have learned and other elements I have not. Thus, this section explores and contextualizes potential shortcomings of the project.

Consideration of Further Investigation

The results merit, and would certainly benefit from, further investigation. Such work could clarify and separate the effects of this particular study. The contexts of reception and appropriation vary with each hermeneutic engagement. Interviews or even questionnaires of a variety of people: students, parents, academics, policy makers, and people with only tenuous attachment to formal education to see how they construct meaning and even ideological character could separate such effects.

Methodological Limitations

My original engagement with the methodology approximated it as a soft or quasi-quantitative approach, but this has slowly yielded to synthesizing, recombinatory

understanding of the process undertaken. The study presented some methodological limitations. Problems occurring in sampling procedures centered on the fact that much of the data collection required construction on my part. Much of the data were not so much discreet, easily quantifiable units, but rather elements that required inference and synthetic composition, such as readings of analytic categories, backstory and motivation. This is a problem only in that the instrumentation was set up like a kind of content analysis collection, complete with data collection sheets. At that point, the procedure seems, in hindsight, to more resemble a mediocre quantitative study than a hermeneutic exploration. In that sense, the data collection spread outside the originally mandated scope, requiring not only researcher inference but judgmental infusion in choosing what features of the films promised importance or future significance.

The data analysis became largely a process of essay writing and construction. For this study and studies involving a heavy interpretive component, that course is appropriate for the work's emergent nature; next time I undertake such an enterprise I intend to factor that consideration into my design. There is a Greek saying that *he ran well but in the wrong race*. The sentiment describes the disjuncture between the envisioned method and the one actually undertaken. Once I discovered the more properly hermeneutically emergent nature of what my research goals demanded, the work went well.

As indicated in the Discussion chapter, my result is contrary to the original prediction, if not in specific finding, in shape and breadth. I had anticipated that possible ideologies could have been socialism, classical/neo-liberalism, contemporary liberalism,

classical conservatism, neo-conservatism, and others. This was contrary, if not in kind but degree, from the result of all films being either liberal or conservative. Nevertheless, the distinction is not due to methodological flaws. Rather, the difference between projected and actual results is due to the effective application of the emergent hermeneutic constructions infused along the way.

Admittedly, my choice of potential ideologies was undertaken with a certain degree of naivete. I selected some primary categories common in rudimentary explorations of the subject, like so many notions from a sewing basket. Upon reflection, I see that the "sewing basket" approach to the discourse admits a kind of neutralization to the topic, a kind of sociology of knowledge approach reminiscent of Mannheim, but *sans* his moment of initial settling of accounts, consideration of the researcher's position. Not only was a recognition of subjective position absent from my understanding of the source material and choice, but no "settling of accounts" was proffered by me either. I take the moment now to disclose that at the outset I constructed my own ideological position as socialist. However, my exploration and engagement of the films led me slowly but surely into its solace. Indeed, the more films I watched, the more liberal-sympathetic I became. I can see now that given limited range of options provided, either something that appeared as conservatism or a kind of liberalism that seemed to focus on giving a hand up to those in need, I decided to roll up my sleeves and stretch put my hand too.

At the time of this writing, it has been numerous months since any extended encounter with the thesis' findings and I locate myself settling back to a more broadly

constituted critical position, back more in the direction of my socialist roots, but not necessarily so far returned. Today, I find myself exploring a social democratic stance, more liberal than at my starting point but less so that as appropriated through the films.

My hermeneutic engagement with the texts revealed deep reasons for the truncated ideological range. Liberalism flexes its position, not content to merely kick sand into the faces of other, competing, or indeed, critical positions. Rather, it does not even allow them onto the beach, if only to pause and breathe the warm salt air. The pervasive liberal ideology of the United States, throughout its spheres of influence, via a primary organ of transmission, Hollywood, renders competing perspectives strange to say the least, if not deviant or worse, invisible.

Personal Discoveries

This subsection explores things I both have and have not learned in the process of this thesis' preparation. It may be true that one mark of an effective education is the feeling on the part of the student, at the end of the process, of being certain of less than at the beginning. The same is quite possibly true of a truly comprehensive, excellent Master's thesis. For the purpose of my reflection here nevertheless, the present thesis will have to do.

I may have suspected, but I do not think I realized what an area of concern and space of contestation educator depictions in film are—to almost everyone in the world— except those who are not teachers and principals. I also learned something of the value

to be generated, hermeneutically, by approaching such work from an orientation assuming multiple bases of meaning possibility.

Regarding the films, I learned something in the first sub-genre that would quite possibly please the disposition toward film of the erstwhile Dr. Adorno. The Classroom Western illustrates a remarkable convergence of character, conflict, and plot across genres, linking the Wild West of the 19th century to inner-city classrooms a hundred years later. I find the aristocratic yearnings of the reputatly classless America intriguing. Youth films and pictures depicting adolescents can be often suprisingly grown-up. The supposedly undisputed highest ideals of the teaching profession, in fact, are highly disputed. Finally, if straight correlation bears any inferential power, then often the key occupant in the key building determining the ideological flavor of films about education is not the chairman at Universal Studios home office or the vice president in charge of development at Dreamworks HQ—it is whoever is occupying the White House.

As I have stated repeatedly, the range of ideological persuasion evident in the films is much narrower than the range of possibility allows. The debate rages, but both sides, in the end, win—or lose — depending on your persuasion. I am inclined to say the latter. My orientation is certainly not conservative, and though I admire progressive pedagogy, racial equality, and fair opportunity for all, liberalism does not really address all my concerns. My own orientation would be socialist, and it either affirms or denies the influence of a bias toward this perspective that I could find nary a trace of it in any of the films. Again, I shall side for the latter.

Having written that, and consistent with the Gramscian hegemonic explanation I favor, I shall affirm one last thing I have learned. I did not realize that propaganda was employed outside wartime. The propaganda encountered down at the local multi-plex or video outlet may lack Warner Brothers cartoon characters dropping bombs, parade squares, or Leni Riefenstahl[37] in the credits—its a gentler sort, but its function remains—to generate and instill consent. In the end, I guess when I now go down to buy my ticket and popcorn, I think I have a better idea of what else I am being sold.

As suggested above, an education is often shaped as much by what the student does not learn as by what he does. I now address some things I have not learned—my negative discoveries. I did not learn how other people construct the ideological character of the films; I just focused on my own engagement. Having said so, I do not know how the films' ideology affect and influence others. How does ideology figure in films of other genres like Romance, Action, War? A theme throughout the thesis has been the association between the ideological persuasion of the U. S. President and Hollywood—in either congruence or response. What exactly is the nature of that relationship? Is it causal?

I did not explore fine tunings within the liberalisms and conservatisms of the individual films. The categories for analysis are in relatively broad strokes. I could have explored the distinctions between progressive, 20[th] century liberalism and its classical or "neo" versions, or the conservative stripes ranging from its classical, cultural, or "neo" orientations in more detail. I did not, though, for the sake of lucidity, considering this a

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[37] Riefenstahl is the director of Nazi propaganda films such as *Triumph of the Will* and *Olympia.*

preliminary work. I do not know if having done so would have altered my ultimate finding.

Additionally, I could have explored in more detail the theoretical implications of my finding for the same reason. What are the further reaching implications of the Gramscian analysis here? How does the Gramscian conception admit the presence of student resistance (most any teacher will testify to at least some of it in the classroom)? What other crystallizing modes of category (class, gender, race, sexual orientation) are susceptible to hegemony? How does hegemony translate into the world of mass communication? How would it change viewed through a classically Marxian or Adornoian lens? Marx's view of ideology is neither neutral nor uncontested. How does the often-tortured history of the concept, through phases and forces of neutralization, denigration, and recent resurgence engage dialogue with his *German Ideology*? Additionally, how does the classical Marxian variant stand and apply in the era of mass communication? My admittedly naive understanding of Adorno proceeds with the idea that the rational conditions complicit in both advanced Western civilization and its attendant relations of domination do not hold within them the sufficiently critical germ of potential liberation. How would a further exploration of a distinctly suitable intellectual approach effect my discussion of ideology and the products of mass communication presented in this thesis? Again, that could be fertile ground for further exploration.

Reflective Culmination

I now turn my reflection from an examination of processes and results to one of implications. In essence, I turn from the prior and present of the study to the future, from what has already been done to what can be done—from past to promise and possibility.

As discussed in the Research Method section, an important component of the work is its fundamental orientation of Critical Social Science. The CSS lens envisions people who can become aware of implicit filmic messages and thus break from the Hollywood "script" to write a new ending to the story. Students, parents, teachers, academics, administrators, and policy makers can thus find implications for practice through such awareness. As each answer often engenders even more questions, associated questions for further research interrogate both the content and context of Hollywood films.

Critical Social Science

Neuman defines CSS, as a "critical process of inquiry that goes beyond surface illusions to uncover the real structures in the material world in order to help people change conditions and build a better world for themselves" (2000, p. 76). The methodology is concerned with equipping an emancipatory critique of power relations.

The cumulative liberalism of the films is iniquitous. Gramsci's theory of hegemony reveals that the breezy Saturday afternoon matinees or first-date entertainment of the pictures present an air conditioned, popcorn lulled illusion masking

a support of power relations rendered invisible in terms of both its existence and dominant function.

Armed with knowledge, the audience may rise out of its darkened auditorium seats and step into the light. No longer masked as merely entertainment, the screen's image surrenders to the truth of its hegemonic function. With knowledge, the audience can choose to no longer purchase tickets until more diverse stories are told, tales that critique the pervasive market orientation and context. The audience can demand or ideally create for itself new films that break with the hegemonic mold. Indeed, if the audience only demands new product until placated, the existing market orientation is simply fine-tuned to accommodate and mute truly critical voices. Fundamental change begins when the audience rises to create new and genuinely challenging art. The audience must apprehend and transcend its status as merely position point in the existing marketplace.

The audience can see the man behind the curtain and pull him out for all to behold, revealing how power is invisibly exercised. By affirming objective reality, human dignity and integrity are also affirmed. People's creativity, adaptability, and unrealized potential can be released, no longer trapped by illusion and exploitation (Neuman, 2000). The conflictive nature of hidden structures is revealed. As the credits roll, people can smash the traditional Hollywood ending, and write a new denouement.

Implications for Practice

Practical implications for the finding are amenable to students, parents, teachers, academics, administrators, and policy makers. Students can know that when they slap money down for a movie ticket or video they are getting a lot more than they may have originally bargained for. Also, they can be aware that one or even two points of view, even if they are the only ones apparently visible are rarely the only ones possible. Students, with their capacity for some form of rebellion, can remember that rebellion with integrated marketing structures and fast food tie-ins is not rebellion at all.

Alternatively, parents can be more aware of what their children are watching as well as monitor their own opinion formulations. Films about school can shape ideas about where children spend more awake-time than home. Parents, for a variety of reasons, often spend more time watching movies about the subject than at the real life settings they so often depict.

Teachers can be aware of the ideological messages in such pictures, something that becomes important as film becomes increasingly integrated with language arts and social studies curriculum and instruction. Teachers can be aware of the messages to facilitate guarding against any divergent influence, but can also use them strategically to highlight convergent curricular objectives in these and other subjects.

Academics may find interest at the site of popular culture, ideological constructions related to it, and social contexts. Sociologists, not simply sociologists of education, can explore the result as an application of mass media study and how social context shapes ideological reception. Sociologists of education can explore the

categories of that field intersecting with the finding: both in the present context and as an exploration of the historical patterns of pedagogical theory and practice, especially since the Second World War. I have shown there is a correlation between Hollywood films and policy, but what is the nature of the correlation? An intriguing and important question, this query beckons an answer more expansive than the concluding space of this chapter permits; yet it anticipates and ferments a rich source for further, foreseeably fruitful exploration.

Educational administrators and policy makers can glean application as well. Administrators may find intriguing models for practice and consideration: some favorable, some unfavorable, and some even erstwhile invisible. Policy makers may acquire the films as grist for public opinion formulation, a lightening rod or litmus test of the mood at a time and place. I hope that such an application would not be manipulative, but rather a starting point for fundamental discussion and change.

As these films illustrate a pervasive market orientation, influential forces strive to shift public education toward such models. Hopefully, the market influence exposed by my result can shine light on the easy, almost imperceptible way that that sensibility creeps into the world views and orientations of numerous parties: students, parents, teachers, academics, administrators, policy makers, and customary audience members alike. If with the light of knowledge, people still choose the commodity market path, or have that direction thrust upon them, it at least did not happened in benightedness. There may be nothing in the dark that is not in the light—the dark of the theater, the dark of ignorance—but in the light; at least you can see it.

Questions for Further Research

As discussed above in the Consideration of Further Investigation section, interviews or even questionnaires of students, parents, academics, policy makers, and others could explore how some such individuals construct meaning and ideological character. A variety of further questions is alluded to in the Personal Discoveries section: How does ideology figure in films of other genres like Romance, Action, War? What is the nature of that relationship between the U.S. president and film ideology? What are the finer points within the individual films' liberalisms and conservatisms? What are the further reaching implications of the Gramscian analysis? How would the analysis change viewed through a classically Marxian or Adornoian lens? What is the temper of the correlation between Hollywood films about education and educational policy?

Other questions remain: Why is there a dearth of critical research in the previous studies? Why were depictions of poor people always closely linked to crime—is life in all poor neighborhoods only a moment from violence? What is the relationship of ideology and hegemony to other popular culture products: comic books, music, music videos, video games, television, the Internet? Finally, of course, how does the result implicate the Canadian context?

Conclusion

The 25 Hollywood films about education studied in this thesis are shaped by their screenplays, the credited, shooting scripts used by directors and learned by actors. However, they are also shaped by their *uncredited* scripts, the unprinted, unbound, unstated scripts of ideological legitimation. Audience awareness of these invisible narratives can help it see what the real story on the screen is and use that knowledge to write a new ending, an ending that addresses the people in the seats before the corporate head office. The overall ideology of the films is liberal. Gramsci's theory of hegemony explains this as a legitimating feature of economic domination. Yet, such a state need not be considered necessarily binding. Critical Social Science assumes creative people can take such knowledge and let it shape practice for positive change toward democratic interest.

In the *Republic*, Socrates illustrates the Platonic difference between appearance and reality with his simile of the cave (Osborne, 1992). People are chained in a cavern such that they can only see images cast upon the wall. This being the limit of their vision, all that is revealed to them, they assume the limit of their reality. Eventually, of course, one escapes, leaves the darkened cave, and walks, painfully at first, into the light. In company with the sun, the philosopher sees reality beyond the mere appearance he had erstwhile known. He returns to the cave with his unlikely story of truth, and both he and his tales are discounted (Plato, 1955).

The simile resonates as audiences sit comfortably in the dark of their local multiplex, lulled by the comforting images similarly cast upon the screen. Film is an

entertainment, and though most know the difference between the projected figures and their lives in the obvious ways, the reality is more elusive in its subtler tones. Everyone knows animals cannot talk and fish cannot fly, but the unstated ideological character— the uncredited script is another matter. It is not so easy to discount what is difficult to know is even there. In fact, if people knew it was there, they might not want to see it anyway. As the ascender from the cave well knows, sunlight distresses eyes used only to darkness and shadow. Shadow, after all, does not so readily admit the fire that casts it as the sun exposes all shadow.

As viewers sit with their popcorn, cheering Richard Dadier, laughing with Jack, and crying with Glenn Holland, they can suspend disbelief to be entertained, to see characters and stories that take them beyond their day to day experiences. As they sit in the theatre, they can watch in the dark. Nevertheless, they need not remain in the dark as they leave the auditorium. As they quit the darkened theatre of the Hollywood classroom, like the philosopher from Plato's cave, they can walk, slowly at first but surely nonetheless, into the light.

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