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INTRODUCTION

American Rebels

THE HEROIC AGE OF AMERICAN ART

MILDRED: Hey Johnny, what are you rebelling against?

JOHNNY STRABLER: What do you got?

—THE WILD ONE (1953)¹

Clad in a black leather jacket and slanted cap, astride a Triumph Thunderbird GT motorcycle, Marlon Brando's Johnny Strabler in *The Wild One* (1953) quickly became an iconic symbol of postwar rebellion. The real rebel, however, was not on the silver screen. Stanley Kramer was the producer behind this Hollywood studio film when he took an ill-advised two-year stint at Columbia Pictures in the middle of what was a legendary career as an *independent* producer and director in American film. Here is a list of some of his more famous independent films: *The Champion* (1949), *Home of the Brave* (1949), *Cyrano de Bergerac* (1950), *High Noon* (1952), *The Defiant Ones* (1958), *On the Beach* (1959), *Inherit the Wind* (1960), *Judgment at Nuremberg* (1961), and *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner* (1967). It was a heady time in Hollywood when Kramer began his career as an independent producer. The Hollywood studio system was collapsing and anyone and everyone were striking out on their own. It was the beginning of a long revolution in American film from the most pulp to the most avant-garde films. And Kramer was there at the beginning, personifying what *New York Times* columnist Peter Bart called the “the *enfant terrible*, the *wunderkind*, the tough-minded

young operator who could work within the lethargic Hollywood system, yet produce films that defied its very precept.²

But it turns out that in the 1950s American rebels were popping up across the arts in film, music, dance, literature, poetry, and even pulp comic books. Marlon Brando's Johnny Strabler was actually not expressing a directionless ennui in answering Mildred's question about what he was rebelling against. He was expressing a general no-holds-barred attitude seemingly permeating American culture. Yet such a generalization is misleading, because this also was the Cold War era of suburban homes, anticommunist hysteria, investigative congressional hearings, censorship, book burnings, white citizen's councils, and foreign interventionist wars. America seemed to be split into warring factions: Martin Luther King Jr. vs. Senator Joe McCarthy, Chuck Berry vs. Pat Boone, Marlon Brando vs. Ozzie Nelson, Stokely Carmichael vs. George Wallace, Abbie Hoffman vs. Robert McNamara, and Gloria Steinem vs. Hugh Hefner. Sound familiar?

Of course, I am a sociologist. We live for generalizations. But generalizations based on empirical evidence, systematic analysis, and a penchant for cramming the messy things of social life into neat theoretical or conceptual boxes. We seek patterns and trends from the minutiae of everyday life and the various events of history. And I have a historical generalization to share with you about art in the United States. Building from the work of French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu, I call the roughly three decades following World War II the Heroic Age of American Art.³ The American arts during this period would experience a general rebellion against the institutional structures that had constrained artists and others in creating their art and reaching potential audiences, or worse, exploited their talents to reap the benefits from commercial markets or cultural institutions. While the terms *avant-garde* and *independent* existed in the field of arts and entertainment before this period, they remained quite marginal, especially in the public discourse about art and entertainment. There was a brief moment in the Jazz Age of the 1920s when the first modernist urges of artistic rebellion or entrepreneurial efforts at independent production expressed themselves. But the Great Depression, and then World War II, put a damper on such aspirations. It was only in the late 1940s that the American *avant-garde* and American independents began to make major strides against cultural orthodoxy and institutional power.

This book approaches the Heroic Age of American Art through music and film and two iconic artists in these fields, Miles Davis and Martin Scorsese. I look at the careers and what I call the *public stories* of two artists who

came to define major rebellions in music and film during the Heroic Age: modern jazz and New Hollywood film. I chose Davis and Scorsese not only because they were highly celebrated icons of their respective rebellions, but also because no other artists from their generation of rebels remained as independent, innovative, outspoken, and successful over their extended careers. The public stories about music and film, and about Davis and Scorsese, were the narratives in sound, image, and text about these art fields, artists, and their artwork. These public stories were fashioned in live performances, records, films, books, television, radio, journals, magazines, newspapers, and live events. These stories were told by various storytellers, including critics and journalists and the artists themselves. So, these public stories were *collective* narratives told and experienced over time. Such public stories were also told through what Boris Tomaševskij calls an artist's *biographical legend*: the linking of personal biography with an artist's career and art.⁴ For both Davis and Scorsese, personal biography played an important role in their public stories. This book asks what do the public stories and biographical legends of Miles Davis and Martin Scorsese tell us about the Heroic Age of American Art in the last half of the twentieth century?

I also examine how the social identities of Miles Davis and Martin Scorsese informed their rebellions, careers, and public stories: Davis as a middle-class, male, African American musician and Scorsese as a working-class, male, Italian American filmmaker. I initially began this analysis with no preconceived notion of what I would find outside of the basic context of the importance of race, ethnicity, and gender in American art and society. What I found was quite remarkable and startling. As you will see, the *public stories*, *biographical legends*, and *art* of Davis and Scorsese speak just as powerfully about race, ethnicity, and gender in the last half of the twentieth century as they do to the rebellion in American arts. So, these artists provide compelling accounts not only of the conflicts over autonomy, creativity, and status in American art since the mid-twentieth century but also compelling accounts of the powerful and dynamic forces of race, ethnicity, and gender in American art and society during this period. This is because Davis's and Scorsese's social identities were integral, as well as inescapable, elements of their rebellious and autonomous art as well as their public stories. From the race consciousness and masculinity expressed and inscribed in Davis's music and public story to the ethnic consciousness and masculinity expressed and inscribed in Scorsese's films and public story, we will discover how artists, critics, producers, audiences, and others in art fields have circulated, contested, and rearticulated racial, ethnic, and

gender ideology not only in their art but also in the public stories they tell about this art and its artists.

This introduction, however, will begin with a discussion of the work of Pierre Bourdieu and my analysis of the Heroic Age of American Art. I will paint a generalized picture of this rebellion in arts and entertainment. I will look at the contours of this rebellion in terms of how certain distinct paths appeared in this rebellion often called highbrow, middlebrow, and lowbrow art. I will look at how autonomy and independence became valued norms during this period. I will also write about art fields, especially music and film, in which we can imagine the positions taken by artists, producers, critics, and audiences in terms of these paths, the ideas active in these fields, and the quest for one important, yet often elusive, idea called autonomy. And again, sociologists generalize not because the world is so clearly structured with all the pieces fitting precisely in the categories and positions of an art field, but because such generalization helps us understand what I call *structured meaningful activity* in art. As sociologist Ron Eyerman argues, structured meanings inform, in part, the actions, interpretations, appreciations, and emotions of those active in an art field.⁵ And such structured meanings are the product of a historical and collective process even as individuals engage, and possibly transform, such meanings. But such structured meaningful activity is improvisational and always happening in an unpredictable world. And meanings themselves are not necessarily crystal clear. But yet, people act on ideas, or as sociologists like to say, human activity is embedded in symbolic interaction in which we act on ideas and interpret others' actions, and of course, their art, with these ideas.

Before I move to the Heroic Age of American Art, I think one quick example of how structured meaningful activity works in an art field will be helpful. In this book, I look at "independent" film. In the art field that people call *independent film*, and an art field in which people *act* with independent film in mind, defining what constitutes an independent film is often a contentious or tenuous affair. Yet "independent film" festivals and organizations dot the North American landscape for something most everyone agrees cannot be easily defined. But as we will see, this conundrum is less about independent film than about Hollywood. It is about the resentment in independent film toward the vast power and resources of Hollywood that marginalize independent film in the commercial film market, or worse, the constant fear in this art field of Hollywood's co-optation of independent film, and therefore, its killing of the spirit of independent film. The perpetual quest for independent film, and its often-elusive nature, is an actual act of positioning

oneself as someone committed to the *idea* of independent film and against the *idea* of Hollywood film. And, as will we see, part of the elusive nature of independent film is people come to define these ideas differently. So, I do not use the public stories that inform this book to definitively define, affirm, or reject the ideas expressed by Miles Davis, Martin Scorsese, and others about independence, autonomy, creativity, innovation, race, ethnicity, or gender. My intention is to show how such ideas in these public stories constituted the *structured meanings* that oriented the making and reception of music and film as well as the articulation of various social identities and cultural politics that informed American art since the first rumblings of heroic rebellion in the 1940s.

The Heroic Age of American Art

I borrow the term “heroic age” from the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu.⁶ Bourdieu argues that France underwent such an age in the last half of the nineteenth century in literature and the arts. In terms of Western art history, this is the moment when modernism and the avant-garde transformed the meaning and practice of Western art. It is the moment when modern ideas like autonomy, innovation, progress, and rebellion motivated artists and others. It is the moment when “avant-garde” art became a permanent part of Western modern art. In Bourdieu’s terms, avant-garde art became a permanent position in the structured meaningful activities of artists and others in the field of modern art in France. Individuals acted from a position of being part of an avant-garde movement. And they acted on the various ideas associated with the avant-garde such as autonomy, independence, bohemian, or rebel. And more crucial in Bourdieu’s analysis is how this position became permanent. For Bourdieu, the Heroic Age of French Art created a permanent position of avant-garde artist and art that set in motion a perpetual cycle of heresy for each new generation of modern artist.

In Western art history, the permanent position of the avant-garde and its perpetual rebellion of heresy since the late nineteenth century can be seen in the series of art movements—impressionism, postimpressionism, cubism, futurism, surrealism, and such—that present modern art as a world in constant flux, if not in constant progress forward, although postmodernism more or less killed the idea of progress in literature and art. I argue that a similar “heroic age” occurred in American art, but a century later than in France. As mentioned previously, a modernist burst did occur in American

art in the 1920s. But the avant-garde at that time was mostly an imported one. A Heroic Age is about the generation of permanent domestic avant-garde or independent art positions within a national field of art. At the same time, not all arts followed the same path. American literature, for example, did advance earlier in establishing a domestic modernist position. But the postwar period was, in a sense, a perfect storm of changes in American art and society that led to a general burst of domestic rebellion and innovation across the arts that truly transformed how Americans viewed the nature of art and entertainment.

The chart below gives you a quick sense of this major transformation in American art. It shows how the national flagship newspaper the *New York Times*, located in the most important center for art and entertainment in the United States, covered “avant-garde” art from the 1920s to the first decade of the twenty-first century. The Heroic Age of American Art is clearly evident in this coverage. We see its initial burst in the late 1940s and then see it hit its stride in the following two decades of the 1950s and 1960s. Then the coverage shows how avant-garde art found a permanent, institutional position in American art during the 1970s that has remained up to the present. Again, what defines the Heroic Age of American Art is the moment when the position of *avant-garde* or *independent* art became a permanent objective and subjective element of the American art field. My own work on American avant-garde and independent art, especially in music and film, also points to the Heroic Age of American Art spanning roughly from the late 1940s through the 1970s.⁷ By the 1980s, avant-garde and independent art had become permanent and institutionalized positions in American art. That is, the *taken-for-granted idea* of avant-garde or independent art today, whether applauding this art’s vibrant state or lamenting its marginal standing, is both a product and defining feature of the Heroic Age. For some time now, “avant-garde” and “independent” have been important motivating and interpretive ideas in the structured meaningful activities in American art and entertainment.

Sociologists have pointed to several factors that can account for this comparatively late arrival of a Heroic Age of American Art. One major factor is the later institutionalization of high art in America compared to France. Vera L. Zolberg draws attention to a combination of social, economic, and political changes that led to a flourishing of the high arts in the mid-twentieth century.⁸ Judith R. Blau argues that a similar group of factors led to this “historical epic” in American high art. She emphasizes a rise in the size of an American middle class, a rise in educational attainment, and a

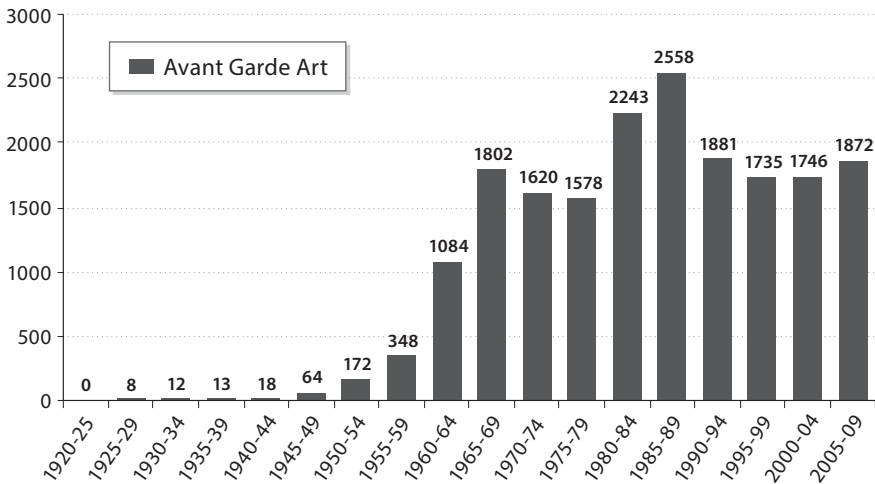


FIGURE 1. *New York Times* articles with avant-garde art reference, 1920 to 2009
Data for this graph was generated from ProQuest Historical Newspapers: *New York Times*

rise in government and institutional support for the arts in generating a renaissance in cultural creativity and institutionalization across the high arts.⁹ And according to Paul DiMaggio, social-structural changes in the United States supported this institutionalization of high art across the visual, musical, theater, and dance arts into the mid-twentieth century.¹⁰ It was not until the middle of the twentieth century that America had the type of social structure and mature art fields to create the social context necessary to generate a domestic avant-garde art in high art—a social context similar to the Heroic Age of French Art. Without mature and institutionalized high art fields, it was hard to find an orthodoxy to actually rebel against, or a population of artists large enough to generate artistic heresies. So, it was in the 1940s and '50s that a wave of domestic avant-garde genres and movements in high art appeared, such as abstract expressionism, experimental music, and experimental film.

This historical epic, however, also included changes in the middlebrow and lowbrow popular arts.¹¹ In the postwar period, the culture industry attained its most concentrated control over film, radio, and music, only to then suffer a large setback. Artists entered a postwar period in which a select number of cultural intermediaries had centralized power over film, radio, and music. Such intermediaries acted more like bureaucratic functionaries than as enablers of artistic autonomy or innovation.¹² These decision makers in the industrial oligopoly determined what became popular art. Changes in

technology and law in popular art and mass media in the 1950s undermined this concentrated power in film, broadcast, and recording.¹³ Not only did the Hollywood studio system collapse, but the oligopolies of the major radio networks and major record companies collapsed as well. This crisis in the culture industry unlocked film, broadcast, and recording to *independent* artists and *independent* entrepreneurs. Major corporations also adjusted to the new chaos and competition by using *entrepreneurial* producers within their organizations.¹⁴ Suddenly new approaches and new markets appeared in popular art. Popular art, therefore, was able to respond to changes in the tastes and dispositions of artists and audiences in a more dynamic social class structure in the United States in the postwar period. The perfect storm of autonomy, independence, and rebellion at midcentury in the United States, therefore, occurred in both the high and popular arts. The potential for significant changes in the positioning of artists and their works—what Paul DiMaggio calls the “opportunity space” in art fields—unlocked American art for radical realignment.¹⁵

The struggles for autonomy, innovation, and legitimacy in the Heroic Age of American Art took more diverse directions compared to the paths Bourdieu originally outlined.¹⁶ Bourdieu only focused on the high arts in his model of the avant-garde in the Heroic Age of French Art. I argue that in the Heroic Age of American Art, the struggle between autonomy and the demands of markets, institutions, and industries expressed itself not just in high art but also in middlebrow art and lowbrow art. Forms of rebellion and innovation led to the structuring of genres, works, artists, intermediaries, and audiences along a continuum from high art to popular art with artistic genre communities developing into divergent struggles over autonomy and innovation. The struggle between new generations of heretical artists and older generations of orthodox artists fell along this continuum of high and popular art. And one of the defining distinctions in these rebellions was the relation and distance an avant-garde or independent art genre and its artistic community—a genre community—had to popular aesthetics and popular audiences served by the culture industries. These rebellions, in other words, would include genres wedded to the most abstract of formalist aesthetics consumed by small, mostly well-educated, upper- and upper-middle-class audiences to the most concrete of pulp aesthetics consumed by large, educated, and not-so-educated, middle- and working-class audiences. And at particular moments, different avant-garde or independent art movements would articulate conflicting and contentious meanings and practices over what constituted truly autonomous and innovative art.

American Music and Film

American music and film experienced heroic ages that had a breadth of rebellion and innovation from the most abstract avant-garde experimentalism to the most popular independent pulp. While various genre communities—artistic communities dedicated to a particular style of art called a genre ideal—forged distinct paths of avant-garde or independent music and film, there were moments of connection and interaction between these communities.¹⁷ This was especially the case because a number of these genre communities commonly shared the same urban bohemian spaces or entertainment scenes such as Greenwich Village in New York City or North Beach in San Francisco. In the 1960s, for example, a number of rebel genres in music and film shared a more open social space of an “underground” bohemian art scene in New York City where “happenings” included avant-garde Fluxus artists to modern jazz Loft artists to rock groups like the Velvet Underground. This is the messiness I mentioned earlier in terms of generalizing “distinct” paths of rebellion or innovation. Genre communities, however, oriented artists and others to specific genre ideals in music and film regardless of the interaction between communities or individuals who participated in more than one community. Genre communities also worked on what sociologists call “boundary maintenance,” that is, not allowing their genre ideals to be contaminated by other genres. Genre communities, therefore, reveal the distinctions in meaning and practice in music and film that artists and others navigated in their own unique and messy way. Lou Reed of the Velvet Underground is an example of an artist who navigated between the most avant-garde tendencies and most popular tendencies in American music. Miles Davis and Martin Scorsese also navigated between different aesthetic tendencies in their music and film. And it’s exceptional artists like Reed, Davis, and Scorsese that bring to light the often contentious or contradictory genre community boundaries and ideals that appeared during the Heroic Age of American Music and Film.

Experimental music and *experimental film* both represent the high art road of rebellion in American music and film during the Heroic Age. Both experimental music composers and filmmakers associated themselves and their art with the broader community of high art avant-garde artists. The high-art American avant-garde, therefore, tended to share certain genre ideals that crossed the different arts as they collaborated in various artistic circles such as the circle of artists and architects who at one time attended or taught at Black Mountain College, North Carolina, in the 1940s and 1950s.

A major genre ideal in experimental film and music was a preference for abstractions or deconstructions of conventional forms of visual or literary representation or abstractions and deconstructions of conventional forms of harmony, melody, and meter. In music, this was evident in John Cage's use of nontraditional modes of sound making—including simply the ambient sound of an outdoor concert stage—and the minimalist repetitive compositions of Steve Reich. In film, this was evident in the structural, nonnarrative films of Stan Brakhage to the minimalist, single continuous-shot films of Andy Warhol that lasted five or more hours. Susan Sontag's 1966 *Against Interpretation*, an important manifesto of the American avant-garde, speaks to the tendencies in avant-garde art to break from commonly held conventions. Such breaks work to make their art unfamiliar and counter to conventional interpretations.¹⁸ Overall, most, although not all, experimental film and music demanded a level of cultural taste and knowledge that limited their accessibility to a large public. Both genre communities struggled in the 1940s, '50s and '60s, but by the 1970s eventually found institutional homes, not surprisingly, in higher education and high art organizations.

Many in the American avant-garde, however, openly rejected the snobbery of the old high art establishment. Both experimental music and film had genre ideals that emphasized a populist appreciation for amateur, folk, and/or popular arts. As Susan Sontag argued, "Because the new sensibility demands less 'content' in art, and is more open to the pleasures of 'form' and style, it is also less snobbish, less moralistic. . . . The fact that many of the most serious American painters, for example, are also fans of 'the new sound' in popular music is *not* the result of the search for new diversions or relaxation. . . . It reflects a new, more open way of looking at the world and at things in the world, our world."¹⁹ So many avant-gardists certainly embraced the popular. What they rejected was the commercial and industrial products manufactured by the culture industry. As Sontag wrote, "It does not mean a renunciation of all standards: there is plenty of stupid popular music, as well as inferior and pretentious 'avant-garde' paintings."²⁰ The problem, however, for avant-garde artists and other rebel artists was discerning authentic, smart popular culture from commercial, stupid popular culture. And avant-gardists also could not easily separate popular art and popular audiences from the commercial mass market and the culture industries that served them. Then avant-gardists finally had the problem that popular audiences—the American folk—liked to easily interpret and enjoy their art.

Rock 'n' roll and *exploitation film* represent roads of rebellion that pursued more popular-oriented genre ideals during the Heroic Age. Both emerged in

the mid-1950s as independent record labels and film production companies served a teen market that the culture industry had no interest in serving, unless with manufactured Pat Boone pop music or moralistic film tales of rebels without a cause. Teenagers, however, preferred Little Richard's *Tutti-Frutti* (1955) on the independent label Specialty or Roger Corman's women-prison exploitation film *Swamp Women* (1955) produced by independent Allied Artists. Both genre communities were looking to capture the mass market in popular music and film. So, a major genre ideal for these communities was commercial and popular appeal—the polar opposite of avant-garde rebels. But both rock 'n' roll music and exploitation films came from the margins of the mass markets dominated by the major record labels and major film studios. Rock 'n' roll came from the marginal race and country markets, and exploitation film came out of the Poverty Row film market of B-reel films. But both also succeeded in breaking into the mass market with local radio airplay and independent record distribution for rock 'n' roll and an exploding drive-in market for exploitation film. Both represented how the Heroic Age in popular art would set in motion a perpetual cycle of rebellion and innovation in popular mass appeal art between subcultures of marginal popular art and the mass market: whether cycles of pop music rebellions from rock to funk to punk to rap to grunge, or cycles of independent exploitation films from George Romero's *Night of the Living Dead* (1968), to John Carpenter's *Halloween* (1978), to Wes Craven's *A Nightmare on Elm Street* (1984), to James Wan's *Saw* (2004).

What is important in recognizing the rock 'n' roll and exploitation film rebellions is not that they represent some actual continuity between various popular art rebellions from the 1950s up to the present, but that they point to the rise of a *permanent* position of “indie” or “alternative” or “underground” or “subcultural” popular art that informs the structured meaningful activities of popular artists and others outside the “mainstream.” The structured meaningful activities around “alternative rock” in the 1980s and 1990s, or “underground hip-hop” in the 1990s and 2000s, show the continued orientation of heresy versus orthodoxy that defines even the most popular music. It also explains how James Wan can view his *Saw* franchise as an act of rebellion of an independent spirit even as this franchise has grossed nearly one billion dollars. But this position in American art is not simply about commerce. It is more about a genre ideal wedded to the popular aesthetics reflected in the cultural dispositions and tastes of the individuals who make and consume this art. Within these popular aesthetics other genre ideals can exist, from the anticraftsman and radical ideals of punk to the craftsman and radical

ideals of hip-hop. Even exploitation films can incorporate other ideals, as in the late 1960s and 1970s with Dennis Hopper's counterculture *Easy Rider* (1968), Melvin Van Peebles's black-power *Sweet Sweetback's Baadasssss Song* (1971), Martin Scorsese's counterculture *Boxcar Bertha* (1972), and George Romero's anticonsumerist *Dawn of the Dead* (1978).

Modern jazz and *independent film* fall between the high art position taking of avant-garde experimental art and the lowbrow popular sensibilities of rock 'n' roll and exploitation film. Both genre communities saw their rise to prominence in the 1950s. These are middlebrow popular arts that have borrowed from the avant-garde as well as the popular, but also held a genre ideal similar to the avant-garde in terms of creating art and not entertainment. These genre communities would grapple with questions of authenticity, independence, and co-optation in relation to the culture industry and the popular mass markets in music and film. Unlike experimental music and film, modern jazz and independent film continually grappled with the conflicts and contradictions of genre communities with seemingly incompatible genre ideals of art for art's sake and commercial appeal. Such tensions also reflected how both genre communities, like experimental music and film, struggled to establish institutions to support them; institutions that would allow these communities to be free from the demands of the culture industry and also fight the lack of respect for their genre ideals in established high art institutions.

Both modern jazz and independent film also articulated strong genre ideals around the cultural, social, and political currents of their times. The other new rebel genres also would articulate these same currents, but for modern jazz and independent film these currents would fundamentally shape the meaning and practice of their art. Independent film began with a number of "message filmmakers" like Stanley Kramer who produced *Champion* (1949), a tale of the rise and tragic death of an unscrupulous Irish working-class boxer, and *Home of the Brave* (1949), a tale of a black soldier's psychological struggle with the ravages of war and racism.²¹ Later independent film articulated the politics of the 1950s civil rights movement, the 1960s New Left, and the post-1960s identity politics of race, gender, and sexuality. Modern jazz would grapple with the rising radicalism of the civil rights movement from the 1950s to the early 1970s as black cultural and political consciousness motivated black jazz musicians in a variety of ways. The rising radicalism of black jazz musicians would force the jazz art world to finally grapple with the long-running co-optation of black jazz music by white musicians, critics, entrepreneurs, and white-run corporations. Modern jazz also would involve a broader continuum between avant-garde tendencies

and popular tendencies because it was an art subfield artistically dominated by black musicians blocked from the legitimate position of classical music and the rebellious position of experimental music. There is a reason jazz musicians and critics often call jazz America's classical music.

Miles Davis and Martin Scorsese were iconic artists in the two middle-brow genre communities of modern jazz and independent film; so these will be the communities central to the chapters that follow this introduction. I purposely chose these genre communities because of how their liminal "in-between" state—the constant balancing between the tendencies of the high art avant-garde and the mass-appeal popular—brings to focus important distinctions that shaped the structured meaningful activity of rebellion and innovation during the Heroic Age. I chose Davis and Scorsese because in their respective genre communities no other artists during the Heroic Age, and continuing throughout their careers, consistently created their art, remained central to their genre communities, and also remained financially successful popular artists. The public stories of these genre communities, and of Davis and Scorsese, reveal the contradictions faced in these rebellions in terms of questions and conflicts dealing with aesthetics, autonomy, innovation, authenticity, and commercialism. In particular, we will see how the "popular" existed both as an ideal and as a threat in modern jazz and independent film, just as the "avant-garde" constantly challenged whether modern jazz or independent film were truly innovative and rebellious genres. But amid the various positioning around ideas about art, autonomy, and innovation were other ideas and contradictions in the Heroic Age generated by the racial and gender formations in the United States. The Heroic Age, in other words, did not simply open the American art field to aesthetic rebellions that created over time a more diverse array of art, but it also invited an opening for a cultural politics where race, ethnicity, and gender were integral parts of these rebellions as well as in the art and public stories of Davis and Scorsese.

The Racial Formation

Sociologists Michael Omi and Howard Winant in their classic 1986 work, *The Racial Formation in the United States*, presented a comprehensive analysis of how race serves as a fundamental foundation of American society.²² The concept of a *racial formation* remains such a powerful critical tool in looking at American society because it unmask the workings of race and racism from the most micro of everyday practices, what Omi and Winant originally called the "racial etiquette" of everyday life, to the macro structures of social institutions,

what sociologists call “institutional racism.”²³ And for Omi and Winant, interwoven through the micro and macro structures of the American racial order is the ideological rationalization of this order and the cultural subordination of the racial other. By recognizing the United States as a racial formation, I place race front and center as a defining feature of American society, and therefore, a defining feature of American art. Race, therefore, was an inescapable part of the Heroic Age of American Art. And the public stories of Miles Davis and Martin Scorsese reveal how race played a part from the everyday to the institutional, from the practice of art making to the interpretations of artists and their art, to finally the biographical legends that defined rebel artists.

The various analyses and critiques of “color-blind” ideologies are another important line of argument on the American racial formation. As Omi and Winant originally argued, the greatest power of the racial formation is its ability to refashion itself to fit contemporary social, cultural, economic, and political realities. Color-blind ideology as a mainstream ideology first emerged during the eras of the New Deal and civil rights movement as ideological support for racial equality.²⁴ Sociologist Eduardo Bonilla-Silva, however, argues that the post-civil rights era has seen the rise of a “color-blind racism” that works to reproduce the racial formation in the United States.²⁵ Color-blind ideology in the post-civil rights era works to delegitimize the supposed identity politics of African Americans and other minorities as irrelevant, or even worse, provocative and self-interested. This ideology sees an America in which racists and racial prejudice might still exist, but racial discrimination supposedly no longer exists as an institutional, or systemic, obstacle to minorities. The true path to equality in this ideology is a world where an individual is “not judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character.”²⁶ It is an ideology that expresses itself in both conservative and liberal politics.²⁷

Post-civil-rights-era color-blind ideology, in both its conservative and liberal forms, also coincided with the rise of what Michelle Alexander calls the New Jim Crow. Alexander sees a new American racial formation where mass incarceration and the marginalization of African Americans as felons led to a new racial caste system as oppressive as Old Jim Crow America.²⁸ The racial biases in the justice system and war on drugs has led to a vast criminalization of African Americans in the United States. Therefore, beginning in the 1980s, being labeled a “felon” acted over time, like the color of one’s skin in the Old Jim Crow, to place African Americans once again as second-class citizens facing barriers to voting, jury duty, employment, housing, welfare, health care, and education as well as the everyday burden of being stigmatized as a felon.²⁹ By 2010, it was calculated that over 25 percent of African

American adults were ex-felons.³⁰ Both Miles Davis's and Martin Scorsese's careers and public stories show how the power of color-blind ideology during both the days of the Old Jim Crow and the days of the New Jim Crow not only affected American politics and society but also significantly affected American art in strikingly complex and diverse ways.

A final line of argument on the American racial formation provides further insights into the ideological and cultural currents of our racial order and American art. The broad scholarship on what has come to be called "whiteness studies" provides a critical lens to understanding the power of white privilege and white identity.³¹ Color-blind ideology obviously is one way white privilege is swept under the rug in America. But whiteness studies also points to how the construction of whiteness and white identity has been part of the racial formation since the colonial period in America. As we will see, white identity during the Heroic Age of American Art would express itself in its inescapable relation to "blackness" or the "other." On the other hand, we will see how in conjunction with the rise of color-blind ideology was the construction of a European American white racial identity as a supposedly distinct community with a shared history and culture. Less discussed in whiteness studies, however, was the ongoing recuperation of blackness and black identity in the African American community in the twentieth century. As sociologist Herman Gray argues, blackness has acted as a crucial site not only of white construction of the other but also as a site where African Americans have contested and negotiated the representations of their community to itself and to mainstream institutions and audiences.³² While whiteness is an ongoing process of reimagining, so blackness is an ongoing process of reimagining as well. As we will see, however, unlike whiteness, blackness was an ongoing process of reimagining where the white racial lens and white privilege constantly worked against efforts on the part of African Americans to construct a self-defined, full-dimensional social identity.

Race lives on in the house of music because music is so saturated with racial stuff; it inhabits the semiotic site supporting what Wahneema Lubiano calls "The House That Race Built." As a key signifier of difference, music for America—in its wonder, in its transcendence, in its affective danger—historically conjures racial meaning.

—RONALD RADANO AND PHILIP V. BOHLMAN, MUSIC AND
THE RACIAL IMAGINATION (2000)³³

Musicologists Ronald Radano and Philip V. Bohlman point to the central role the American racial imagination has played in American music. And in

referring to *The House That Race Built*, a 1997 anthology on the American racial order leading into the twenty-first century, Radano and Bohlman point to the unique role music has played in the ideological and cultural conjuring and reproduction of the American racial formation. Since black-faced minstrelsy in the early 1800s, American music has remained a site where the “imagination of race not only informs perceptions of musical practice but is at once constituted within and projected into the social through sound.”³⁴ For Radano and Bohlman, music becomes a “sound-text” in which individuals and their imaginations negotiate the racial contours of the American racial formation. But since the black-faced Irish minstrels of the early 1800s, music has been a site of intimate as well as fraught dynamics of interracial hybridity.³⁵ “Music thus occupies a domain at once *between* race but has the potential of embodying—*becoming*—different racial significations,” while continuing to reproduce the racial imagination of the American racial order.³⁶

In terms of modern jazz, jazz studies scholars over the last twenty years have explored the central role of the racial imagination in this genre community.³⁷ This exploration involves both the white and black racial imaginations and the contentious and conflicting relations of such imaginations in what many white musicians, critics, and fans considered a liberal color-blind art field. The significance of this scholarship is how it shows a complex, multifaceted dynamic of race relations ranging from the white construction of blackness and black masculinity, to black jazz musicians’ navigation of this dynamic as they fashioned their own sense of black identity and masculinity, to the battles over the meaning and practice of jazz music. My own previous work on the jazz art world argued that the rise of modern jazz was an expression of the long history of race and racism as a major ideological and structural force in American music. I also looked at how black musicians during the twentieth century worked to construct a race music to redefine the status, and express the culture and history, of the African American community.³⁸

Modern jazz, due to the unique *intimacy* and *social distance* that defined this interracial art world, also provides a unique view of the complex dynamics of *blackness* not only as representation but as lived experience and selfhood. All these dynamics of the racial imagination, blackness, and the racial order expressed themselves in modern jazz during the Heroic Age and the career of Miles Davis. Davis’s public story allows us to see blackness, as Herman Gray argues, as “shifting cultural fields and social relations and the material circumstances in which black people operate . . . the discursive work—cultural practices, social meanings, and cultural identifications—that

black people use to negotiate and construct meaningful lives.”³⁹ Davis’s public story will show how his expression and negotiation of blackness moved from the everyday dynamics of racial etiquette and social distance that shaped his reception and appreciation as an iconic jazz musician to his creation and contestation over the meaning and practices of race music in the last half of the twentieth century.

The field of film reflected the more common dynamic of race in American art and entertainment. Outside of the field of music, African Americans were marginalized to the point of either invisibility or brief moments of caricature. African Americans were excluded in the film industry as producers of popular Hollywood film and limited to small, stereotypical roles. Even as black actors, like James Edwards and Sidney Poitier, saw small openings as actors in Hollywood film beginning in the 1950s and 1960s, they were portrayed through the white lens of those creating and producing these films like Edwards in *Home of the Brave* (1949) and Poitier in *The Defiant Ones* (1958), both produced by “message filmmaker” Stanley Kramer, who also directed the second film.⁴⁰ During the Heroic Age of American Art this is most obvious in the marginalization of black filmmakers during this period. The now celebrated blaxploitation film, a hugely successful crossover genre in the early 1970s, emerged from a separate circle of artists than those active in the dominant exploitation genre community. And when this circle of black artists demonstrated the financial rewards blaxploitation could generate both in and outside the African American community, Hollywood and independent exploitation studios quickly co-opted this genre and placed it in the hands of white producers and white filmmakers. And once Hollywood found alternative genres to fill its coffers, it dumped blaxploitation film and the genre disappeared by the end of the 1970s. The hopes of a “Black Hollywood” were quickly dashed.⁴¹

The public story of Martin Scorsese resonates with work on the racial order and whiteness as his biographical legend refracted the evolution of white identity in the post–civil rights era. Sociologists have analyzed an ethnic revival beginning in the late 1960s that generated a cultural flowering of symbolic ethnic identity among European ethnic communities such as the Italian American community of Martin Scorsese. Sociologists then discovered how once distinct European ethnic identities gradually melded into a white ethnic racial identity by the last decade of the twentieth century.⁴² Part of this transformation was the rise of a new hyphen-nationalism that reconstructed white ethnics’ historical memories of the American experience. Moving from a Plymouth Rock myth to an Ellis Island myth, white

ethnics viewed their history as immigrants as the foundation of modern America.⁴³ As we will see, Martin Scorsese's public story will miraculously follow this very transformation as he moved from being an unmeltable Italian American to a cheerleading white ethnic American at the start of the twenty-first century.

Hypermasculinity in Art and Entertainment

Just as race and ethnicity were integral to the art and public stories of Miles Davis and Martin Scorsese, their gender identities were equally important. This should not be surprising given that gender, like race, has been a fundamental social structure of American society. The sociologist Barbara J. Risman has provided a comprehensive framework for understanding the American gender formation similar to what Omi and Winant have done for the American racial order.⁴⁴ She focused on socialization and gender identity, everyday social interaction and gendered scripts, and social institutions and institutionalized gender inequality. And interwoven between these elements of the gender formation was a gender ideology and dominant culture that perpetuated this gender order. Risman would return to her original theory in 2005 to reaffirm its validity, address the persistence of gender inequality, and discuss how the gender formation must be understood in light of the intersectionality of race, class, sexuality, and other forms of structured inequality.⁴⁵ During the Heroic Age of American Art, the major impact of the gender order was, first, the continued marginalization of women in the dominant cultural institutions and culture industries in the United States, and second, the power of hegemonic masculinity within certain genre communities and their art. Women have always played major roles as singers, songwriters, and actresses in American music and film, but instrumental musicianship and film auteurship, especially at the level of professional music and film, was a masculinized practice. The marginalization of women persisted in the various rebellions during this age, although a number of genre communities afforded women more opportunities as artists and producers. Given my focus on Miles Davis and Martin Scorsese, however, it is the role of gender identity and gender ideology in the masculinity and misogyny permeating music and film that emerges as a striking aspect of the lives, careers, and public stories of these iconic rebel artists.

More recent work in men's studies has focused on the role of hegemonic masculinity and the rise of hypermasculinity as crucial to understanding the gender order. R. W. Connell's classic 1995 *Masculinities* introduced the

term “hegemonic masculinity” as a critique of gender role theory that failed to consider power and patriarchy in gender identity and gender ideology.⁴⁶ In its original conceptualization, Connell recognized multiple masculinities but placed them in a hierarchy in which hegemonic masculinity acted to subordinate women through objectification and violence as well as to marginalize alternative masculinities. While many critiques followed Connell’s original conception of hegemonic masculinity, she argued in 2005 that hegemonic masculinity as a concept and a reality remains crucial to understanding gender formations.⁴⁷ But Connell also acknowledged how one must recognize the multifaceted expression of this hegemony; its less powerful hold on other masculinities; the intersectionality of alternative and hegemonic masculinities; women’s agency within the hegemonic regime of masculinity; and finally, the *difference* in its articulation in actual individual gender identities, in actual individual and group gendered behavior, and as a cultural signifier in art, entertainment, and sport. Given these important contributions complicating the process of hegemonic masculinity, I find this concept remains extremely relevant to understanding the gender formation in America. This is especially true in dealing with music and film, both art forms central to hegemonic masculinity as a cultural signifier. In music and film, hypermasculinity has played a major role in the performance and presentation of masculinity, and the *normalization* of hegemonic masculinity made such exaggerated gender markings unquestioned in these fields of art and entertainment.

Like music and film, sports has been central to hegemonic masculinity as both a site of enactment and a cultural signifier of gender identity. Michael A. Messner has looked extensively at sports as a cultural phenomenon and social institution in which hegemonic masculinity plays a vital role.⁴⁸ His work is especially relevant as he looks at hegemonic masculinity from the microlevel of everyday interaction to the macrolevel of sports institutions. The worlds of music and film, especially in their more popular genre communities, exhibit a similar dynamic of hegemonic masculinity. Messner also points to how “leaders” in sports teams, and the sports world more generally, exhibit, and are compelled to exhibit, hegemonic masculinity in the world of sports. We can extend this analysis to how “stars” in the world of music and film feel compelled to perform hegemonic masculinity on and off stage and on and off screen. Both Miles Davis’s and Martin Scorsese’s public stories attest in uncontestable ways to the power of hypermasculinity during the Heroic Age of American Art. Miles Davis as a performer and a black jazz artist embodied and expressed this hypermasculinity in his public story to

the ultimate undermining of his legacy as a celebrated icon of the African American community. Martin Scorsese has had a career-long obsession with hypermasculinity intimately tied to his ethnic and racial identities. Male violence also would play itself out in both these public stories in frightening ways that speak to such issues that continue to haunt America today.

The Public Stories and Biographical Legends of Miles Davis and Martin Scorsese

My study is based on what I call the *public stories* of Miles Davis, Martin Scorsese, and their art fields. I interpret the “stories” in sound, image, and text about these artists, their artworks, and their art fields. These public stories were found in newspapers, magazines, journals, books, film, television, radio, press releases, conferences, exhibitions, and award ceremonies. These public stories also included the live music performances, recorded music, and films of Davis and Scorsese. They were public in two senses. They were stories told by a wide set of authors and open to a wide set of audiences. Public stories are *collective* renditions of art worlds, artists, and their art. Michael Ryan and Douglas Kellner argue that the *ideological power* of media texts involves understanding them as discursively “transcoding” different discursive fields such as the interpretive schemes found in everyday social life or social institutions.⁴⁹ I interpret public stories in this sense. I look at public stories as discursive fields that exist between artworks and the interpretive schemes individuals use in their everyday lives and social institutions. This includes the interpretive schemes used by artists, producers, critics, and others in what John Thornton Caldwell calls the *production cultures* of art fields.⁵⁰ Public stories are the collective transcoding of art fields, art, and artists and their cultural, social, and political significance. Looking at public stories is significant because they are expressive spaces where individuals construct and negotiate various narratives and meanings spanning various discursive fields. They reveal not only the *structured meaningful activity* in the making and reception of art but also the interaction of different *structured meanings* from other discursive fields and ideological formations. Public stories are cultural politics enacted and experienced beyond just the making of art, the content of art, and the reception of art. They represent the collective, public conversation *about* art and artists that makes up a crucial part of the cultural politics of art, media, and society.

I also look at the biographical legends of Miles Davis and Martin Scorsese. These legends were one part of their public stories. They spoke to

their art, careers, personalities, attitudes, behaviors, and lives in general. The sociologist and film studies scholar Robert E. Kapsis adopted this term from the literary critic Boris Tomaševskij to look at how Alfred Hitchcock and others constructed a biography that transformed this director's reputation in the United States from an insignificant director to a celebrated auteur.⁵¹ Tomaševskij and Kapsis use the term *legend* to emphasize how such biographies are socially constructed and how they act to establish an artist's reputation. While my work addresses the reputations of Davis and Scorsese, it also expands the social significance of biographical legends in the public stories of artists and art fields. Just as France Winddance Twine and Charles A. Gallagher argue that personal biographies act as powerful articulations and personally felt validations of larger ideological formations,⁵² biographical legends of artists also become powerful *collective* expressions in public stories where ideological formations are articulated, contested, and rearticulated in the biographical imaginings of artists, storytellers, and audiences. And given how the biographies and social identities of Davis and Scorsese became so prominent in their public stories, these stories were an especially powerful public expressive space where questions of autonomy, creativity, art making, race, ethnicity, class, and gender were linked to the personal and artistic as well as to the social and political. As we will see, the public stories of Davis and Scorsese not only elicited their biographies and social identities, but equally interpolated the biographies and social identities of those who told these stories and those who read them.

To capture these public stories, I made an extensive collection of documents covering a period from the mid-1940s up to the present. I decided to collect the core of my documents from the first public stories of Davis and Scorsese through their long careers. Davis performed and recorded until his death in 1991, so the core documents related to jazz and Davis go from 1946 to 1992. The core documents related to film and Scorsese, who continues as a filmmaker today, go from 1964 up to the present. This involved analyzing magazine and newspaper articles, reviews, criticism, and news from the general press as well as jazz, music, film, art, and industry publications. This material, from over seventy newspapers, 125 magazines, twenty-three jazz and music journals, and nineteen film magazines, was indexed in a database of over three thousand documents that included other miscellaneous material such as press releases. I created a similar database in my earlier research on the rise of a jazz art world.⁵³ I also used this earlier database for this project. Both these databases were indexed by date, publication, author, coded subject, and individuals referenced in the document. In addition to these

collections, I collected trade books, including jazz and film histories, jazz and film criticism, and books related to Davis and Scorsese. I also reviewed film, television, and radio documentaries and interviews related to these artists. Finally, while my analytical focus was on the stories told about Davis, Scorsese, and their artwork and art fields, I consider their art works as part of their public stories. So, I listened to the recordings of Miles Davis from his early recordings in the mid-1940s to his last studio recording *Doo-Bop* (1992) as well as watched videos of live performances. And I viewed Scorsese's films from his first films as a student at NYU to his most recent feature film before the completion of my work, *Silence* (2016). This broad array of material provided a rich empirical foundation for an examination based on an open coded and inductive content analysis of the material.

How to Read This Book and Why

In this introduction, I tried to present the basic themes, questions, and art fields in which I would look at the careers and public stories of Miles Davis and Martin Scorsese. This included some shared distinctions and contradictions in the Heroic Age of American Art that these two artists would encounter in music and film. I then introduced important themes related to the expression of their social identities in their public stories connected to their racial, ethnic, and gender identities. I have broken this book into two parts. Part one, "Rebels Making Art," looks at how public stories in music and film have pointed to the complex interplay of the structured meaningful activities of art making in important genre communities during the Heroic Age and in the artistic trajectories of Davis and Scorsese. It seeks to find the contours of the distinctions and contradictions that defined each field and informed the art making of these two iconic artists and other artists as well. Part two, "The Biographical Legends of Rebels," looks at how the social identities and biographical legends of Davis and Scorsese have informed their public stories and their art. This second part seeks to find how both artists defined their biographical presence as artists and how others also defined these legends in their public stories. The main question is how Davis's and Scorsese's social identities shaped their biographical legends as iconic artists in American music and film.

I wanted my analysis of Miles Davis and Martin Scorsese to reflect as much as possible what emerged from their public stories. I let their public stories do the work in "Rebels Making Art" and "The Biographical Legends of Rebels." This leads to four chapters that touch on an array of issues and

themes. On one hand, each chapter provides a different perspective on the art and public stories of Davis and Scorsese. On the other hand, in these four chapters we also find a number of overarching themes and important connections that provide a broader understanding of the Heroic Age of American Art. The goal of this book is less about presenting, and even less so, judging the artists Davis and Scorsese, although I provide a detailed account of their public stories. My intention is to use the public stories of Davis and Scorsese to explore the structured meanings that informed American art around questions of autonomy, rebellion, race, ethnicity, class, and gender. What the four chapters make clear is how the opening of the American art field and the rise of avant-garde and independent art was an invitation for a more vigorous, open, and at times, combative cultural politics. As Davis and Scorsese negotiated the contentious and contradictory nature of autonomy and creativity in their fields, their rebelliousness was intimately tied by them and others to their race, ethnicity, and class. In both cases, it was the expression of their social identities as an African American and Italian American that most significantly defined their authenticity as rebel artists. At the same time, these four chapters show how race, and racism, led to distinctly different aesthetic agendas, and equally distinct receptions of these agendas, for Davis and Scorsese. Furthermore, the dynamics of gender and masculinity as played out in their racial and ethnic rebelliousness would come to problematize their positions as American rebel artists. These artists' rebellions against the culture industries, commercial conventions, and their racial, ethnic, and class marginalization ultimately were intertwined with destructive and controversial expressions of hypermasculinity.

But I am not simply discussing Davis's and Scorsese's art or the remarks they made in their public stories. I am presenting a collective public storytelling in which the invitation to engage in cultural politics was enacted across art fields. These public stories became discursive fields that transcoded structured meanings about autonomy, creativity, commercialism, race, ethnicity, class, and gender as well as politics and American society. The significance of these four chapters is how the public stories of Davis, Scorsese, and others reveal that the Heroic Age of American Art opened up an expressive space in which everyone engaged, contested, negotiated, transformed, and reaffirmed various structured meanings and ideological formations. These public stories were special expressive spaces where individuals directly and collectively confronted the cultural, social, and institutional politics of the last half of the twentieth century into the beginning of the twenty-first century. My work also shows how the conflicts, contradictions, and power of the

ideological formations of race and gender interpolated these public stories not only in new, rebellious, and progressive ways, but also in problematic and retrogressive ways that contributed to the reproduction of these formations in the United States.

My work presents a number of significant contributions not only to sociology but to other disciplines as well. My initial research agenda was to apply Pierre Bourdieu's analysis of the Heroic Age of French Art to the United States.⁵⁴ No other scholar has actually attempted a similar analysis to another national art field. So, my first contribution is to present a comparative study of a heroic age that reveals a far more complex dynamic of autonomy and cultural politics than in Bourdieu's analysis, and does it in a detailed analysis of the actual structured meanings at play in defining and contesting autonomy and rebellion. Also, while Bourdieu and other scholars like Priscilla Parkhurst Ferguson and Shyon Baumann have looked at the role of criticism in legitimizing genres of art and constructing hierarchies of aesthetics and tastes in art fields, they and other cultural sociologists have not addressed how critics also participate in public stories where cultural politics beyond artistic legitimacy and status take place.⁵⁵ My work also expands the understanding of cultural politics found in the work of Herman Gray, Sherrie A. Inness, Ron Becker, and other scholars in cultural and media studies, that focus on the politics of representation and aesthetics in art works.⁵⁶ Following Tricia Rose's more recent work on hip-hop music, and expanding Michael Ryan and Douglas Kellner's concept of transcoding, I show how public stories—the collective discourses about art fields—are special expressive spaces that transcode, and therefore, bridge a large range of discursive fields and ideological formations.⁵⁷ Following France Winddance Twine and Charles A. Gallagher, I also show how public stories bridge the microlevel of personal biography and art making to the macrolevel of ideological formations and social structure.⁵⁸ Thus, this work opens up a remarkable window into how public stories about art commingle the most micro and the most macro, not simply in the making and reception of American art, but in the collective rendition of everyday lives, biographies, careers, aesthetics, art, social identities, politics, and the nature of the American experience.

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