3 Who's Got the Car Keys?

Geographic, Economic, and Social Mobility in the Magic Kingdom of Los Angeles

> By the mid-twentieth century, if not sooner, virgin cities had begun to replace virgin land in the minds of many Westerners as the key image in defining the region.
> JOHN FINDLAY/*MAGIC LANDS*

In his study of Western U.S. cities, John Findlay identifies a way to read the twentieth-century American cities of the West as "magic kingdoms," of which Disneyland is the primary example. According to Findlay's use of term, a magic kingdom is a specially designed public site within a Western U.S. city, and upon which the city relies for its own identity, that attempts "to exclude diversity and misery from their idealized settings, substituting in their stead a world indexed to the middle-class standards of an affluent society" (9). Consciously setting themselves apart from older Eastern cities, these magic kingdoms conceived of themselves as "refuges from the aesthetic and ecological realities of cities," such as minority and working-class residents (Findlay 9). Extending Findlay's argument to the earlier part of the century, this chapter will demonstrate that Los Angeles was constructed by city "boosters" and Los Angeles novels as a magic kingdom free of the "problems" of the public sphere created by the immigrant and poor residents of other large American cities. The Los Angeles novels of the 1930s build upon those images of Los Angeles as a magic kingdom, erasing the pasts and presence of Indian, Mexican, and other communities of color while at the same time depicting the successful upward mobility of the Jew-

ish immigrants who founded the Hollywood studios. Findlay's magic kingdom is a useful way to read the city of Los Angeles as it functions in the novels and culture of the 1930s because it illuminates the utopian "magic" city's dependence on the elision of racial and class differences, represented as private issues that have no place in public space or discourse. I will use Findlay's term to refer to the specifically Western character of the utopian city of Los Angeles, as it is imagined in the novels and in the rest of the country, and to contrast it with the lack of attention paid to the lived reality of Native and Mexican Americans in the city. The magic kingdom devises a way to include Native and Mexican Americans without having to actually engage with them socially: by creating commodified "Old West" and "Spanish" styles for white consumption in the public spaces of the city, specifically its commercial sphere.

Los Angeles played a crucial role in the production of U.S. public culture in the period from 1930-45, as a geographical location and as an imaginary site. During the Depression and the war years, moving into the middle classes became more of an obsession than ever before, and when work and food were scarce the country looked for inspiration to images of people who were "going places" and the technological innovations that would carry them into a brighter future. Los Angeles texts of this period, along with the history and geography of the city, provided those images and articulated the national desire for class mobility as well as the consumer desire for physical mobility in the form of the automobile. Recurring tropes of mobility in the fiction and film of the period also figure prominently in the economic and social developments in Hollywood and the wider national culture between 1930 and 1945. This chapter offers ways to read the presence of multiple colonial pasts in fictional texts that center around the "magic land" of Los Angeles, including the city's public and private spaces—architecture, decor, industries, and urban planning. In Los Angeles novels, the city's history links into three discernible narratives of mobility: geographic, in terms of urban expansion, migration, and immigration; economic, in terms of the rags to riches myth that beckoned immigrants from all over the country and the world; and social, in terms of acceptance and assimilation into the dominant culture. These texts not only circulate images of mobility, they also provide the scene on which thwarted desires for mobility are played out. Images of mobility in Hollywood films and Los Angeles novels participate in the ways in which class and geographic movement

operate in the national imagination. Ironically, the images of the highway and the automobile (a strange combination of privacy within public space) in many of these texts signal negative mobility and lack of access to the highways of modernity, even in the freeway city of Los Angeles.

The literary phenomenon known as the Los Angeles novel has its origins in Helen Hunt Jackson's 1884 novel *Ramona*, but David Fine dates its birth in the 1930s, when the movie studios attracted writers from all over the country to furnish scripts for the newly introduced "talkies" (Introduction 2). These writers, including James M. Cain, Raymond Chandler, Nathanael West, and F. Scott Fitzgerald, not only created treatments, dialogue, and screenplays for studios, they also "wrote novels that gave the city its metaphoric shape, [and] established a way of reading the Southern California landscape" (Fine, Introduction 2). Cain's and Chandler's novels are set in Los Angeles without specifically centering around Hollywood, while West, Fitzgerald, and Budd Schulberg (a Hollywood native) use the setting and metaphors of the movie capitol to describe the corruption and falsity of the city and of the nation as a whole. For the purposes of this chapter, I consider a Los Angeles novel one that is set in the city; a subset of this genre is the Hollywood novel, which takes as its primary subject the film industry of Los Angeles, located in the popular imaginary site of Hollywood. Thus, a Hollywood novel is by definition a Los Angeles novel, but a Los Angeles novel may or may not be a Hollywood novel.

The first section of this chapter examines the ways in which twentieth-century white Angelenos in Los Angeles novels romanticize their "magic" city's past as a "Spanish colony," eliding the history of Southern California as a Native American settlement and later a territory of independent Mexico, while Native and Mexican American residents are invisible or severely stereotyped in Los Angeles novels and marginalized geographically and economically in the public spaces of the city itself. The second section considers the Los Angeles novels' representations of mobility narratives pertaining to the Hollywood Jews, the immigrant founders of the major studios and their particularly Los Angeles-based, and often self-consciously public, experiences of Americanization and assimilation, in contrast to the experiences of the Mexican Americans in Los Angeles at the same time period. The chapter concludes with an explication of the mobility trope as it pertains to whites living and working in Los Angeles. The city represents for many of them the pinnacle of Western expansion, modernity, and speed—a

trope concentrated in recurrent images of public mobility in the form of automobiles and freeways. But for others, Los Angeles also embodies the corruption and contradictions at the heart of the American Dream.

"SPANISH STYLE": COLONIAL PASTS AND PRESENCE IN 1930S LOS ANGELES

The history of Los Angeles is marked by mobility narratives, from the conquistadors to the Okies. The geographic movements of people from Europe, other regions of the U.S., and Mexico to the "magic land" of Los Angeles are represented quite differently in the Los Angeles novels of the 1930s and 40s, ranging from heroic and steadfast to malevolent and corrupt. Predictably, all of the positive representations of migrants depict white Europeans and Americans, including assimilated Jews, although some representations critique the Midwesterners who dominated Los Angeles's social and political life in the 30s. The less flattering images are reserved for raced and classed "others" including less assimilated Jews and Native and Mexican Americans, when they are represented at all. The parallel experiences of Jews compared with Native and Mexican Americans afford interesting contrasts when they attempt to participate in the dominant culture of Los Angeles, and the Los Angeles novels provide numerous examples of these contrasts. The virtual absence of fully developed Mexican and Native American characters in the Los Angeles novels speaks to their invisibility in the city's wider culture, while the commodification of "Spanish" or "Old West" architecture and decorating trends for white consumption illustrates the elaborate distancing techniques needed to excise them from the "magic" city's identity.

The Pierces' red tile roof and stucco facade in James M. Cain's *Mildred Pierce* and Homer Simpson's galleon-motif living room decor in Nathanael West's *The Day of the Locust* promote the illusion that California's past was populated by white Spanish missionaries, cowboys, and happy converted Indians, erasing the racial violence and labor exploitation of that earlier time as well as the continued marginalization of the city's Mexican population into the 1930s, when repatriation of thousands of Mexicans was subsidized by the Los Angeles city government. Bert and Mildred Pierce have a "Spanish" style living room with a "crimson velvet coat of arms,"

"drapes, hung on iron spears," and paintings of western scenes including "a butte at sunset," a cowboy, and a covered wagon (Cain 104). And although Homer Simpson's "Irish" cottage has "New England Farmhouse" style bedrooms, the living room is "Spanish" with a model galleon on the mantel, "wall fixtures in the shape of galleons with pointed amber bulbs projecting from their decks," and a table lamp "that had several more galleons painted on it" (West 287). The reduction of history, even mythologized history, to a decorator's fad on such a massive scale that Cain's narrator calls it "the standard living room sent out by department stores as suitable for a Spanish bungalow" still contains in its symbols an unquestioned imperialism (104). The galleons, covered wagons, cowboys, iron spears, and coat of arms simultaneously connote past European colonialism and the continued colonization of North America by the United States. The actual historical background for the "Spanish" bungalows in Los Angeles was the armed conquest and subsequent settling of the Western United States by systematic movements of "explorers," troops, and colonists across oceans, deserts, and permeable national boundaries.

The prominence of these symbolic motifs from three different centuries of Los Angeles history in middle-class living rooms in the 1930s affirms what Gesa Mackenthun calls "an asynchronous temporality in which the present is shot through with memories of a past that keeps encroaching upon the living" (269) and, furthermore, articulates a desire to assimilate the past into innocuous mass-produced decoration. In Cain's novel *Mildred Pierce*, Bert Pierce built his "Spanish" bungalow on land he developed into a residential subdivision during the real estate boom of the 1920s; up until 1848, when most of the large ranchos were subdivided, the land was probably a part of land grants to Mexican settlers. But the tenacity of the "Spanish" myth in 1930s California popular culture and architecture attests to the strength of the symbols of colonial mobility and power: the galleon and the covered wagon carrying the white race and nation to its manifest destiny in the West. At the same time, less appealing and picturesque forms of mobility, such as that of displaced Native and Mexican Americans remain underrepresented in the Los Angeles novels and invisible to the residents of the city at the time. White European and American geographical movements are noble acts of Manifest Destiny, whereas Mexican border-crossings are altogether more threatening. Some Los Angeles novels represent white migrants—usually Midwesterners—to the city in a critical light,

often caricaturing them as unsophisticated and conservative, but Mexican American characters come across as far less sympathetic.

One of the few Mexican American characters in a Los Angeles novel of the 1930s is Mig in Nathanael West's *The Day of the Locust* (1939). He is first described by the narrator as "toffee-colored with large Armenian eyes and pouting black lips," although the reader infers that he is Mexican because of his nickname, short for Miguel, and the Spanish greeting he uses (328). He raises birds for cock fighting, drinks tequila, and eventually has an affair with Faye, the femme fatale in the novel. As the protagonist, Tod, watches him around a campfire, he realizes that Faye and Miguel are flirting. Tod's perception of Miguel's sexual threat is expressed in racial terms:

> […] the Mexican sat full in the light of the fire. His skin glowed and the oil in his black curls sparkled. He kept smiling at Faye in a manner that Tod didn't like. The more he drank, the less he liked it. (331)

Miguel's racial difference is clearly stressed in these passages: his "toffee-colored" skin that "glowed" in the firelight and his sparkling black curls attract Tod's notice as well as Faye's. The only Mexican American character in the novel, Miguel conforms to racist stereotypes of Mexicans, and his sexual power only increases the hostility of the white men who already dislike him. Although a minor character with little development, Miguel's facial features are described in painstaking detail—much more so than other more central characters—and in terms that draw attention to his ethnicity. The narrator refers to Miguel as "the Mexican" interchangeably with his name, as though he were only an embodiment of his national or racial origin, an archetype of Mexico. Miguel has named his cocks for figures in Mexican national history, including Villa and Zapata, but his transient presence in the novel doesn't allow his character to develop any real identity.

Apparently homeless and unemployed but not seeking work, Miguel lives in a camp in the Hollywood hills with a cowboy named Earle, although they later move into Homer Simpson's garage with the birds. Homer finds the situation distressing, especially the hen: "You never saw such a disgusting thing, the way it squats and turns its head. The roosters have torn all the feathers off its neck and made its comb all bloody and it has scabby feet covered with warts and it cackles so nasty" (372). Homer then compares the hen to Miguel: "He's almost as bad as his hen" (372). Homer's

distaste for the hen is linked to his discomfort around Miguel, who in turn taunts Homer because he knows he dislikes the hen: "he tries to make me look just for spite. I go into the house, but he taps on the windows and calls me to come out and watch" (372). Homer is intimidated by the implications of sexual violence that the hen represents, and Miguel enjoys tormenting him with the spectacle of the bloody hen; for Homer, Miguel comes to stand for the repressed sexual aggression he fears in himself. Like the Mexican American residents of white-dominated Los Angeles in the 1930s, his main function in the novel is local color and confirming the stereotypes of whites—he is a homeless cockfighter with oiled hair who seduces white women.

The only Native American character in *The Day of the Locust* ironically parrots white attitudes toward Mexicans, arguing in the most blatantly racist language in the novel that "they were all bad" (405). As Tod listens to this debate, another character argues that "he had known quite a few good ones in his time" (405). After the Indian cites "the case of the Hermanos brothers who had killed a lonely prospector for half a dollar," the other man replies with an anecdote about "Tomas Lopez who shared his last pint of water with a stranger when they were both lost in the desert" (405). Tod wants to find out about Miguel and Faye, so he interjects his opinion that "Mexicans are very good with women" (405). To his dismay, the Indian answers that they are "better with horses" and follows that tangent instead (405). Eventually Tod coaxes more information from them, discovering that Earle claims he fought Miguel because "the Mex robbed him while he was sleeping" (405). The Indian replies, "The dirty, thievin' rat" and spits (406). The Indian character is a convenient vehicle for displacing anti-Mexican sentiment away from whites and onto a comic, archaic figure. West plays up the irony of the Indian's racism by describing him as similarly typecast and marketing his own caricatured cultural identity. Although the Indian hates Mexicans and he refers to Miguel as a "dirty greaser," he wears a sandwich board advertising "Tuttle's Trading Post for Genuine Relics of the Old West" and laughs when introduced to Tod as "Chief Kiss-My-Towkus," to which he answers frankly, "You gotta live" (405). At the trading post he sells souvenirs, including "Beads, Silver, Jewelry, Moccasins, Dolls, Toys, Rare Books, Postcards" (404). Like the city of Los Angeles creating an "Old Mexico" tourist attraction on Olvera Street, the only Native American character makes his living literally selling emblems of his

commodified culture to tourists. His "relics of the Old West" suggest a mythological Californian past, but the real past and present of Native Americans in California is invisible in the novel.

Although there are few Native or Mexican American characters in the other Los Angeles novels, the city's mythological Spanish past comes up frequently. Al Manheim, the narrator of Budd Schulberg's Hollywood novel, *What Makes Sammy Run?*, explains his attraction to the idea of Hollywood:

> I was anxious to investigate the persistent rumors that the 'streets paved with gold' which the early Spanish explorers had hunted in vain had suddenly appeared in the vicinity of Hollywood and Vine. I was half convinced that Southern California was really the modern Garden of Eden its press agents claimed it to be. (32)

Manheim's musings refer to the ways in which twentieth century Los Angeles "boosters" played up the romantic historical past of Spanish colonialism without reference to either the area's past Mexican political rule or the Mexican American communities still resident there. Like the European colonizers, Al contemplates Los Angeles as an empty space, a "Garden of Eden," that could be a source of personal wealth rather than as a place that has been home to an indigenous population of Indians for 20,000 years and Mexican Americans for nearly two centuries.

The European colonization of the Los Angeles area officially began when Spain claimed the area with explorations in 1769 and the first colonists in 1781 (del Castillo 4-5). Many of the most successful early "Spanish" settlers, known as Californios, were farmers from the northern Mexican desert who saw themselves as nominally Mexican but isolated and largely cut off from the rest of the Mexican state. After failed attempts to lure more colonists to the dry, distant California outpost, the Spanish colonial government forced the immigration of convicts and orphans in 1825, 1829, and 1830, much to the chagrin of the comfortable, class-conscious Californios, who were by then concerned with maintaining their large ranchos and the purity of their "Spanish" blood in the midst of the newly arrived Mexicans, whom they saw as *cholos* (low class) and thieves (del Castillo 6-10). While the Californios had maintained a distinction between themselves and the resident Native American tribes, collectively named Gabrielinos after the mission established there, the dividing lines became

more rigid as the area grew in population. The Indians had first arrived 20,000 years earlier; by 1770, there were approximately 5000 Indians living in the Los Angeles basin (del Castillo 1-2). Although the first Mexican settlers often intermarried with the Indians and adopted aspects of their cultural knowledge, particularly medicine and agriculture, by 1836 they forced the Indians into segregated villages increasingly distant from the Mexican town (del Castillo 3). After conversion to U.S. statehood in 1850, Indian prisoners, who were often arrested randomly or for the slightest infractions, were sold to the highest bidder for private service in weekly public auctions; the practice continued through 1869, when high death rates had finally decimated Indian population (Robinson 45-46).

In his letters of 1852, Hugo Reid describes the effects of the breakup of the missions on the Indians of the Los Angeles area during the transition from Mexican colony to American territory and then statehood (Heizer). His perspective on the Indian situation is clear in his assertions that the Indians suffered, not because of the abrupt political and economic changes or maltreatment by whites, but because of the Mexicans, "Sonoreños" who exercised a bad influence on them in the absence of beneficent white missionaries:

> These Sonoreños overran this country. They invaded the rancheria, gambled with the men and taught them to steal; they taught the women to be worse than they were, and men and women both to drink. Now we do not mean or pretend to say that the [Indians] were not previous to this addicted both to drinking and gaming, with an inclination to steal, while under the dominion of the church; but the Sonoreños most certainly brought them to a pitch of licentiousness before unparalleled in their history. (qtd. in Heizer 99)

Reid's racial hierarchy apparently places Mexicans below Indians, although he sees that he is skirting self-contradiction by almost claiming the Indians were innocents; since they were only recently Christianized their morality was fragile, but the Sonorans "overran" the area like an army of pests and unraveled the limited victories of the church, corrupting the Indians. Unwilling to acknowledge the impact of American expansion on the Native American tribes of the Los Angeles area, Reid prefers to interpret the social problems in the Indian community as a result of an outside influence—he

projects that bad influence onto Mexicans in order to maintain his superiority and avoid any accountability for his presence in California.

WHITE CITY: LOS ANGELES IN THE 20TH CENTURY

It is ironic, then, that the romantic nostalgia for Old Spain pervades the white culture of Los Angeles throughout the booming first third of the twentieth century, in spite of the fact that the city's history complicates such a misreading of the past. The historical basis for the "Spanish" founders myth crumbles when we consider that of the 23 adults who founded Los Angeles in 1781, eight were Indian, ten were of African descent, and one was Filipino; of the 21 children, 19 were mixed race and two were full-blooded Indians (Ríos-Bustamente and Castillo 33). The enforced homogeneity of the magic Los Angeles cannot reconcile the "Spanish" past with the Mexican realities of the twentieth century city, so it transforms the living culture into a commodified "style." Nevertheless, as George Sánchez points out, "it was the middle-class midwesterner . . . who dominated the public culture and politics of the city during the early twentieth century," and who preferred the "Spanish" motif in architecture and decor (91). The substitution of a contrived "Spanish" style for economic and social acceptance of real Mexican Americans illustrates the enduring imperative for homogeneity and the increasing consumerism of the white elites in 1930s Los Angeles. As Monroe Stahr in *The Last Tycoon* explains the business of the movies, "we have to take people's own favorite folklore and dress it up and give it back to them," white Los Angeles dressed up Mexican culture and put it up for sale (Fitzgerald 105).

Meanwhile the city's population had quadrupled between 1910 and 1930, leaping from 319,000 to 1.24 million (Sánchez 71). Among the newcomers were eugenics enthusiasts who flocked there hoping to found a white enclave far from the growing immigrant populations of the East coast, where the warm sun would "reinvigorate the racial energies of the Anglo-Saxons" (Davis 27). As Perley Poore Sheehan's 1924 book *Hollywood as a World Center* makes clear, Los Angeles represented a new kind of American city, without the cross-cultural complications of older, more ethnically mixed East Coast cities: "They are pleasant folk, these neighbors of yours in Hollywood. They speak English. […] They keep their own

places beautiful and are concerned with the beauty of the street. They are lovers of flowers and birds" (37). Writing as if slum-dwellers in New York or Boston don't love flowers and birds, Sheehan constructs a race-inflected class distinction between "Aryan" Angelinos and residents of other cities who don't speak English and who are presumably less "concerned with the beauty of the street" than with daily survival of their families. The city represents "the end of the trail" for the "last great migration of the Aryan race" (Sheehan 1). Sheehan's Hollywood participates in the identity maneuvers of Findlay's magic kingdoms: Los Angeles is described as a Western utopia consciously different from other U.S. cities, where immigrants and the poor inhibit the magic new city from evolving. Sheehan's magic city, where people speak English, conforms to Findlay's definition of a magic kingdom, which is "less troubled by urban problems and more open to improvements in metropolitan design, social relations, and styles of living," including the elusive flowers and birds (Findlay 2). The connection between livable new urban spaces and racial and class homogeneity marks the history of the American Western city, beginning well before Findlay's chosen time period of the 1950s; the founders of Los Angeles had it in mind as early as the 1880s, and the population explosion of the 1920s and 30s only exacerbated the competing identities of the city, as the self-styled magic kingdom, but also as a real-life multicultural amalgam of American, Mexican, and other cultures.

The gradual whitening of Los Angeles continued throughout the 20s and 30s as thousands of Midwesterners moved to sunny single-family homes in and around the city, bringing with them their "Aryan" and Puritan values: temperance, religious conversion, and strict social mores (Sánchez 91). Nathanael West satirizes the Midwestern flavor of 1930s Los Angeles in *The Day of the Locust*, in which Homer Simpson is a Midwestern migrant whose gold-digger girlfriend leaves him for Miguel, the heavily stereotyped Mexican cockfighter. The apocalyptic ending of the 1939 novel stages a riot at a movie premiere in which the "lower middle classes" go on a rampage, providing Tod with a perfect experience upon which to base his painting, "The Burning of Los Angeles" (410). He muses that the Midwesterners who move to Los Angeles are not "harmless curiosity seekers," but actually "arrogant and pugnacious" and "savage and bitter" (411). Playing on the Edenic images of California, West paints a vivid picture of the disillusionment that awaits the retirees, who had "slaved at some kind of dull,

heavy labor, behind desks and counters, in the fields and at tedious machines of all sorts, saving their pennies and dreaming of the leisure that would be theirs" (411). All the years of delayed gratification build up to a disappointment of epic proportions, as the migrants move to California but cannot adapt to a life of leisure: "They get tired of oranges, even of avocado pears and passion fruit" (411). The boredom turns the Midwesterners mean, and they begin to feed on violence in the news and movies: "lynchings, murder, sex crimes, explosions, wrecks, love nests, fires, miracles, revolutions, war. […] Nothing can ever be violent enough to make taut their slack minds and bodies" (412). The disillusionment of the retirees and their thirst for sensationalist images are ultimately responsible for the riot, since the crowd originally assembles to try to glimpse the stars attending a movie premiere. West's dark vision of the city centers on the corruptions of Hollywood, but he refuses to make a false distinction between the movie industry and a mythical idyllic Midwest. Indeed, the riot is the result of those people who "come to California to die; the cultists of all sorts, economic as well as religious, the wave, airplane, funeral, and preview watchers—all those poor devils who can only be stirred by the promise of miracles and then only to violence" (420). Unlike Hugo Reid's scapegoating of the Sonoran Mexicans, West ascribes the ugliness of Los Angeles to white Americans, culminating in a violent mob scene.

In 1930, 37 out of every 100 American-born Angelinos were from the Midwest; the majority were from Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Iowa, Nebraska, Missouri, Kansas, Michigan, and Wisconsin (Sánchez 88). Newly transplanted Iowans, for example, established "state societies" that held picnics to help one another adjust to their Los Angeles lives and maintain their Midwestern identities; many midwesterners from other states followed suit (Sánchez 92). As West sarcastically writes, "Did they slave so long just to go to an occasional Iowa picnic?" (411). His character Homer Simpson comes from "a little town near Des Moines, Iowa, called Wayneville, where he had worked for twenty years in a hotel" (286). After a bout with pneumonia, Homer moves to California on the advice of his doctor and rents an inexpensive "Irish" cottage in Pinyon Canyon—the realtor explains that "the people who took cottages in that neighborhood wanted them to be 'Spanish'" rather than Irish, so Homer's rent is low (287). The effect of the waves of Midwestern migrants on the culture of Los Angeles is far-reaching, as Carey McWilliams writes in his landmark 1946 study, "One

could make a book of the Iowa jokes heard in Southern California. […] On meeting in Southern California, strangers were supposed to inquire: 'What part of Iowa are you from?'" (170). But the impact of such a large Midwestern contingent also affected the city's Mexican American communities, usually adversely.

In addition to their religious and cultural differences with the prior population, the influx of American Protestants also intensified the suburbanization of the city: "ruralize the city; urbanize the country" was the motto of the head of city housing as early as 1910 (Sánchez 92). In the process of developing the magic city of Los Angeles into a utopian white middle-class enclave, medical metaphors of sickness and ailing health came into play, as editorials described the poor and non-white neighborhoods in terms of traffic fever, urban blight, and tooth decay whose remedy was removal and thorough antiseptic cleaning (Klein 14). One such campaign led to the construction of the Union Station next to the Placita in 1934, necessitating the demolition of parts of Chinatown and the Mexican American neighborhood. Another 1930s urban "restoration" involved the movement to create an "Old Mexico" tourist area on Olvera Street. As Sánchez describes it, "the restoration was completed at the very moment when thousands of Mexicans were being prodded to repatriate" (226). For Mexican residents, the Union Station project and the Olvera Street development clearly delineated their role in the city: "Mexicans were being assigned a place in the mythic past of Los Angeles—one that could be relegated to a quaint section of the city destined to delight tourists and antiquarians" (Sánchez 226). These projects had mixed results for the Mexican American community: their residential neighborhoods were forced farther from the central downtown area and farther from racially mixed and Anglo neighborhoods, while their culture was commodified for tourists and at the same time ignored and marginalized by white fellow residents of Los Angeles. Like Miguel in *The Day of the Locust*, Mexican Angelenos were minor characters in the story of the city, only acknowledged in the most patronizing and least respectful ways and only when it benefited the white city officials and residents.

"FROM POLAND TO POLO IN ONE GENERATION": MOBILITY NARRATIVES OF THE HOLLYWOOD JEWS

Fitzgerald's Hollywood novel, *The Last Tycoon*, tries to negotiate between anti-Semitic stereotypes and the real Jews who created the Hollywood system. His narrator Celia, daughter of an Irish-American industry executive, describes a minor character, Manny Schwartz, as visibly Hollywood because he looks Jewish and greedy: "a middle-aged Jew" (4), who "stares with shameless economic lechery" at Monroe Stahr (6). Celia further describes Schwartz's appearance more specifically, how his "exaggerated Persian nose and oblique eye-shadow were as congenital as the tip-tilted Irish redness around my father's nostrils" (7). She ascribes his Jewishness to his appearance but she also reads his greed, his "economic lechery," as a Jewish characteristic, playing into the anti-Semitic rhetoric of Jews as not only greedy but also sexually deviant or lecherous. Schwartz's character commits suicide in the childhood home of a former U.S. president, and Celia balks at the connection of the two men: "Manny Schwartz and Andrew Jackson—it was hard to say them in the same sentence" (13). Jackson, symbol of the Gilded Age, might actually be an appropriate figure for a Hollywood executive, but Celia seems reluctant to consider Schwartz a real American: instead she focuses on his immigrant identity, assuming that "he had come a long way from some ghetto to present himself at that raw shrine" (13). Again Schwartz is described in religious terms, as if he has embarked on a pilgrimage to the "raw shrine" of Andrew Jackson. However, as Celia's narrative of Schwartz amply demonstrates, the financial success of an immigrant Jew in Hollywood was no guarantee of acceptance as an American, or even as a member of the middle class. Schwartz represents the first generation of Hollywood Jews, whose foreign accents and mannerisms marked them as outsiders in American culture; their children and successors, the second generation, were much more assimilated and Americanized.

The theory that American Jews, particularly the second generation, are somehow different from European Jews arises in several Hollywood novels, including *The Last Tycoon* and Budd Schulberg's *What Makes Sammy Run?* Both novels attempt to invalidate anti-Semitic stereotypes while at the same time exploring what Schulberg and Fitzgerald imply is a new type of Jew: the Hollywood Jew. In Schulberg's novel, Sammy Glick isn't simply

the ambitious, money-hungry Jew of the anti-Semites, although he can be read according to that stereotype; rather, he is described as a truly Americanized, capitalist Jew, who denies his Jewishness if it will help him get a job. In *The Last Tycoon*, several Jewish characters, including Manny Schwartz, do conform to stereotypes although the protagonist Stahr does not; exposed to this range of Jewish characters, other characters ponder the inflexibility of anti-Semitic stereotypes, wondering if American Jews really are a departure from the stereotypes of European Jews. Both these novels raise the problem of anti-Semitism in the context of the Horatio Alger myth of American Dream: to be a successful American, an immigrant must work hard and save money, but if a Jewish immigrant displays this ambition, it is seen as greed. The challenges both novels present are not only to anti-Semitism but to the contradictions inherent in the American Dream itself. In the 1930s, the Hollywood Jews were uniquely positioned at the intersection of assimilation, financial success, and "Americanness" on the one hand, and the powerful image-making and nation-building industry of the movies on the other. Neal Gabler has shown that the early Hollywood Jews had a "ferocious, even pathological, embrace of America" due in part to their incomplete acceptance as immigrants (4). His study of the "empire" created by the Hollywood Jews explores the paradoxical relation between immigrants and America in the movie business: "that the movies were quintessentially American while the men who made them were not" and that nevertheless "American values came to be *defined* largely by the movies the Jews made" (7). One of Gabler's most convincing examples of this paradox is the "small-town America" series of Andy Hardy films made with Mickey Rooney and Judy Garland, which were the brainchild of Louis B. Mayer, the Russian Jewish immigrant and founder of MGM (215-16). My reading of the 1930s Hollywood novels works through a similar paradox—that the values considered to be definitively American were inextricably linked to the qualities that informed anti-Semitic images of Jews, and that both these sets of values were to a large degree fueled by class anxieties. Interestingly, however, the mobility narratives of the Hollywood Jews in *What Makes Sammy Run?* and *The Last Tycoon* rarely acknowledge the fact that the American Dream they embrace also drives the expansionist imperialism that founded Los Angeles and disenfranchised Native and Mexican Americans in the process, even when one character's class con-

sciousness develops through his association with the embryonic union movement for Hollywood writers.

In Schulberg's novel, Al Manheim struggles with his feelings for Sammy Glick, trying to figure out what makes him run, how he got to be so ambitious and driven. At the root of Al's concerns about Sammy is his own Jewish identity: he wants to differentiate himself from Sammy without falling into anti-Semitic rhetoric, so he finds other differences between them, namely class. Al's initial opinion of Sammy is clearly rooted in class antagonism, based on what he sees as Sammy's residue of working-class immigrant coarseness. He continually judges Sammy in terms of class: he is "cheap" and tasteless, son of European Jews who settled in Rivington Street tenements on New York's Lower East Side, in contrast to Al, who grew up in New England with his middle-class rabbi father. Retreating into class prejudices, Al attempts to explain Sammy's nature as a result of his ghetto childhood, but when Al's involvement with Hollywood labor struggles awakens his class consciousness he realizes that poverty isn't fully responsible for shaping Sammy. He discovers that Sammy is the quintessential modern American businessman, and his Jewishness and his working-class origins are only secondary markers—they don't explain him.

Al, a theater reporter, first meets Sammy when he is an office boy at Al's New York newspaper. He is horrified by Sammy's blind lust for power and wealth, which Al identifies with Sammy's street-urchin manner and "dog eat dog" ethics (75). Al grew up in New England, son of a Reformed rabbi, attended a Methodist college, and doesn't go regularly to temple. His father's kindly middle-class morality and sense of fair-play still influence him, though without specifically religious ramifications. In fact, in an ironic construction, Al refers to his father's character as a "Christ-like gentility" (20). Al is repulsed by Sammy's "cheapness," the way his class origins in the tenements mark him as inferior to more assimilated, middle-class Jews like himself. When Sammy engineers a publicity stunt to get his name in the paper, Al's rhetoric echoes the class-centered discourses of the 1930s: "Don't be cheap. Cheapness is the curse of our times. You're beginning to spread cheapness around like bad toilet water," to which Sammy replies, "Sure it was cheap. […] After all, I got better publicity free than you could have bought for big dough" (22). The word "cheap" has different meanings for the two men from such different class backgrounds: for Sammy, cheap is good—it means affordable, while for Al it means the ugliness of poverty,

tasteless. Indeed, Gabler describes the Hollywood Jews as "aggressively tasteful rather than boorish," and Sammy strives to achieve tastefulness as his career takes off (240).

Soon afterwards Sammy begins to recognize the importance of class-based "taste" that Al tries to teach him and manifests his class mobility through his constantly upgraded shoes, which tie in with the controlling metaphor of the novel, "running," as in the novel's title, *What Makes Sammy Run?*. His class mobility, which he attains by "running" non-stop, making deals, and exploiting everyone he can, is symbolized by his shoes throughout the novel. Sammy tries to change his class identity the way he changes shoes, from the "new pair of $7.50 black flanged shoes" he buys with his first windfall (18), to the trendy Mexican *huaraches* given to him by his first director (37), to the elaborate procedure in his bedroom where a custom fitter measures his feet and suggests making a plaster cast so that his "designers can draw up any style shoe you wish and you're sure of getting a one-hundred-percent perfect fit" (205). By the time Sammy is a studio executive, he buys the most expensive shoes he can find because he believes that they mark him as successful and powerful. He recognizes that his public consumption is a register of his class status, as Al comes to understand witnessing Sammy's outrageous public spending. One night in a chic nightclub, Sammy buys everyone champagne and "blew five hundred bucks at the crap table (and told everyone it was a thousand)" (94). Al is mortified by this gross show of affluence as his companion analyzes Sammy's actions in a sociological perspective: "Kit tried to explain that it wasn't really a loss because a guy called Veblen said we make our reputations by how much money we publicly throw away" (94). Sammy's intuitive understanding of consumerism and class perception keeps him "running" through his money, knowing that earning a reputation as a big spender is as much about social power as it is about mere cash money. Al's middle-class taboos against conspicuous consumption add to his desire to distance himself from Sammy, but Kit pushes him to see Sammy in a wider social context.

In his attempts to distinguish himself from Sammy, Al constantly compares Sammy to other Jews, including himself, trying to find out what makes him run. The comparisons never yield a satisfying answer, however, since Sammy represents the top of the evolutionary pyramid in Al's version of social Darwinism. After witnessing Sammy call an agent in Hollywood

and finagle a reading for a story out of thin air, Al compares himself to Sammy: they are "both columnists, both Jewish, both men, both American citizens" but they live in what Al sees as completely separate worlds (27). Moreover, Al needs to distance himself from Sammy's "dishonesty, officiousness, bullying," because those qualities contradict his idealistic notion of a good American, one who plays fair and succeeds by following the rules. But class distinctions often play into anti-Semitic stereotypes, as second generation Hollywood Jew Betty Lasky illustrates in her description of the older Warner brothers: "They were very animalistic types. I wasn't used to types like that—the ghetto types. […] They were so ugly-looking but so ghetto ugly. […] It was like a child going to a circus and looking at a freak" (qtd. in Gabler 239). Lasky, whose father raised her with a French governess in a completely sheltered aristocratic existence, devises a simile that suggests the specular nature of the relationship: she is the normal "child" at the circus looking at the "freak," who is ostensibly as human as she is, yet so utterly deformed as to be almost unrecognizable, causing her to doubt or deny any kinship. Growing up in relative comfort, far from the tenements, middle- and upper-class Jews like Lasky and Al Manheim are aware of the differences between themselves and "ghetto types" but have difficulty explaining it to themselves except through references to "types" and class.

Al's visit with Sammy's mother and brother in the old neighborhood suggests to Al "the irony of the fascist charge that the Jews have cornered the wealth of America" (179). The traditions of the old Eastern European Jewish communities translated slowly into American market capitalism, and Al associates the traditional Jews with age and obsolescence. Compared to his brother Sammy Glick, Israel Glickstein is another kind of Jewish man, devout, caring, and community-minded, but he also seems to Al "like an aged Jew in prayer. […] like an old, bent man with a young face" (181). Israel has stayed true to the old traditions and works at a settlement house trying to keep the Lower East Side community together. Marking his difference, Al notices that he speaks "without an accent but with the wailing tone and cadence of the Jewish chants" (184). The old-fashioned character of Sammy's family also extends to his mother, who speaks more comfortably in Yiddish than English. Al recounts her ideas about Sammy: "In the old country there may have been Jews who were thieves or tightwads and rich Jews who would not talk to poor ones, but she had never seen one like Sammy" (194). The new American Jew doesn't fit the old defini-

tions—he isn't religious and feels no loyalty to other Jews—but he does subscribe to the American mobility myth that hard work brings success. Al concludes that, in order achieve success in America, ambitious Jews like Sammy reject the traditions that are

> withering away in America, for the customs and the traditions that the Glicksteins brought over at the end of the nineteenth century may have been inherited by Israel, droning in his *yarmolka* at my side, but were thrown overboard as excess baggage by anyone in such a hurry as his younger brother. (184)

Employing the metaphor of the immigrant's ocean voyage, Al describes the modern ambitious Sammy as hurrying, willing to jettison any and all of his culture to speed his success. The geographical metaphor of immigrants on ships represents Sammy's class mobility, which Al sees as his "running" after profit at the expense of those middle-class values Al holds dear: civility, modesty, sensitivity.

Al's reading of Sammy also emerges through his knowledge of poor Jews who fail to succeed—men who share many of the core values Al sees in himself and whose scruples prevent them from attaining the kind of success that Sammy claims for himself. Al compares Sammy to ghost writer Julian Blumberg, who is "just about the same age, […] probably brought up in the same kind of Jewish family, same neighborhood, same schooling, and started out with practically the same job. And yet they couldn't be more different" (96). Julian represents for Al the proof that anti-Semitic stereotypes are untenable: he is one of those "Jews without money, without push, without plots, without any of the characteristics which such experts as Adolph [sic] Hitler, Henry Ford, and Father Coughlin try to tell us are racial traits" (96). There are simply "too many Jewish nebs and poets and starving tailors and everyday little guys, to consider the fascist answer to What Makes Sammy Run?" (96). But when Al can't explain Sammy the individual simply by his Jewish identity or his ghetto roots, he turns to sociological explanations.

By the end of the novel Al decides that Sammy is only the logical result of the American capitalist system that fosters ghettoes like Rivington Street, which are "allowed to pile up in cities like gigantic dung heaps smelling up the world, ambitions growing out of filth and crawling away

like worms" (203). Sammy isn't an anomaly, he's the natural product of the competitive market:

> I realized that I had singled him out not because he had been born into the world any more selfish, ruthless and cruel than anybody else, even though he had become all three, but because in the midst of a war that was selfish, ruthless and cruel Sammy was proving himself the fittest, the fiercest and the fastest. (203)

Al recognizes that Sammy isn't Sammy just because he was born a poor Jew—his brother is nothing like him although from the same family. He rules out Hollywood as a bad influence, since Julian works for the studios, too, and still has a conscience. Finally, Al attributes Sammy's ruthless "running" to the values at the root of American free enterprise. The notion that the harder you work the more successful you will be has become in Sammy a pathology that has blocked his abilities to experience what Al sees as "human" existence—love, happiness, generosity—in any terms other than profit-oriented. As this realization dawns on him, Al remarks that he "could almost hear the motor in [Sammy] beginning to pick up speed again" (246). Sammy's "running" carries him up the ladder in the studios to executive status, but ultimately, for Al, this "running" forms a "blueprint of a way of life that was paying dividends in America in the first half of the twentieth century" (247). As Sammy points out to Al, "going through life with a conscience is like driving your car with the brakes on," whereas Sammy chooses to go at top speed (55). The metaphor here operates not only as a representation of class mobility, but as a particularly modern American kind of movement: driving a car. Sammy's mad dash to success isn't described only in terms of shoes and running, but also in terms of driving fast: upward mobility is linked here with that quintessentially American status symbol, the automobile.

In the history of the Hollywood studios, Louis B. Mayer represents one mobility narrative in which a young immigrant strives to become "American," which he takes to mean middle- or upper-class and successful. As Gabler points out, Mayer provided through his movies, such as Andy Hardy, "reassurance against the anxieties and disruptions" of the 1930s—reassurance he knew was needed because he himself felt its need (119). Mayer's fantasy of America came from his own need to join, as an upwardly mobile Jewish immigrant, the comfortable middle classes that kept Jews

from joining their country clubs and schools. His desire to belong, finally, to American society was the driving force behind his studio's success. In fact, according to Gabler, a "native born, white, Anglo-Saxon, Protestant" American couldn't have accomplished what Mayer did: to invent MGM's picture of America, "one would have needed the same desperate longing for security that Mayer and so many of the other Hollywood Jews felt" and few native-born Protestant Americans could feel, as Mayer did, "so fearful of being outside and alone that one would go to any lengths to fabricate America as a sanctuary, safe and secure, and then promulgate this idealization to other Americans" (119). In other words, the urge to assimilate gave Mayer the motivation to model an on-screen nation, which came to influence how Americans imagined their country.

His cultivation of American-ness suffused his private life as well, and Mayer took up horseback riding and betting on races as part of his new aristocratic American persona. He was "one of the most successful racehorse owners in the country," which Gabler points out was one more arena in which he learned to circumvent anti-Semitism: he and a group of other Jewish movie executives built their own track after Santa Anita refused them (265). Listening to Hollywood moguls, clearly patterned after Mayer, talking about race horses, Fitzgerald's executive Monroe Stahr muses to himself that the Jews in Hollywood differ from European Jews of the past: "for years it had been the Cossacks mounted and the Jews on foot. Now the Jews had horses, and it gave them a sense of extraordinary well-being and power" (74). Stahr describes the reversal literally, in which Jews own horses, but also the metaphoric shift in which Jews now have power in the form of cultural and financial capital. To attain that capital, the Hollywood Jews had to establish their own institutions because they were excluded from existing middle- and upper-class social and economic structures: their own country club, their own race track, their own schools, and as Gabler's title indicates, their own movie empire and their own screen version of America. Becoming American meant more than living in the United States—it also meant making money and participating in prestigious social events.

Because of anti-Semitic American conventions, upward class mobility for the Hollywood Jews didn't always translate into social status, although class identity was extremely important. Leaving behind the taint of the ghetto was crucial for the first generation of Hollywood Jews in the 1920s, and the second generation is often described as more effortlessly assimilat-

ed and Americanized: as Gabler extrapolates, "who needed the suit cutters, junkmen, and bouncers when they could have bright assimilated Jews like Thalberg" (230). But even that first generation of movie executives, including Mayer, saw themselves as more American than their fathers, most of whom were adult immigrants while their children grew up in the United States. The narrative of progressive Americanization from one generation to the next only amplifies how distant "true American-ness" really was for the Hollywood Jews, who hoped that their children would "give the lie to the anti-Semitic stereotype of the Eastern European Jew" by appearing cultured and tasteful, embodiments of the "new Hollywood Jew" (Gabler 241). The second generation were better able to assimilate into American society, but often with the class biases and internalized anti-Semitism of Al Manheim and Betty Lasky, who associate certain mannerisms and physical characteristics with poverty and "ghetto Jews." Becoming American also meant becoming middle-class; mobility means leaving something or someplace behind, as Sammy Glick throws his Jewish baggage overboard in Al's metaphor.

Los Angeles offered the Hollywood Jews a perfect place to become American: the relatively young city, still resembling a frontier town at the turn of the twentieth century, housed the even younger movie industry, which yielded the enormous growth and subsequent profits to allow the immigrant founders to propel their children and successors into wealthy and assimilated American society. The presence of more physically marked "others" in the form of Mexican Americans doubtless also contributed to the relative ease with which the Hollywood Jews joined the mainstream of American culture: reforming or giving up their religious practices, subscribing to conservative and "patriotic" social and political values, and educating the American in what it really means to be American. Unlike Mexican Americans, whose cultural links to Mexico were more immediate and harder to refute, both because of geography and physical appearances, the Hollywood Jews were able to "pass" for, and gradually become, American on their journey across national, social, and economic boundaries.

WHITE PEOPLE IN CARS: DRIVING AMBITION, AVENUES OF SUCCESS, AND DEAD ENDS

In many texts of the time, the city planning as well as the interior decoration of Los Angeles represented the new American city. As the city grew in the 1930s, the single family bungalows and wide clean suburban streets in strictly segregated neighborhoods were held up by realtors as a pleasant alternative to the crowded, dirty, immigrant-populated cities of the East Coast. Presented as a new modern city, Los Angeles was both more ordered and, to many, more restrictive: during a sightseeing drive around town, Celia, a rich producer's daughter in *The Last Tycoon*, calls it "a perfectly zoned city, so you know exactly what kind of people economically live in each section, from executives and directors, through technicians in their bungalows, right down to extras" (Fitzgerald 70). As the daughter of a producer, she grew up with an insider's awareness of studio power relations that she could read directly onto the city's built environment. Like Celia, Carey McWilliams documents the "rigidly stratified community" of the motion picture industry as it can be mapped onto the city: in the actual neighborhood of Hollywood "live the hangers-on of the industry; its carpenters, painters, and machinists; its hordes of extras," while "the elite live outside Hollywood in Beverly Hills, Brentwood, Bel-Air, Santa Monica, the Hollywood Hills, and San Fernando Valley" (334-35). In the racially segregated city, class further divided neighborhoods. A study of city housing in 1940 illustrates the segregation facing African Americans: while prosperous children of European immigrants could move to better neighborhoods, upwardly mobile blacks were simply not allowed to buy houses in "white" middle-class neighborhoods (Marchand 82). Instead, affluent African Americans lived in isolated areas separate both from the white middle class and from the black working class.

In ever-present details such as the iron spears, galleons, and the Spanish bungalow, Hollywood in the 1930s and early 40s created images and stories that attempt to make sense of the history of the western U.S. and of Los Angeles's pasts in ways that can be recuperated into an American racial and geographic home. Hollywood novels and films incorporated national and social concerns about race, class, and mobility into the cultural imaginary, participating in the construction of American identities while occasionally also questioning them. Segregation in Hollywood wasn't limited to hous-

ing, however; in the film studio on- and off-screen jobs were subject to the same hierarchies as the city's residential neighborhoods. As white middle class writers flocked to the studio screenwriting jobs paying $75 a week, working-class women, many of them immigrants, competed for the lowest paid jobs on the lots: secretaries, film lab workers, and costumers earning $18 a week (Nielsen 175). The division of labor in costuming jobs for women was also racially hierarchized: white women worked as cutters and fitters, while the most difficult jobs, such as beading dresses, belonged to Mexican American women (Nielsen 166-68). African American women weren't allowed to work in costuming at all in the 40s, as seamstress Grace January's experience at Paramount proves: "she quit after a week because they would either not give her any work at all or just give her dirty work to do" (Nielsen 168). The fleeting glimpses of African American and Asian American servants and workers in films and the paucity of starring roles for actors of color remind us that while white women were beginning to enjoy increasing mobility and visibility outside their traditional domestic roles, people of color and poor whites were needed to step into those roles. Along with the sought-after socio-economic mobility for white Americans came the symbols of wealth, which often translated onscreen into an Asian houseboy or African American maid, and of course, giant, streamlined, fast automobiles.

Selling relatively large homes and tracts of land to single families encouraged the low urban density that was new even to a country famous for its wide open spaces and bolstered the already increasing reliance on the automobile that marked the first three decades of this century (Marchand 117). The increased personal space afforded by a single family home also made owning a car necessary, as it placed more distance between families and increased the distances between residential and business areas. Even in the 30s traffic was daunting for inhabitants of the "rich ghettoes" far removed from the business centers: Fitzgerald's tycoon, Monroe Stahr, often slept in his office suite at the film studio to avoid the daily drive across "the immense distances of Los Angeles County—three hours a day in an automobile [was] not exceptional" (146). For the working and middle classes, for whom sleeping at work was not an option, owning a car was a needed guarantee of mobility, an assurance that they could get to work on time.

The automobile in American culture in the early twentieth century represented all things modern, innovative, and above all, mobile. A car con-

veyed a person's consumer status and her endless personal mobility, allowing her to work, live, and shop in areas of town separated by vast distances while also allowing her to avoid parts of town (and the people who lived there) that were undesirable. Peter Ling argues that, in the 1920s, "Americans rejected mass transit in favor of the private motor vehicle" because of a complex confluence of factors, including the desire for single family housing, urban decentralization, corruption in transit companies, and the desire for individual isolation due in part to racial and class hostilities (90). According to Ling, the main attractions of automobility were its efficiency as a "delivery system" that moves workers and consumers to more distant markets and as a "social insulator" for the inhabitants of the diverse, rapidly growing populations in sprawling cities such as Los Angeles (90). For example, the growing white Midwestern population of Los Angeles associated "mass transit with the lower castes," a prejudice that was reinforced by "the practice of the Pacific Electric of housing its Mexican track workers in labour camps along the tracks in suburban districts" (Ling 88). The automobile in Los Angeles gained primacy at the same moment when the public transit system—streetcars and Interurban Railway—was dismantled: mass transit declined steadily after the mid-1920s, while the proposal for the first freeway came in 1937 (Kay 214). During the Depression, the notion of enhanced individual mobility also resonates in terms of socio-economic class: taking control of one's own direction, leaving behind the crowds, the isolated automobile driver resembled an American pioneer, a rugged individualist who is faster, more prosperous, and more independent than the streetcar riders.

The streamlined Art Deco styles that automobile manufacturers marketed as "aerodynamic," a word that likens their cars to aircraft, became the marker of modernity for those who could afford it. In the Depression, streamlining connoted "technological progress as such and the program to engineer recovery by the rational application of science and technology to industry" (Gartman 102). Faith in modern technology and speed, embodied by the new sleek cars, allowed consumers to focus more on superficial appearances than on underlying problems: the "spectacular unity, continuity, and cleanliness of streamlined forms kept consumers thoughtlessly dazzled and diverted from the Depression's historical realities of economic stagnation and class conflict" (Gartman 103). The scientific rationale behind streamlining was specious, too, since the wind resistance was only signifi-

cantly reduced at very high speeds and the smaller windshield and more pronounced curves actually reduced visibility. Rather, the increased aestheticization of the automobile reified it, since the streamlining "kept the eye moving and prevented the concentration of thought on signs that testified to the fragmented process of production" (Gartman 127). During the 1930s, Americans loved to imagine themselves behind the wheel of a new streamlined car, even if it is bought on the installment plan, speeding along the highway, and no city was more automobile-friendly than Los Angeles.

At the same time as its modernity beckoned, Los Angeles also appealed to the American fascination with the West as the nation's frontier, its manifest destiny. When heavy industry began to lay off workers in the North and East, the so-called "postindustrial" landscape of California promised a different kind of economy, the pinnacle of which was "the movies" and stardom. Hollywood represented wildly divergent national fantasies: a modern utopia with orange trees and movie stars, but also an amoral frontier boom town. As Richard Lehan points out, Los Angeles is "the last major city to grow out of the idea of the West" while at the same time it is "the first city in the western world to take its dimensions from the automobile" (30). During the Depression, film audiences experienced Hollywood as the source of the movies and as a signifier of easy money, second chances, and a happy, prosperous white America. Going west to Los Angeles retained traces of the nineteenth-century imperative to young men seeking their fortunes, although instead of gold and the open frontier, wealth resided in the burgeoning movie industry.

The 1920s and 30s saw nationwide road improvement campaigns as the number of car-owners increased—in Los Angeles the numbers increased forty-fold to 800,000 in 1930 (Marchand 117)—and "roads replaced train tracks as the nation's circulatory system and in its metaphoric vocabulary" (Marling 58). In the Los Angeles novels of the 30s and early 40s, driving takes up a larger proportion of the action than in novels set in other cities or regions. In Fitzgerald's *The Last Tycoon*, Monroe Stahr meets his date Kathleen in a parking lot. They drive to Santa Monica, stop at a roadside restaurant but don't go in because its parking lot looks "forbidding with many Sunday drivers" (81), drive on to dine in a drug store, then back to her house, where Stahr says "let's jump in the car and drive somewhere" (86). After the awkwardness of trying to say good-bye at her door, Kathleen seizes the offer:

she caught at the exact phrasing—to get away from here immediately, that was accomplishment or sounded like it—as if she were fleeing from the spot of a crime. Then they were in the car, going downhill with the breeze cool in their faces, and she came slowly to herself. (86)

Only through constant movement, driving around the city, can the characters in the Hollywood novels find a sense of self. Often the female characters enjoy particular pleasure in cars, as does Mildred Pierce in James M. Cain's novel of that name. For her, the car also symbolizes freedom from her marriage and a new-found self-determination. Mildred wrangles the car away from her estranged husband and drives it home, speeding down Colorado Avenue: "the car was pumping something into her veins, something of pride, of arrogance, of regained self-respect, that no talk, no liquor, no love, could possibly give" (164). The power to drive fast, to escape a bad situation, to control the direction of her life, makes the automobile a potent symbol of freedom for women in these novels.

The automobile plays a lead role in the relatively new genre of detective fiction, much of it made into films, particularly that of Raymond Chandler. In the first Philip Marlowe novel, *The Big Sleep*, published in 1939, Chandler portrays the Los Angeles cityscape as a series of urban avenues and quiet canyon roadways, with the lone private eye on the prowl and on the stake out in his car as he works on the Sternwood case. The *noir* city of *The Big Sleep*, in the novel and the later film, is embodied by the rich oil-baron Sternwood family as decadent, immoral, and corrupt, from the frail patriarch in the wheelchair to the two sleazy sisters who love to gamble, drink, and use drugs. The image of the solitary tough guy driving around Los Angeles easily translated onto the movie screen in the 1946 film of Chandler's novel, with Humphrey Bogart cruising the murky *noir* city making an indelible visual and metaphorical impact on the American imagination. Marlowe exemplifies the individualist who cannot survive without a car of his own: we can't picture him on the streetcar. The car chases and get-aways so vital to the hard-boiled detective novel and the *film noir* thriller depend on the private automobile, as do many of the distinctive visual images and descriptions: "rain drummed hard on the roof of the car and the burbank top began to leak. A pool of water formed on the floorboards for me to keep my feet in" (19), "six more bright lights bobbed through the driving rain" (20), "the filaments of its [head]lights glowed dimly and died" (20), "the car was

dark, empty, warm" (121), "silent, rain-polished streets" (125). Marlowe lives his life in the car, kissing women, kidnapping criminals, tailing suspects, and meeting informants in automobiles.

In a telling section of *The Big Sleep*, Marlowe meets a woman informant, Agnes, who leaves town immediately after their meeting. The meeting takes place in her car, a gray Plymouth, after which Marlowe gets out and she drives away; the narration exemplifies both Marlowe's misogyny and the central role of the automobile in the novel. Agnes opens the chapter with her demand, "Give me the money," and after he hands her the bills she "bent over to count them in the dim light of the dash" (109). Marlowe describes the sounds that punctuate the conversation in the car: "[t]he motor of the gray Plymouth throbbed under her voice and the rain pounded above it" as she tells him the crucial information he needs to crack the case (109). The sensory experience of sitting in the car in the rain, with the "dim light of the dash," typifies the feeling of transitory and mobile Los Angeles existence in the novel as a whole. Agnes recalls going Sunday driving on Foothill Boulevard with her boyfriend and spotting Marlowe's missing person in a car—"a brown coupe"—as they passed it (109). They followed the car to a "small garage and paintshop", a "[h]ot car drop, likely," where the missing woman was being held (110). Marlowe waits until Agnes finishes and then "listen[s] to the swish of tires on Wilshire" (110). After the meeting he returns to his own car and watches as "the gray Plymouth moved forward, gathered speed, and darted around the corner on to Sunset Place. The sound of its motor died, and with it blonde Agnes wiped herself off the slate for good" (110). He tallies the situation so far: "Three men dead, Geiger, Brody and Harry Jones, and the woman went riding off in the rain with my two hundred in her bag and not a mark on her. I kicked my starter and drove on downtown to eat" (110). Every detail in this brief but important section depends on the primacy of the car in Los Angeles culture: the transience and intimacy of a clandestine meeting in a car in the rain, the coincidental spotting of a missing woman on a Sunday drive, the secluded hideout as a garage, and the understated lyricism of Chandler's urban setting punctuated by the "swish of tires" and the throbbing motor of Agnes's Plymouth. Agnes, like Mildred Pierce, has her car and her freedom as she drives off down a Los Angeles street; indeed, Marlowe resents her freedom in light of the carnage he has seen so far investigating the case, and perhaps also his reliance on her for this important information.

Often, however, driving around never really leads anywhere, as many characters in Los Angeles novels discover. David Fine points out how important driving is, particularly in the 1930s novels of James M. Cain: "the fast-moving car fosters both a sense of power and control over one's destiny and, at the same time, a feeling of separation or insulation from the influence of others and a constraining social environment" ("Beginning" 50). Fine describes the ways in which Cain's protagonists, from Mildred Pierce to Walter in *Double Indemnity* to Nick and Cora of *The Postman Always Rings Twice*, live and die in the roadside restaurants and on the highways around Los Angeles. In their struggles for financial security and true love, these characters play out their lives against the unique landscape of Southern California, "foothill, canyon, shoreline, desert," which "provided regional novelists with ready-made images for fluidity, mobility, and a deceptive sense of freedom" (Fine "Beginning" 51). Speeding across the landscape, Cain's characters seek more than geographic mobility—driving their cars they can imagine what freedom feels like, whether freedom from a spouse, the police, poverty, or just their mundane lives.

During the Depression and into the 1940s pleasure driving was a cheap form of entertainment that involved sightseeing and stopping at restaurants and service stations along the highways. The American Dream of setting up a successful business out of a minimal investment and lots of hard work was easily translated into highway economics: in Robert Sherwood's 1935 play *The Petrified Forest* and Cain's 1934 novel *The Postman Always Rings Twice* the survival of the restaurants depend on their locations along highways and the drivers who stop in for snacks, coffee, and a tank of gasoline. In the Michael Curtiz film of Cain's *Mildred Pierce*, Mildred chooses a building on a busy intersection to start her restaurant, which will give her family an economic boost into middle class. Selling the idea to her friend Wally, she exclaims, "it's good for drive-in trade—I clocked 500 cars in an hour!" Mildred's restaurant idea blossoms into a booming chain of drive-in restaurants, each with its own parking lot and located near busy intersections; she offers home cooking to hungry motorists and commuters who haven't the time or energy to cook at home, a precursor to the fast-food industry. The high traffic represents a potentially lucrative restaurant market to Mildred Pierce, but her own car is a symbol of more than customers—the automobile represents the social mobility that she desires for herself and her daughter.

Her daughter Veda, however, isn't happy with a roadside pedigree no matter how many middle-class trappings it buys her: "You think that just because you made a little money you can get a new hairdo and some expensive clothes and turn yourself into a lady. But you can't because you'll never be anything but a common frump whose father lived over a grocery store and whose mother took in washing." Even Mildred's overcompensation in gifts isn't enough for the voracious Veda: when she spends too much on a dress for Veda, she tosses it away scornfully, saying she "wouldn't be seen dead in such a rag." When she gives Veda a posh Buick convertible for her birthday, Veda grabs the keys and speeds away from her mother as fast as she can. The filial relationship between Mildred and Veda prompts Mildred's employee and confidante, Ida, to remark, "Personally, Veda has convinced me that alligators have the right idea. They eat their young."

Mildred's ambitions have influenced Veda to the point that she interprets the world only in terms of class; unlike her mother, who has experienced the hard work of upward mobility and respects working people, Veda is a snob. When her younger sister Kay behaves like a tomboy, Veda tells her, "You act like a peasant." Describing her father's girlfriend, Veda sneers, "she's distinctly middle class." But Veda's most powerful rejection of her mother's class origins comes in the angry outburst when she shouts her intentions to leave home at the horrified Mildred:

> I can get away from you! From you and your chickens and your pies and your kitchens and everything that smells of grease! I can get away from this shack with its cheap furniture and this town and its dollar days and its women that wear uniforms and men that wear overalls! […] You think that just because you made a little money you can get a new hairdo and some expensive clothes and turn yourself into a lady. But you can't because you'll never be anything but a common frump whose father lived over a grocery store and whose mother took in washing.

Veda condemns her mother's restaurants—chickens, pies, and kitchens—and her attempts to look the part of the successful businesswoman. The kind of upward mobility Mildred works so hard for on the busy intersection is debased currency to Veda, who becomes a perverse embodiment of her mother's social and economic class ambitions. Like the second generation of the Hollywood Jews, she has absorbed the values of the middle- and up-

per-class world that her mother worked for, only to then reject her mother's poor origins and lack of "taste."

For the upwardly mobile businesswoman in Cain's (and Curtiz's) *Mildred Pierce*, Los Angeles is the setting for social and economic progress from a dreary lower middle-class existence to fabulous wealth, but at a personal cost of both Mildred's daughters—Kay dies while she is at rich Monty Beragon's beach house and Veda is banished for her affair with her stepfather, Monty (in the film, Veda goes to prison for murdering Monty when he refuses to marry her). The novel ends with Mildred back together with first husband Bert, who says of Veda, "to hell with her. […] let's get stinko!" (366). Similarly, if not as sordidly, film ends with a beautiful sunny day, as Mildred and Bert leave the police station together, walking past a pair of scrubwomen and into the glaring California sunshine. All of Mildred's tearing around town in her automobile, enjoying her freedom and business successes, only served to land her right back with her first husband, safe and secure with a hard-working man.

As so many of the Los Angeles novels attest, upward mobility is attainable for whites with ambition, such as Mildred Pierce, and for immigrants who can shed their "foreign" cultural identities, such as the Hollywood Jews. The prosperous careers of Mildred and Sammy have their high costs, but by the superficial standards of wealth and power, they are completely successful. Upward mobility for countless other Angelenos was not so accessible: the Midwesterners of West's dystopia in *The Day of the Locust* and the lost souls and two-bit crooks of Chandler's *The Big Sleep* exemplify the wrong turns and dead ends that await many of the white Americans who sought the American Dream in Los Angeles. The magic city has predicated its image on the utopian Western metropolis, attempting to elide the history of Native and Mexican Americans who founded and settled the town and who still live on the margins of the Los Angeles novels such as West's, in the form of caricatures and parodies that reinforce the sense that they don't belong. The symbols of mobility that permeate the Los Angeles novels of the 1930s signal the elisions that cannot be completely successful: the "Spanish style" and the automobile are potent symbols of Los Angeles and they contain the traces of histories with which the magic city's imaginary origin stories are continually at odds.

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