

Introduction: American Mobilities

Is it conceivable that the exercise of hegemony might leave space untouched? Could space be nothing more than the passive locus of social relations, the milieu in which their combination takes on body, or the aggregate of the procedures employed in their removal? The answer must be no.

HENRI LEFEBVRE/*THE PRODUCTION OF SPACE*

According to the ideology of separate spheres, domesticity can be viewed as an anchor, a feminine counterforce to the male activity of territorial conquest. I argue, to the contrary, that domesticity is more mobile and less stabilizing; it travels in contradictory circuits both to expand and contract the boundaries of home and nation and to produce shifting conceptions of the foreign.

AMY KAPLAN/*"MANIFEST DOMESTICITY"*

Mobility has been a key feature in American culture from the settlement of the original colonies to the nation's expansion toward new territories. Even after the closing of the frontier in 1890, Eastern populations continued to spread westward in search of property and prosperity. The allure of available land and natural resources drew Americans to all corners of the country

hoping to establish a better life for themselves and their families. Through the turn of the century, the urbanization that accompanied industrialization continued to draw rural populations until, by the prosperous 1920s, more Americans lived in the city than in the country. During the 1920s, cities in the western states swelled, particularly in California, as middle-class white Americans scrambled to escape what had become known as the (racialized) nightmares of urban life: immigration, overcrowding, pollution, disease, and crime. But the 1920s were also a time of economic warning signals: agricultural industries were already depressed and while stock prices were inflated, real wages were stagnant. The progress of America was slowing down.

After the crash of 1929, the Depression forced a phenomenon I call “negative mobility” into the national imagination. In the 1930s, geographic mobility could no longer be equated with nation-building progress; rather, the migration, displacement, and homelessness of millions of unemployed Americans during the Depression constituted a real threat to the nation itself. Instead of signifying upward social mobility, geographic movements during the Depression resulted from involuntary relocation in search of work, food, and shelter.¹ Up to this point in American history, westward movement had always implied progress, development, and opportunity, and thus been linked ideologically with upward class mobility. However, during the 1930s and in the two subsequent decades, the United States underwent a reconfiguration of space that touched every facet of daily life and cultural production. The Great Depression was the first time in American history when massive migrations resulted not from the push of expansion, urbanization, or immigration, but out of economic crisis—negative mobility pre-occupied the nation. The Depression forced thousands of Americans to leave their homes because of downward class mobility, not in search of land ownership but because they could no longer afford rent or mortgage payments. Territorial expansion—moving west, homesteading, and build-

1 Some statistics may give a sense of scale: in 1933, almost half of all home mortgages were in default, resulting in a thousand foreclosures every day (Hobsbawm 100-103). That year 40 million men, women, and children nationwide lived without a dependable source of income and 10 percent of the white population lived on relief, compared to 18 percent of African Americans (Taka-ki 367).

ing railroads—was replaced in the national imagination with this new kind of negative mobility motivated by economic survival and represented in ways that illustrate the reinterpretations of domesticity generated by the Depression.

Representations of homelessness in the form of Hoovervilles, Okies, and hoboes began to appear in the public culture as Americans grappled with the increasingly difficult daily struggles for basic human requirements. A 1934 reportage piece in *American Mercury*, Meridel Le Sueur's "Women Are Hungry," portrays the particular and often unnoticed suffering of women from all stations of life—teacher, farm girl, and old and young mothers.² The last section, entitled "Moon Bums," describes two teenage "girl bums" the writer interviewed as they waited to hop a freight south for the winter: "Fran and Ethel stood with their bundles. They looked like twigs as the light from the engine swathed over them. They looked like nothing" (157). The women tell her about one of their recent domestic situations: "Last winter they had lived in dry goods boxes outside of Chicago with two fellows who were carpenters and made the shacks, and the girls did the cooking and the fellows did the foraging" (155-56). Fran and Ethel recount a grotesque imitation of domesticity, as unmarried homeless men and women live in marginally private, improvised outdoor houses acting out their traditional gender roles, the women explain, because "a man isn't picked up in the city like a girl is. A girl is always considered a moral culprit when she begs in the city, and she is sterilized or sent away to a farm or a home which she hates" (156). Their ironic re-enactment of traditional domestic roles was short-lived, obviously, because they were again hopping a train for another winter home, but Le Sueur's reportage stresses many of the elements of negative mobility that this book will explore at length in its chapters: the ways the domestic private sphere is crowded into the public during the 30s through the phenomenon of negative social and geographic mobility, and the lingering effects of these sociospatial disruptions on the next two decades.

2 The piece is also remarkable in its attention to the formerly middle-class teacher with a Ph.D. in a light spring suit, whose sense of personal shame for her poverty prevents her from seeking relief until her despair and advanced stages of starvation provoke her suicide.

World War II brought a different kind of mobility to the home front: enormous economic expansion and geographic movement toward the centers of the war industry. According to the Census Bureau report in 1945, at least 15.3 million people had moved to a different county since the bombing of Pearl Harbor in 1941 (Chafe 10). Unlike the Depression, when masses of people were evicted or forced to leave home due to poverty, the war brought the promise of high-paying jobs and millions of Americans were willing to relocate.³ People were earning and spending more: between 1939 and 1944, salaries and wages more than doubled, nightclub income rose 35 percent, and racetrack betting in New York in 1944 climbed to a daily average of \$2.2 million (Chafe 9-10). The war pulled white women and African Americans into jobs that had formerly belonged exclusively to white men, who were now fighting the foreign war. Patriotism and higher wages motivated many women to leave their jobs for the defense plants—over half the working women in Mobile, Alabama, for example, changed to war work, which paid an average of 40 percent higher wages (Chafe 13). Although women in manufacturing in 1945 still only earned 65 percent of their male co-workers, that was much more than their previous jobs in stenography, laundry, and waitressing paid (Chafe 15).

The booming economy gave new hope to the African American unemployed and working poor, who had suffered worst during the Depression. Migrants from the South poured into American cities to work in the war industries: over half a million African Americans left the South in search of defense jobs, and in Los Angeles the black population increased from 75,000 in 1940 to 135,000 in 1945 (Takaki 398). World War II brought opportunities for geographic and socio-economic mobility to the nation on the heels of its worst economic crisis, and over 400,000 African American women left domestic employment for war industry jobs (Chafe 18). The new earning power and geographic mobility did not resolve the social restrictions that limited African Americans' participation in American life, but as historian William Chafe argues, "war had provided a forge within

3 The 1940s brought terror and ruin to the 100,000 Japanese Americans who lost their homes and jobs when forced to relocate to internment camps. An expansion of this study would take up the negative mobility narratives of internment as an important corollary to the limited but significant gains made by women and African Americans during the war.

which anger and outrage, long suppressed, were seeking new expression” (21). Race riots in Detroit and Harlem increased black protest nationwide and forced government officials to acknowledge that segregation was a problem, although the Office of War Information claimed that nothing could be done about it until after the war (Chafe 22). As the NAACP’s Walter White pointed out, “World War II has immeasurably magnified the Negro’s awareness of the disparity between the American profession and practice of democracy” (qtd. in Chafe 29).

Women, too, were reluctant to give up their wartime jobs to return to their homes or previous lower-paying positions: 75 percent wanted to continue working rather than succumb to the negative mobility that a return to the domestic sphere would constitute for them (Chafe 28). But the end of the war brought a campaign to return women to the private sphere, arguing that the 11 million returning veterans needed their jobs. The fear of economic collapse due to the reduction or elimination of defense industry jobs put many in mind of the recent horrors of the Depression: “As *Fortune* magazine commented, ‘the American soldier is depression conscious [...] worried sick about post-war joblessness’” (qtd. in Chafe 29). The fear of another Depression in the minds of postwar Americans, combined with the hope for peace and prosperity in the aftermath of the war, created a strange national climate of consumerism, conservatism, and conformity—the 1950s. In a way that wasn’t possible in the tumultuous 30s and 40s, America focused on the home as the quintessential figure for the nation: the safety of the American family home represented the security of the nation in the postwar era, even as the national defense industries geared up for the Cold War arms race.

The strong focus on the home had material effects on the postwar economy, as well as representations of the nation. Prosperity in the 1950s resulted in a massive housing boom—13 million new homes were built—and the emergence of the new professional managerial class (Chafe 117). In the years between 1947 and 1957, the number of salaried middle-class workers rose 61 percent (Chafe 115). Families were growing faster than ever, as the rate of population growth during the Baby Boom (1946-64) more than doubled the growth of the 1930s, equaling the growth rate of India (Chafe 123). Not only were middle-class families growing in size and income, they were also becoming the preferred symbol of the nation, in both international and domestic contexts; the renewed interest in the domestic private sphere dur-

ing the 50s paralleled the escalating tensions of the Cold War. In her study of family life in the 1950s, Elaine Tyler May argues that “locating the family within the larger political culture, not outside it [...] illuminates both the cold war ideology and the domestic revival as two sides of the same coin: postwar Americans’ intense need to feel liberated from the past and secure in the future” (10). People’s memories of the previous two decades fostered this powerful longing for security, and I argue that the Great Depression as well as World War II exerted strong influences on the postwar sense of home. Rather than reading the 50s as a convenient midpoint of the century, the beginning of the “postwar” period, I suggest that we look at the ways in which the 50s are historically and culturally continuous with, and in part constituted by, the 30s and 40s.

The subject of this book is to trace the way representations of mobility produced and circulated during the Depression, World War II, and the Cold War connect the private sphere—the family, the home—and the public sphere—work, war, government. The negative mobility of the Depression eliminated the possibility for a private sphere for many Americans, who literally lost their homes and livelihoods. Geographic migrations during the 1930s were motivated by desperation: eviction, starvation, and unemployment. Effectively marking the end of negative mobility on such a scale, World War II moved still more Americans out of their homes, this time towards upward economic mobility, as millions moved to work defense jobs and women were hired in war work. 1940s Americans were still worried about poverty, but they benefited from the continued economic expansion even into the 1950s as income and consumer spending continued to increase. The Depression forced Americans in subsequent decades to rethink the assumption that geographic mobility was the key to the class mobility and private security they desired.

American Mobilities focuses on a pivotal point in the century when Americans realized that mobility—of capital and of labor—could have its disadvantages—instability, vulnerability—which would in later decades again become apparent. Mobility is a crucial element in all of these changes in social space: people, jobs, and capital moved from East to West, from rural to urban to suburban, and between private and public spheres during the 1930s, 40s, and 50s. A historical perspective that includes pre-war, war-time, and postwar periods together helps us to better understand the origins of contemporary representations of mobility: uneven transnational flows of

capital and labor, racialized appeals to anti-immigration and anti-affirmative action laws, and the breakdown of the nation-state in the wake of the dissolution of the Soviet Union. In the new millennium, questions of mobility prove to be an important thread that runs through the twentieth century from the desperation of the Depression through the prosperous years of economic and international expansion and back into global financial crisis. Historian Eric Hobsbawm observes economic and ideological continuities between the Depression and postmodern eras:

Those of us who lived through the years of the Great Slump still find it almost impossible to understand how the orthodoxies of the pure free market, then so obviously discredited, once again came to preside over a global period of depression in the late 1980s and 1990s, which, once again, they were equally unable to understand or to deal with. (103)

This comparison also drives an essay by Fredric Jameson that suggests that late 20th-century finance capital can be productively read in terms of the 1930s:

What is wanted is an account of abstraction in which the new deterritorialized postmodern contents are to an older modernist autonomization as global financial speculation is to an older kind of banking and credit, or as the stock market frenzies of the eighties are to the Great Depression. (261)

These parallels point to the need for books like the present one, that encourage us to consider the role of the Depression, as well as World War II and the Cold War in the twentieth-century United States.

How did the reconfigurations of space that took place in the United States during these three decades affect people's lives and identities as they are represented in cultural texts? How do American cultural texts from the first half of the twentieth century represent forms of social and geographic mobility? What does the recurring motif of geographic movement signify in terms of the shifts between public and private spheres in the context of the national crises of the 30s, 40s, and 50s—Depression, World War, and Cold War? These questions inform my study of the representations of social and geographic mobility in this period. As I attempt to answer these questions, the methodologies of literary study are my most important paradigm: close

reading of language, attention to narrative structures, and above all an interest in representation. These approaches alone could not take me where I want to go, however, since my questions reach into other fields of knowledge: history, geography, and cultural studies. Delving into history becomes indispensable when some of the texts most crucial to my inquiry have been largely neglected by historians and literary critics; if there is little or no general cultural knowledge of African American independent cinema of the 1930s, for example, the task of synthesizing information from primary sources and orienting it for the larger purposes of my study becomes necessary. Similarly, the rich field of critical geography, especially the work of Derek Gregory and David Harvey, provides me with ongoing theoretical conversations about space and movement from which to draw terms and concepts when my own explorations of (representations of) space and mobility exceed the reach of conventional literary inquiry. Borrowing judiciously from many disciplines enriches the scope of this study and enables a more thorough investigation of the representations of mobility in twentieth-century American literature and culture.

This book explores the ways in which representations of social mobility and their co-construction with discourses of class, gender, and race function in textual and cinematic spaces of the 1930s, 40s, and 50s. The project investigates the role these issues played in the reconfiguration of American space from rural to urban, from East to West, from domestic to international. Texts from this period represent space in ways that problematize American assumptions that socio-economic mobility is available to all: time and again, characters in these novels and films learn that having a car and a road doesn't necessarily mean you can get somewhere. Because American national identity has always concerned itself with movement—into the wilderness, across the continent, into middle and upper classes, into outer space—the trope of mobility is particularly important during times of national crisis, when the public imagination needs more than ever a believable myth of American history. The images of mobility that permeate the fiction and film during the years between the Depression and the Cold War are intimately implicated in these historical events.

I would like to define some of the key terms that I will use in this book, particularly mobility, space, place, and the domestic. As I use the term, mobility denotes both the ability to move and movement itself. Some characters have the ability to move geographically but still lack the most im-

portant mobility: upward social and economic movement. For this study, mobility encompasses the socio-economic and the geographic because the texts frequently represent both, often connecting or equating them. Often, too, geographic mobility across American space represents international expansion, in the form military or commercial intervention. The emphasis on moving on, moving out, and moving up not only links the texts in this study; it also characterizes American national identity throughout history. As Morris Dickstein argues, representations of movement prevailed in virtually every facet of American culture in the 1930s: Busby Berkeley's choreography, Dorothea Lange's and Margaret Bourke-White's photographs of migrant workers, and the streamlined styles of modernist design. Extending Dickstein's premise to the subsequent decades, this book argues that during the 1930s, 40s, and 50s, from the national crisis of the Depression to the patriotic boom of World War II and the Cold War, Americans were fascinated with mobility and that fascination manifested itself in representation.

Movement presumes space, which brings us to a term fraught with grandiose and diverse meanings in recent literary and theoretical work. Henri Lefebvre defines social space as "neither a 'subject' nor an 'object' but rather a social reality—that is to say, a set of relations and forms" (116). In this sense, these chapters contribute to a history of American space as it is represented in literature and film and as it is reconfigured in social practices and fractures along the lines of race, gender, and class. This project draws on the methods of both literary study of representation and the geographic study of space, attempting to breach the distance between the two methodologies to read space as a relational, socially created phenomenon. Relational space, in this study, is represented in fiction and film at all scales—houses, streets, cities, states, territories, and nations—and their representations in American cultural texts are implicated in the changing and contested values that shape Americans' lives.

Given the popularity of the term "space" in literary scholarship, I would like to elaborate more specifically what I mean when I employ it. As scholars in transnational American Studies continually challenge themselves not to reinscribe the dominance of the U.S., but rather contribute to the critique of that dominance with the goal of empowering non-U.S. and non-Western voices, those of us who presume to write about space need to be cautious not to abstract the concept to the degree that it operates outside of material history. In his essay, "Isaiah Bowman and the Geography of the American

Century,” Neil Smith describes what he calls the “spatial turn” in the 20th century, which, he notes frequently, is also known as the American Century. The spatial turn signals “a dislocation of economic expansion from absolute geographical expansion” marked by uneven development which contributes to “economic expansion organized in and through ‘relational’ rather than absolute space” (Smith 20; 46).

This division of space into absolute and relational is a critical move that many geographers make: separating abstract, absolute, or metaphorical space from material, social, or actual space in order to emphasize the latter’s alternative to a fixed, container model that cannot change. Absolute space refers to space with definite boundaries, for example, private property or nation states, which can contain events and objects—this notion of space operates in the proclamation of the closed frontier, for example, which says that there is no new or unclaimed territory within the borders of the U.S. (Smith 16). On the other hand, the relational space Smith refers to marks the “spatial turn” to the global and eventually transnational 20th century in which the U.S. operated (and dominated) in “spheres of influence” and “trade zones” rather than imperial colonies like those of nineteenth-century England. After the closing of the frontier and the spatial turn of the American Century, the movement of American capital no longer equals the movement of American settlers; relational space depends on uneven development, not virgin territory. The increased mobility of American capital coincided with, and indeed fostered, the immobility of “others” whose stasis is attributed to idiosyncrasies of culture or biology, rather than economics.

I argue that the spatial turn in the early decades of the twentieth century—“modernity”—gives us a geographical context in which to look at the changes taking place both in cultural and in economic arenas. In the 30s, 40s, and 50s, American expansion in the relational space of foreign diplomacy coincided with the Great Depression in which national economies collapsed, and the exportation of Hollywood films worldwide accompanied the trade routes of United Fruit and TWA. I want to stay aware of the risk involved in these kinds of generalizations, which lies in the ease with which terms like “space” and “mobility” can become unmoored from material places and social constructions of identity—thus making it difficult to pin down the power relations involved. I aim to keep my own work grounded in this sense: to focus on mobility as a way of understanding the uneven distributions of power that underlie both economic and cultural production.

The American Century is the century of uneven development, as Neil Smith argues, and this book seeks to find ways to talk about space and mobility without losing sight of the material relations that take “place” in public and private spheres.

A specific location in space, then, is the common-sense understanding of a “place.” Place, as I employ the term, connotes a location that is both geographically grounded and invested with cultural meaning: for example, “rural” may not be a single point on a particular map, but it is grounded in its opposition to “urban.” The concept of “place” emphasizes the links between space and identity, although in a more literal way than the metaphorical “politics of location,” the method of inquiry into identity that has so fruitfully informed the work of feminist scholars from Adrienne Rich to Caren Kaplan.⁴ In this book, the term “place” refers to a concept that depends on both geography and the social constructions of identity that accompany that geographical location. In the introductory essay to *Knowing Your Place: Rural Identity and Cultural Hierarchy*, editors Barbara Ching and Gerald W. Creed explain their book’s focus on rural identity as a first step in “questioning the cultural ascendancy of urbanity” that has prevailed, as Raymond Williams has shown, since before Roman times, and that privileging of the urban has only gained ground since the first stages of industrialization (Ching and Creed 30). In this sense, my use of the term place is more rooted in geography than many recent studies allow; frequently place or location is used metaphorically to refer to terms of identity such as gender, nationality, and/or race. Like Ching and Creed, I employ the term as a kind of “middle ground in which ‘place’ can be metaphoric yet still refer to a particular physical environment and its associated socio-cultural qualities” (7).

One place that is crucial to the argument of this project is the site of the domestic. “Domestic” has two distinct and usually quite separate meanings, both of which depend on their opposite concepts for specificity: the private home as opposed to the public sphere and the nation as opposed to the foreign. In her essay “Manifest Domesticity,” from a special issue of *American Literature* entitled “No More Separate Spheres,” Amy Kaplan troubles

4 Kaplan argues for a politics of location “that investigates the productive tension between temporal and spatial theories of subjectivity [that] can help us delineate the conditions of transnational feminist practices in postmodernity” (138).

the boundaries between these two definitions, paying particular attention to their gendered dimensions:

When we contrast the domestic sphere with the market or political realm, men and women inhabit a divided social terrain, but when we oppose the domestic to the foreign, men and women become national allies against the alien, and the determining division is not gender but racial demarcations of otherness. (582)

Kaplan's essay makes an important step toward linking the discourses of gender, imperialism, and nation in current critical conversations about antebellum America; building on her thesis, I suggest that both definitions of domestic are necessary for an understanding of U.S. culture during the first half of the twentieth century. Kaplan's revision of the "domestic" private sphere—as inherently implicated in domestic and international politics and markets—provides a way to read purportedly "private" issues such as race and gender in terms of the major social and political, "public" upheavals in the 1930s, 40s, and 50s. Indeed, many of the representations of conflict this book considers arise from the inadequate separation of these spheres, when racialized or gendered others, for example, move into the public sphere. This movement takes the form of social as well as geographic mobility, as the socially constructed meanings associated with one place are carried into the other.

Geographical mobility in the 30s is frequently associated with social movement; however, for the rural poor in Faulkner's *As I Lay Dying* and the working class in Le Sueur's *The Girl*, racialized notions of class influenced by the eugenics movement mark poor whites as "white trash" unable to succeed and unworthy of success in spite of their attempts to move from rural to urban spaces. In Chapter One, I read these two novels through the term "white trash" as it is used to racialize poor whites by middle-class town- and city-dwellers who interpret poverty as a matter of taste or choice rather than the result of social and economic forces. Raymond Williams's *The Country and the City* is crucial to this chapter and subsequent chapters, since it articulates the far-reaching ways that national rural/urban dichotomies can be situated in terms of class. Just as, according to Williams, rural life constituted the obsolete other for the industrializing urban English, poor whites in the U.S. have historically been the object of specifically American forms of othering in class as well as racialized distinctions. Attention to

whiteness in recent academic work has yielded many important studies from critics in a variety of fields, including Duane Carr, David Roediger, and Alexander Saxton. But my first chapter has also been influenced by the recent anthology edited by Annalee Newitz and Matt Wray, entitled *White Trash: Race and Class in America*. It was their ahistorical and undertheorized approach to contemporary class and race issues that inspired me to attempt a literary historical genealogy of the term, grounded in the texts and geographies of the Depression. Representations of rural life, I argue, should be read in terms of a larger trajectory: judging poor white rural Mississippians as “trash” allows them to be ridiculed and their poverty to be individualized rather than understood as part of the structurally uneven national movement toward industrialization, urbanization, and consumerism. Similarly, the Girl in Le Sueur’s novel is classified by a relief worker as unsuitable to reproduce based on her poverty, pregnancy and single status, all of which bring into play the eugenics-inspired discourses of social work that targeted poor women for institutional intervention. Both texts depict the ideological, aspirational precarity of the middle class that compels them to distinguish themselves from poor whites on the basis of biology rather than address the economic and social bases for their poverty.

Both texts also depict extreme confluences of public and private spheres: everything that belongs inside comes out as Addie Bundren’s funerary procession becomes a grotesque public spectacle while her body decomposes in its coffin. The funeral should be a family matter, her coffin should be in the ground, and her putrefying insides should be underground. The novel ends with the introduction of Anse’s new wife, figured as a commodity obtained in town as were his new teeth and the children’s bananas. In *The Girl*, the bodies of the poor are commodified as instruments of labor and subject to invasion by the state as improperly fertile. The Girl’s politicization takes place in a community of homeless women protesting the inadequacy of state prenatal care, and the birth of her daughter is witnessed as a political event by the gathering protesters. The concerns of the home—marriage, childbirth, and death—become problematically public in Faulkner’s and Le Sueur’s Depression-era texts, as “domestic” concerns serve to define public notions of identity—class, race, and gender. This chapter received favorable editorial reviews from *Arizona Quarterly*, where it was published as an article with some revisions in 2000; I have included here the version from the journal, which improved under the guidance of the

anonymous reviewers. The chapter's section on Faulkner's *As I Lay Dying* was later incorporated, with further revisions, into a chapter on that novel and *Absalom, Absalom!* entitled "Shifting Sands: The Myth of Class Mobility" for Richard C. Moreland's *A Companion to William Faulkner* (Blackwell, 2007).

As the private moves into the public sphere, American national space is increasingly represented in terms of the public spaces of cities during the 30s and 40s, and a trajectory from East Coast to West Coast charts a reconfiguration of national urban space. Chapter 2 reads the novels *Imitation of Life* by Fannie Hurst and *If He Hollers Let Him Go* by Chester Himes, examining the roles of the two coastal locations as national sites of commerce, inflected by place and by raced and gendered notions of workplace and the private sphere. Although the change in emphasis from East to West during the 1930s and 1940s has been documented it has not been fully theorized by cultural critics, so I turn to the changing representations of domestic and commercial space as a way of reading the reconfiguration of national space in these two texts. Hurst's novel describes Bea Pullman's movement from domestic to commercial, from East Coast westward and then abroad, in her enormously successful corporation; simultaneously, Hurst represents Bea's life as a successful businesswoman, increasingly disembodied and removed from the domestic sphere. Neither wife nor homemaker, Bea chastises herself as a failure because she doesn't conform to her mother's traditional notions of femininity. Himes's novel, on the other hand, portrays Bob Jones's experiences of racism in the Los Angeles shipyards during World War II, emphasizing the parallels between racial and sexual violence and between national racist institutions and international military expansion. Bob's difficulties in the public sphere of industrial work and city streets illustrates the sometimes painful consequences of mobility when African American workers across the country migrated to California and into occupations previously reserved for whites. As representations of white women and African Americans moved out of the home and into the formerly white male workplace, the social spaces of the nation—and the way they are represented in literary texts—underwent massive and often violent changes.

Westward movement during this period shifts the national imagination of urban space from New York to Los Angeles, a new city in the mythic West where California's colonial past erupts in fictional texts, architectural

styles, and decorating trends. In Los Angeles, geographical mobility in the form of automobiles comes to symbolize a particularly modern, American, and “Western” freedom. The dialectic of foreign and domestic takes some sharp turns throughout the history of space in the Los Angeles area, as shifting power relations around race and ethnicity affect who has the power to claim citizenship and social mobility. Chapter 3 draws on the multicultural history of Southern California to read reassertions of whiteness in the newly emerging genre of California novels: from James M. Cain and Raymond Chandler to Budd Schulberg and Nathanael West, the geographic and socio-economic mobility that characterizes representations of California doesn’t always pan out the way it promises to. I turn to John Findlay’s study of post-1940 western cities, *Magic Lands*, which provides a theoretical framework for reading Los Angeles in this period. Findlay’s notion of the “magic city” as a phenomenon of the American West helps me to explain the images of Los Angeles as a new kind of city, a conscious departure from the cities of the East Coast and Midwest, that now represents the home of the modern nation. The movement of large numbers of Americans from East to West during the 30s and 40s helps to establish a new sense of the nation, figured as a new urban form: the Western city.

Among the most important new residents of Los Angeles were the Jewish immigrants who founded the Hollywood movie industry, and Neal Gabler’s comprehensive study of the Hollywood Jews, *An Empire of Their Own*, provides a unique cultural history of the American cinema by exploring how the immigrants’ mobility narratives helped shape the way the rest of America imagined itself through the cinema. The film industry in the 30s and 40s enjoyed intimate access to the American public’s most private processes of identification, and the on-screen representations of social and geographic mobility from this time period participate in public notions of nation and citizenship. This chapter situates the historical and literary representations of the Hollywood Jews’ social mobility in the larger context of the changing American notion of the city as a western phenomenon. Concluding with a look at the quintessential symbol of Los Angeles—the automobile—Chapter 3 examines the use of the car as a symbol of social mobility and, frequently, immobility, as the hard-luck denizens of the Los Angeles underworld in the novels of James M. Cain and Raymond Chandler try and often fail to achieve socio-economic success. I preserve the original chapter here; a shorter version of was published in 2004 as part of the

Netherlands Association of American Studies conference proceedings volume edited by Jaap Verheul. That chapter is entitled “Los Angeles in the 1930s: Magic City, White Utopia, or Multicultural Museum?” and deals primarily with the novels of Nathanael West and James M. Cain.

The trajectory from rural to urban spaces and from East to West Coast culminates in the parallel constructions of American expansion into the West with U.S. imperialist movement in Europe and Asia during the 1940s. In the original dissertation’s Chapter 4, a reading of two low-budget films produced during the years of preparation for and participation in World War II, *Harlem Rides the Range* (1939) and *I Walked with a Zombie* (1943), I placed these popular texts in the context of past and present nation-building and empire-building narratives. The chapter was substantially revised prior to publication in *Cinema Journal* in 2002, during which process I cut the entire discussion of the zombie film to focus exclusively on the black-cast western; it is this revised version I include here. Like Bob Jones’s struggle for rights and recognition in the public sphere in Chapter 2, the African American cowboy films of the late 30s and early 40s depict a heroic and patriotic African American male citizen who participates in the important process of national consolidation of space in the American West. The appearance of black actors in the traditionally white role of cowboy hero complicates the racial hierarchies, not only within the film genre, but also in the context of the national imagination of American masculinity. *Harlem Rides the Range* also depicts American geographic mobility, in the westward movement at the frontier as well as the reterritorialization of the west (and the western) as a site of African American heroism, further demonstrating the primacy of the mobility trope in relation to the dual meanings of the domestic as both the private sphere of home and as it implies the national public sphere of American cultural politics.

Maud Martha is the only work of fiction by Gwendolyn Brooks (1917–2000), the first African American poet to win a Pulitzer Prize. It is a short novel or novella made up of a series of vignettes centering around the title character, a young African American woman, covering the period from her childhood to early adulthood in Chicago. To better understand the representations of class and space as co-constructions in *Maud Martha*, in Chapter 5 I employ a key concept from geographical theory: the “imaginative geography.” What geographers emphasize is the material, embodied nature of imaginative geographies: they are not just images. Rather they are

products of, and influences on, physical lived experience as raced, gendered, classed, and otherwise marked and unmarked bodies in society. This chapter considers two crucial vignettes from the novel as it argues that, in the spatial event of reading, the text's imaginative geographies play a role in the development of literary meaning, in that a reader's impression is informed by the text's representations of the characters' thoughts, dreams, and actions as portrayed in the text. But they can also be a product of reading literature, in that the act of reading fosters an imaginary experience of other places, other lives, and other bodies. This kind of textual mobility constitutes another facet of this book's central argument: that American literature and culture of the early 20th century demands a consideration of this crucial trope. This chapter was initially left out of the dissertation but was presented as a conference paper at the MLA in Chicago in 2007 and published as an article in the *Japanese Journal of American Studies* in 2008.

The concluding chapter originally traced the representations of space and mobility in the films of John Ford from the Depression through the Cold War, including *Wee Willie Winkie* (1937), *The Grapes of Wrath* (1940), and, most importantly, *The Searchers* (1956). For its 2002 publication in the *Japanese Journal of American Studies*, I deleted the discussion of the other films in order to expand and deepen my geographical reading of *The Searchers*. Ford's signature use of Western landscapes and the stark contrast he makes between claustrophobic domestic settings and outdoor "wild" spaces position audiences to envision the U.S. as an expansionist world power. In their representation of American space, Ford's films problematize the complex interrelations between public and private spheres, played out in the geographical locations that came to represent, in his distinctive cinematic shorthand, the nation. Ford's deployment of the mobility trope in his horses, wagons, and buckboards contrasts with his representations of the interior world of the home, for example, in the constricting, oppressive feeling that arises from his use of ceilings and doorways. His films create a geographical and social way to narrate the power relations that reside in the landscapes and the indoor spaces of his films, as well as the "domestic" and foreign policy issues confronting the nation during the 1950s in particular. In this analysis of *The Searchers*, I argue that the domestic sphere is ultimately structured by the public sphere, as the Cold War western constructs a picture of a static, unmoving home that depends on the

presence of a mobile man of action, capable of violence in his duty to protect the home. The surly but benevolent John Wayne character is the figure for American militarism in the Cold War, when the Duke's brash frontier violence is depicted as obsolete but still unfortunately necessary.

Understanding the ways in which the domestic discourses of the 30s are still present in quite different forms in the 40s and 50s can offer us a broader perspective on 1990s representations of mobility and the domestic, the decade when these chapters were written. Lauren Berlant argues that the Reagan era's focus on family values has resulted in "collapsing the political and the personal into a world of public intimacy" (*Queen* 1). Public attention to private issues, including President Bill Clinton's relationship with Monica Lewinsky and the public's access to the narrative of their sex acts, only underscores Berlant's argument that personal actions and values are substituted for political discourse in contemporary American culture. But while the fact that Clinton's private affairs threatened his political career in a way unthinkable during FDR's presidency illustrates the vast differences between postmodern and modern media and standards of public discourse, I argue that exploring the continuities as well as the differences can lead to a fuller understanding of the century as a whole.

Recalling President Clinton's frequent self-comparisons and references to an earlier president famous for his intimacy with the nation, Franklin D. Roosevelt, during his campaign and both terms in office, I suggest that Clinton's brand of public intimacy is modeled on FDR's: through his use of the new public medium of radio, Roosevelt "gave many people a feeling that he was their personal friend and protector, that they could tell him things in confidence" (McElvaine 6). Just as Roosevelt projected this impression of intimacy via his radio programs in which he addressed the American in the second person as though in conversation, Clinton appeared on late night talk shows and MTV town meetings, trying to prove that he was personally interested in reaching into Americans' homes. Little did Clinton know how intimately Americans would know him—years after that campaign, the Lewinsky affair prompted him to plead for privacy to sort out his family problems. But I suggest that the public intimacy with the Presidency began with FDR, an origin in the Depression which forges a link between the 30s and the 90s, oriented around the threshold between public and private spheres.

Mapping the representations of private and public spheres as they intersect with gender, class, race, nation, and sexuality in 1980s and 90s road movies, for example, can inform readings of such important films as *Stranger than Paradise* (1984), *Powwow Highway* (1989), *Thelma and Louise* (1991), *Lost Highway* (1996), and *Breakdown* (1996). These films—like the films in Chapters 4 and 6—represent American mobility and its relationship to national identity in ways that can tell us much about contemporary domestic and foreign policies. Tuning in to the discourses of the movement, including the American genre of the road film, underscores the connections between the brink of the millennium and the decades of and after the Great Depression, when the Bundrens, the Girl, Bob Jones, Mildred Pierce, Philip Marlowe, Bob Blake, Maud Martha, Ethan Edwards, and dozens of other characters followed their aspirations of the American Dream of socio-economic and geographic mobility in wagons, on horseback, on foot, by train, or along the highways of the nation.

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