

3 That Past, This Present

Historicizing John Ford, 1939

Though its credit sequence features a montage of leisurely movements – shots of a stagecoach and its escort moving one way; of U.S. cavalry, then Apache warriors, the other; of the stagecoach again, sans escort, as if returning – *Stagecoach* proper begins with riders galloping hell-bent-for-leather almost directly toward the camera, in a long shot.¹ This shot then dissolves to an army outpost on the edge of nowhere, hitching rails to frame left, tents and camp furniture and a flag staff to frame right. A bugle blows. The stars and stripes ascend the pole in the background while the riders pass back-to-front through the frame. A more visually and dramatically central flag raising occurs at the end of *Drums Along the Mohawk*, another 1939 John Ford film involving frontier outposts, besieged settlers, sinister aristocrats, newborn infants, and courage tested by combat or contest. And it concludes, almost as *Stagecoach* begins, with a display of the national banner. Few of the Revolutionary-era characters who watch its ascent in *Drums* have ever seen the flag before; the symbolism of its stars and stripes must literally be explained. And individual “watchers” are picked out by Ford’s camera and cutting to witness its ascent, as if they were watching on our behalf. Claudette Colbert’s Lana Martin thinks the flag is “pretty”; a black woman, Daisy, Mrs. McKlennar’s “servant,” looks up tearfully; Blue Back, a Christian Indian, offers salute; and Henry Fonda’s Gil Martin gets a good eyeful and says it’s “time to get back to work” because there’s a “heap to do from now on.”

It is the work of this essay to investigate the historicity of John Ford's films and filmmaking in 1939, commonly regarded as Hollywood's and Ford's most "spectacularly prolific" year.² I invoke a portion of that history as prologue in order to acknowledge the necessary partiality of the enterprise. There is more to Ford than *Stagecoach*, *Young Mr. Lincoln*, and *Drums Along the Mohawk*. And there is far more to 1939 than John Ford movies. These two flag raisings also foreground the question of textuality, or intertextuality. For instance, critics have often noted the New Deal multiculturalism of the sequence in *Drums Along the Mohawk* – as if Ford were breaking his historical frame, were addressing the needs of his 1939 present by including a black and a Native American within his mythical national community.³ That it was myth then, as it is myth now, was probably self-evident. It is hard to imagine a 1939 audience whose members did not catch some hint of irony, or naïveté, in Ford's asking them to imagine the flag being seen for the first time. It is also hard to imagine a very large 1939 audience whose members did not also assume that the black woman in question was a slave, the property of Gil and Lana, passed to them with the McKlennar farmstead upon the death of its feisty, proto-feminist mistress (Edna May Oliver).

I make the latter claim more for historical than interpretive purposes, and in order to mark the historicity of interpretation itself. Most latter-day viewers are prone to assume that Daisy is a free black. This assumption likely follows from the film's setting, in upstate New York, well above the Mason-Dixon line; yet it follows from ignorance, because "Dutch" New York, where *Drums* is set, in fact had a large population of slaves, and because slavery in many New England states was not illegal until well after the Revolution.⁴ Given that the Walter D. Edmonds novel upon which *Drums Along the Mohawk* was based was in its thirty-first printing when the film was released, and that the novel's Daisy, like almost every other black character in the story, was held in bondage, it seems likely that many of the film's original viewers – those many who had read the novel, at least – would have assumed Daisy's servitude, given the absence of explicit evidence to the contrary. That Ford and his collaborators did not provide that evidence is consistent with Ford's New Deal idealism, in seeking to avoid the negative connotations of slavery, though this silence might

also be taken as complicit with the racial status quo circa 1776 – or 1939.⁵

It is not the goal of this essay to claim that a “1939” reading of *Stagecoach* or *Drums Along the Mohawk* is automatically to be preferred to some ostensibly more “universal” or “formalist” analysis, or vice versa. I *do* wish, however, to second Rick Altman’s claim that all film interpretation is a social process, under constant negotiation, and that the process amounts to social construction, the building of a “constellated” community via “lateral communication.”⁶ I have lately come to the view that *Stagecoach*, *Young Mr. Lincoln*, and *Drums Along the Mohawk* form a tightly interrelated set; part of my task here is to specify those relationships, however briefly. Setting about to “historicize” John Ford circa 1939, I decided to check my current understanding of the films against that of the films’ original audience, on the assumption that differences between then and now would be telling, as the flag-raising example indicates. I hardly have direct access to that audience, to be certain; but there is precedent for thinking that some aspects of the films’ original reception can be inferred from their various exhibition circumstances, understood chiefly as a matter of intertexts – those documents and films that probably functioned as “pre-texts” for members of that audience.⁷

Obviously Ford’s version of *Drums Along the Mohawk* could not have served as a pre-text for the earlier *Stagecoach* until its release in November 1939. Indeed, I began my research believing that intertextual relations among *particular* films were not likely to matter as much as advertisements and news coverage of various sorts, given the view I then had of 1939 exhibition practices – of films’ being released first to producer-owned or -affiliated first-run houses or “palaces,” then moving out to more modern or modest neighborhood venues, with some few films, typically the most successful, being re-released after the passage of some considerable time.⁸ Accordingly, I assumed that most viewers would have experienced the films sequentially – *Stagecoach* first, *Young Mr. Lincoln* second, *Drums Along the Mohawk* last – which led to the question of how much or little “John Ford” might have served as a “pre-textual” reading strategy for 1939 audiences, given the eight-month gap between *Stagecoach* and *Drums*. Was Ford an auteur for these viewers?

My initial hunch about the relative weakness of the “Ford” pre-text in the pre-auteur era seemed at least partially confirmed by the national newspapers and magazines I consulted, though Frank Nugent’s reviews of all three films in the *New York Times* were emphatically pro-Ford.⁹ The *Time* review of *Stagecoach*, which got second billing to *Let Freedom Ring* (1939) as contributing (via the Western) to a trend toward “Americanism,” highlights *Stagecoach* producer Walter Wanger rather than Ford; Wanger’s “contempt for the Production Code” is manifested in the characters of Dallas and Ringo, one a “prostitute,” the other a “desperado”; Wanger gets the portrait photo; and Ford is mentioned only in a prepositional phrase.¹⁰ Ford gets better treatment (for being “in peak form”) in the *Variety* review of *Stagecoach* but is not mentioned by name in the *Variety* review of *Young Mr. Lincoln*, which saw the film’s “production and direction” as “rather lethargic”; and Ford is mentioned only once, in passing, in *Variety*’s review of *Drums Along the Mohawk* (which “highly pleases the eye even if the story, on occasion, gets a bit slow”).¹¹ Likewise, though all three of Ford’s 1939 films received “Movie of the Week” treatment in *Life* – which amounted, in each case, to a photos-plus-legends preview of the movie – mention of Ford is minimal by contrast with the attention paid to producers (Wanger and Zanuck) and stars (Fonda and Colbert). Ford is mentioned once in the *Stagecoach* story (as having paired with Dudley Nichols before, on *The Informer*, 1935), not at all in the storyboard presentation of *Young Mr. Lincoln*, and as an “able purveyor of raw melodrama” who nevertheless “dwells lovingly over a childbirth” in his direction of *Drums Along the Mohawk*.¹²

Once I started checking the more “local” material to which I had microfilm access, however, various aspects of this picture shifted remarkably. The exhibition data for Atlanta, Georgia, for example, quite confounded the assumption that Ford’s films were ordinarily available to viewers only in order-of-initial-release sequence. Accordingly, I checked every 1939 day of as many local newspapers as possible for the sake of tracking exhibition and promotion patterns, which effort yielded an almost literal cross-section of America, slicing southeasterly from Ames, Iowa, to St. Louis, Missouri, to Atlanta, Georgia. Also scanned for opening-run display ads and reviews were a number of other regional newspapers.

In view of the race question raised in connection with *Drums Along the Mohawk*, and of Altman's claims regarding the construction of generic and critical communities, let me say a few more words about audience, at least as regards those cities for which exhibition data were collected. With the obvious exception of *Variety*, whose ostensible reader is an industry insider, the audience invoked in all the other print venues surveyed is a "mass" audience, a "democratic" audience to the extent that everyone is ostensibly invited to consume the product on offer. Yet one social fact is well worth noting, as placing constraints upon that invitation – the fact of racially segregated theaters.

This was not an issue in Ames, Iowa. According to the 1940 U.S. Census, less than 1 percent of the state's 2.5 million people were black. In all likelihood, few blacks were represented in the census data for Ames, which tended to exclude students, given a city population of 12,555 – though the WPA guide to Iowa observes that the presence in Ames of Iowa State College gave the town "a metropolitan character and coloring."¹³ Ames had four theaters in 1939. With double bills and four screens, up to fifteen films were exhibited per week; few (if any) films played more than a week, nor were there many revivals. Given the Iowa legal code, which forbade discrimination in theaters, it seems likely that filmgoing was experienced as somewhat democratic, even if minority patrons were too few to cause majority patrons much distress.¹⁴

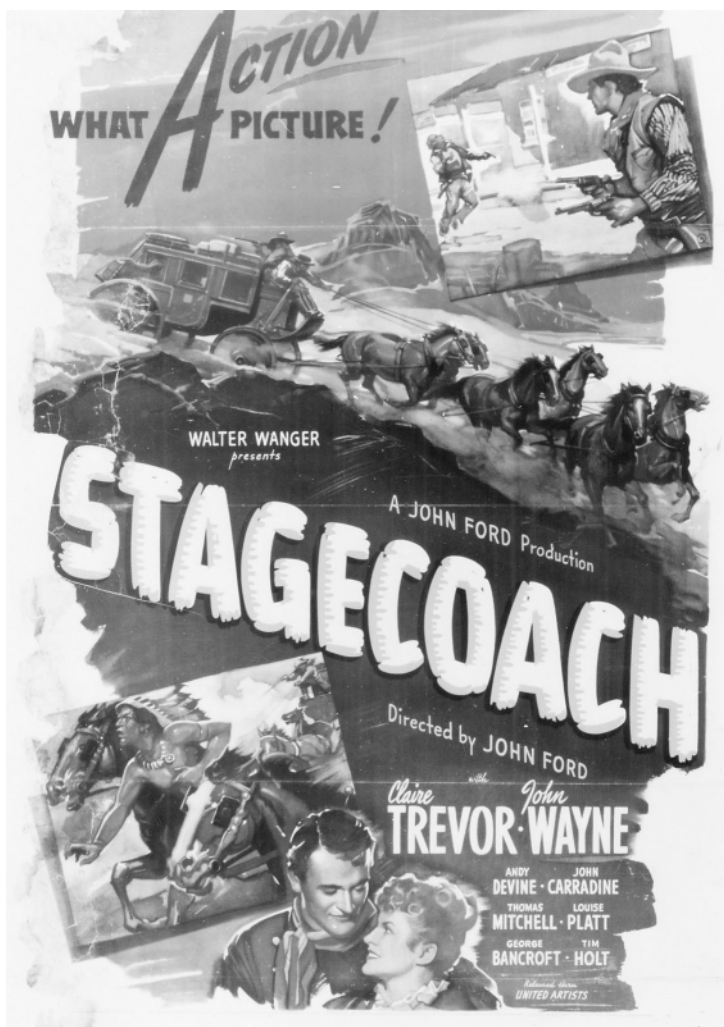
Atlanta, Georgia, obviously handled its racial distress quite differently in its approximately thirty-six theaters. The daily "Amusement Calendar" listing of film times and titles in the *Atlanta Constitution* usually divided its screens into categories: Picture and Stage Shows, Downtown Theaters (these first two categories cover some ten venues, at least half of which combined films and stage acts on occasion), Neighborhood Theaters (between fifteen and twenty-four screens), and Colored Theaters (between six and eight screens).¹⁵ Per the 1940 U.S. Census, Atlanta had a population of 302,288 and Georgia's work force was 33.48 percent black; the inference that roughly one-third of Atlanta's population was black in 1939 is confirmed by a story that ran on March 14.¹⁶ Screens per capita favored the white population, though blacks were probably allowed to view films from balcony seating in at least some of the (probably downtown) theaters.¹⁷

St. Louis had by far the largest population among the three cities for which exhibition patterns were charted: 816,048 per the 1940 Census, though that number does not include the population of East St. Louis, Illinois (75,609). Per the WPA guide to Missouri, the black population of St. Louis was 11.4 percent of the total.¹⁸ The city described in the pages of the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* had between eighty-five and ninety-five screens, though the paper represented them differently than its Atlanta counterpart. Only the five or six downtown theaters were “listed”; the eighty-odd other venues hawked their wares chiefly through list-like, copy-crammed advertisements (St. Louis was big on double bills and giveaways) arranged mostly by reference to theater chains. Though a separate ten-venue black theater circuit existed in St. Louis and East St. Louis, these theaters apparently did not advertise in the *Post-Dispatch*.¹⁹

A picture of various mass media – newspapers, as in this case, but also music, cinema, sports – alternately inscribing and effacing the borders of community is at the heart of *Film/Genre*, in which Altman describes “genrefication” as a process whose moments of apparently “classical” stability are better seen as instances of precarious balance among overlapping and competing communities and interests. I will claim that the 1939 promotion and reception of *Stagecoach*, *Young Mr. Lincoln*, and *Drums Along the Mohawk* can be seen as a moment of such contestations, among producers, exhibitors, and critics; and that my own newly minted grasp of these films represents a logical extension of this process – especially to the extent that interpretation, like genrefication, involves a revaluing of the hitherto “marginal,” adducing once-peripheral features as being, “in fact,” central to some (more recently proposed or achieved) community.

In retrospect, a crucial site in the historical process linking then and now is the poster for *Stagecoach* – adduced as typical of the film’s press-kit promotion campaign – on view in Edward Buscombe’s 1992 British Film Institute (BFI) monograph on the film.²⁰ The uppermost part of the poster is devoted to the director – via two blocks of text and a photo of Ford (pipe in hand, posed beside a camera) – promising viewers “LUSTY EXCITEMENT AND ROARING ADVENTURE” from the “Academy Award winner” who directed *The Hurricane* (1937), *The Informer*, and *Submarine Patrol* (1938). At the center of the poster (to the left of the second block of Ford text) is a large

composite portrait of the film's nine primary cast members, in costume. Immediately below that, spanning the width of the poster, is a photo-derived representation of the stagecoach, its horses at full gallop as they pull the coach from right to left. This picture is then mirrored, if inverted or reversed, in the graphic shape of the film's title, printed roughly the same size, but with its larger-type "Stage" being pulled left to right by a smaller-type "coach." Above the latter



Typical advertising poster for *Stagecoach*.

portion of the title is the phrase "WALTER WANGER presents"; below the title comes all the other cast information we'd expect, with Claire Trevor and John Wayne getting bigger billing than the rest.

There is considerable continuity of design elements between the poster reproduced by Buscombe and the display ads for *Stagecoach* I examined – even though some thirty-five *different* ads, appearing a total of forty-five times, are in question.²¹ The most common elements are the film title and the graphic representation of a stagecoach (often in silhouette); the smaller the ad, the likelier these elements (alone) are present. Another common element is the emphasis on the travelers as a group. Usually this involves some version of a composite cast portrait, as a cloud of heads hovering in space, or presented separately, mug-shot or yearbook fashion. Occasionally, the copy sounds this theme: "NINE STRANGE PEOPLE!" Sometimes distinctions are made. The full-page display ad in *Life* distinguishes passengers from crew: "The Seven Oddly Assorted Strangers Who Started for Lordsburg" are shown in a poster-style box, with Wayne almost literally "on the floor." A separate, much more stylized graphic of a driver and a shotgun guard atop an invisible stagecoach is used to fill out the cast.

Other ads use gender as the pertinent difference. Thus the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*: "HELL-BENT FOR ADVENTURE! . . . 2 women on a desperate journey with 7 strange men!" If distinctions among passengers are made graphically, it is Dallas, literally, who stands out, in six different ads, nearly always accompanied by sexually charged copy: "HER COARSE VOICE, HER INSOLENT SMILE, HER TAWDRY CLOTHES . . . Made decent people draw away!" (*Des Moines Register*); "HER CLOTHES WERE TAWDRY . . ./ HER LIPS WERE PAINTED/HER VOICE WAS COARSE . . ./ But her courage was magnificent!" (*St. Louis Post-Dispatch*). In five ads among those surveyed, Claire Trevor's Dallas is graphically paired with John Wayne's Ringo, either by the size of their portraits relative to those of other passengers on view or by placement. An ad in the *Washington Post* makes the "romance" point verbally explicit, likening the excitement generated "when the stagecoach thunders thru danger ninety miles from nowhere" to that on view "when a dance hall girl and an escaped convict look into each other's eyes!"

The sexual and/or Freudian strain of the ad campaign is palpable if understated across the whole set of ads. It is on view in the presentation of Dallas as a tart, and as erotically linked to Ringo. It

STARTS TODAY DOORS OPEN 10 A. M.
25c TO 2 P. M.

LOEW'S

HELL-BENT FOR ADVENTURE!
... 2 women on a desperate
journey with 7 strange men!

DARING DEEDS, BOLD LOVES AND
RECKLESS VALOR SWEEPS THE PLAINS!

A BIG IMPORTANT PICTURE
THUNDERS ACROSS THE SCREEN!



... BRANDED!
... SHAMED!
She is the woman
they talk about in
"Stagecoach"! And
he's a straight shoot-
ing hummer with a
price on his head!
Daring lovers of the
raw, untamed frontier!

STAGECOACH

**DISCOVER
A NEW STAR!**
Hollywood predicts John
Wayne will be a new roman-
tic sensation. "Combination
of Gary Cooper and Lew
Ayres" says columnist
Ed Sullivan.

*Walter Wanger
Production with mighty cast!*

CLAIRE TREVOR · JOHN WAYNE
ANDY DEVINE · JOHN CARRADINE
GEO. BANCROFT · DONALD MEEK
THOMAS MITCHELL · LOUISE PLATT

Directed by John Ford with all the power and elec-
trifying drama of "Hurricane" and "The Informer"



PLUS MGM'S RIOTOUS COMEDY HIT!

JOE E. BROWN

'FLIRTING WITH FATE'

LEO CARRILLO WYNNE GIBSON
BEVERLY ROBERTS

Contemporary newspaper advertisement for *Stagecoach*.

is also on view as a model of sociality, understood almost geographically as a matter of behavioral or ideological levels. Per the *Ames Daily Tribune*, the passengers are "cut off from civilization...faced with deeper and deeper danger... THEN strange things began to happen... conventions cracked and love, hate, cowardice and courage came startlingly to the surface." Similar language appears in the *New York Times*, where we are told that "emotions crack and hidden strength and failure come startlingly to the surface." This social-psychological model is also applied by the ads to individuals. A second *Ames Daily Tribune* ad tells us that "Each [character has] a hidden secret that will

amaze you when it is revealed." (So can we see those Monument Valley buttes as eruptions, as of something once-upon-a-time repressed?)

It is more than occasionally claimed that "*Stagecoach* ushered in a new cycle of large-scale Westerns."²² Not every 1939 audience would have agreed. Many of the big Westerns of 1939 preceded *Stagecoach* into the theaters here surveyed. *Stand Up and Fight*, *Jesse James*, and *The Oklahoma Kid* opened in advance of *Stagecoach* in Ames and St. Louis. In Atlanta the order was slightly different: *Stand Up and Fight*, *Jesse James*, *Stagecoach*, and *The Oklahoma Kid*. Moreover, many ads for those films emphatically invoked the genre as it existed *before* the release of *Stagecoach*. A display ad for *Stand Up and Fight* in the January 6 *Atlanta Constitution* declares, in no uncertain terms, that "There was 'The Covered Wagon'/ There was 'Cimarron'/ There was 'Wells Fargo'/ And now [...] comes" *Stand Up and Fight*. Ads in the March 15 and 16 editions of the *Ames Daily Tribune* describe *The Oklahoma Kid*, alluding to the gangster-genre legacy of stars James Cagney and Humphrey Bogart, as providing "TOMMY GUN ACTION IN THE SIX-SHOOTING WEST" and subsequently declare *The Oklahoma Kid* to be "GREATER THAN 'Cimarron.'" A display ad in the April 4 *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* is quite emphatic on the generic setting of *Dodge City* (1939): "WEST OF CHICAGO THERE WAS NO LAW! WEST OF DODGE CITY THERE WAS NO GOD!"

Stagecoach was clearly part of this trend, but by contrast with those of other films its ad campaign rather played down its genre status. The connotations of the word "stagecoach" and the associations evoked by the image of the coach do most of the genre work in the *Stagecoach* ads under examination. Only two of those ads overtly feature Monument Valley, which did not yet connote "Western." (An ad in the *Des Moines Register* refers to the "Glorious Beauty of the Southwest" as one of the film's attractions.) Some few ads, by evoking "the American frontier" (*New York Times*) or the "Raw Untamed Frontier" (*Atlanta Constitution*), echo the famous Frederick Jackson Turner thesis about the closing of the West – to the effect that the once "open" frontier had been a guarantor of political and economic democracy.²³ But the closest any of the *Stagecoach* ad copy gets to the film's westernness is in phrases that as much deny as assert the genre affiliation. Per the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, *Stagecoach* is "a new kind of

drama about the *old* American west," while a similar phrase in the *Life* display ad nominates *Stagecoach* as "A New Kind of Picture About the American West."

By contrast with the ad campaign's reticence on the genre question, its attention to John Ford is emphatic – if sporadic. Ford is identified as the film's director in twenty of the thirty-five ads, whereas Wanger is cited as its producer in twenty-six. Ten ads, like the poster discussed by Buscombe, evoke Ford's reputation and filmography as sustaining the film's claim to attention. A Radio City Music Hall ad describes Ford as a "repeated Academy Award winner." A *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* ad avers that *Stagecoach* is "Directed by John Ford with all the power and electrifying drama of 'Hurricane' and 'The Informer.'" But six other ads expand this intertext by one title – *Submarine Patrol*, and almost always as first on the list. Most latter-day film scholars are likely to be puzzled by the inclusion of *Submarine Patrol*, if only because today it is an almost unavailable title.²⁴ The arrangement of the list into reverse chronology – from most to least recent – suggests an assumption about viewer memory: The older the film, the less likely it will serve promotional or intertextual purposes. So what might viewers have expected of *Stagecoach* on the basis of these particular display-ad and Ford-directed pre-texts?

If we link the purported "strangeness" of the *Stagecoach* passengers to the frontier/civilization theme also evident in the ads, we can prophesy after the fact that *The Informer* – the main character of which, Gypo Nolan (Victor McLaglen), is almost literally tortured by his estrangement from both Irish and British factions in 1922 Dublin – would prepare viewers of *Stagecoach* to attend to the way social mores and assumptions are stressed (for better, for worse) by the clash of rival cultures. Tom Connor even describes Gypo, after the latter's loudly defensive performance at the wake of Frankie McPhillip, as shouting "like an aboriginal," as if anticipating the sense in which the Irish of *The Informer* are akin to the Apaches of *Stagecoach*, in being at the mercy of an occupying army – a link then confirmed when Curley casts Ringo as an Apache, at the Apache Wells stage stop, in telling him not to stray too far from the reservation. *The Informer* also anticipates *Stagecoach* in its linkage of an outlaw character (Gypo, Ringo) with a prostitute (Katie, Dallas), thus bringing both eroticism and gender under the heading of "strangeness," thereby

defamiliarizing standing definitions of “society” or “the social.” These associations are made ironic one notch further when we note that Gypo’s desperate decision to inform on Frankie is sparked by the hope of escaping – to America, with Katie, while the happiness we imagine for Dallas and Ringo is possible only upon their escaping – from America.

If the colonialist theme of *Stagecoach* is not pre-textually cued by its linkage to *The Informer*, it is hard to imagine a viewer of *The Hurricane* failing to make that connection upon seeing *Stagecoach* (or vice versa). These two films have almost identical endings – an Edenic “natural” couple or family escaping “the blessings of civilization” under the watchful and forgiving eyes of people who, quite literally, represent “the law” of the culture in question (French Polynesia in one, territorial New Mexico in the other). Indeed, the law officer in both cases decides to suspend the law for the benefit of some larger purpose – “justice” and “happiness” in *The Hurricane*, something its participants call would “marriage” in *Stagecoach*.²⁵ In both cases, a hard-drinking physician played by Thomas Mitchell is a primary figure in the ideological debate that precedes the law’s suspension, when he is not busy delivering babies. More intriguingly, the race question, evoked indirectly in *Stagecoach* – in Buck’s running complaints about his Mexican in-laws, in the warfare between Geronimo and the U.S. Army, and in the Civil War background repeatedly invoked in the exchanges between Doc Boone (Thomas Mitchell) and Hatfield (John Carradine) – is emphatically explicit in *The Hurricane*. Terangi is imprisoned for striking the wrong white man, though everyone knows he struck in self-defense, and he breaks out of jail, like Ringo in *Stagecoach*, to return to Manacura and his family.

The pre-textual pertinence of *Submarine Patrol* to *Stagecoach* is obviously harder to describe, given the film’s unavailability. A December 24, 1938, display ad in the *Ames Daily Tribune* gives us a hint: “Landlubber weaklings . . . they’d never even seen a ship! Then orders came to sail their tiny craft . . . one of the heroic ‘Splinter Fleet’ . . . into a raging hell . . . and trial by danger made them MEN!” An ad in the October 18, 1939, *Atlanta Constitution* adduces the film’s timeliness after the German invasion of Poland as explaining why viewers might want to have another look: “See Today’s Headlines Re-enacted on The Screen!” (Theaters in St. Louis and Atlanta

brought back any number of classic war movies as major-power hostilities became more likely, among them *All Quiet on the Western Front*, 1930; *Hell's Angels*, 1930; and *The Road to Glory*, 1936.) Clearly, citing *Submarine Patrol*, *The Hurricane*, and *The Informer* in the display ads for *Stagecoach* has the effect of splitting the audience of the latter, between those who have and those who have not seen (some of) the other movies. It attests to the historical difference of viewing conditions in 1939 and the present that *Submarine Patrol* is *not* generally viewable now, though I was surprised at the extent to which, by contrast with Ford's official "1939" movies, it was viewable and probably viewed at the time.

The first hint that multiple Ford films might have been screened in 1939 proximity in a given city came in the *Ames Daily Tribune*. Though *Stagecoach* played Ames for only five days in March, on three of those days *Wee Willie Winkie* (1937) was playing elsewhere in town. Other Ford films to play Ames in 1939, never for more than a week, included *Four Men and a Prayer* (1938) in January, *The Hurricane* and *Young Mr. Lincoln* in July, and *Drums Along the Mohawk* in November. The bill of Ford fare was different in Atlanta, as was the exhibition pattern, in that most of the films appeared across the year, often on multiple screens (numbers following titles for Atlanta and St. Louis indicate "screen days," i.e., days multiplied by screens, rather than total numbers of screenings): *Four Men and a Prayer* (January; two) *Submarine Patrol* (February–April, July, October–December; thirty-five), *Stagecoach* (March, May–September; fifty-four), *The Lost Patrol* (May, August–December; twenty-two), *Young Mr. Lincoln* (August–December; forty-one), *Judge Priest* (September; two), and *Drums Along the Mohawk* (November; nine).

The most striking figures regarding "John Ford – 1939" are derived from the pages of the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*. Though released in November 1938, *Submarine Patrol* almost outdid *Stagecoach* as measured by St. Louis "screen days," playing at least one day in every month from February through May, and September through November, for a total of 225 screen days, while *Stagecoach* played in March, and in May through November, for a total of 234. The other Ford films to play St. Louis were *The Hurricane* (June through September; 32), *Young Mr. Lincoln* (June through November; 213), *The Lost Patrol* (October; 2), *Four Men and a Prayer* (November; 3),

and *Drums Along the Mohawk* (November and December; 38). On 79 days of the year, astonishingly, at least two Ford films, sometimes three, were playing simultaneously in St. Louis. By contrast, there were only 14 such “multiple Ford” days in Atlanta.

Part of the story here involves what I see as differing interests between producers and critics, and possibly between producers and exhibitors as well. A difference among *producers* is evident in the display-ad pre-texts that promoted *Young Mr. Lincoln* and *Drums Along the Mohawk* – by contrast to those promoting *Stagecoach*. Partly this involves the fact that *Stagecoach* was released through United Artists, while *Young Mr. Lincoln* and *Drums Along the Mohawk* were both produced and distributed by 20th Century–Fox; the ad campaigns were mounted by competing publicity departments. Fox or its contracting exhibitors ran somewhat fewer display ads in the venues surveyed – thirty ads, forty-two placements for *Young Mr. Lincoln*; twenty-seven ads, forty-one placements for *Drums Along the Mohawk* – compared with thirty-five ads and forty-five placements for *Stagecoach*. Moreover, both of the Fox ad campaigns were, in more or less obvious ways, muddled or conflicted, a conflict partly explicable, in each case, by reference to intertextuality.

The most constant features of the *Young Mr. Lincoln* ad campaign were a block-type rendition of the film’s title, usually stacked as “YOUNG/MR. LINCOLN”; *some* representation of Henry Fonda’s Lincoln, sometimes alone (in five ads, though one of these, repeated thrice, featured a silhouette profile), sometimes with Mary Weaver’s Mary Todd (in seven ads), more often in various “montage” configurations with other photos and graphics (several of these feature multiple Lincolns, though often one is oversized in comparison with the other figures); and a motto, which appears (with slight variations) in eleven of the thirty ads: “The Story of Abraham Lincoln that has *never* been told!”

Yet *some* aspects of that story *are* presumed to be familiar – Abe’s stovepipe hat, his head-penny profile, which Fonda’s makeup clearly mimes, his “lightning wit.” An ad in the *Washington Post*, indeed, implores us to “See . . .” Lincoln “fight the famous ‘moonlight murder’ case.” So the Lincoln depicted in the display ads tends to be, shall we say, multiple or split: a courageous attorney and an awkward lover (“This, too, is Lincoln”), a “young” man and a figure from legend,

a personage both known and unknown, both history and “NOT HISTORY.”²⁶ Quite apart from its nascent genre status as a biopic, *Young Mr. Lincoln* was only one among several Lincoln stories in high-profile circulation at the time, including Sherwood Anderson’s *Abe Lincoln in Illinois* and Carl Sandburg’s *Abraham Lincoln*, the last four volumes of which (*The War Years*) appeared that December, though their publication had long been anticipated. Clearly, the Fox publicity department was anxious to cash in on the trend, while maintaining the distinctiveness of *Young Mr. Lincoln* relative to the other texts, most emphatically its distinction as a 20th Century–Fox and/or Darryl F. Zanuck production. Of the thirty display ads for *Young Mr. Lincoln* in our sample, eleven carry some version of the production/producer credit.

Of the twenty-seven different display ads examined for *Drums Along the Mohawk*, eight ran more than once. The single most elaborate ad appeared with only minor variations in three major dailies: the *Baltimore Evening Sun*, the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, and the *Atlanta Constitution*. Allowing for variously sized ads, and partly because of repetition, the campaign to promote *Drums* was the least distinctive of the three, for being the most predictable. Nearly every ad, including many non–display ads, touted Technicolor as a selling point. Of the twenty-seven ads, twenty-two (plus most of the repeats) featured a “couple” shot or depiction of Henry Fonda and Claudette Colbert, usually aligned with the film’s title. In the larger ads, the title is stacked (“DRUMS/ ALONG THE/ MOHAWK”) and given three-dimensional depth, like the “20th/ CENTURY/ FOX” logo itself, to the point where the title becomes a fort, when colonialist defenders are depicted on top, with attacking Iroquois below; or a promontory, when Iroquois braves are depicted as running across it, toward the reader. (“Drums,” we might note, is a similarly ambiguous reference; we *hear* drums associated with Indians, but the only drums we *see* belong to colonial military formations.) The Walter Edmonds novel is cited or alluded to in twelve different ads. And three ads feature some version of the following hook line: “When torch and tomahawk spread their terror . . . and a pioneer woman’s courage had to be as great as her love!”

The “frontier” theme is picked up in the larger ad, mentioned previously, which describes the “young lovers” as venturing “into the

valley where the savage Iroquois lurked," the Iroquois graphically depicted in many ads as cartoonish spear-carrying warriors. All of which might pass muster as promoting *Stagecoach*, to judge by most critical descriptions of the latter, but viewers familiar with the Edmonds novel might well wonder where all the Tory vs. American (or "Dutch" vs. American) politics of the book had gone. Likewise, viewers of the film might reasonably have been disappointed if they had gone expecting "treachery, massacre, torture" (as the same ad promises). Indeed, by contrast with the racial and sexual atrocities committed on all sides in the Edmonds novel, Ford's picture of frontier warfare is curiously civilized – crops and houses burnt, yes, even Joe Boleo (Francis Ford) threatened with immolation. But the assaults on the German Flats fort are conducted and depicted as well-disciplined military operations jointly launched by British loyalists and (treaty-honoring?) Indian allies.²⁷ Arguably the most brutal moment in the film comes when the German Flats defenders fire chain shot point blank into an assaulting column of Iroquois and British regulars; even the Americans are appalled by the carnage. Set against this the courtesy with which even drunken (and multilingual) Iroquois accede to Mrs. McKlennar's cantankerous wishes regarding her marital bed, the question of who is more or less civilized becomes far more complicated in the film than its ad campaign would seem to allow, despite the repeated evocation of the source novel.

If less various or coherent than the ads promoting *Stagecoach*, the ad campaigns employed to sell *Young Mr. Lincoln* and *Drums Along the Mohawk* in the venues studied were equally consistent in one crucial respect – they gave short Hollywood shrift to John Ford. Though the *Stagecoach* ad campaign gave Walter Wanger better billing than Ford, citing him twenty-six (out of thirty-five) times as the film's producer, Ford is cited as director twenty times, and nine of those include references to other Ford films, as we have seen. By contrast, the ad campaign for *Young Mr. Lincoln* lists Ford only seven times (though twice the film is described as "Brilliantly directed by John Ford"), while Zanuck is cited ten times. The Fox ad campaign for *Drums Along the Mohawk* is of a piece with that of *Young Mr. Lincoln*, with Zanuck receiving eleven mentions to Ford's four.

The evidence seems to confirm Altman's claim that the major studios generally sought to downplay genre, which was nonproprietary

and shared across the industry, and to emphasize studio-specific cycles or features, typically stars, producers, then (and only then) directors, with obvious exceptions like Frank Capra and Ernst Lubitsch. For what the studios were selling, finally, was themselves. In 1939, John Ford was evidently not as crucially a company man as Darryl Zanuck, and Fox treated him accordingly in its ad campaigns. By contrast, what United Artists had to sell, to judge by its name and history, was “artistry.” Though that capacity was often attributed to independent producers – people like Wanger, or Sam Goldwyn, who produced *The Hurricane* – it also seems probable that the treatment accorded to Ford by the ad campaign for *Stagecoach* was likelier to happen at United Artists than elsewhere.

I have not sufficient space here to elaborate fully the claim that *Stagecoach*, *Young Mr. Lincoln*, and *Drums Along the Mohawk* constitute a set of films so closely linked as to make those links crucial to any future understanding of the movies. That such links *can* be crucial is obvious beyond doubt in the way even Ford’s *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance* (1962) doubles back on *Stagecoach* – via props, casting, and theme. Such “positive” intertextual links are numerous across the films of Ford’s 1939 trilogy, as my opening remarks about the narrative parallels between *Stagecoach* and *Drums Along the Mohawk* attest. Other connections between the two films include scenes in which an “eastern” character (Mr. Peacock, of Kansas City, Kansas, in *Stagecoach*; Lana Martin, lately of Albany, New York, in *Drums*) is confronted by a “savage” (Yakima, the station-keeper’s Apache wife; Blue Back) and recoils in horror from the sight or thought of otherness. Both *Stagecoach* and *Drums* include instances of childbirth, more alluded to (by calls for hot water) than directly depicted, though the newborn’s cry in each case is linked to the world of nature via juxtaposition – to the sound of a coyote in one, the image of a calf in the other. Once the baby is ready for introduction, on both occasions, we hear an awe-struck male declare (more or less) “I’ll be doggone” – Buck, as Dallas holds the Mallory infant; Gil Martin, as he holds Gil Jr. Both films, moreover, place the fact of childbirth in close proximity to the fact or threat of death. In *Stagecoach*, the scene with Dallas holding the baby immediately precedes, and clearly prompts, the scene in which Ringo effectively proposes to Dallas (“I still got a ranch across the border . . .”). But that proposal is itself preceded

by Ringo's report that his father and brother were murdered by the Plummers, which is matched by Dallas's recall of the "massacre on Superstition Mountain" that left her an orphan. The equivalent scene in *Drums*, by contrast, immediately *precedes* the birth sequence and depicts the aftermath of the Battle of Oriskany – in Gil's exhausted account of close and bloody combat (which includes his astonished revelation that for Ward Bond's Adam Hartman, killing and carnage amounted to "having a good time") and also in the unsuccessful attempt to save General Herkimer by amputating his leg.

The ties that bind *Young Mr. Lincoln* to *Stagecoach* and *Drums* are more subtle but nonetheless revealing. Peter Stowell, for instance, has written at some length on the role of "fences" in all three films, as marking "the metaphoric line of demarcation between civilization and wilderness," which line Ford's frontier characters must "pass beyond if they are to find themselves."²⁸ To the obvious extent that *Stagecoach* ends near where *Drums* begins, on the image of a wagon crossing to the "other" side, this construal is obviously helpful. What also happens along these fences, in all three films, is something we'd likely call courtship, a creation rather than substitution of allegiances. Ringo's proposal to Dallas takes place across a fence, which Curley subsequently nominates as a boundary in telling Ringo to "stick close to the reservation." Once in Lordsburg, Ringo and Dallas walk along the streets to her "home" in the red-light district, their itinerary marked by sidewalks, porch rails, hitching posts, and rail fences – at the end of which journey Ringo renews his proposal, now fully mindful of Dallas's past, and from her side of the rail. Likewise, Ann Rutledge interrupts Abe's riverside study of Blackstone's *Commentaries*, hailing him across a fence that separates Abe's "legal" space from the river bank. Abe crosses to her side, the "natural" side if you will, and they walk together along the bank. No explicit proposal is repeated, much less uttered – yet Abe says (an almost matrimonial) "I do," in regard to liking Ann's red hair, and Ann expresses a "heart set" hope that they will go to college/seminary together. That these two "courtship" scenes ought to be linked is confirmed, to my mind, by a gesture each man makes – Ringo taking and subsequently carrying Dallas's purse, Abe taking and subsequently carrying Ann's flower basket. The comparable scene in *Drums* comes after the Loyalist attack on the Deerfield settlement – when Lana and Gil



Ringo and Dallas (Claire Trevor) by the fences in the red-light district of Lordsburg. (Collection of the editor)

visit their burnt-out cabin. We first see the cabin at night, and little fencing is visible; subsequent views are more emphatic in showing how split-rail fencing links portions of the farmstead to one another and to the common byway. Ironically, when Gil and Lana return, there's more fence than cabin left standing, and it is in the ruins of the cabin that Lana proposes that they start over again by going to work for Mrs. McKlennar – to the chagrin of Gil, who now voices Lana's earlier objections to frontier life.

One other similarity is worth adducing for allowing me to propose a "negative" or "retroactive" analysis of comparable passages, along lines suggested by Altman in his discussion of "differential commutation."²⁹ Ford's films are renowned for their "celebration" scenes, often in the form of dances celebrating specific communal occasions. The most obvious instance in the 1939 trilogy is the Halloween sequence in *Drums*, which celebrates a bountiful harvest and the wedding of John Weaver and Mary Reall. In the midst of this festivity, Gil Martin quietly drifts away, going upstairs to gaze at his

sleeping son. Lana follows, unseen by Gil, and is prompted by the sight of her husband and son to pray that their lives “go on like this forever.” A similar scene appears in *Young Mr. Lincoln*. After Abe recalls the members of the Springfield mob bent on lynching Matt and Adam Clay for murder to their better New Testament senses, he receives (as if in reward) an invitation from Mary Todd to attend a party thrown by her Springfield sister. He attends, he dances (in the “worst” way), and then he retreats – at Mary’s suggestion – to the mansion porch, where he gazes so intently at the river that Mary Todd literally retreats into the background, as witness to his devotion. Of course, the mood is different, in part because the upper-crust company of Springfield society makes Lincoln uncomfortably self-conscious. But the juxtaposition of family continuity (the Clays, the Martins) and something like death (the river-as-Ann, the departed souls remembered on All Hallows’ Eve) is strikingly similar nonetheless. If we ask where a similar scene occurs in *Stagecoach*, the most immediate answer might be nowhere – no dance, no departing dancers, no pensive reflection nor expression of hope. But if we read these phrases in something like reverse order, we might conclude that the family catastrophes recounted by Ringo and Dallas are akin to Abe’s recollection of Ann, that Ringo’s description of his Mexican ranch is the hopeful vision, and that the departing dancers are, indeed, Dallas and Ringo, who exit the adobe for the station yard. Hence the communal celebration in *Stagecoach* occurs when Dallas, a “dance hall girl” (as ads and reviews describe her), shows Mrs. Mallory’s daughter to her companions. The hopeful glow on Dallas’s face when declaring “It’s a girl” thus matches Lana’s hushed prayer for perpetual good fortune.

In suggesting that borders can be negotiated as well as crossed, that meaningful relations can exist along the periphery as well as at the center of community, I am invoking Gilberto Perez’s description of Ford’s narrational style as “relaxed, digressive, episodic, prone to dwelling on character and situation in disregard of action.” Ford’s style is anti-linear, anti-hierarchical, even “feminine,” on this account, and a fit medium for the social allegories of the films, in which civilization typically “undergoes a breakdown of classes and snobberies and a renewal of the democratic spirit.”³⁰ The gender implications of this renewal as they pertain to Ford’s 1939 films are more than hinted at in the exchanges of gender and class positions

already discussed – though far more could be said (as, for instance, about granting voting rights to women at Dry Forks!).³¹

For brevity's sake, I will attend to only one more feature of Ford's 1939 trilogy – arguably the most interesting, for being least obvious and accordingly most forceful by way of reconfiguring one's view of the films: Ford's view of "the law." The puzzlement that prompts the inquiry is why Curley insists on taking Ringo (and everyone else) to Lordsburg at all – if the point of riding shotgun (as it is typically inferred from the remarks of Buck and Curley's deputies) is to capture Ringo *before* he gets there, thus to protect him from the butcher-like Luke Plummer and his brothers, who evidently run the town. Ringo in custody, they could just as easily return to Tonto, or return Ringo to the penitentiary, which seems closer to Tonto than to Lordsburg to judge by Ringo's progress. Indeed, in response to Buck's suggestion that Curley let Ringo shoot it out with Luke Plummer, Curley is emphatic about wanting to see Ringo back in the pen ("I aim to get him there all in one piece") on the premise that either Luke or his "just as ornery" brothers would prevail in a fight. Other dialogue makes it clear that Ringo's brother and father were murdered by or at the behest of the Plummers, and that Ringo himself was falsely convicted of killing the Plummers' foreman on the basis of their testimony – facts that nearly everyone in the territory (save Doc, who asks after Ringo's brother) seems well aware of.

As Richard Slotkin points out in *Gunfighter Nation*, there is more than one kind of justice in *Stagecoach*: "Lordsburg justice is just good enough to punish Banker Gatewood, but it cannot provide the more positive sort of justice required by Ringo and Dallas."³² I do not have the sense that Curley intended to endanger every passenger for the sake of righting legal wrongs done to Ringo – Curley begins the journey thinking they'll have cavalry escort for the whole trip – but he remains open to the possibility that justice is better served by letting fate or vengeance take its course, a prospect effectively confirmed when Ringo proves his courage and marksmanship during the chase-and-rescue sequence. Of course, this too is an ideologically risky prospect. How is letting Ringo shoot it out with the Plummer brothers any different from letting a mob lynch Matt and Adam Clay?

The answer is that Ringo already had his trial, and justice clearly failed. What did that trial look like? Just like the trial, I want to say, in

Young Mr. Lincoln – a trial in which the law itself, in the person of Scrub White, in the person of J. Palmer Cass, in the persons of John Felder and Stephen Douglas, each an officer of the law or the court at one point or another, is as much on trial as the accused defendants. Apart from something like a miracle, the Clay brothers would have been convicted and hanged, and on the basis of perjured testimony from the actual murderer. That miracle is effectively earned, moreover, by Abe's express willingness to distinguish one law, the morality of asking Mrs. Clay to choose between her sons, from another, which claims the right to force her testimony: "I may not know so much of law, Mr. Felder, but I know what's right and what's wrong." It is hardly a mistake, then, that among the Independence Day festivities is something called (very explicitly, via a painted signboard program) a "Pie Judging Contest," right alongside a "Rail Splitting Contest." It's not the baking but the judging that's at issue. And no less at issue in *Stagecoach* than in *Young Mr. Lincoln*, even if we have to wait until the second film in the 1939 trilogy to complete that part of the picture. Indeed, in both films the male hero earns his success by pledging faith in a woman, a woman about whom he (now) knows "everything," and the token of that faith, in both instances, is something he keeps under his hat – three folkloric bullets in Ringo's case, an almanac in young Mr. Lincoln's.³³

Nothing less than the fate of the Union, as figured in the unity of the Clay family, seems at stake in *Young Mr. Lincoln*, especially to the extent that we see the Clay brothers as stand-ins for African Americans, rural youths nearly lynched for killing a white man – Scrub White, to be exact! (I hear confirmation of this proposition in the banjo-accompanied "spiritual" that the family intones together in the Springfield jail cell of Matt and Adam; the national press made much of the appearance of Marian Anderson singing spirituals at the film's Springfield premier.³⁴) *Drums Along the Mohawk*, by virtue of its Revolutionary War subject matter, requires less allegory to justify a similar attribution of "national" significance. I take the intertextual links of Ford's 1939 trilogy as indicating that something equally momentous is at stake in *Stagecoach*. Yet exactly what is hard to specify – and largely because of Ford's own fairly complex treatment of "history." Though *Stagecoach* is the first film of the set, it is simultaneously the "earliest" and the "latest." While its historical period

is roughly one hundred years later than *Drums*, *Stagecoach* nevertheless takes place in what is arguably the least civilized of the three settings, as if temporal and social progress cannot be equated.

Moreover, each of the three films features instances of historical “frame breaking” – Gatewood’s Hooverite paean to *laissez-faire* capitalism, the “Lincoln Memorial” shots that punctuate the courtroom scenes and the conclusion of *Young Mr. Lincoln*, the flag-raising scene in *Drums* – which indicate quite clearly that Ford’s invocations of history are always metaphorically addressed to a contemporary moment and audience. (Hence the standard view of *Stagecoach* as premonitory of World War II.) This eternal Emersonian presentness, while not exactly ignoring or collapsing history, has the effect of compressing it – bringing “that past” into “this present,” thereby lending the present some of the exigence, the urgency, and the hopefulness of the past, when that past was “now.” Conversely, such compression also attributes to the offscreen present some of the hindsight clarity with which the present ordinarily imbues the historical past. The flag carried aloft in *Drums* is the same flag we barely notice at the beginning of *Stagecoach*, is the flag that Ringo and Dallas effectively leave behind at film’s end, its promise compromised by the film noir darkness of Lordsburg, a darkness that subsequently shadows the flag’s apparently more hopeful ascension in *Drums*. In thus attributing to Ford a self-critical modernist practice, I find myself again in agreement with Perez, who claims that Turner’s frontier thesis is too often seen as agrarian, as urging nostalgia, when it should be seen, as Ford sees it, dialectically or aesthetically, as forward looking: “Turner’s – and Ford’s – conception of the frontier parallels the idea of the avant-garde in the arts: the notion that art gains its vitality and its point through the continual venture into new territory.”³⁵

If I now compare my contemporary understanding of Ford’s 1939 trilogy, at least in its abbreviated, display-ad form, with those “pre-textual” construals promoted by the publicity departments of United Artists and 20th Century–Fox, I am struck as much by the similarities as by the differences, though it was difference I was seeking. There is an obvious continuity of *terms*, especially those pertaining to the “frontier” thesis, which is writ large, shall we say, across the display ads for *Stagecoach* and *Drums Along the Mohawk*. Strikingly, the frontier as a geographical location is *not* invoked in the promotion

of *Young Mr. Lincoln*; the frontier in that case is the past, or history, a border between the known and unknown. The topic of “the law” is only slightly less apparent in the display ads. Ringo is depicted as an outlaw, with “a price on his head,” Dallas as an outcast. Lincoln is repeatedly depicted as a lawyer, an attorney for the falsely accused. Here the odd case out is *Drums Along the Mohawk*, where a political revolution – an emphatic conflict of laws and their enforcement – is barely alluded to in the ads, though it does play an explicit role in the film.

Another similarity is on view in the relationship between exhibition and reception circumstances. I began my research under the impression that circumstances then and now would yield remarkably different understandings of the films – especially to the extent that 1960s-style auteur criticism is taken as enforcing such a difference. I want to say now that the difference a director makes was a difference in dispute in 1939. The 20th Century–Fox studio, we might say, was considerably less auteurist than United Artists, though the studio did credit Ford on occasion. Indeed, 20th Century–Fox promoted *Drums* as if it were *Stagecoach*, as if the studio were trying to distinguish it from *Gone with the Wind* (1939), comparison with which might have activated the “race” subtext clearly on view in Edmonds’s novel. Fox effectively used the “frontier” thesis, with its emphasis on marauding savages, as a cover story, thus avoiding the slavery question.

I speculate that exhibitors, too, kept an eye on the director credits when deciding which films to book for revival runs.³⁶ To the extent that revivals competed with newly released films for screen space, exhibitors may have been at odds with producers. I base this speculation, obviously enough, on the surprising number of Ford films on exhibit in 1939 in St. Louis and Atlanta. That Ford’s films were so frequently on exhibit, however, provides a positive if qualified answer to the question of whether directors’ names could serve generic or intertextual purposes in 1939. A strong Yes in St. Louis; a weak Maybe in Ames – to the extent that only a dedicated movie fan in the latter venue would likely have noticed the many similarities I have enumerated.

Then again, such dedicated movie fans *did* exist. We still call them film critics. One especially important to Ford was *New York Times* reviewer Frank Nugent, who eventually went on to write eight scripts

with the director, among them *Wagon Master* (1950), *The Quiet Man* (1952), and *The Searchers* (1956). Reviewers in less prestigious venues had less opportunity, evidently, to express opinion, or to court Ford's. Most reviews that appeared in the *Ames Daily Tribune* and the *Atlanta Constitution*, for example, clearly smacked of "press kit." The Lee Rogers review of *Stagecoach* in the *Atlanta Constitution* opines the familiar wisdom – "On the stage is as strange an assortment of passengers as ever breathed the same tobacco smoke" – as prologue to an explication of the cast list, which constitutes the bulk of the review.³⁷ In this sense, we can see a considerable part of the local or regional press as taking a producer-centered view of the business.

According to David Bordwell, the 1960s transposition of auteurism from France to Britain and America, where it became a strategy for re-reading "Classical Hollywood" via "Art Film" interpretive protocols, had the effect of genre-fying at least some Hollywood film directors.³⁸ Altman's picture of genre – in which marginal or adjectival features (visual style in film noir, say) are reconfigured as central, as definitive, thus necessarily implying that once-central features should play lesser roles – makes it easier to see how this process works. Altman's urging that we always remain aware of the potential harm this process can do, by way of marginalizing some films, some filmmakers, some film viewers, is a point well taken. In the present context, I want to say that the negative equation of Ford with conservative "Americanism" sometimes expresses a desire to put films like *Stagecoach* on the cultural margin, as embodying a regressive tendency we should repudiate or go beyond. Then again, Ford is always seeking that margin himself, and very often for the sake of asking what our center should look like, how we can move it progressively forward.

For the sake of reanimating that debate, then, I conclude by praising a marginal figure in film history, one Colvin McPherson, the "Motion Picture Critic" of the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*. I do so despite the fact that McPherson does not attend very sympathetically to the Native American perspective. His November 12 column praises the Technicolor of *Drums Along the Mohawk*, for instance, because "Copper-skinned savages look much more frightening in natural hue." Perhaps I hope to mark some difference here between us, between then and now. And yet McPherson is also explicitly alive to the question of history – in observing, for instance, how the "savagery"

on view in the film, as in the novel, is military and political, a matter of “burning the crops that could go to feed Washington’s army.”³⁹ And he is also achingly alive to the possibility of film style, to exactly those features Perez points to in declaring Ford’s style both “modern” and “feminine.” Thus in his review of *Stagecoach* McPherson describes how “Ford ever and again allows his cameras to survey the horizons serenely, while the musical score keeps up the spirit of the journey and the horses plunge ahead through the desert.” And, unlike most of his peers, he senses how much the Lordsburg part of the story matters, though his remarks are rushed and casual: “The picture goes on for a little while afterward, to clear up matters for Wayne and Miss Trevor, and ends with one of its awe-inspiring panoramas, a fine job all the way along.”⁴⁰ In Altman’s terms, McPherson is building a community here, of interpretation and appreciation, one I am glad to be a part of. Though it is unlikely he saw himself as in explicit conflict with the studio system, he certainly takes a more active view of criticism than many of his peers, and I can think of at least one big Hollywood producer for whom such praise of Ford would have been anathema, given his refusal to produce *Stagecoach* in the first place – that is, *if* David O. Selznick ever found time to read out-of-town newspapers while overseeing the production of another world-historical 1939 movie: *Gone with the Wind*.

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NOTES

1. My title refers to Douglas Pye’s “Genre and History: *Fort Apache* and *Liberty Valance*,” published initially in *Movie* 25 (Winter 1977/78), pp. 1–11, and, subsequently, revised to answer my rejoinder, “All I Can See Is the Flags: *Fort Apache* and the Visibility of History,” *Cinema Journal* 27, no. 2 (Winter 1988), pp. 8–26, as “Genre and History: *Fort Apache* and *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance*,” in Ian Cameron and Douglas Pye, eds., *The Book of Westerns* (New York: Continuum, 1996), pp. 111–22. I understand the present essay as continuing that conversation.

2. Peter Stowell, *John Ford* (Boston: Twayne, 1982), p. 15.
3. In addition to Stowell's Chapter 3 ("The Myth of the American Frontier: *Stagecoach*, *Young Mr. Lincoln* and *Drums Along the Mohawk*," pp. 14–53), see Janey Place, *The Western Films of John Ford* (Secaucus, N.J.: Citadel Press, 1974), pp. 42–57; John E. O'Connor, "A Reaffirmation of American Ideals: *Drums Along the Mohawk* (1939)," in John E. O'Connor and Martin A. Jackson, eds., *American History/American Film: Interpreting the Hollywood Image* (New York: Ungar, 1979), pp. 97–119; and Robin Wood, "*Drums Along the Mohawk*," *CineAction* 8 (Spring 1987), pp. 58–64, reprinted in *The Book of Westerns*, pp. 174–80.
4. My information comes from the entry on the "United States" (especially its section on "The North," by Jean R. Soderlund, in Seymour Drescher and Stanley L. Engerman, eds., *A Historical Guide to World Slavery* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), pp. 395–405).
5. Though Edmonds depicts slavery in colonial New York as an established practice, he does so with considerable (liberal) irony, much of it at Lana's expense. His last chapter, for example, features a passage in which a post-Revolutionary Lana expresses bitterness at Congressional delay in settling Gil's claims to "militia pay and the indemnity for the first burning of their farm" because, "If he had had that pay, he could have bought the black girl Klock offered to sell him" (*Drums Along the Mohawk* [Boston: Little, Brown, 1937], p. 583). Ford's equivalent irony attends on the fact that Gil and Lana leave the fort *without* Daisy, though that irony depends upon their taking her for a slave in the first place.
6. See Rick Altman, *Film/Genre* (London: British Film Institute, 1999), especially Chap. 9, "What Roles Do Genres Play in the Viewing Process?" On "constellated communities" and "lateral communication," see pp. 161–2.
7. See Altman, who relies heavily on posters and display ads, but also Janet Staiger, *Interpreting Films: Studies in the Historical Reception of American Cinema* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1992).
8. My view of 1930s exhibition practices follows from a lifetime of reading, often film history texts for which the "vertical integration" sought by the Hollywood "majors" and its subsequent disintegration after the *U.S. vs. Paramount* decision of 1948 became primary explanatory tools for describing the rise and fall of the "studio system." That I am not alone in holding this view is attested to in the latest (sixth) edition of Gerald Mast and Bruce F. Kavin's *A Short History of the Movies* (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 2000) where we find the following passage: "There used to be very few ways to see an old movie – not just a 1930s or 1940s movie, but any movie that was no longer playing in theatres. Films were released, played for a few weeks or months, then faded into memory" (p. 562).
9. The titles of Nugent's *New York Times* reviews are worth citing in full, for being absent from the reviews as reprinted in *The New York Times Film Reviews*. In order, they are "A Ford-Powered 'Stagecoach' Opens at Music Hall; Mickey Rooney Plays Huck Finn at the Capital" (March 3, p. 21, reprinted in this volume), "Twentieth Century-Fox's 'Young Mr. Lincoln' is a Human and

- Humorous Film of the Prairie Years" (June 3, p. 11), and "John Ford's Film of 'Drums Along the Mohawk' Opens at the Roxy - 'One Hour to Live' at the Rialto" (November 4, p. 11).
10. "New Westerns," *Time* (March 13, 1939), pp. 30, 32.
 11. I cite from *Variety Film Reviews 1907-1980* (New York: Garland, 1983), which is organized only by review dates, not page numbers; see February 8, June 7, and November 8, 1939.
 12. See "Movie of the Week: *Stagecoach*: Wanger Films the Log of Perilous Overland-Stage Journey in 1885," *Life* (February 27, 1939), pp. 31-2, 34-5; "Movie of the Week: *Young Mr. Lincoln*: Henry Fonda Plays the Title Role," *Life* (June 12, 1939), pp. 72, 74-7; and "Movie of the Week: *Drums Along the Mohawk*: Claudette Colbert Stars in Frontier Drama of the Revolution," *Life* (November 13, 1939), pp. 74-7.
 13. *The WPA Guide to 1930s Iowa* (1938; Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1986), p. 169. Originally entitled *Iowa: A Guide to the Hawkeye State*, this volume, like its Missouri and Georgia counterparts cited below, was "Compiled and Written by the Federal Writers' Project of the Works Progress Administration."
 14. See Douglas Gomery, *Shared Pleasures: A History of Movie Presentation in the United States* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1992), p. 159.
 15. The terms for the first two categories tended to shift; the neighborhood vs. colored distinction was stable.
 16. See Ralph McGill, "Negro's Place in Atlanta's Life Told Rotarians by Noted Leader," *Atlanta Constitution* (March 14, 1939), pp. 1, 7.
 17. See Gomery, *Shared Pleasures*, p. 163.
 18. *Missouri: A Guide to the "Show Me" State* (New York: Duell, Sloan and Pearce, 1941), p. 298.
 19. See "Picketed Negro Movie House to be Reopened," *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* (June 14, 1939), p. 4C; and "4 Negro Movie Operators at Neighborhood Theatres," *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* (July 6, 1939), p. 3A. Only two of the ten theaters are mentioned by name in these stories - the Criterion and the Strand - and neither appears in the newspaper's listings.
 20. Edward Buscombe, *Stagecoach* (London: British Film Institute, 1992), p. 77.
 21. A "display ad" is not as easy to define as it might at first seem. Partly it depends on context and size: Does the ad stand out from those around it? Partly it depends on style: Are the design elements provided by the newspaper or the studio? Thus, for instance, ads for *Young Mr. Lincoln* and *Drums Along the Mohawk* in the *New York Times* were limited to small "house"-style listings identical in size to nearly all the other movie ads in the paper and hence do not qualify, in my view, as "display" ads. By contrast, Radio City Music Hall ads for *Stagecoach*, though in a house style, were much larger, and are discussed above. Readers can track down the display ads in question by reference to the following list of newspapers; the dates in parentheses (always in this order: *Stagecoach*, *Young Mr. Lincoln*, and *Drums Along the Mohawk*) indicate when the first ad of a given engagement appears: *Ames Daily Tribune* (April 8, July 1, November 21), *Atlanta Constitution* (February 26, August 1,

- November 11), *Baltimore Evening Sun* (March 15, May 30, November 2), *Des Moines Register* (April 3, June 29, November 7), *New York Times* (March 1), *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* (March 22, May 4, May 28, November 8), *Washington Post* (April 25, June 14, November 30). The *Life* ad appeared in the February 13 issue. References to ads for other films are by date within the text. The numbers for ads and "screen days" are as exact as could be determined. Some days or pages of some papers were missing, and I assumed that films advertised were actually films exhibited.
22. Rudy Behlmer, "Bret Harte in Monument Valley: *Stagecoach* (1939)" in *America's Favorite Movies: Behind the Scenes* (New York: Ungar, 1982), p. 118. Behlmer, it bears noting, reprints another poster, which replaces Berton Churchill's Gatewood with Francis Ford's Billy Pickett in the cast photo. On the generic typicality of *Stagecoach*, see Michael Coyne, *The Crowded Prairie: American National Identity in the Hollywood Western* (New York and London: I. B. Taurus, 1997) and Garry Wills, *John Wayne's America: The Politics of Celebrity* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1997).
 23. Frederick Jackson Turner's "The Significance of the Frontier in American History" was first published in the *Annual Report of the American Historical Association for the Year 1893* (Washington, D.C., 1894) and has been widely reprinted. Stowell, *John Ford*, makes extensive use of Turner in his chapter comparing Ford's 1939 movies.
 24. As far as I am aware, the only copy of *Submarine Patrol* available for viewing is held in the Film and Television Archive at UCLA.
 25. Actually, the word Dallas and Ringo both use is the verb "to marry"; I use "marriage" by way of evoking Stanley Cavell's *Pursuits of Happiness: The Hollywood Comedy of Remarriage* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1981), thus to mark the fact that Ringo and Dallas do not, at least in our sight, solicit the validation of a marriage ceremony, which the contemporaneous remarriage comedies suggest is not validation enough.
 26. Echoes of the Lacanian *Cahiers du cinéma* analysis of *Young Mr. Lincoln* are hard to miss in the paragraph this note elaborates; compare how the *Cahiers* editors describe the "subject" of the film as "the reformulation of the historical figure of Lincoln on the level of the myth and the eternal." "John Ford's *Young Mr. Lincoln*," in Bill Nichols, ed., *Movies and Methods* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976), pp. 501–2.
 27. On the "Covenant Chain" relation between the League of Six Nations and the British Crown, see James Wilson, *The Earth Shall Weep: A History of Native America* (New York: Atlantic Monthly Press, 1998), especially Chap. 5, "New York and the 'Ohio Country,'" pp. 98–131.
 28. Stowell, *John Ford*, p. 19.
 29. Altman, *Film/Genre*, pp. 174–8.
 30. Gilberto Perez, "American Tragedy," in *The Material Ghost: Films and Their Medium* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998), pp. 239, 240.
 31. On the link between the Western and women's suffrage, see Lee Clark Mitchell, *Westerns: Making the Man in Fiction and Film* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), pp. 94–119.

32. Richard Slotkin, "The Western Is American History, 1939–1941," in *Gunfighter Nation: The Myth of the Frontier in Twentieth-Century America* (New York: Harper Perennial, 1993), p. 310.
33. My construal of the courtroom sequence (and much else) in *Young Mr. Lincoln* is indebted to Ron Abrahamson and Rick Thomson, "Young Mr. Lincoln Reconsidered: An Essay on the Theory and Practice of Criticism," *Cine-Tracts* 2, no. 1 (Fall 1978), pp. 42–62. See also William Cadbury and Leland Poague, *Film Criticism: A Counter Theory* (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1982), especially Chap. 1, "Beardsley's Aesthetics and Film Criticism," pp. 3–37.
34. See Walter Winchell's "On Broadway" column in the June 7, 1939, *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*: "The out-of-town showing of *Young Mr. Lincoln* netted less wordage to the film than to Marian Anderson, who guest soloed" (p. 2D). I imagine Winchell was thinking about Bosley Crowther's "Mr. Lincoln's Gala Night: Twentieth Century-Fox Haunts a Ghost at Midnight in Springfield, Ill.," *New York Times* (June 4, 1939), sec. 9, p. 3, where he reports that Anderson's performance was "broadcast over a national hookup."

Anderson's May 30 performance in Springfield was almost literally shadowed by her earlier and far more famous performance of April 9, 1939, at the Lincoln Memorial, having been denied access to the DAR-controlled Constitution Hall. Newsreel footage of the earlier concert shows the Memorial's statue of Lincoln looking right over Anderson's shoulder, toward the camera, in the very "frame breaking" pose Ford has Fonda assume in *Young Mr. Lincoln's* courtroom sequences. Moreover, she sang very similar programs on both occasions. See Rosalyn M. Story, *And So I Sing: African American Divas of Opera and Concert* (New York: Amistad, 1993), esp. Chap. 3, "Marian Anderson: The Voice of a Century," pp. 37–58; "Young Mr. Lincoln Has Its Premiere," *New York Times* (May 31, 1939), p. 26; and *Treasures from American Film Archives: 50 Preserved Films* (San Francisco: National Film Preservation Foundation, 2000).

It is also worth noting that the legacy of racially motivated lynching was so strong during this period that the Georgia version of the WPA Guide, *Georgia: A Guide to Its Towns and Countryside* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1940), could speak almost boastfully, in its chapter on "The Negro," of the good works of "The Association of Southern Women for the Prevention of Lynching" (p. 86).

35. Perez, "American Tragedy," p. 243.
36. Though the practice of "block booking" dominates discussion of exhibition patterns during the classical era, the practice is typically described as applying to first-run films, hence my speculation that exhibitors had some leeway in regard to revival runs. If not, they still had choices to make about which "blocks" to book, which studios to deal with, and Ford did fare well during the period in question, despite the variety of his studio affiliations. On late-1930s exhibition practices, see Giuliana Muscio, *Hollywood's New Deal* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1997).
37. Lee Rogers, "Stagecoach Assembles Strange Travelers in Loew's Drama," *Atlanta Constitution* (March 5, 1939), p. 6.

38. David Bordwell, "The Art Cinema as a Mode of Film Practice," *Film Criticism* 4, no. 1 (Fall 1979), pp. 56–64.
39. Colvin McPherson, "The Screen in Review," *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* (November 12, 1939), p. 6G.
40. Colvin McPherson, "The Screen in Review," *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* (March 26, 1939), p. 6G.