AN ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF

John D. Divelbiss for the degree of Master of Arts in English presented on April 28, 2014.

Title: Re-Viewing the Canon: Using Film and Critical Pedagogy in the Standards-based Classroom

Abstract approved:

Jon R. Lewis

This thesis analyzes the efficacy of emancipatory (critical) pedagogical practices in an educational climate of standards-based reform. Using two films noir of the blacklist era—Body and Soul and Crossfire—as the core texts of a unit in a secondary school curriculum, I argue that an emphasis on student agency and a de-centering of curriculum and instruction is not only compatible with national reforms like the Common Core State Standards but is essential for English/language arts classrooms in the 21st century.

In addition to a scholarly review of critical pedagogy and media literacy, and close readings of the two films themselves, this thesis also ends with an informal case study in which both films-as-texts were taught to 9th grade students. By combining theory and practice, I was able to model the praxis at the heart of critical pedagogy, what Paulo Freire calls in Pedagogy of the Oppressed, “reflection and action upon the world in order to transform it.”

The films of the blacklist match current national mandates for relevant texts, for media and visual literacy, and for authentic and emancipatory pedagogy.
Narrowing down even further on two highly-regarded films released in 1947, the same year the blacklist was initiated, allows for an analysis of the artistic and aesthetic complexities of the texts as well as the high-stakes terms of the political engagements of the blacklist. Both films promote the civic honesty—the willingness to face the dark corners of our history—essential for a democracy. The films also represent a visual vocabulary primer, enabling the kinds of media study crucial for our media-saturated world. Bundling the historical/aesthetic/pedagogical readings of these films in this thesis allows me to engage in current debates on literacy, textuality, and the changing mission of secondary-level English literature studies.
Re-Viewing the Canon: Using Film and Critical Pedagogy in the Standards-based Classroom

by

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A THESIS

submitted to

Oregon State University

in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

Presented April 28, 2014
Commencement June 2014
Master of Arts thesis of John D. Divelbiss presented on April 28, 2014.

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I understand that my thesis will become part of the permanent collection of Oregon State University libraries. My signature below authorizes release of my thesis to any reader upon request.

John D. Divelbiss, Author
I’d first like to express my sincere appreciation for the rousing provocations of each of my professors during my time at Oregon State. Special thanks must go to my thesis advisor, Dr. Jon Lewis. His insight and feedback at each stage of the thesis process helped me refine my ideas and sharpen my writing. Great thanks also to committee members Dr. Evan Gottlieb and Dr. Ray Malewitz, whose classes and instruction and willing support encouraged my reach to sometimes exceed my grasp. Thank you also to Graduate School Representative Dr. Juan Antonio Trujillo, who generously gave his time and energy to this committee.

A final, gigantic, thank you goes to my family: Amy, Logan, and Zoë. Thank you for giving me the time and the space to be a graduate student once again. Most of all, thank you for your patience and love. Without you and your support, none of this could have happened. Without you, none of it would have mattered.
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Still, there’s an upside to the Common Core’s arrival. As the public better appreciates its sweep, there is likely to be much discussion about schools and what we want them to do. Ideally, this will involve a reconsideration of the contours of knowledge and the question of how we can become a better-educated nation. 1

Re-Viewing the Canon: Using Film and Critical Pedagogy in the Standards-based Classroom

Chapter One: Introduction

Common Standards and the Metamorphosis of Public School Literacy

The Hollywood blacklist era of 1946-1952 2 coincides with both macro-sized shifts in American culture (post-war to Cold War, urban to suburban, Rosie the Riveter to Mrs. Ward Cleaver) and smaller aesthetic shifts in the artistic ambitions of the “Hollywood film.” This mostly neglected window of time—particularly from a pedagogical standpoint—with its dynamism of racial and gender roles and stereotypes, reveals 21st century-like concern with both personal and cultural complexity. The teaching potential of this quiet time of transition receives little comment in most humanities' course curricula when scaled against the titans that precede and succeed it. When held up to Hitler, Stalin, or even the rise of Elvis, the battles between relatively obscure Americans like Dalton Trumbo and Abraham Polonsky and their government may seem trivial.

This neglect (or oversight) becomes most visible in the secondary school classroom. Recent public educational reform like the Bush-era No Child Left
Behind often appears to be searching for a life ring of “authenticity and rigor” that can buoy our students up with the Malaysians, the Finns, and the South Koreans in global-marketplace competitiveness. Much of the reform of the past twenty years has centered directly on literacy—and what determines it—and a reconfiguration of the English language arts (ELA) classroom. The role of canonical texts, fiction-heavy content, and the limitations of defining textuality (and literacy) in the traditional, print-based, sense has undergone multi-iterative revision and review. In order to address the theoretical stakes at hand in my thesis, a clear picture of this fluctuating contemporary educational climate, at the national and local level, is imperative.

The most recent reform push comes in the guise of E.D. Hirsch's 1987 work *Cultural Literacy: What Every American Should Know*, which became both a best seller and a lightning rod for educational divisions. Hirsch's theories—essentially that literacy “depends on a knowledge of the specific information that is taken for granted in our public discourse”—have taken twenty-five years to see their full flowering in the national Common Core State Standards (CCSS) initiative, taken up by forty-five of the fifty states as of 2013.³

Hirsch lauds the movement not for its absolutes of curriculum but for its specificity of content. In a 2010 editorial in *The Washington Post*, the eighty-two year old Hirsch applauded the move away from skill-building “literacy” into knowledge-acquisition...particularly “culturally rich” curricula articulated vertically through the ELA classroom and horizontally throughout the sciences, social studies, and mathematics at each grade level. Hirsch, who doesn't stint his
praise—calling the Common Core the “Big Idea”--looks to the CCSS to provide not just standardization but a Luther-like reformation:

Transforming the...“literacy block” into a rich, meaningful and sustained engagement with subject matter would be the single greatest transformation of instructional time in decades. If there is one Big Idea that can help arrest the decline of reading achievement in American schools, this is the one. To their credit, the authors of the Common Core standards have taken pains to get this right, and it is a master stroke.

Of course, plenty can go wrong. If textbook publishers hear the message “more nonfiction” instead of “coherent curriculum” then the effort will have come to little. Slapping random nonfiction (duly tested for complexity) into existing textbooks will be no more effective than the reading of random fiction has been.

The draft standards of course leave curriculum decisions to the states, but the message is clear: there must be a curriculum. And it must be coherent, specific and content-rich. Truly to adopt these standards means to adopt a curriculum having greater specificity and coherence than any currently followed by a state.4

As Hirsch fears might happen, Oregon has not taken up a “randomizing” effect of anthologized non-fiction replacing that of quasi-serious works being anthologized in the name of fictional “diversity.” Cultural literacy, in the form of significant political documents, receives equal weight in the CCSS to the canonical high school fictional texts. The standards themselves are split between “informational” texts and literature in ELA; and while no one text or body of work becomes an essential work, an emphasis on a “core” body of knowledge and skill is explicit in the push for federal uniformity.5

The implementation of the CCSS has its detractors, as would be expected in any large-scale, federally-sanctioned, educational reform. Aside from the expected left/right wing political punditry, part of the theoretical argument against adoption relies upon the “deductive/inductive” reasoning suggestive of a
“standard” of context and content: If standard “A” is appropriate for state “B,” how can the assumption be made that it is also relevant for state “Q/W/P”? And if this “core” specificity of content approved by E.D. Hirsch, Jr. works for child “C,” how can that lead to a blanket approval of the content for children “D/S/I”? In an editorial in the *Kappa Delta Pi Recorder*, Christopher H. Tienken equates “standardized concepts” with standardized “curriculum,” and rhetorically correlates core “skills” with career “choice:”

> How can one curriculum prepare every student for any one career? Where is the evidence to support that assertion? How can it be that future plumbers, information technology personnel, graphic designers, certified auto mechanics, pastry chefs, entrepreneurs, teachers, home health aides, commercial airline pilots, or the tens-of-thousands of other possible careers—some of which have not even been invented yet—require mastery of the same one-size-fits-all curriculum? I don't want my auto mechanic to have mastery of the same exact content and set of skills as my website designer, my accountant, or my university department chair. I want cognitive diversity.6

What Tienken fails to note (and what CCSS proponents emphasize) is the inherent limitations of equating educational content with career “readiness,” or the charged and classist suggestion that different societal roles (auto mechanic vs. university department chair) would not require an “essential skill” such as that listed in Common Core Reading Standard 9 for grades 9-10: “Analyze seminal U.S. documents of historical and literary significance (e.g., Washington’s *Farewell Address*, the *Gettysburg Address*, Roosevelt’s *Four Freedoms speech*, King’s ’Letter from Birmingham Jail’), including how they address related themes and concepts.”7 While not an integral part of either the department chair’s or the auto mechanic's job description, this standard does address what remains integral
to a democracy: an awareness of each individual’s role in the tug and pull of a
dynamic citizenry. It is also clearly a “standard” easily transferable across state
(and career) demarcations.

At this nascent stage—with full implementation of both the standards and
their companion national assessments beginning in 2015—little has been written
on the relation between the standards and the emancipatory, more theoretical,
movements of critical pedagogy and media literacy. Scholars JuliAnna Avila and
Michael Moore address the potential embedded in the standards for critical,
socially conscious, engagements, but find more potential in a critical challenge to
the standards themselves, arguing that “the most imperative critical literacy
activity that could be added to an English/language arts class is to model for
students the process of critiquing the standards themselves and asking why they
should occupy such a central place in the classroom.” While a valid critique of
the origins of power and federally-mandated determinacy, simple deconstructing
of the standards in the name of emancipatory pedagogy neglects the essence of
the English/language arts classroom—the student interaction with compelling and
complex works of literature, fictional or otherwise.

Re-Viewing the Canon

An intensive study of Hollywood blacklist-era films (films directly
connected to the congressional hearings of 1947 and 1951) achieves the aims of
both the broad-reaching CCSS and the critical pedagoge. These films do not
limit themselves to pragmatic “standardized” skill building. Nor do they function
solely as vehicles of theoretical analysis. What were called the “prestige pictures”
of this era were in essence low-budget, high-minded, films that addressed the social issues of the day: racism, sexism, and a society in flux. The often overlooked fact that many of the creative figures behind these films suffered at the hands of their government adds layers of political, non-fictional, backstory to each text. This makes their use in an informational/literary/digital skills-based classroom articulated and interwoven.

Film and media studies, as distinct literacy strands, are not part of the explicit focus of the initial Common Core reformation. In fact, using film as the “anchor text” of a reading unit in a language arts classroom would seem to contradict (or at least confound) the major tenants of the movement, which are foremost an assertion of the primacy of text-based instruction. In Appendix A of the Standards, the authors sound a general note of dismay about current textual complexity, noting that the “turning away from complex texts is likely to lead to a general impoverishment of knowledge, which, because knowledge is intimately linked with reading comprehension ability, will accelerate the decline in the ability to comprehend complex texts and the decline in the richness of text itself.” They conclude with an even deeper note of warning about the effect of this decline of text complexity in public schools: “This bodes ill for the ability of Americans to meet the demands placed upon them by citizenship in a democratic republic and the challenges of a highly competitive global marketplace of goods, services, and ideas.”

Rather than stifling students’ access to complex textual sources, however, using blacklist films as the generative center of a unit gives immediate access to
multiplicities of documents, research, and critiquing. The Common Core “mission statement” suggests this role of literature that comments upon its time, is an active player in its time, and yet (as literature should) transcends its time:

As a natural outgrowth of meeting the charge to define college and career readiness, the Standards...lay out a vision of what it means to be a literate person in the twenty-first century. Indeed, the skills and understandings students are expected to demonstrate have wide applicability outside the classroom or workplace. Students who meet the Standards readily undertake the close, attentive reading that is at the heart of understanding and enjoying complex works of literature. They habitually perform the critical reading necessary to pick carefully through the staggering amount of information available today in print and digitally. They actively seek the wide, deep, and thoughtful engagement with high-quality literary and informational texts that builds knowledge, enlarges experience, and broadens worldviews. They reflexively demonstrate the cogent reasoning and use of evidence that is essential to both private deliberation and responsible citizenship in a democratic republic. In short, students who meet the Standards develop the skills in reading, writing, speaking, and listening that are the foundation for any creative and purposeful expression in language. (emphasis added)11

As the mission statement acknowledges, twenty-first century students contend with more than print-based sources of information, and—equally as valid in a language arts classroom—they contend with more than print-based sources of literature as well. Providing a challenging curriculum that generates the “critical reading,” the “high-quality” material and the fodder for “responsible citizenship” (as blacklist films do) exceeds the expectations inherent in the reform itself.

A look at the specific standards themselves proves that the CCSS is not an attempt to reinvent the wheel, just to standardize its dimensions. For example, in the reading literature standards, the first of the ten “anchor” standards comes under the heading “Key Ideas and Details.” The first of the three anchor
standards under this grouping is: Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text. The specific standards for high school students, broken into grades 9-10 and grades 11-12, states for 9-10 graders: Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text, and for 11-12 graders: Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text, including determining where the text leaves matters uncertain. The gradation from “explicit” in the anchor standard, to “explicit” and “inferential” in the 9-10 standard, to “explicit/inferential/uncertain” in the 11-12 standard does not address radically new, 21st century, skills and behaviors: Students have been asked to analyze and cite textual evidence in humanities courses since before John Dewey. Nor does the standard provide any absolute as to which and what kind of texts are appropriate for these tasks. A sidebar found on the same page as the high school standards notes that

To become college and career ready, students must grapple with works of exceptional craft and thought whose range extends across genres, cultures, and centuries. Such works offer profound insights into the human condition and serve as models for students’ own thinking and writing. Along with high-quality contemporary works, these texts should be chosen from among seminal U.S. Documents, the classics of American literature, and the timeless dramas of Shakespeare. Through wide and deep reading of literature and literary nonfiction of steadily increasing sophistication, students gain a reservoir of literary and cultural knowledge, references, and images; the ability to evaluate intricate arguments; and the capacity to surmount the challenges posed by complex texts.

The films of the blacklist match the push for relevant texts (non-fiction),
for media/visual literacy, and for authentic and emancipatory pedagogy. By narrowing down even further to two highly-regarded films released in the same year (1947) that represent the artistic and aesthetic complexity of the genre and the high-stakes terms of political engagement, I argue *Body and Soul* and *Crossfire* satisfy the civic honesty—the willingness to face the dark corners of our history—essential for a democracy. The films also present a visual vocabulary primer, just “foreign” enough in time and content to be “new” for students, yet containing the essence of modern media nomenclature. Combining these discrete strands (the historical, the aesthetic, and the contemporary) in one unit gives students a similar outcome to studying “The Gettysburg Address” but with more opportunity for critical engagement.

Finally, these films have the potential to convey in content and backstory what Paolo Freire called, *pedagogical praxis*—the interrelationship between theory and practice, reflection and action. Freire found this blending as the central mission of the pedagogue, in his terms (and with allusion to his most famous work) “political action on the side of the oppressed must be pedagogical action in the authentic sense of the word, and, therefore, action with the oppressed.”15 While modern American students would find it difficult to acknowledge their “oppression” in Freire's more Marxist connotation, addressing oppression as it stands in a 21st century technocratic and consumerist society, and the opportunity to work *with* and not solely *for* an instructor, would give modern students a valid taste of Freire's authenticity.

Chapter two of this thesis will address this pedagogical confluence of
practice and theory, primarily as it has evolved from Freire into contemporary critical pedagogy. The less well-known work and pedagogical theories of French philosopher Jacques Rancière, particularly in *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*, approach Freire's ideas of a non-centralized, de-hierarchical, classroom from a less political, more aesthetic, position. Setting the two theorists in counterpose (one emphasizing political, the other personal, liberation) models the balance within my thesis: developing a curriculum that challenges students in the contemporary classroom both politically and aesthetically.

Chapter three expands the terms of pedagogical theory from the somewhat dated politics of Freire and Franco-specific arguments of Rancière into contemporary critical pedagogues like Henry A. Giroux, Peter McLaren, and Allan Luke, whose theories embrace both emancipatory education and media theory, in which parallel (to the CCSS) federal reformation addresses the role of media literacy in the public school.

Chapter four will present an overview of the historical and political atmosphere in which the blacklist developed, including a close look at HUAC (House Committee on Un-American Activities) of both the pre and post-war eras. The non-fiction companion texts and research potential for students expands from this pre-McCarthy communist hysteria…requiring an analysis of how this historical moment can be an emancipatory opportunity as well as an articulated research opportunity correlated to the CCSS. The focus of the chapter will also include the two representative films, *Crossfire* and *Body and Soul*. Each of the two films will be addressed both through close reading as well as placed in the
pantheon of Hollywood and the historicity of Washington.

In this final chapter, and in the conclusion, Freire's *praxis* will be activated. Each of the films will be taught in a high school setting (to “Honors” freshmen ELA students), with a focus on media literacy, adherence to the CCSS, literary analysis, and most importantly, an emphasis on the emancipatory pedagogy of Freire, Rancière, Giroux, et. al. This case study involves two classrooms, two teachers, as well as a blend of both qualitative and quantitative data analysis.

The purpose of this thesis is not to expand the scholarly literature of the Hollywood blacklist, nor to approach the films through alternate interpretive eyes. Rather, by bundling the historical/aesthetic/pedagogical readings of the films, my research engages the current debates on literacy, textuality, and what should be taught in the English/language arts classroom—primarily, however, this thesis addresses *how* and *why* this cultural and artistic moment (1946-1960) can speak so well to students in a 21st century setting.
Young people need to understand that not all images are there to be consumed like fast food and then forgotten—we need to educate them to understand the difference between moving images that engage their humanity and their intelligence and moving images that are just selling them something.16

Chapter Two: The Pedagogical Stakes

The theories of critical pedagogy often position themselves against many of the current trends in publication education, which emphasize job creation and assessment-based success. In its nascent stages in the 1970s, through its development in the 1980s and 1990s, on to its current status as a multi-faceted entity today, critical pedagogy has argued for the democratizing mandate of public education in Western societies and the United States in particular. Rather than a focus on knowledge-acquisition and skill-building, critical pedagogical theory encourages an emancipatory (a de-centering) mandate for both the classroom teacher and his/her students.

The basic terms of critical pedagogy seem naïve and ideological on their face: make the classroom a dynamic, politicized, arena where student agency in a democratic system becomes the primary mission of education. However, the key to critical pedagogy's radicalization of public schooling isn't solely a more “socialized” system where teachers and curricula take a less authoritative role. A devotion to morality—both in the content of the coursework and in the outcomes of the experience—must be embedded in any pedagogical theory or praxis. This liberating focus, less on the content and more on the student, makes critical pedagogy appear less applicable to reforms such as the Common Core.
The recent shifts in public education to federally standardized assessment and performance/outcome-centered curricula may have started with George W. Bush and the No Child Left Behind Act, but it continues to drive the discussion on public education at the federal level. Barack Obama's 2010 announcement of a $250 million dollar “public-private effort to increase the number and quality of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) teachers” at its base—read economic—level seems both forward-thinking and educationally ambitious. However, the true motivation behind the “push” becomes clear in Obama's own words on the subject. “Our future is on the line,’ said Obama in announcing the new partnerships [with private corporations like Exxon] and honoring more than 100 science teachers. 'The nation that out-educates us today is going to out-compete us tomorrow.”

Superficially benign statements like “out-educate” and its more obvious iteration of “out-compete” throw education into the semantic world of the free market and football. Education, in this perspective, becomes a field of competition, where the goal is not so much to help your fellow man or woman as it is to “out-learn” him or her. More subtly, the President's words reveal both a bias for science-based, normative, and empirical pursuits like engineering and math and an unspoken demotion of any other education that doesn't allow us to “out-educate” Singapore or China. That leaves both the humanities, and any truly unquantifiable standards like a moral and engaged population, searching for relevance. Even the very acronym—STEM—used to define these “essential fields of study” connotes a core superiority, evocative of origin and essence.
The Critical Educator

The counterweight to this global market-based philosophy comes from critical pedagogy, especially critical pedagogy’s insistence on the humanizing and practical application of theory to the betterment of humanity. The origin of this theory finds much of its language and philosophy from two strands: The Frankfort School of critical theory and the work of Brazilian pedagogue Paulo Freire. In the critical theorists, critical pedagogy finds an academic analysis built upon the critique of experience in the social sphere. Neo-Marxist theorists like Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno influenced later scholars and academics in the United States through their insistence that a “critical” theory may be distinguished from a “traditional” theory according to a specific practical purpose: “a theory is critical to the extent that it seeks human emancipation, ‘to liberate human beings from the circumstances that enslave them.’” Critical pedagogue Joe L. Kincheloe sums up the influence of the Frankfort School on academia in this way:

Impressed by critical theory's dialectic concern with the social construction of experience, [New Left academics] came to view their disciplines as manifestations of the discourses and power relations of the social and historical contexts that produced them. The “discourse of possibility” implicit within the constructed nature of social experience suggested to these scholars that a reconstruction of the social sciences could eventually lead to a more egalitarian and democratic social order.

The evolution from the philosophical influence of the critical theorists to pragmatic application of pedagogy works mostly through the person of Paulo Freire. As an educator, Freire worked with the lowest socio-economic classes in Brazil. His 1970 publication *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* works as a Rosetta
Stone-like bridge between the works of the Frankfort School and those of the next generation of critical pedagogues, most of whom see Freire's ideas as the guiding principal for their late 20th and early 21st century critiques.

Primary among Freire's theories in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* for the contemporary American public educator is the conceptualization of the educational “banking” model: an education in which the Subject/Teacher deposits knowledge into the essentially empty object/student. This model of teaching Freire equates to the more politicized “Oppressor/oppressed” hierarchy upon which the archetypal schoolhouse is built. For Freire, this type of educational model “turns [students] into ‘containers,' into ‘receptacles' to be filled by the teacher. The more completely she fills the receptacles, the better a teacher she is. The more meekly the receptacles permit themselves to be filled, the better students they are.”21 This is, in an exaggerated sense, the fear of standards-based education: that teachers will fill students up with the “knowledge” that makes them successful test-takers but minimal critical thinkers. Freire suggests not only a one-way relation of teacher/student in the banking model, but an inherent sense of superiority that validates and justifies the simple dissemination of knowledge: “In the banking concept of education, knowledge is a gift bestowed by those who consider themselves knowledgeable upon those whom they consider to know nothing. Projecting an absolute ignorance on others...negates education and knowledge as a process of inquiry.”22 For Freire, and the later critical pedagogues who follow his theories, true education lies in the “reconciliation...the solution of the teacher-student contradiction”23 and, most difficult of all when taken to the
level of praxis, a new definition of the roles within the classroom: the “teacher-student and the students-teachers.”

Freire's alternative to this oppressive banking model of education is the “problem-posing educator.” Unlike the controlled dispensation of knowledge where the depositor-teacher's task is to “organize a process which already occurs spontaneously, to 'fill' the students by making deposits of information,” the problem-posing educator's role is “to create; together with the students, the conditions under which knowledge at the level of the doxa is superseded by true knowledge, at the level of the logos.” This illuminates a major philosophical theme of Freire's work, that of the educator and the student “co-creating” history/knowledge/reality. This negates the static view of discrete “reality” waiting for either the discovery by the student, or more likely, the depositing of the teacher. For Freire, liberating pedagogy is a “constant unveiling of reality...the emergence of consciousness and critical intervention in reality.”

This point, that knowledge and reality is something to be made and debated in a critical sense, might suggest Freire to be incompatible with the recent federal laws concerning standardization of content and assessment. However, as we shall see in the praxis of Freire's theories and their applicability to the Common Core Standards, problem-posing education can occur in co-habitation with rigorous, yet flexible, standards that do not tell what (Freire's doxa) as much as how.

Freire's companionable pedagogy, with its insistence on dialogue and democracy between teacher (oppressor) and student (oppressed), correlates most clearly with the English/language arts classroom. Both dialogue and problem-
posing praxis fit tightly into literature and inquiry models, free of a restraining canon (or content)...Freire's doxa in literary form. Releasing the teacher from the content-heavy banking model, where the expert-teacher of a work like Romeo and Juliet supplies the analysis as well as the validity of the text, problem-posing directs each of the learners involved—teacher and students—in to “the act of cognition which unveils reality.”

By not only de-centering the power relationships within education but de-emphasizing the curriculum/canon as well, each of the involved players reworks both his/her role and his/her way of thinking.

Freire identifies the passive and ordered acquiescence of middle class and college-bound students in a further juxtaposition of the two types of pedagogy: “Banking education treats students as objects of assistance; problem-posing education makes them critical thinkers. Banking education inhibits creativity and domesticates...the intentionality (emphasis Freire's) of consciousness by isolating consciousness from the world, thereby denying people their ontological and historical vocation of becoming more human.”

Using literature that can both challenge and connect to students, and the often canon-bound teacher, creates the potentiality for the “unveiling” of reality Freire advocates. The intentionality (emphasis mine) of consciousness, the questioning of ontology, are not easy matters to assess in a standardized format, suggesting that problem-posing education and standardization are non-compatible. This incompatibility, however, becomes an issue only if content takes precedent over skill. If students and teachers are able to focus on the “dialogue” of education more than the “matter,”
this seeming divide breaks down.

**Contemporary Freirean Visions**

A study of the literature and debate in the 40-some years since the publication of *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* shows a wide range of application of Freirean thought. In a 2011 essay on using critical pedagogy in “privileged” school settings with “non-oppressed” students, teacher David Nurenberg comments upon the underexposed truth of Freirean pedagogy in the modern, suburban, high schools of the United States: students *not* of color, students brought up in relative security, with at least thirty years of realignment of curriculum whose intent was to include more “voices” in the literature canon. Nurenberg quotes one of his students as saying, in exasperation with literature from oppressed classes and cultures, that “‘We got Holocausted to death in middle school.’” The implicit argument here acknowledges a difficult lesson in Freirean theory. If the teacher remains the Subject and the student the object, even a politically progressive model can end up becoming a “banking” experience and result in resistance and resentment. This suggests it is not so much the content of critical pedagogy that becomes liberating as it is a marriage between the content and the delivery. Students shouldn’t be forced into thinking “correctly” as much as they should be inspired to think “critically.”

Even political engagement itself, which critics on each side of a banking/liberating argument should agree as essential to a democracy, can become another teacher-driven construct if not handled correctly. In Nurenberg's “privileged/suburban” classroom, where politics seems to address only the
“Other” and his or her suffering, political curricula cannot be something delivered with a flavoring of Oppressor guilt. As Nurenberg says of his own classroom dynamic: “Far from Freire’s conception of politics as an outgrowth of human choice and interaction, most of my students tend to see politics as an optional pursuit or an activity for enthusiasts...that is ultimately irrelevant unless one chooses to engage with it and downright irritating when one is forced to (say, by a teacher). A teacher cannot ignore this irritation; students will not learn unless the teacher finds a way to engage their willing consent.”32 This “willing consent” does not come from the content supplied by a teacher or canon. Instead, as Freire himself points out, it comes from the ontological questioning provided by the dialogue between the agents within the classroom. This dialogue should, therefore, not follow the scripted intentions of the teacher, even if that means questioning the assumptions of a progressive curriculum. Unfortunately, the current relationships within our dysfunctional political system exacerbate this disconnect with students...as well as adults. When this sense of disengagement combines with literature that alienates and implicates students of the dominant (Oppressive) culture, a more divisive dichotomy of student/teacher roles in the ELA classroom is assured.

Again, however, Nurenberg suggests this deficit can be turned to good use by an ELA teacher who addresses Freirean thought as pedagogical, not ideological, emancipation. An honest assessment of both the curriculum and culture (in the classroom and in general) should supply students with skills to critically address challenging narratives in order to activate debate, not cultural
guilt or resentment. A curriculum that necessitates a “politically correct” canon instead of the traditional, and non-political, one leads to an equally didactic absolutism. As Nurenberg says, “Narratives that promote white guilt (or rich guilt) not only are counterproductive but are also not entirely accurate. The answers to who is victim and who is beneficiary of oppression are not so simple, and in this complexity lies an opportunity for engagement.” The key here, from the emancipatory view, is “opportunity for engagement.” It is not so much the curriculum itself as how that curriculum is treated within the classroom culture. If one group (oppressed) is set apart from another (oppressor) and one role (teacher) is set above the other (student), curricular content can become irrelevant.

Nurenberg's analysis of Freire and his work is valuable here for two reasons: first, because Nurenberg is able to articulate the transference of critical theory away from both academia and the social sciences (where it has been centered) into the role of the student and teacher in a classroom setting. More importantly (for its implications to a critical theory of pedagogy) Nurenberg is a classroom teacher (specifically an ELA teacher), with real students, real standardized tests, and a real opportunity to pragmatically apply theory into practice.

This inspired sense of “active criticism” finds its strongest voice in American cultural critic and theorist Henry A. Giroux, who has been writing about critical pedagogy for over 40 years (and who taught high school social studies early in his career as well). Giroux is credited with codifying much of what constitutes the current overview of critical pedagogy. While Giroux's focus,
like that of Freire, remains on the political relationships both in the classroom (oppressed/oppressor) and in the society, Giroux updates Freire's thesis for a supersaturated information culture in which individuals (students) find themselves with more to buy and less agency or cognizance of their role in the process.

In a 2010 article, “Bare Pedagogy and the Scourge of Neoliberalism: Rethinking Higher Education as a Democratic Public Sphere” Giroux defines both the current educational model in the United States (which he terms “bare pedagogy”) and what, again in his view, would be a critical pedagogical resistance to it:

Bare pedagogy is a political and social practice that mirrors the economic neo-Darwinism of neoliberalism. It places an emphasis on winning at all costs, a ruthless competitiveness, hedonism, the cult of individualism, and a subject largely constructed within a market-driven rationality that abstracts economics and markets from ethical considerations. Within this pedagogy, compassion is a weakness, and moral responsibility is scorned because it places human needs over market considerations. Bare pedagogy strips education of its public values, critical contents, and civic responsibilities as part of its broader goal of creating new subjects wedded to the logic of privatization, efficiency, flexibility, the accumulation of capital, and the destruction of the social state.34

Giroux's evaluation of education captures the conundrum within critical pedagogy, both as theory and as practice. In order to make teachers into more than disseminators of knowledge, of encouraging educators to become, as Giroux has put it “public intellectuals,” instead of public servants, more than a radical shift in ideology must occurs. In this view, public education in the United States has been gutted both financially and philosophically.

In his article “Education, Markets, and an Audit Culture,” Michael W. Apple succinctly captures this double jeopardy: “The decades of attacks on state
employees have not only had the predictable effects of lost employment... [but also] profound effects on identities and have produced a crisis among many state employees and managers concerning doubts about their expertise."35 When the theorists are under attack, when the “authority” becomes the “oppressed,” when time spent teaching anything other than to-the-test means a loss of vocation, identifying one's self as more than an “employee” is fraught with existential implications.

Giroux, Freire, et al. would of course view this social/political situation as emblematic of the need for a critical pedagogy now more than in any time in the past. This impetus, in light of the implied thread of the Barak Obama's words about school's purpose, funding and essential (empirical) school subjects, becomes even more provocative when placed in the humanities classroom: and more precisely, in the secondary English/literature classroom. Not only the seat of “literacy,” which can be construed as code for “test-taking ability” in federally mandated programs like No Child Left Behind, the literature classroom still offers access to the dialectical, moral, and critical energies advocated by everyone from the Frankfort School to current feminist pedagogical theorists (and English instructors) like Shari Sternberg and Amy Lee.36 The difficulty is in creating both a curriculum and classroom where the normative capitalist structures of commodity exchange and competition are replaced by dialogue and democratic debate. An emphasis, therefore, on pedagogical and curricular reform, as implied through the skills-focused Common Core, can capture this duality. Changing what is taught must work cohesively with changing how it is taught.
A case can be made for the Hollywood films of the late 1940's as being the crucible for invigorating both educators (public intellectuals) and students, who often consciously and subconsciously feel themselves to be neither political, radical, or even engaged in the democratic process. Neither a panacea nor an indoctrination, these films, and the stories behind those people who made them, give students an historical and a literary window from which to view both themselves and their society. Yes, politics pervades both the content of the films and the context of the world surrounding them. In a critical pedagogical view, this is paramount. As an educator, the fine line between “political message” and “humanist literature” is forever crossed, with Shakespeare or Toni Morrison. Whether a study of these films actually develops a “critical student” depends more on the vagaries of the actual pedagogical experience than it does their supposed Marxist affiliation.

**Rancière and the Explicator**

In *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*, the French philosopher and aesthetic critic Jacques Rancière addresses many of Freire's ideas of a de-centered classroom, but he does so from the perspective of an aesthetic theorist not a politically motivated pedagogical reformer. Rancière’s work delivers a similar message to that of Freire, but he addresses Freirean issues in the tradition of such French thinkers as Althusser and Deleuze. The essential difference between Freire's vision of the classroom and that of Rancière is one of equality: While Freire seeks a leveling of the social hierarchy within the classroom, Rancière's work argues an even more radical premise...the potential equality of *intellect* within the classroom. Rancière
sees emancipation occurring only when the teacher (whom Rancière calls the Explicator) acknowledges his/her own ignorance and the relative intelligence of those who are “explicated” upon. In a succinct juxtaposition of this difference, Sarah Galloway highlights the intellectual “oppression” suggested in Rancière's view of the Explicator:

Rancière does not rely on notions of humanity as conscious beings...In common with Freire, Rancière sets up an educational model for the enactment of oppression in society....Here, school children are encouraged to believe that they cannot understand without explanation (that is, explication), which makes them intellectually reliant on a teacher, in contrast to life before school....The more the teacher explains, the more the child becomes dependent on explanation; it is a regression without end.... But unlike Freire, who viewed such techniques as aspects of a banking education, Rancière maintains that cramming is not the problem. The problem, according to him, is explanation, which assumes that children need help to understand.37

In Rancière’s terms, this makes the student always reliant on the teacher for information and education. This creates both a hierarchy and, more importantly for Rancière, an intellectual laziness in students. The conceit to this anti-explication argument Rancière finds in the story of the 18th and 19th century French pedagogue Joseph Jacotot, whose “emancipatory” teaching emphasized the equality of all intellects, the false promises of ultimate understanding, and the radical belief, revealed in Rancière’s title *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*, that one should teach what one does not know.

Rancière approaches his own thesis with a playful and provocative voice, titling various sections of his book “The Emancipator and His Monkey,” “Reason Between Equals,” and “The Society of Contempt.” From the onset, Rancière critiques the essence of pedagogy in modern society:
Before being the act of the pedagogue, explication is the myth of pedagogy, the parable of a world divided into knowing minds and ignorant ones, ripe minds and immature ones, the capable and the incapable, the intelligent and the stupid. The explicator’s special trick consists of this double inaugural gesture. On the one hand, he decrees the absolute beginning: it is only now that the act of learning will begin. On the other, having thrown a veil of ignorance over everything that is to be learned, he appoints himself to the task of lifting it. Until he came along, the child has been groping blindly, figuring out riddles. Now he will learn.38

This, then, is the ultimate emancipation of the pedagogue, for it frees both the teacher and the student from the demands of “understanding” and its opposite, “ignorance.” In a literature classroom, this can be figured as the “canonical” curriculum, where the Explicator has both his/her own background of understanding (having also been the subject of explication for years) and the weight of cultural determinacy of the “correct” texts to explicate. Immediately, the roles become entrenched, the student reliant on the teacher for enlightenment: “it is just this little word, this slogan of the enlightened—understand—that causes all the trouble. It is this word that brings a halt to the movement of reason, that destroys its confidence in itself, that distracts it by breaking the world of intelligence into two, by installing the division between the groping animal and the learned little man, between common sense and science.”39 In Rancièrean pedagogy, not even the interrogative/dialectical approaches of Socrates are emancipatory or without an undercurrent of explication. For, the relationship between the one who knows (Socrates) and the one who does not (any number of Socratic students) is not only unequal but “stultifying,” forcing the student to search for the Socratic “answer” instead of his or her own.

For Rancière, using Jacotot's experience, this means the pedagogue would
give the student work he himself did not know or understand (the example from Rancière is an untranslated book that Jacotot gave to his language students without instruction/explication) and allow the student to riddle out the words, grammar, and meaning of the syntax himself—making education a process of the will to learn. This Jacotot termed “universal learning,” and for Rancière, this type of learning perpetuates itself through a repetition of non-Socratic self-questioning: “The student must see everything for himself, compare and compare, and always respond to a three-part question: What do you see? What do you think about? What do you make of it? And so on, to infinity.” In a Freirean way, but with less political emphasis on a Utopian classless society, the students-teachers and the teacher-student equalize. It is still the role of the pedagogue, however, to push the will of the student toward learning: Rancière’s relationship is not an equal one.

Ironically, Rancière asserts that this “program” of study will not work in institutionalized settings, and he does not see a time when emancipatory pedagogy might liberate the “oppressed” as in Freire's work. For Rancière, the social construct of institutionalized education enforces an inequality. In her essay, Galloway synthesizes this difference of emancipation as one of transforming the social (Freire) and one as transforming the individual (Rancière). Galloway says, “For Freire, emancipatory education can only take place as discrete projects within an oppressive society, and systemization [of emancipation] is only possible after a social revolution.” This puts the onus on the pedagogue to work within a system in order to change that system. In the same argument, Galloway contrasts
Freire to Rancière, claiming that for Rancière “social emancipation is impossible because the very existence of society and its institutions relies upon a union of intellects, making all society inherently oppressive.” Rancière claims all intellects to be capable of learning, but that the level of will each individual devotes to her education separates teacher/student, and that the society perpetuates this by its insistence on “Explicator/ignorant” patterns of learning.

For the purposes of my thesis, where the focus is less on the social relationship within the classroom and more on the mode in which students and teachers learn, Rancière’s theory blended with Freire's initial social-critical moves becomes more applicable. Social justice in a Freirean sense must be a part of an emancipatory curriculum, but this affects the environment and agency in classroom relationships more than the content. Rancière, with his insistence on the individual's role in his or her own “understanding,” fits more readily into an analysis of the ways in which students learn.

The demographics of a classroom cannot be ignored when designing liberating curricula. If, for the sake of argument, 60% of my students have immediate access to a smart phone in their pockets, the chances for de-centering an Explicator-based system are more fruitfully immediate than reversing societal inequalities. Galloway does an efficient job “explicating” this differentiation: For Freire, “texts, pictures, and the like are used to prevent knowledge transmission [and]...must incorporate representations of the lives and concerns of students so that there is no need for a teacher to interpret” while for Rancière, “emancipatory education demands an unequal relation between teachers and
students, as it is the will of the teacher that drives the emancipatory movement toward equality of intelligence.” The text/book/picture, therefore, does not need to be a representation of “emancipation” or reflective of the Oppressed's condition; the text/book/picture must “mediate” between the intelligence of the teacher and that of the student and become a source for the testing of wills to provoke an equality of intelligences. Students are not given the “keys” to emancipation so much as given the space in which to test the limits of their emancipation...through the “pressure” or will of the teacher.

Galloway's colleague Gert Biesta narrows in more completely on the Rancièrean form of emancipatory education with a critique of traditional (read “Freirean”) pedagogy as ironically unequal—a theory that works under the conclusion that in order to be effective, the pedagogue must be the agent in transforming the student from oppressed to liberated. In Beista's analysis, “Modern [critical pedagogical] emancipation is not only based on dependency—it is also based on a fundamental inequality between emancipator and the one to be emancipated...the emancipator is the one who knows better and best and who can perform the act of demystification that is needed to expose the workings of power” (emphasis original). In Freire's theory, this inequality of emancipator working for (above) the oppressed becomes problematic. As Biesta reads the point, if an emancipatory education still requires a teacher to point out (demystify) social inequalities and power workings for students, than an inherent inequality will always be in place. Biesta encapsulates this paradoxical relationship with a master/slave analogy: “[A]s long as the master remains a
master, the slave can only ever become a former slave or an emancipated slave—but not a master” (emphasis original). Rancière acknowledges, unlike many critical pedagogues, that the “master” portion of the relationship should remain the same, it is the “master explicator” who needs to step aside for the “willful master” who is “only an authority, only a will that sets the ignorant person down a path, that is to say to instigate a capacity already possessed.” It is not a socio-political emancipation; it is a personal-epistemological one.

In the next chapter, I will address more recent variants of emancipatory education. Henry A. Giroux's work is especially applicable here as it moderates between current educational and political climates (in Western democracies) and the ongoing need for liberating educational theory. Giroux, and similar theorists, also focus on the role of media within the sphere of both pedagogy and politics (two essentially wedded practices), which leads into the film study praxis at the heart of this thesis.
Film does more than entertain; it offers up subject positions, mobilizes desires, influences us subconsciously, and helps to construct the landscape of American culture....it also deploys power through the important role it plays in connecting the production of pleasure and meaning to the mechanisms and practices of powerful teaching machines. Put simply, films both entertain and educate.49

Chapter Three: Critical Media Literacy

As the central narratives in a pedagogical praxis, the films Crossfire and Body and Soul provide a unique opportunity for public school students to pursue relevant and complex texts while matching larger federal mandates and assessments. These films, as emancipatory narratives, challenge and critique on-going concerns in our society such as race, class, and gender inequalities. The texts, like the socially progressive written texts of Steinbeck, place the a priori discourses of democracy and the ethereal American Dream into a critical light.

What these films provide additionally, however, gives them a potentiality absent in traditional print-based texts within the canon (like Of Mice and Men or The Grapes of Wrath). As visual texts, and as aesthetically and politically engaging narratives, these films also address 21st century concerns with media literacy and the rapid evolution of textuality itself. In their review of the literature of critical media literacy Donna E. Alverman and Margaret C. Hagood address the blurring of distinction between popular culture, media, audience, and text.50 They also address the limitations imposed upon this burgeoning complexity if approached solely as a “visual literacy” activity within the classroom. For them, media literacy is more than decoding signs. Critical media literacy must account
for politicized, dynamic, relationships between visual/media texts and their audiences.

According to these authors, “It is important to note about this multiplicity of meanings for the term critical media literacy that we have not referred to it as simply visual or critical viewing literacy, both of which are limited by their reliance on the outdate notion that audiences are passive in relation to media messages.”\(^ {51} \) This suggests the role of visual media within the classroom does not limit itself to an analysis of meaning, but rather becomes a critical operation on the relationships between media and audience. This focus on audience as an active, critical participant in the pedagogy of visual media updates much of Paolo Freire's interest in liberation pedagogy. It places the audience and the text in the center of the spotlight. If the term “audience” is supplanted with “students/teachers,” the activity of teaching “visual literacy” becomes more than a rote decoding, and participants in the experience “do not merely reflect a text's message, but instead actively produce meanings that then become part of the historical and social conditions in which future cultural texts are constituted.”\(^ {52} \) In this literacy model, mediated relationships and their consequences stand equally with aesthetic appreciation and the close reading responses inherent in contemporary language arts classrooms.

Hollywood blacklist films, with their imbrication within a distinct historical and political framework, bring this analysis of not only text but audience into the contemporary classroom. Through this attention to both text and audience, a clearer critical/emancipatory relationship opens up. Alvermann and Hagood argue that a critical classroom/pedagogy “demands of students, not that
they conform to some image of political liberation nor even that they resist, but
simply that they gain some understanding of their own involvement in the [texts],
and in the making of their own future.”53 Using visual texts in the literature
classroom provides this broadened emphasis on medium/message/audience.
Using blacklist films as the primary vehicle for such exploration, as opposed to
relying solely on contemporary/popular images and media such as the internet and
television, provides a temporal distancing that allows students to make their own
“involvement” in such texts clearer and disarticulated from the educational
system. Because they are historically situated, these films provide the “window”
rather than the “mirror” with which students can begin to define their own
emergent roles in media culture.

Henry A. Giroux argues for this re-evaluation of both canon and
instruction as a key to student success in the 21st century.54 Giroux recasts the
teacher/academic as a “public intellectual,” whose responsibility is to “use those
electronically mediated knowledge forms that constitute the terrain of mass and
popular culture.... [and] challenge the traditional definition of schooling as the
only site of pedagogy by widening the application...of pedagogy to a variety of
cultural locations.”55 Giroux, in a critical move against what he terms bare
pedagogy of assessment-based educational policy, argues that the duty of these
public intellectuals is not simply to provide students with content, but with a
curriculum that demands active debate and critical engagement:

The content of the curriculum should affirm and critically enrich the
meaning, language, and knowledge forms that students actually use to
negotiate and inform their lives. Academics can, in part, exercise their
role as public intellectuals via such curricula by giving students the
opportunity to understand how power is organized through the enormous
number of “popular” cultural spheres that range from libraries, movie theaters, and schools to high-tech media conglomerates that circulate signs and meanings through newspapers, magazines, advertisements, new information technologies, computers, films, and television programs.\textsuperscript{56}

While Giroux's emphasis here seems to focus on the academy and the university, it should by no means be a process or a canon left to “higher education” to address. In our hyper-mediated culture, students become “textual consumers” early. Providing them with the critical perspective to see their roles within the dynamic of “cultural spheres” cannot be left solely for the narrower window of post-secondary education.

\textbf{Media and Emancipatory Pedagogy}

Concerns about media study in today's curricula are not limited to theorists like Giroux. In a 2010 Knight Foundation-funded white paper,\textsuperscript{57} Renee Hobbs sets out specific guidelines on the use of media within 21\textsuperscript{st} century curricula. Like Giroux, the Hobbs' report emphasizes the role of visual/digital media as a primary agent for democratic engagement...and a battlefield where competing entities commodify and manipulate messages. Hobbs suggests the role of the school is to provide citizens with tools to consume \textit{and} produce texts in diverse media:

To fulfill the promise of digital citizenship, Americans must acquire multimedia communication skills that include the ability to compose messages using language, graphic design, images, and sound, and know how to use these skills to engage in the civic life of their communities....The inclusion of digital and media literacy in formal education can be a bridge across digital divides and cultural enclaves...and a means for providing more equal opportunities in digital environments.\textsuperscript{58}

Using visual texts from the middle of the previous century would not seem to meet this demand for the emergent “digital citizenship.” The visual fluency with which post-World War II audiences would engage in films like \textit{Crossfire} and
Body and Soul required much less awareness of the text/audience and consumer/producer complexity of today's students. The suggestion, however, that media literacy only involves preparing students for continuous digital updates via Twitter limits “media” to those forms conforming to pragmatic functionality. These mediated sites can also quickly fall prey to commodification and the whims of popular interest: MySpace begat Facebook begat Instagram begat Twitter ad infinitum. If taken solely as an exercise in technological “tool usage,” media literacy would only apply to the most recent iterations of social media or cell phones. The mandates for a language arts classroom by nature should transcend the pragmatic (while acknowledging it). Some aesthetic appreciation must remain at the heart of an English classroom's curriculum. Reading Hamlet must address more than the medial qualities of Shakespearean drama and the implications of Shakespeare's socio-political messages.

What both Giroux and Hobbs argue to be the real thrust of media literacy—an informed and critical citizenship able to act upon democratic ideals—is at the core of the blacklist period, a time in which the text/context relationship was particularly important. The films, therefore, satisfy “medial,” “political,” and “aesthetic” pedagogical opportunities. Hobbs makes certain to clarify the broad range of skills, but narrow focus of intention, within media literacy education. The audience/classroom in this sense remains focused on the “production” of citizenship more than the production of media content:

In this report, the term “digital and media literacy” is used to encompass the full range of cognitive, emotional and social competencies that includes the use of texts, tools and technologies; the skills of critical thinking and analysis; the practice of message composition and creativity; the ability to engage in reflection and ethical thinking; as well as active
participation through teamwork and collaboration. When people have digital and media literacy competencies, they recognize personal, corporate and political agendas and are empowered to speak out on behalf of the missing voices and omitted perspectives in our communities. By identifying and attempting to solve problems, people use their powerful voices and their rights under the law to improve the world around them.59

The key challenge, pedagogically, is to position blacklist film such that students/teachers peer both at and through the texts. A window onto 1947 and its political and social stakes is especially valuable (in a pedagogical sense) if it can reflect back upon the contemporary interests and media negotiations of 21\textsuperscript{st} century classrooms. What blacklist films can do, and what Hobbs emphasizes in her white paper, is to create a critical distancing between audience and text. Because they are not contemporary forms of media, and yet they directly connect to contemporary conditions, these films filter the “technology” out of the media equation. They emphasize that using technology is not the same as critiquing its role, that, according to Hobbs, “educators must not just teach with digital technologies, tools or games. To develop media literacy competencies it is necessary to teach about media and technology, making active use of the practices of dialogue and Socratic questioning to promote critical thinking about the choices people make when consuming, creating and sharing messages.”60

Allan Luke's scholarship looks at blending this media awareness within the classroom with Freire's initial explorations of critical praxis. Luke emphasizes the role literacy must play in addressing the issues and politics inherent in the “critical,” and also suggests a reworking of this same literacy must include an assessment of the text itself, particularly those texts whose traditional inclusion in the classroom makes them suspect to “ideological and hegemonic.”61
functionality. More than an analysis of the power relationships within society (and the classroom), Luke suggests critical literacy provide “technical resources for analyzing how texts work (Wallace, 2003). For example...the analysis of a textbook or media representation” and, further, to “teach [learners] how the selection of specific grammatical structures and word choices attempts to manipulate the reader.” The language of “textual decoding” recommended by Luke works even more substantially when that text is visual rather than written matter. Modern students are more enmeshed in, yet ignorant of, the “grammar” that generates the messages of modern media. Providing a “text” that both introduces the basics of this visual grammar, and problematizes the historical and thematic messages inherent in these texts, creates a multi-dimensional literacy opportunity, one that includes both the binaries of oppressor/oppressed and those of audience/medium.

**Film as Critical Literature**

As a scholar of critical pedagogy and media literacy, Henry Giroux becomes an important voice for emancipatory teaching practices and source for the critiquing of what he terms “new media.” Giroux addresses both his own early experiences teaching with film (as a young high school social studies teacher) and his current theoretical interests in cinema as transformative vehicle of “public pedagogy” in his article “Breaking into the Movies: Pedagogy and the Politics of Film.” Giroux problematizes the absolute, and narrowly focused, didactic motive for film study, which he confesses motivated his early pedagogical moves. Instead, Giroux argues that using film in a critical sense within the classroom must not ignore film's (particularly Hollywood's) role as a “powerful
force for shaping public memory, hope, popular consciousness, and social agency [that] invites people into a broader public conversation.” While using an earnest documentary (which Giroux says was his first inclination as a teacher) that indicts the injustices inherent in unequal social positioning may “teach” students a narrowly defined lesson on inequality, Giroux suggests the power of Hollywood film within a dynamic, politicalized, classroom should address the complex positioning of film in the public sphere, and in the roles of students' lives outside of the institution of school. As Giroux states, because it is

Uniquely placed between the privatized realm of the home and other public spheres, film provides a distinct space in which a range of contradictory issues and meanings enter public discourse sometimes in a subversive fashion that addresses pressing and urgent issues in American society. As a space of translation, film also bridges the gap between private and public discourse, plays an important role in putting particular ideologies and values into public conversation, and offers a pedagogical space for addressing how a society views itself and the public world of power, events, politics, and institutions.

This emphasis on film's public role, as both a space for shared narrative experience and critical/theoretical engagement, makes its use as a focus of textual analysis within the classroom particularly trenchant. Public school itself, in its public/private and shared/individualized roles, echoes film's “important role in putting...ideologies and values into public conversation.” By blending the two public pedagogies, using film as a core text softens the boundary between school and “real life,” between textuality and “reality,” and between entertainment and “literacy.” Using blacklist films, as opposed to contemporary films with which students will be more familiar and comfortable, maintains the division, soft though it is, between the two spheres. Blacklist films, given their historic-cultural milieu, aesthetic distance (Film Noir vs. Computer Generated Imagery), and
obvious chronological age, remind students that their inter-relationship with the text is more than a “mirroring” of their own lives and interests. The pedagogical key is that the political and social issues within the films and the historical consequences of the blacklist itself do remain relevant, and provocative, in contemporary American society.

Critical pedagogy scholar bell hooks also recognizes this unique role of film to be a narratively rich and publicly influential medium. For hooks, “Movies not only provide a narrative for specific discourses of race, sex, and class, they provide a shared experience, a common starting point from which diverse audiences can dialogue about these charged issues.” sucht Locating these highly relevant issues (a quick search of any database would elicit multiple examples of the current cultural problematics of race/sex/class in America) in a historical framework like the blacklist highlights the on-going influence of Hollywood mediation, allowing students to see a contiguous give-and-take between the medium and social concerns.

Giroux is careful to acknowledge the de-centered role of the teacher in a classroom in which such mediated, and public, texts become the primary critical component. Of his own approach, he says “Not only do I encourage a critique of my own interpretations and analyses of film, but I also urge students to develop their own positions as part of a critique and engagement with varied positions (including my own) that develop amidst class dialogue and in conjunction with outside readings and critical reviews.” sucht This democratic role, as one of many possible “voices” within a critical debate, becomes even more earnest in an interaction with blacklist films, where critical and political lines have already
been firmly drawn by historical facts. Instead of approaching the texts as “examples” of certain political/historical injustices, the films can be approached in a more media-literate way, focusing class debate and effort on reading the texts for signs and symbols that would influence one or another reading. The historical truth encompassing the texts—the HUAC and the Hollywood Ten and the blacklist itself—vivifies the theoretical and adds weight to the film, “[enabling] people to think more critically about how art may contribute to constructing public spaces that expand the possibilities for both pleasure and political agency, democratic relations, and social justice.”69 Helping students take the leap from the historical “truths” inherent in the films to applying these strategies of analysis and critique to their own mediations with film (and other forms of visual media), creates a historical, aesthetic, and media savvy student/citizen.

Tyson E. Lewis concretizes the difference between an aesthetic approach to critical pedagogy and what he terms Paolo Freire's “problematic formulation of the image-pedagogy relationship”70 in his article “The Future of the Image in Critical Pedagogy.” In the vein of Gert Biesta and Sarah Galloway, Lewis juxtaposes Freire's initial moves in critical pedagogy, narrowing in on Freire's book Education for Critical Consciousness (1973), with the more recent concepts offered by Jacques Rancière, in books such as Aesthetics and Its Discontents (2009) and The Emancipated Spectator (2009). Unlike Biesta and Galloway, however, Lewis narrows in on Freire's concept of the “art image” as a tool for pedagogical emancipation.

Lewis analyzes Freire's use of specifically chosen “codified images” in order “To help students recognize themselves as Subjects of history rather than
Objects.” In Freire's scenario, a group of Brazilian illiterates are brought together and shown ten didactic images related to Brazilian culture. As Freire says, “To introduce the concept of culture, first we 'broke down' this concept into its fundamental aspects. Then, on the basis of this breakdown, we 'codified' (i.e., represented visually) ten existential situations....Each representation contained a number of elements to be 'decoded' by the group of participants, with the help of the coordinator. [The artist]...perfectly integrated education and art.” These images are deliberately activated to provide a “dialogue” in which the pedagogue gradually brings the students into an understanding of their role as Oppressed. Of the ten images, the central three relate to “man's” role in nature; the first shows a native hunter, barefoot and face-painted, using a bow and arrow to kill birds; the second shows a European-esque hunter, with bird gun and attendant hunting dog; the third shows a cat and a dead mouse. Freire generalizes the responses of the group to the meaning in the image, using phrases like “They always answer” and “They then perceive immediately.” In each case, the coordinator and his/her group use the images to discuss the power of acculturation through literacy. The first image (native hunter) and the last image (cat/mouse) provide clear (in Freire's retelling) correlates to the European hunter, who possesses both the technological and literacy advantages of modern culture. The de-coding of the signs (images) in this model suggests that art affects, or translates, a clear message that is essentially the same for each Subject. Here, the role of the “coordinator” is to guide the “participant” to the appropriate de-coding...thereby enacting “emancipation” through placing the image in its specific, defined, context.

In Lewis' estimation, this one-to-one correlation of image to message,
where the image sends one particular message (in Freire's case, a specifically *emancipatory* message) leaves out the aesthetic nature of art: the ability of art to send more than a unidirectional or univocal idea. Of Freire's model in using art to direct specific emancipatory intents, Lewis says that “Creation in this model is never the creation of the new, nor is agency the agency of invention, and the word appears as the result of an ideal causality that translates intentions to images to signs.”74 Lewis suggests here that art, in its aesthetic complexity, cannot be shaped to provide direct results—unless it devolves into the “banking model” of education at the heart of Freire's critical engagement with traditional educational structures.

The difficulty of establishing Freirean emancipatory pedagogy in contemporary situations falls not so much on Freire's overtly didactic use of media “imagery” as much as the socio-political differences in Freire's teaching situation. Freire used “images” because he was teaching actual “illiterates:” people who had not been taught to read and write. Unlike a contemporary model, where “literacy” for a high school student is defined in cultural, medial, or historical terms, Freire's use of visual media was pragmatically motivated. As he says of his “codifications/images” in the section titled *Education and Conscienciacao,* “It is remarkable to see with what enthusiasms these illiterates engage in debate and with what curiosity they respond to questions implicit in the codifications [images]...As the dialogue intensifies, a 'current' is established among the participants, dynamic to the degree that the content of the codifications corresponds to the existential reality of the group.”75 It is almost disingenuous to extrapolate upwards from this example, correlating this use of “codification” with
illiterates to “media” with high school students. However, while the methodology of Freire may not function in the same manner today, his suggestion of “image” as cultural currency does. Also, his emphasis on critical citizenship as a pathway to emancipation does translate from “then” to “now.” Of his motivations with “codification” Freire says, “We wanted to offer the people the means by which they could supersede their magic or naïve perception of reality by one that was predominately critical....This meant that we must take the people at the point of emergence and, by helping them move from naïve to critical transitivity, facilitate their intervention in the historical process.”

Because Freire's use of “image” is limited to a direct transference of “message,” Lewis turns to Rancière, and his problematizing of the Oppressor/Oppressed relationship within critical pedagogy, to provide a less hierarchical relationship between art, explicator, and student. As Lewis says of Rancière, “Rather than decoding images (a transmission model of reception that grants creative agency to the artist), the spectator, for Rancière, translates images. The act of translation opens a space between intent and content, leading to dissensus rather than consensus over the image. It is here that democracy emerges as the possibility of disagreement over what is seen in the image [emphasis original].” In this regard, the relationship between teacher and student becomes one of facilitation. Dissensus, as opposed to the more strictly oppositional dissent, provides an opening for students to access their own aesthetic response to the art (in the case of this thesis, blacklist film), which by definition should be their own sensory response. It also avoids the didactic tendency of “decoding” images at the behest of, in Freire's case, a coordinator.
An aesthetically positioned critical pedagogy should be one that “opens a space of dissensus with the common sense assumption concerning what is and is not visible.”78 This becomes even more compelling when the aesthetic response bundles with authentic political complexity as in the case of blacklist film. And in a technological era in which multiple positions can be accessed nearly immediately (through smartphones and other personal media devices), one-way, hierarchical relations between teachers and students themselves lose validity.

Digital Media and Pedagogy

In their article “The Importance of Still Teaching the iGeneration,” Thomas M. Philip and Antero D. Garcia isolate some of the prevailing prejudices inherent in the introduction of new media forms in public school discourses. The authors particularly note the tendencies of policy makers at local and national levels to focus on the technological device as the key player in the current negotiation between pedagogy and media. The authors argue that many current reforms and innovations rely on “unsubstantiated assurances that a device’s capability will transfer from a commercial, scientific, or industrial context to the classroom, rather than a candid assessment of its potential and limitations in facilitating rich learning, drive educational decisions from the national level down.”79 The panacea of the iPad, they suggest, once placed in the nimble digits of a modern student by a benign institutional entity, does not preclude or invalidate teacher agency and the role of the traditional (and communal) school structure.

Updating the philosophical struggle that pits technological innovation against the seemingly archaic role of “teacher” into the now nearly ubiquitous
smartphone age, Philip and Garcia list the potentiality inherent in bringing an
individualized, “pocket-sized,” curriculum to public education:

There are a number of reasons why mobile devices appear to be a natural fit for engaging students in learning. They are increasingly ubiquitous and introduce previously unimaginable possibilities into the classroom space, and youth perform a wide range of tasks with them outside of school. They are also distinct from many prior technologies in that they are typically brought into school spaces by students themselves. Because smartphones are intimately tied to today’s youth popular culture and are 'personal, portable, and pedestrian' (Ito, Okabe, & Matsuda, 2005), they appear to offer a particularly productive opportunity for student buy-in.80

For the authors, of course, this appearance of “student by-in” is only that: a commodified vision of a teacher-free pedagogy. Instead of this focus on the “tool,” they suggest a more effective strategy involves a focus on the “3Ts”: text, tool, and talk.81 The technology (new media) now becomes a part of a larger discourse in which the teacher takes, essentially, a mediating role. The text in this relationship involves an analysis of not just its applicability to a student's life or its availability in the appropriate technological format (as it would in a student-centered curriculum) but its value in providing students in both “urban” and “suburban” settings the opportunity to engage in analyses of “the culture of power.”82 Smartphones and other “tools” to access new media outlets and venues do not privilege this analysis of power structures, and through their commodification and commercialization, may also inhibit it. Without a teacher mediating the flow of information, and without a guiding determiner free of exterior motivations, digital-texts can easily exchange critiquing power dynamics for commodifying them.

The second of the “Ts” suggests this very problem. As digital facilitators, technology like smartphones and tablets give students immediate access to
concepts and contexts difficult to reach with even “traditional” computers. This liberalized access without concomitant pedagogy creates a “PowerPoint” effect, where style trumps substance, and what a tool can do supplants why the tool is necessary at all. Again, the role of the teacher as facilitator or mediator gives the tool, and the attendant new media “fix-all” aura, its actual classroom viability. Philip and Garcia point out that “To move beyond [the] ideological trappings of technology, it is critical to shift from a perception of a technological tool as an inherent object of youth interest or as a surrogate for effective teaching to an explication of its particular affordances within a classroom context.” It is this suggestion of “ideology” within the use of technology, the hope for cure-all fixes to complex issues, that must be addressed before firing up Google or Prezi.

The final “T,” talk, relates to the intended role of the teacher/facilitator as well as the new communicative opportunities opened up by more “school-ready” social media such as blogs and wikis. With the new media, students can extend conversations beyond classroom walls. Additionally, students are able to transpose traditional forms of communication into their own, more comfortable, modes. But as the authors point out, this easy crossover from pedagogical text and tool to student-centered discourse can have deleterious effects. Without more rigorous, school-centered, opportunities for engaged and sustained “talk,” such as in-depth analysis papers and extended research, students find themselves lacking in the very skills most highly regarded, and valued, in higher levels of education (and by standardized mandates like the CCSS). Philip and Garcia sum up their tepidity on technology sans pedagogical mediation with an acknowledgement of the power of relationship between students and teachers more than between
student and media: “The context, not the tool, is what is important when making
decisions about utilizing new technology within learning environments. Simply
making a mobile device available to students or using these devices to study
issues important to them does not bridge relevancy between the students’ multiple
worlds. Here again the role of pedagogy is fundamental.”84 Using the media
(whether technical, social, or commercial) in a critical manner, in which the tool
becomes only a participant in a larger dialogue, transcends the need for the
newest, quickest, smallest, or smartest devices.

But if “context” should take primacy over technical “progress” in
contemporary classrooms, a further problematic is the nature of the “con-text”
itself. Just as any new media inserted into the classroom does not replace, or even
supplement, the communal and emancipatory potential of that space, neither will
just any selected film provide the appropriate amount of change suggested by
theorists like Giroux and cultural mandates like the Common Core State
Standards. Peter McLaren and Zeus Leonardo problematize the “selection” of
essential film-media in their article “Deconstructing Surveillance Pedagogy:
Dead Poets Society.” For an pedagogical experience to be truly emancipatory, the
theoretical basis for the practice must allow educators “to question for the 'first
time,' the differential incorporation of high and popular culture in schools...to
identify the repressed margins of unofficial cultures, to name the struggles with
the lifeworld of subaltern groups, and to legitimate the silenced culture of the
popular.”85 Not only must a film generate aesthetic and narrative complexities, to
be truly a praxis of critical pedagogy it must expose both the power structures and
problematize the relations between high and popular culture within the school
setting.

A Hollywood film like *Dead Poets Society* (1989), which illuminates, in McLaren's words, “the avatars of Romanticism by evoking the sign of *carpe diem*” and whose teacher (played by actor/comedian Robin Williams) “encourages, better yet makes it imperative for [his] students to pursue education to the ends of self-actualization, existential freedom, and humanistic quest for peak experiences.”

would seem to be an excellent opportunity to engage students in an analysis of the individual's role(s) within the social structure. However, according to McLaren and Leonardo, this type of film, which privileges the solo pursuit of revolt and self-emancipation over the societal “common good,” actually “lacks the politicized and self-reflexive discourse students need.”

In a textual sense, this particular film-as-media literacy works to bring both popular culture and visual literacy issues to the forefront. From a critical pedagogical standpoint, however, a film such as *Dead Poets Society* sends an individualized, neoliberal, message that runs counter to the aims of critical pedagogy. If we are all finding ourselves, McLaren and Leonardo suggest, we will not be able to find others.

McLaren and Leonardo evoke Foucault's ideas of the body within the biopolitical arena, particularly Foucault's *Discipline and Punish* (1975) to suggest the type of liberation implied, but ultimately narrowed, by Robin William's radical teacher. The authors suggest this “bondage between the students' bodies and their seats...reminds us of the way the body is perfected by the architecture of surveillance.”

In this way, the methods Mr. Keating (Williams) uses within the film to help his students achieve a self-actualized *carpe diem*...encouraging them
to stand on their desks, walk in individualized manners, or read poetry in the alter-
setting of a cave...suggest a reordering of both the physical and idealized self.

What McLaren and Leonardo find troubling about this liberation (and its
suggested pedagogical use) is that it frees the self but does nothing to change the
“surveilled” nature of the biopolitics of the school.

Ultimately, the film itself, as a narrative and aesthetic vision of pedagogy,
traditional schooling, and self-identity, does offer problematic levels of meaning
for students to confront. Although its message may be that of the Romantic and
Transcendentalist, and, as the authors stress, “fails to consider how individuals are
differentially enabled to act by virtue of the economic and cultured constraints
they face, and by virtue of the opportunities afforded them on the basis of race,
ethnicity, class, gender, and sexual orientation,” the teacher can still bring these
concepts through his/her own critical reading of the work. As Giroux points out,
it is not essential, or even warranted, for the teacher to supply a reading that
supplants or supplements that of the student. Instead film, as an audience-
intensive media, allows a public airing of “ideologies and values.” McLaren and
Leonardo make this point explicit, although slightly ironic, when they remind us
that their own relationship to Dead Poets Society is as pedagogues (They used the
film while teaching a class in educational foundations at UCLA). Their own
critical pedagogical interventions with their students (prospective teachers)
consisted of convincing their students that McLaren/Leonardo's own theories (as
critical pedagogues) outweighed those that could be read in the narrative of Dead
Poets Society. McLaren and Leonardo summarize their own teaching experience
with the text as a near-conversion of their students from initial appreciation of the
carpe diem school of pedagogy to the critique of such individualism:

After discussing with the students various readings in critical pedagogy and developing with them a working vocabulary of critical terminology, students were able to point to many of the limitations in Keating's pedagogical philosophy and praxis. Critical pedagogy was identified in the final instance as the production of a pedagogical locality which can be characterized as a situated community of dialogical learners. Such a community is dedicated to generating the context for dialogical praxis whereas in mainstream pedagogies, schooling is produced or driven by the already existing context provided by the nation-state. That the students were able to make this distinction is, in our minds, one of the most essential steps in understanding both the perils and the promise of critical pedagogy.90

The implications latent in this summation of con-textual success (for McLaren and Leonardo) expose some of the difficulty with using literature (in this case film) to make larger statements about political inequalities. The “dialogical praxis” used in this particular pedagogical experience would seem to be one set of interpretation (the “critical pedagogical” position of the teachers) placed in opposition to a second set (the “carpe diem” position of the students). According to the summation of the experience provided by the authors/teachers, the “dialogue” ends up favoring that of the prescribing members of the community: It is obviously both a “context” and a “dialogue” predicated on the readings and interests of the teachers.

As a meta-commentary on the responsible role of the teacher within pedagogical discourse, finding fault in Mr. Keating's emphasis on the individual path versus the common good has some merit. Placed against the emancipatory vision of the critical pedagogue, which in its Freirean iteration emphasizes class and gender problematics, the self-enlightening goals of white, male, Anglo-Saxon prep school students seem callow. However, from a media-literate perspective,
and from a more general philosophical perspective, *Dead Poets Society* in its
textuality, becomes as valid as a text that might more readily reveal power issues.

To echo Philip and Garcia, it is neither the “text” nor the “tool” that should play
the primary role within a media-related discourse, it is the role of the teacher
herself and the “talk” that is engendered through her mediation.

French philosopher Alain Badiou, in “The Enigmatic Relationship
between Philosophy and Politics”91 addresses this figure in his analysis of
philosophy as an “act” more than an “idea:”

In this second view of things [the first being philosophy as solely a
“scholastic vision”], philosophy is no more knowledge than it is
knowledge of knowledge. It is an action. We could say that what
identifies philosophy are not the rules of a discourse but the singularity of
an act. It is this act that the enemies of Socrates designated as 'corrupting
the youth.' And...this is the reason why Socrates was condemned to death.
'To corrupt youth' is, after all, a very apt name to designate the
philosophical act, provided that we understand the meaning of 'corruption.'
To corrupt here means to teach the possibility of refusing all blind
submission to established opinions. To corrupt means to give the youth
certain means to change their opinion with regard to social norms, to
substitute debate and rational critique for imitation and approval, and
even, if the question is a matter of principal, to substitute revolt for
obedience.92

In the Badiouan view, the philosopher and the teacher are synonymous,
and the action that makes the philosopher is “to teach the possibility of
refusing...blind submission to established orders.” The philosopher-teacher's role,
therefore, becomes one of promoter more than prescriber. The answer isn't so
much to make tool/text/talk match up with existing agendas, even those as noble
as Freire's, but to give a sense of agency and “means to change their opinion” to
the youth.

This type of active, and in Socrates' case dangerous, philosophy returns us
to Giroux, whose view of teachers as “public intellectuals” evokes Badiou's philosopher-teacher model. Giroux's recent critical work, such as 2011's “The Crisis of Public Values in the Age of the New Media,” combines the critical pedagogue's locus of social justice with a critique of the inherent problematics in the individualizing technologies replacing and commodifying “public spheres” of discourse. Giroux sees current “new media” (circa 2011) as a “moral anesthesia and political firewall that legitimate a ruthless and fraudulent free-market system while failing to make visible the workings of casino capitalism that rejects as weakness any measure of compassion, care, trust, and vulnerability.” This aspect of media, acting as a partner to capitalism in the de-politicizing of public spheres such as the school, the university, and politics itself, becomes a primary concern if the contemporary school-model is portrayed as one of many sites for “producing a lost generation of young people, a multitude of disposable individuals and groups, and a culture of deepening collective cynicism.” This view, however robustly “Socratic” it may be in its condemnation, perceives and targets larger movements without acknowledging smaller actants.

“New Media” is more chimera than leviathan. It has neither a center nor can it be temporally registered or captured. In its rapidity and its adaptability, it is more protean than dictatorial. Using media that comments upon “New Media” issues, yet is divorced from the technological forces developed around the digital age, gives the teacher/philosopher/facilitator a platform distinct from “the rapid pace of change” that, according to Giroux, “prevent[s] experiences from crystalizing, events from being seriously discussed, and commitments to a just society from developing.” Using blacklist films like Crossfire and Body and
Soul allows the “public intellectual” to confront and present contemporary pedagogical issues like media literacy, political issues like neoliberalism, all while manipulating the tools of the New Media (such as instantaneous information) to provide the space in which the student/viewer can determine her own role.

In chapter four of this thesis, the focus narrows in on the essential pedagogical and historical elements of the blacklist. The goal—translating the theories of media literacy and critical pedagogy to the praxis of a contemporary literature-based classroom—will be addressed.
John Rankin (February 5, 1793 – March 18, 1886) was an American Presbyterian minister, educator and abolitionist. Upon moving to Ripley, Ohio in 1822, he became known as one of Ohio's first and most active "conductors" on the Underground Railroad. Prominent pre-Civil War abolitionists William Lloyd Garrison, Henry Ward Beecher and Harriet Beecher Stowe were influenced by Rankin's writings and work in the anti-slavery movement.96

John Elliott Rankin (March 29, 1882 – November 26, 1960) was a Democratic congressman from the U.S. State of Mississippi who supported racial segregation and, on the floor of the United States House of Representatives, voiced racist views on African Americans, Jews, and the Japanese, even accusing Albert Einstein of being a communist agitator.97

Chapter Four: The Hollywood Blacklist

Praxis in Medias Res

Using blacklist-era visual texts, as mentioned previously, imbricates the actual and the fictional, living protagonists and theoretical idealisms. This puts historic and aesthetic pressure upon accepted canons and teaching practices within the language arts classroom. Viewed as “living texts” as opposed to hypothetical narratives, with problematics immanent in artistic decisions and real-world consequences, this politicizes not just the text and the semiotics therein but the critical choices made without.

The traditional high school text for this era and this type of historicizing of literature is Arthur Miller's play The Crucible, which thinly veils John Proctor's
ethical crisis within the Salem Witch Trials as meta-commentary upon McCarthy's communist hysteria-mongering of the 1950's. Aside from their accessibility and practicality as visual media texts, Hollywood blacklist films provide a further pedagogical benefit beyond Miller's play: multiple, actual, “John Proctors.” The tension between the content of the films, which only suggest communism/witchcraft, and the consequence of the actual committees/trials, which reveal the hysteria and its personal consequences, problematizes for students accepted views of history and personal conduct.

Taking the Rancièrean, quasi-explicator, route, I asked the students to “find out something on John Rankin” as a homework assignment. We had done in-class “Wikipedia work” on terminology like “communism,” “Hollywood blacklist,” “socialism,” and “Post-War America”: brief, smartphone-enabled, listings of un-filtered definitions. My assumption, with this context, was that my students would find the correct John Rankin—I had even put a link on the class blog to John Rankin's Wikipedia page, which reveals a craven, publicity seeking, congressman from Mississippi who made frequent use of racial and religious stereotypes in his role as both a HUAC member and a Congressional Representative.

The next class I asked, “So, who is John Rankin?” expecting dutiful repetition of my expected medial experience. Instead, most of the students who offered a response gave a “He was an Abolitionist and Presbyterian minister who was one of the early 'conductors' on the Underground Railroad,” answer in diligent honors student voices. John Rankin (Abolitionist) arrives before John E. Rankin (rabid race-baiting politician) in a search engine's hierarchy.
This gives rise to what I call the “John Rankin Effect” of the internet as pedagogical oracle. It turned a simple knowledge-based activity that I could have explicated in a few minutes into a lengthy discussion on the nature of not just internet “truth,” but the very nature of meaning-making when confronted with unlimited access to information. Establishing *identity* is certainly a core disruption of the blacklist itself. It is also inherent in the themes and meanings of the artistic statements that inspired HUAC in the first place. It isn't as simple as asking students, “Which John Rankin will you be?” but it does problematize the medial approach to textuality in contemporary English classrooms.

Lydia Brauer and Caroline T. Clark identify this hybridized and decentralized approach to texts in their article “The Trouble is English: Reframing English Studies in Secondary Schools.” They identify the flux in which contemporary secondary English classrooms and curricula push traditional textual studies from three often discrete approaches, or metaphorical determiners. The first traditional approach, according to the authors, is the position that “texts are sacred; they have endured because they convey universal human truths...that transcend their historical location.”98 Here, the teacher frames textual study so that students gain an aesthetic appreciation for the scholarly, canonical, text. This could be idealized as the “Bardolatry” still seen in many public school districts;99 Shakespearean texts are often taught in modes that isolate them from much of their specific socio-political claims and leave them in an ethereal, universalized, realm.

In the second metaphorical relationship used in classrooms, Brauer and Clark suggest “texts are predators, and students are thus potential prey... [who
must] arm themselves against the deceptive rhetorical and ideological strategies of these texts." In opposition to the first, this metaphorical approach suggests the teacher-student-text triangle involves a deconstructing of medial and canonical texts. Here, as in the case of much media studies, texts are deconstructed to reveal their attitudes on power relationships and inherent messages. The student-teacher-text discourse becomes one of negotiation amongst the various sub-texts found within a work.

Brauer and Clark’s third metaphor is one in which “texts are transparent windows to other times and cultures, and students are encouraged to be tourists, or in the case of literature about oppression or social injustice (such as the Holocaust or slavery), witnesses.” This approach avoids the aesthetic arrangements of the work to focus solely in on the conduit-like manner in which literature works to place students into alternative societal roles and historical events. The authors are careful to point out, however, that this approach, as well as the other two approaches to the text within the English classroom, is not always a discrete, exclusive, entity. Texts, and the pedagogical approaches to them, often “exist and circulate in English classrooms simultaneously.” The challenge isn't in choosing one text over another, or knowing which works best in what situation. Rather, the complexity of textual identity and the multiplicity of English teacher mandates works to create a “so-called jacks-of-all-trades- and masters of none” mentality for English teachers.

Brauer and Clark offer a fourth metaphor as the most effective in contemporary secondary classrooms, one that places students in the role of “ethnographer” and the teaching of English into an approach in which analysis of
production and audience become as significant as textual mastery. In this fourth modality the teacher and text become vehicles not only of cultural, aesthetic, or historical transmission but guides in questioning the relationships amongst text/audience/production tensions. Brauer and Clark identify the questions surrounding a text (including its role in the classroom) as key to an effective reevaluation of the English classroom. In defense of this meta-pedagogical use of texts, the authors broaden the inter-textual analysis of texts to one that includes the role of text in the classroom itself:

Our aim is to encourage ourselves and others in the area of English education to both name various textual framings and to consider how such positions—never neutral—emerge from sociocultural networks of power. Whose texts are sacred? In what contexts? Under what circumstances do we consider rhetorical strategies as predatory? As revelatory? Thus, not only are texts cultural, but so are their curricular frameworks.104

By placing both the text and the audience in dialogue with the pedagogy itself, Brauer and Clark don't argue for a reevaluation of the canon, or of the various forms of literacy, so much as for a reappraisal of the role of the text in an English classroom. They therefore do not advocate one approach over another, but do suggest a broadening of approaches to encapsulate the teaching as part of the textual discourse. The best type of text for this re-visioning, say the authors, is through media-focused pedagogy: “the closest model for a new kind of textual positioning in secondary education can be found in media literacy and media education curriculum (see, e.g., Buckingham, 2003), which embeds texts in fluid and dialogic relationships with production and audience.”105 Blacklist films, both as Hollywood products and problematized historical documents, easily combine the first three traditional textual approaches—text as universalized/aesthetic
statement, predatory/media messenger, or historical/political window—with that advocated by Brauer and Clark: “[to] explore the sociopolitical contexts of text production, representation, and consumption, and to offer students new ways to question, understand, and study the variety of texts in their lives.”\textsuperscript{106}

Using “The John Rankin Effect” as a touchstone for a unit that questions basic tenets of ethics and choice, it becomes practical—imperative—to present both the artist and his/her art within the broader textual discourse in the classroom. In this way, the curriculum becomes an analysis of art, of culture, and of the way in which we engage media within and without the classroom. Therefore, in this section I will address an historical overview of the blacklist, a close reading of the films used in the unit, and “living protagonists” such as Abe Polonsky, Edward Dmytryk, and Adrian Scott. This will conclude with an anecdotal summation of the pitfalls and successes of the actual praxis of teaching Hollywood blacklist film in a secondary classroom setting.

\textbf{Life and Art: Abraham Polonsky and \textit{Body and Soul}}

In the opening shot of a July 6\textsuperscript{th}, 1999 videotaped interview, Abraham Polonsky sits next to a much younger, and obviously star-struck, interviewer. The interviewer starts what will be a two-and-a-half hour document with the seemingly benign, “[W]e are in Beverly Hills, talking to the gifted writer and director Abraham Polonsky.” Polonsky immediately interjects with, “Abraham \textit{Lincoln} Polonsky.” The flummoxed interviewer mumbles, “We’d better do that again,” the video cuts to a now solo Polonsky, who is asked by a now off-camera interviewer, “Can we have your full name?” and Polonsky simply replies, with a sardonic grin, “Coward.”\textsuperscript{107}
This brief exchange, occurring only a few months before his death, captures the essence of Polonsky's personality and the arc of his life as a radical leftist and groundbreaking filmmaker and screenwriter. It also, from a pedagogical positioning, vivifies the correlation between document and creator, historical event and personal triumph. A first-person perspective on history and ethical choices again patterns Brauer and Clark's vision of the English classroom text as “window/predator/sacred text” as well as “audience/production problematizer.”

Abraham Lincoln Polonsky (1910-1999) was defiantly and proudly American, yet he also proudly fit every standard for Red-baiting “un-Americanism” during the blacklisting era of Hollywood that began in 1947. Polonsky was Marxist, intellectual, Jewish, from New York City, and a leading member of the Communist Party in Hollywood. For all these “crimes,” he was also very much unrepentant. In his two blacklist-era films, 1947's *Body and Soul* (as screenwriter) and the influential noir, 1948's *Force of Evil* (which he both directed and wrote), Polonsky combined the poetic ambitions of a writer with the visionary intensity of a radical. These films do have agendas and messages the Hollywood moguls and Washington right-wingers could rightly point to and ask, “Are you now, or have you ever been a Communist-Leftist-Liberal-Humanist-Realist?” Polonsky's films survived, and by extension he himself survived, because they reach beyond the rhetoric of both the Right and the Left and combine artistic and social integrity. His films should be viewed as the “messages” of a man trying to change Hollywood (and his society) both artistically and politically.
Polonsky's subpoena to appear before the House Committee on Un-American Activities (HUAC) in 1951, and his blacklisting from Hollywood for essentially the next 17 years, can be traced to the political and social upheavals of the 1920s and 1930s. The xenophobia and fear-mongering of witch-hunting politicians hungry for a spotlight pre-date both the infamous Senator Joseph McCarthy and the Cold War by many years. In her book *Unfriendly Witnesses: Gender, Theater, and Film in the McCarthy Era*, Milly S. Barranger relates an interview in which blacklisted playwright Lillian Hellman surmises that McCarthyism “became, 'a very inaccurate name for a shameless period. McCarthy only summed up the anger and fears of a great many people.'” The true roots of the McCarthy-era hysteria can be found in the HUAC hearings of 1938-1944, as well as the actual blacklist-relevant hearings of 1947 and 1951. These hearings point to a fear and hatred of not only communism, but also the policies of Roosevelt's New Deal, immigration, racial equality, and unionization. Their implications for Hollywood, itself transitioning from a hegemonic studio system into a post-war uncertainty, became emblematic of a country fearful of both “otherness” and change.

The chairman of HUAC from 1938 to 1944, Martin Dies, was a congressman from Texas. He was also a member of the Ku Klux Klan. New Jersey congressman J. Parnell Thomas, the chairman of HUAC in 1947 (the year the Hollywood Ten were subpoenaed, held in contempt of Congress, and eventually jailed) was a member of the Ku Klux Klan as well. Committee member John E. Rankin, congressman from Mississippi, made his anti-Semitic and racial views clear repeatedly, proclaiming the need to “save America for
white gentile Americans,” calling columnist Walter Winchell a “communistic little kike,” and on the floor of the House, denouncing the Jewish-Communist conspiracy in Hollywood in 1945, by “proclaiming that ‘alien-minded communistic enemies of Christianity are trying to take over the motion picture industry and spread their un-American propaganda as well as their loathsome, lying, immoral and anti-Christian filth before the eyes of your children in every community in America.’”

It is through this dark lens of racial hatred that leftist and liberal artists like Abe Polonsky were brought before Congress and asked the two loaded questions: “Are you now or have you ever been a member of the Communist Party of the United States?” and “Are you now or have you ever been a member of the Screen Writers Guild?” The answers, or non-answers, to these questions banished some, vilified others, and created a culture of fear and mistrust in Hollywood specifically, and also in the country at large.

The hearings of 1947 and 1951, and their effects on Hollywood, are best captured by Patrick McGilligan and Paul Buhle's book *Tender Comrades*, a collection of interviews with blacklisted artists (including Polonsky). The authors trace the hearings of 1947 back to the Stock Market Crash of 1929, which drew new talent to Hollywood, a place that still offered good-paying jobs and advancement in the bleak times of the Great Depression. McGilligan and Buhle also suggest the advent of the “talkie” film in the late 1920s as vital to the changed complexion of Hollywood. As they say in their introduction, “Newcomers were streaming in [to Hollywood] from various occupations, but especially from those outposts that valued literacy...the early sound-era arrivals came from newspapers, vaudeville, Broadway, and the world of literature. An
especially fertile crop was harvested from radio and the Yiddish theater.” More profoundly, perhaps, in light of the racist anti-Semitism of some of theHUAC congressmen, “the vast majority” of these newcomers, “hailed from New York. They were Jewish [and] had Russian forebears.”

In the 1930s, many liberals in Hollywood championed the fight against both fascism (particularly in the Spanish Civil War of 1936-1939) and the plight of under-represented and oppressed people at home (for example, supporting Upton Sinclair's gubernatorial run to End Poverty in California in 1934). By 1947, the rise of Stalinist Russia, the studio strikes of 1945, the death of both Roosevelt and the idealism of the New Deal, and a powerful group of right-wing Hollywood activists, who formed the Motion Picture Alliance for the Preservation of American Ideals, all formed the groundwork for the arrival of Congressman Thomas in Hollywood on a “fact-finding” mission into communist influence in movies. Both McGilligan and Buhle in *Tender Comrades* and Langdon in *Caught in the Crossfire: Adrian Scott and the Politics of Americanism in 1940s Hollywood* argue that this incursion was abetted both by the sometimes illegal investigations of the FBI, orchestrated by J. Edgar Hoover, and ominously by Eric Johnston, who became the president of the Motion Picture Producers Association (MPPA) in 1945. According to Langdon, soon after he was elected, “Johnston announced to a meeting of the Screen Writers Guild, ‘We will have no more *Grapes of Wrath*, we'll have no more *Tobacco Roads*, we'll have no more films that deal with the seamy side of American life. We'll have no more films that treat the banker as a villain.” In 1947, Johnston and the executives of the Hollywood studios would cave to theHUAC committee, abandon the Hollywood
Ten to their fates, and begin what was to become the blacklist, with the Waldorf Statement. As Barranger notes, this statement allowed the studio heads to “cleanse themselves of uneasy investors, declining profits, and protests against salacious and immoral films. The two-page statement affirmed that the studios 'will not knowingly employ a Communist or member of the party or group which advocates the overthrow of the government of the United States by force or any illegal or unconstitutional means.'”¹¹⁵ The statement, read by Johnston, not only cut the Hollywood establishment free of the Hollywood Ten (who tried to rely on their First Amendment right to free speech as an eventually futile argument), but allowed for further persecution of Hollywood liberals, many but not all communist, in the coming years.

Abraham Polonsky’s blacklist destiny was presaged long before the Waldorf Statement, however. In fact, he neatly fits into almost every one of the criteria McGilligan and Buhle point to as changes in the “complexion” of Hollywood in the 1930's. Buhle's biography of Polonsky, *A Very Dangerous Citizen* (co-written by Dave Wagner), traces the roots of Polonsky's Marxist philosophies and artistic ambitions as a quasi-heritage. Buhle and Wagner's summation that “[Polonsky's] life as a modernist fiction writer, realistic novelist, union educator, radio—and later, television—scriptwriter, wartime intelligence operative, and full-time radical romantic would be revealing even had he never turned to films”¹¹⁶ captures the deliberate progress of a man for whom Marxism was more than merely a Hollywood fad or late-in-life revelation. This type of biography, which threads its way through both the text of *Body and Soul* and the historical complexities of the era, engages students (and teachers) in all four of
Brauer and Clark's “metaphorical approaches” to literature. It isn't only an anecdotal aside (Hemingway and the Lost Generation in *The Sun also Rises*) meant to enrich the aesthetic experience, or window on a time period (Shakespeare and the groundlings) to orient modern students. The blacklist films *and* their audience/producers cannot be separated, or compartmentalized, from the essence of the texts themselves.

Polonsky's early life plays out in almost typical Hollywood fashion (at least as a film like *Body and Soul* or *The Godfather* is concerned): the son of immigrant parents, one of whom espouses less-than-capitalist beliefs but also attempts to merge into the larger American society via a “respectable” profession. Polonsky's father was a New York City Russian-Jewish immigrant pharmacist, and as Polonsky says in the interview from 1999: “My father was a socialist, a follower of Eugene V. Debs...my mother didn't bother with ideas because she thought they got in the way of her cooking.” The interviewer asks Polonsky if his father's political beliefs influenced him, and he replies succinctly with “I'm a radical” and then goes on to tell the story of his aunt, who became a doctor so that she could journey back to the Soviet Union to provide assistance to the Revolution.

Polonsky's choice of college, City College of New York, and choice of degree, English literature, fit easily into the mold of what Congressman Rankin would term “anti-American.” CCNY was a place where “Radicalism was never absent” and a place where “nearly all...the students had immigrant parents and had passed through the New York City public school system” and “almost as many were Jewish.” This path of both radical politics and artistic expression
would later manifest itself for Polonsky in Hollywood, where his role as a communist leader (with its suggestion of a didactic agenda) contrasts with his interest in art and the medium of film. As Buhle and Wagner point out, “The communist regulars, the intellectuals of the small Leninist splinter groups, and the older generation of socialists or wobblies all assumed that artistic form was essentially invested in content, a view that Polonsky would in later decades renounce as the bane of the radical film.”

While the Depression intensified, Polonsky found himself, after attending Columbia Law School, working as both an English instructor (at CCNY) and lawyer, and making in his words, a “combined salary of less than fifty dollars a week...close, but less.” Obviously, neither of these two “respected” professions pays more than a basic salary—even when combined. While still writing and publishing fiction in various magazines, Polonsky was approached to work on a radio script for Gertrude Berg. Significantly, and ironically, this meeting becomes his first introduction to Hollywood. Polonsky said, “I received $27.50 a week from law office...I got a check for two hundred dollars from [Berg] and I realized this was a better profession.” Polonsky soon quit both teaching and the law, and in 1937-38, Berg took him and his wife to Hollywood, to help her write a script. At this point in the interview, Polonsky mentions meeting such leftist “stars” as Ernest Hemingway and Orson Welles, but again returns back to how much money he was making. He said, “I met everybody, because I wasn't involved in looking for a job...I made 400 dollars a week, which was an enormous amount of money, considering all I did was have lunch and discuss the plot of the stories.” This is a truth the pragmatic Marxist reveals: In the 1930's, at the
height of the Depression, making money doing what you feel born to do (write) can trump political idealism. However, true to character, Polonsky doesn't stay in Hollywood. Instead, he returns to New York, where he “operated as educational director and newspaper editor of a regional CIO union north of New York City.”

By the start of World War II, years after he had joined both the Anti-Fascist League, and in 1935, the Communist Party, Polonsky volunteered as a civilian member of the OSS (Office of Strategic Services), the precursor to the CIA, on the advice of his brother, who was in the 82nd Airborne as well as the OSS. In keeping with his wry style, Polonsky matter-of-factly details his new “career” for the interviewer, until he is asked:

Interviewer: “Your communist involvement had no impact on you joining the OSS?”

Polonsky: “They [the OSS] liked me for that [being Communist] because I knew what the hell they [the Resistance] were talking about.”

By this time, Polonsky was under contract as a screen writer for Paramount. And, in typical Abraham Lincoln Polonsky style, ended up assuring his job at Paramount on his return from war through the intercession of the head of the OSS, “Wild” Bill Donovan, who encouraged the studio head of Paramount to use Polonsky’s position as a screenwriter as a front for his overseas activities.

The brief period of time when Abe Polonsky was able to work freely as an artist in Hollywood, basically the five or so years from the end of the war to his blacklisting in 1951, are best captured by his two most successful films, *Body and Soul* and *Force of Evil*. Given his radical curriculum vitae, and the fate of the Hollywood Ten in 1947, it is stunning that Polonsky was both allowed to stay and
willing to stay in Hollywood in order to complete work on his two primarily socialist-Marxist visions. The origin of *Body and Soul*, like much of Polonsky's life, seems the stuff of legend: He “wrote” the basics for the story walking the two blocks from Paramount to pitch his idea to Enterprise.\(^{128}\) And, as he says in *Tender Comrades*, “I told it [the story] to Garfield and [producer Bob Roberts], and they loved it. Immediately, they called a meeting of the heads of the studio…and I told the story again. [S]ince I had about an hour to think about it, I had a complete story.”\(^{129}\)

Unlike John Garfield's character in *Body and Soul*, who cannot live in the corrupting world of money and still maintain his ethical footing, Polonsky was able to balance his artistic and political impulses through the more liberal and independent Enterprise Studios. Part of this success comes from the pragmatic world-view of Polonsky's youth. As he told Buhle and McGilligan in his interview from *Tender Comrades*:

> When you talk about the political problems of film production, it wasn't just [director Robert] Rossen, it was the whole system. You have to talk about what it means to be a radical working in a conventional medium, with certain kinds of aesthetic interests forced on you by the studio and certain kinds of aesthetic interests that you utilize out of the studio material. You also have to realize that we were in the film business not to change the world but to make films. To change the world we were involved in other kinds of things, like the labor struggle in Hollywood, against the studios and against the right-wing union, the IATSE.\(^{130}\)

The story for *Body and Soul* seems to draw on much of Polonsky's experience as a youth from the Bronx as well as a radical interest in expanding the role of oppressed classes and races in America. The film, directed by Robert Rossen (one of the original 19 subpoenaedHUAC “unfriendlies” of 1947), opens in a noir-like vision of loss. The camera swoops in a pan from an empty boxing
ring and the slowly swaying heavy bag of a boxer (evoking both emptiness and the gallows), through the trees, and into a window to view the Champ Charley Davis, played by John Garfield, lying fully dressed on his bed, his haunted and scarred face filling the shot, muttering “Ben! Ben!” to himself. As in many noirs, this opening scene reveals the damaged protagonist we will see again near the end of the movie, Polonsky's script neatly presenting the effects of Charley's (pre-Champ) fall before detailing its parts. This sense of inevitability gives the film its weight. Importantly, it also ties our hero to his greatest shame/betrayal, that of his role in the death of Ben Chaplin (played by Canada Lee), the former champion and friend of Charley...and a Negro. The role of Ben, regardless of the other “subversive” elements of the movie, should be noted, for Polonsky has written him to be neither a caricature, stereotype, nor even a “noble” but “different” athletic specimen. Polonsky's script accentuates not only the poisonous effects of money on the individual, but the way in which business and its capitalistic amorality pits the under-represented classes—in this case African-American and Jewish-American—against each other. In an early scene of the movie, both before the ultimate fight Garfield's Champ has promised to throw and before the flashback that brings us Charlie before his fall, the boxing “promoter” and central antagonist-capitalist of the film, reels off a series of business-specific advice to the “Champ” in the space of a few lines, none of which includes boxing or sport:

- “Ya gotta be business-like, Charley.”
- “Everybody dies—Ben, Shorty, even you.”
- “Everything is addition or subtraction. The rest is conversation.”
- “The smart money is against [you]...and you got to be smart, Charley.”
- “Business men have to keep their agreements.”
Polonsky contrasts this Nihilistic commercialism by immediately flashing back to Charley as a champion amateur boxer. The flashback serves to reveal the naïveté of Charley, his proletariat New York City origins, and the central conflict of the movie, which is the desire for success (material wealth) contrasted to the moral sacrifices needed to attain it. Charley's girlfriend Peg, played by Lilli Palmer, presents what becomes a leitmotif in the movie, by connecting Charley to that of William Blake's “The Tyger,” the jungle, and the brute (and pure) power of Charley's athleticism. The image of the tiger evinces Charley's innate physical strength (his “fearful symmetry”), which emphasizes his more metaphysical destruction at the hands of Roberts—as well as his eventual renewal.

Charley's parents stand in for relatively stock “immigrant” parents of the Depression-era: wanting more for their children and confronting a society that makes that goal tenuous. In a key conversation in the family candy store, as Charley tries to convince his parents to allow him to become a professional boxer, Polonsky sets up the conundrum given to people like the Davis family:

“Ma” Davis (played by Anne Revere): “So now you'll make a living out of hitting people, knocking their teeth out, breaking their noses....twenty years ago, I wanted to move to a nice place, so our Charley could grow up and learn a profession. Instead, we live in a jungle, so he can only be a wild animal.”

“Pa” Davis (played by Art Smith): “Do you think I picked the East Side like Columbus picked America? Can I help it if JP Morgan refused to advance me credit?”

Charley: “I want to be a fighter.”

Ma: “Then fight for something, not for money.”

This scene ends with Charley's father giving him money to buy boxing equipment, Charley crossing the street to his friends at the poolroom, and the
almost instantaneous bombing of the speakeasy next to the candy store. Charley's father is killed, the scene ends with Charley and his mother kneeling over the body, a slow fade-out, and a fade-in on the candy store some time in the future, boards across the door, and a “for rent” sign in the window. Structurally, the event creates a reason for Charley's need both to turn professional and to eventually sell himself to business expediency in the form of Roberts. It also, however, reinforces the effects of rampant, and criminal, Capitalism, in this case the effects of Prohibition and the rise of profit-hungry gangs.

As Charley rises through the ranks of fighters (revealed in a montage of trains, tracks, boxing rings, and town signs), his moral decline is foiled by the attitudes of his childhood friend Shorty, played by Joseph Pevney, and later by Ben. As Charley becomes more involved with Roberts, Shorty warns Peg: “You know what Charley is? A money machine. Like gold mines, oil wells. They're cutting him up a million ways.”

Ben is introduced as what Charley will become to Roberts: a liability to “business.” Unlike Charley, however, Ben understands the consequences of dealing with a man for whom all is “business” and for whom “debts must be paid.” Polonsky's script, and Rossen’s direction, gives Ben the moral high ground. Both in his confrontation with Roberts, whom he stands over and asks directly: “People don't count with you, do they, Mr. Roberts?” and later, when Charley takes the title of “Champ” away from Ben (even though he didn't know Roberts had fixed the outcome), a now permanently damaged Ben becomes the moral voice of the movie. In his death monologue, he punches the air, and repeats “I can take it. I got to take it, I'm the Champ” evoking the most pathos in the
film. He tells Roberts, “I don't scare easy anymore!” and “You don't tell me how to live!” to which Roberts merely says, “I tell you how to die.” Ben collapses in the practice ring, the camera pans up and away, the punching bag swings in the background like a hanged man, and the movie cuts back to the first scene of the film, only now we understand why Charley Davis is haunted by Ben. Rossen quickly cuts again back to the dressing room, and we arrive at the moral dilemma—whether or not Charley is ready to fight for “something, not for money.”

The fight scenes of *Body and Soul* are known for their technical realism (cinematographer James Wong Howe often wore roller skates and used a hand-held camera to replicate the frenetic energy of a fight), but they also providePolonsky and Rossen with the perfect metaphorical vehicle for a story about the priorities of American society. In order to “win” $120,000, Charley is forced to bet against himself and lose the fight. Only a double cross by Roberts provokes Charley's true nature to return...The ring announcer even says, “Davis is following Marlowe [the challenger] around the ring now, like a tiger stalking his prey”...and while repeating “I'll kill him; I'll kill him,” Charley wins the fight, loses his money, but regains his identity.

The ending for *Body and Soul* captures the essential juxtaposition of artist and leftist in Polonsky. In the script, Roberts confronts Davis, and asks ominously, “How do you think you're going to get away with this?” Charley, now both vindicated and free of the money, asks rhetorically, “What are you going to do, kill me? Everybody dies.” This reversal of the antagonist's most threatening line (“Everybody dies”) contains the defiance and liberation of a man
unburdened by “debts” to “business.” Polonsky's script ends with a shot of Charley and Peg, walking away from the camera and down a city street with a sign for “Candies” in the middle distance.

Director and fellow communist—and future “stool pigeon”—Robert Rossen (of whom Polonsky said, “You wouldn't want to be on a desert island with [him], because if the two of you didn't have any food, he might have you for lunch tomorrow,”138 ) wanted to end the film with Charley's death, the last scene showing Charley's body lying in an alley with his head in a garbage can. As a political statement, and in the traditional bleak denouements of films noir like *Double Indemnity* (1944)139 this ending might have achieved a more profound reaction in the audience. However, Buhle and Wagner point out in *A Very Dangerous Citizen*, that the artistic and political message of the film demanded a “Hollywood” happy ending:

> What matters most is the clarity of understanding that Charley attains at that moment [the moment when he confronts Roberts with “Everybody dies”]. For Polonsky this was nothing less than the hope that all of the world's Charleys one day would make the same declaration. Hence Polonsky's frequently expressed frustration with Rossen's ending: this is not a fable about Charley Davis, it is a fable of the working class; it would be “crazy” as Polonsky once said of Rossen's ending, for a group of left-wing storytellers to conclude their finest work by killing off the proletariat!140

Eventually, both endings were shot, and everyone, including Rossen, agreed that Polonsky's ending was the best.

Abraham Polonsky was living in France in 1950 when the blacklist caught up to him. And contrary to many of the blacklisted artists who either escaped into exile or declined to return and be subpoenaed, Polonsky decided to return to the United States. When he was finally called before HUAC on April 25th, 1951,
Polonsky used the Fifth Amendment to refuse answering, as this was the only option for unfriendly witness uninterested in facing either betrayal of friends and associates or jail time for contempt. Polonsky's plea differed from other witnesses, however, because of his OSS service. According to Buhle and Wagner, “As the questioning commenced, an unidentified figure (presumably from the US intelligence services) approached [committee member] Velde and whispered something to him. A few moments later, Velde dubbed the witness [Polonsky] 'a very dangerous citizen'. Asked by friends about this characterization, [Polonsky's wife] quipped, 'Only to himself!'”

Polonsky's motivation for coming back to the United States, like that of the protagonists of his two major films of the blacklist period, contains a certain amount of integrity, loyalty, and honor. In the July, 1999 interview, Polonsky was of course asked about the personal effects of the blacklist. His own words, and his wry acceptance of history, easily capture both Polonsky's art and his politics, and the voices of his films:

Interviewer: “What were some of the feelings going on inside you at this time [1951]...you were obviously taking them [the government] head on.

Polonsky: “You don't have any feelings inside when you're taking them on; it's when you don't take them on that you have all these feelings...I'm a coward, fool...I don't have these feelings. After all, I was in the OSS. I risked my life for nothing. At least this was something.”

Later, in the same interview, Polonsky is asked to “encapsulate” the influence of the blacklist on his personal life:

Polonsky: “The blacklist has made me generous, kind, thoughtful, genial, and a darling hostess. Without it, I would have been a rude bastard.”

Interviewer: “And what was the impact on your children?”

Polonsky: “They think their father is a hero. Because he stood up for his
This interview provides the best coda for the life and work of Abe Polonsky—He humorously emphasizes the pragmatic consequences inherent in a citizen’s disagreement with his government. What Charley Davis thematically fights for and wins, Abe Polonsky does as well. After the interviewer spends nearly four minutes asking his opinion about various famous people (Harry Belafonte? Paul Newman? Adrian Scott? Dalton Trumbo?), he asks Abe about his family. Suddenly, Polonsky illuminates, pulls himself to the edge of his seat, and says, “You mean my great-granddaughter? You want to see a picture of her?”

What must have been one of the last interviews with this famous “victim of the McCarthy-era” ends with a grinning Polonsky holding up two pictures to the camera, telling a grandfatherly story about what obviously is the most important “ideology” to him.

Two Sides of the Coin: Adrian Scott, Edward Dmytryk and Crossfire

Unlike the colorful backstory of Abraham Polonsky, who seems resolutely determined not to let the blacklist define him, the paths of director Edward Dmytryk and producer Adrian Scott symbolize the definitive two sides of the coin of the realm of the blacklist era. Both were members of the “Hollywood Ten;” both stood on their rights under the First Amendment as grounds both to be communist if they so chose and to refuse to answer committee questions about that very issue. Scott, however, refused not only to answer committee questions, but by proxy, refused to implicate anyone else. Scott never named names and died never having produced another film in Hollywood.
Dmytryk, after serving part of his sentence for contempt of Congress, returned to the House Un-American Activities Committee, named names (even though all the names were known by the committee to begin with), was welcomed back (while being turned into a right-wing puppet) and was allowed to continue to pursue his craft into his old age.

Edward Dmytryk's (1908-1999) life story does not have the swashbuckling arc of Abe Polonsky's. For the purposes of this thesis, and in the name of efficiency for the classroom, using other blacklisted artists to comment on Dmytryk gives the flavor (although one-sided) of his legacy thanks to the blacklist. McGilligan and Buhle's book *Tender Comrades* provides a clear window into the still seething attitudes of many of the blacklisted artists, for whom “rats” like Edward Dmytryk personify the darkness of the time. Most of the interviews in *Tender Comrades* occurred at least 40 years after HUAC put away its pitchforks and torches, yet the vitriol remaining for some of the blacklistees is still strong and clear. A selection of voices makes Dmytryk's legacy (at least with his contemporaries) clear:

Screenwriter and blacklistee Walter Bernstein: “I feel uncomfortable assessing this or that degree of guilt [of those who cooperated with HUAC] because, once again, so much of that feeling, whether you admit it or not, is subjective. On the other hand, I can happily despise someone like Edward Dmytryk, for example.”

Director and blacklistee John Berry: “Anyway, I said no, but the defense committee came back to me and gave me that bullshit about being a man of principle. I said sure. And then Eddie Dmytryk kicked me in the balls later on. He's the guy that blew my name to HUAC. A typical hack. His pipe-smoking pose used to drive me up a wall.”

Director and blacklistee Bernard Vorhaus: “Dmytryk, who was the first person to have named me before the Committee, claimed that he had met me at a Communist Party meeting. In point of fact, I had never met
Dmytryk, and I was stationed in New York with the Signal Corps at the time this meeting in Hollywood supposedly occurred.”

Screenwriter and blacklistee John Wexley: “They [blacklisted directors] had tasted power...and saw a lost world for themselves if they didn't work....[W]hen Dmytryk got out of jail—he was remarried...and they had a baby—one of his motivations was to continue to work. It was not that he changed his principles....They [HUAC] can do whatever they like with you, once you have informed. So they trotted him around to American Legion meetings and other places where he would talk about the evils of Communism, Socialism, and the fifth column.”

Adrian Scott's (1912-1973) blacklist biography parallels that of Edward Dmytryk—up until the point that Dmytryk decides to become a “friendly witness” for HUAC in 1951. In addition to their collaboration on *Crossfire*, director Dmytryk and producer Scott (and screenwriter John Paxton) worked on three other successful films—*Murder, My Sweet; Cornered;* and *So Well Remembered*—between 1944 and 1947. *Crossfire*, however, was the only one of the four to have an overtly political message.

The screenplay for *Crossfire* comes from an adaptation of Richard Brooks' 1945 novel *The Brick Foxhole*, which focuses on the murder of a homosexual Marine by members of his own unit. Brooks sets this unit neither in combat nor overseas; the “brick foxhole” is simply a building, located in, with much figurative weight, Washington, D.C. Scott, who had been in Hollywood off and on since the mid 1930’s, saw an adaptation of Brooks' novel for the screen as a way “to address anti-Semitism and the potential for fascism in America.” In an address given at the “Conference for Thought Control” held at UCLA in 1947 (after the release of *Crossfire*), Scott clarifies how his approach to this film exceeded that of a typical Hollywood producer:

We had made several melodramas and were generally dissatisfied with the
emptiness of the format. The screen had done melodramas well, but mainly they were concerned with violence in pursuit of a jade necklace, a bejeweled falcon. The core of melodrama usually concerns itself with an innocuous object, without concern for reality, although dressed in highly realistic trappings. Substituting a search for an anti-Semite instead of a jade necklace, at the same time investigating anti-Semitism, seemed to us to add dimension and meaning to melodrama, while lending an outlet for conviction.150

Scott's playful jab at the early noir/melodrama “tough guy” films like *The Maltese Falcon* exhibits what makes these films made between 1947 and 1951 so powerful. These films were deliberate aesthetic and political statements in the face of immediate problems like “homegrown fascism” as embodied by HUAC itself. Frank Krutnik's book *In a Lonely Street: Film Noir, Genre, and Masculinity* pulls out atypical films noir like *Crossfire* and examines how the films expand the genre of noir beyond the dark, disconcerting, visions of crime and gangsterism seen in many of the films leading up to, and sometimes including, post-war films like *Body and Soul* and *Crossfire*. Krutnik suggests that the post-war films shifted away from pre and early-war films' “obsession with psychological breakdown and sexual malaise, or at least recast these elements within a perspective which stressed the normative processes of law and social order” which ultimately “suggests a work of postwar restructuring.”151 *Crossfire* centers its narration on a specific murder, in a specific community (Washington, D.C.), in an overtly post-war setting. The main male characters, aside from the police detective, are either currently still in the military or recently de-mobilized. *Body and Soul*, on the other hand, flashes-back many years, to the Depression and Prohibition. The center of *Body and Soul* isn't so much the post-war zeitgeist as the message opposing overt capitalism. Scott, as indicated by his allusion both to
anti-Semitism and the played-out genre of melodramas in which he was working (along with Dmytryk), wanted to mirror what was an immediate and terrifying consequence of World War II: a growing acceptance of intolerance matched to the national psycho-trauma of changed soldiers coming back to a changed home.

*Crossfire* makes this point didactically clear as well. In the flashback, the murdered Jewish man Samuels (Sam Levene) attempts to comfort the disturbed young soldier Mitchell (George Cooper), who will soon be accused of Samuels’ murder. Samuels tries to make sense of the “cultural unease” in society by using Mitchell’s current confusion as its microcosm. As Samuels says to Mitchell,

> I think maybe it's suddenly not having a lot of enemies to hate anymore. Maybe it's because for four years now we've been focusing our minds on...on one little peanut. [Samuels holds up a peanut]. The 'win-the-war' peanut. [Samuels eats the peanut]. All at once, no peanut. Now we start looking at each other again. We don't know what we're supposed to do. We don't know what's supposed to happen. We're too used to fightin. But we just don't know what to fight. You can feel the tension in the air.152

For Krutnik, and theorists like Thom Anderson and Joshua Hirsch who coin this hybrid of “social-problem/crime drama” sub-genre of noir “film gris,”153 “the crime narrative provides a generically recognizable structure for the handling of issues, allowing both an elaboration of the problem and its containment within familiar narrative and narrational parameters.”154 The plot of *Crossfire*, for example, uses such noir standards as flashback narration, chiaroscuro lighting, and psychologically disturbing incidences of latent violence and sexuality. It foregrounds, however, a liberal message of tolerance. For example the police detective Finley (Robert Young) not only pursues the “criminal” within the plot, but also establishes the moral compass of the film through a series of lengthy (and didactic) monologues. In one, Finley tries to convince a young soldier (William
Phipps) to help him capture the murderer Montgomery (Robert Ryan); he paces back and forth in his office, on one wall a copy of The Declaration of Independence. Another stroll (and movement of the camera) shows an avuncular portrait of FDR on another wall. A third shot of the same scene reveals a large, multi-paned (suggesting bars, perhaps) window framing a post-card view of the Capitol building. All the while, Finley intones a message of tolerance to this young soldier from Tennessee (and, of course, to us) about how “Hating is always the same, always senseless. One day it kills Irish Catholics, the next day Jews, the next day Protestants, the next day Quakers. It's hard to stop. It can end up killing men who were stripped neck ties next.” Leavened over the “whodunit?” the social-political message of “equality under hate” becomes a potent visual message as well; one which members of groups like HUAC wouldn't fail to notice or acknowledge.

The characterizations in Crossfire can come across as one-dimensional, but the film does extend its commentary beyond that of the anti-Semitic bigot and the power of hate. In particular, the film presents a complex representation of female agency and male indeterminacy in the post-war period. This is engendered by the uneasily allied couple played by Gloria Grahame and Paul Kelly. Both characters lack a distinctive identity, Grahame's character is named Ginny, because she comes from Virginia. She works in a gin (“Ginny”) mill as a “B” girl, selling dances (companionship) to lonely men (soldiers and former soldiers). The implication of her name (Virgin), her occupation (Companion), and the fact that Mitchell works hard to get a key to Ginny's apartment “So he can rest awhile” is amplified by the Man, who confronts Mitchell in Ginny's apartment. The
conversation between the two has a comic surreality that suggests neither man literally or figuratively understands himself in this post-war world:

The Man: “She hasn't come home yet?”
Mitchell: “I don't know. I don't think so. [pause] You mean Ginny, don't you?”
The Man: “Who do you mean?”
Mitchell: “I guess I mean Ginny. [pause] You belong here or something?”
The Man: “Or something. [pause] How long you been waiting?”
Mitchell: “I don't know. I just woke up. I don't even know what time it is.”
The Man: “I know. I saw her with you at the joint.”
Mitchell: “Who are you?”
The Man: “I'm a man who's waiting for her. [pause] That all right?”
Mitchell: “Sure.”

The conversation turns from slightly comic to slightly menacing as the Man goes to make coffee in a curtained-off kitchenette:

The Man: “I'm her husband. I'm Ginny's husband.” [pause] I was a soldier. I conked out. [hits his heart] You're wondering about this set up, aren't you?”
Mitchell: “Yeah, I guess I am.”
The Man: “Ask her, then. She was a tramp when I married her. I didn't know it at first. But I knew before we were married. That's one of the reasons I enlisted. To get away from her. And I couldn't wait to get back to her. When I did, she didn't want me. Funny, isn't it? But I still want her. I still love her. [turns to coffee and then back] You know what I just told you? That's a lie.”
Mitchell: “I see.”
The Man: “I'm not her husband. I met her at the joint, same as you. I wanna marry her. She won't have me.”
Mitchell: “I see.”
The Man: “You believe that? That's a lie too. [pause] I don't love her, and I don't want to marry her. She makes good money there. [long pause as Man stares at Mitchell] You got any money on you?”
Mitchell: “No.”
The Man: “You suppose I could be a soldier....make some dough by the next war?”
Mitchell: “Why not?”
Mitchell: “I don't know.”

Between Mitchell's litany of “I don't know” and “I guess so” and the Man's various self-denials of appropriate post-war personas (husband/soldier) and the barely hidden suggestion of his true persona (violent pimp), students/audiences get a clear example of a post-war atmosphere beyond the deep kiss between the sailor and the nurse in Times Square. And as this scenario—a post-war America—has been a fairly consistent zeitgeist over the course of the last century, the existential dilemma facing a soldier returning changed to a changed world is not isolated to the years 1946-1949.

Ginny's key scene comes in her confrontational dialogue not with “the Man” the character, but “The Man” as in the authority Father-figure, Detective Finley, who enters Ginny's apartment by first leaning in the doorway, surveying her place (and her), Freudian pipe clenched in his teeth, and a possessive look on his face:

Ginny: “What do you want?”
Finley: “I want to talk to you. [pause] What's your name?”
Ginny: “Are you a cop or something?”
Finley: “What's your name?”
Ginny: I don't like cops.”
Finley: “Nobody likes cops. What's your name?”

After a few cop-like particulars, Finely gets to his point.

Finley: “What do you do?”
Ginny: “I work.”
Finley: “Where?”
Ginny: “At the Red Dragon. [pause] Well, what's so wrong about working there? Does that make me a criminal or something? Does that give you the right to bust into my house and start asking a lot of questions?”
Finley: “Is that where you met Mitchell, at the Red Dragon?”
Ginny: “That's where I meet a lot of people. I never heard of Mitchell.”
Finley: “You live here alone?”
Ginny: “Sure. Anything wrong in that?” 158

Of course, in this time period and our own, there is something wrong with this, at least from the pipe-clenching, condescending, positioning of masculine authority. Inherent in the exchange/interrogation between the male figure of authority and the female figure of “dubiousness,” is a pertinent question for the post-war era and our own: How much agency does a woman have in determining her own existence? Not just facing the limitations of a working world designed by Finleys, but in a world where her “working” can only be seen as a covert, unspoken, sexual exchange.

While Crossfire as “message picture” wrapped in a melodramatic/noir plot made a profit of over $1,000,000 and received five Academy Award nominations, its successful blending of genres led it to be singled out as “a very dangerous film in the eyes of HUAC.”159 A quick flash-forward to the transcript of Adrian Scott's appearance before HUAC establishes the surreal, Kafkaesque, quality of not just the “hearings” but the inability of either Scott or the questioning members of the Committee to bring their actual agendas to light. The full text can be found through multiple sources. I have edited some of the procedural, or non-applicable, exchanges for clarity and brevity:

The CHAIRMAN. Adrian Scott. Raise your right hand, please. You do solemnly swear the testimony you are about to give is the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, so help you God?
Mr. SCOTT. I do.
Mr. STRIPLING. Do you have a statement, Mr. Scott?
Mr. SCOTT. I do have a statement which I would like to read. I believe the statement is pertinent. It deals with Crossfire and anti-Semitism.
The CHAIRMAN. Just a minute. We are trying to read the statement.
Mr. SCOTT. Thank you.
The CHAIRMAN. It is hard to read the statement and listen to you at the same time.
(After a pause.)
The CHAIRMAN. This may not be the worst statement we have received, but it is almost the worst.
Mr. SCOTT. May I disagree with the chairman, please?
The CHAIRMAN. Therefore, it is clearly out of order, not pertinent at all, hasn't anything to do with the inquiry, and the Chair will rule that the statement not be read. Mr. Stripling.
Mr. STRIPLING. Mr. Scott, are you a member of any guild, either the Screen Directors Guild or the Screen Writers Guild?
Mr. SCOTT. I don't think that is a proper question, Mr. Stripling.
Mr. STRIPLING. Were you ever a member of the Screen Writers Guild?
Mr. SCOTT. Mr. Stripling, I repeat, I don't think that is a proper question.
Mr. STRIPLING. Are you now or have you ever been a member of the Communist Party?
Mr. SCOTT. May I answer the first question, Mr. Stripling?
Mr. STRIPLING. You said it wasn't a proper question.
Mr. SCOTT. I will see if I can answer it properly.
The CHAIRMAN. You said it wasn't a proper question.
Mr. SCOTT. I believe it is a question which invades my rights as a citizen. I do not believe it is proper for this committee to inquire into my personal relationships, my private relationships, my public relationships.
The CHAIRMAN. Then you refuse to answer the question?
Mr. SCOTT. The committee has no right to inquire into what I think, with whom I associate.
Mr. STRIPLING. We are not inquiring into what you think, Mr. Scott. Mr. Scott, we would like to know whether you were ever a member of the Screen Writers Guild.
Mr. SCOTT. I believe I have answered your question.
Mr. STRIPLING. Mr. Chairman, I ask that you direct the witness to answer the question.
The CHAIRMAN. The witness must respond to the question by answering.
Mr. SCOTT. I believe I have responded to the question, Mr. Chairman.
The CHAIRMAN. Do you decline to answer the question?
Mr. SCOTT. I have answered it the way I would like to answer it.
The CHAIRMAN. Were you ever a member? I don't know from your answer whether you were or were not a member.
Mr. SCOTT. My answer still stands.
The CHAIRMAN. Are you a member?
Mr. SCOTT. I believe I have answered the question. Would you like me to answer it in the way I did before?
The CHAIRMAN. From your answer, I must be terribly dumb, but from your answer I can't tell whether you are a member or not.
Mr. SCOTT. Mr. Thomas, I don't agree with you. I don't think you are. I have answered the question the best way I can.
The CHAIRMAN. Mr. Vail, can you tell whether he is a member or not?
Mr. VAIL. No; I cannot.
The CHAIRMAN. Mr. McDowell, can you tell?
Mr. McDOWELL. No.
The CHAIRMAN. I just can't tell whether you are a member.
Mr. SCOTT. I am very sorry.
Mr. STRIPLING. Mr. Scott, could you tell the committee whether or not you are
now or have ever been a member of the Communist Party?
Mr. SCOTT. Mr. Stripling, that question is designed to inquire into my personal
and private life. I don't think it is pertinent to this--I don't think it is a proper
question either.
Mr. STRIPLING. Do you decline to answer the question, Mr. Dmytryk?
Mr. SCOTT. Mr. Scott.
Mr. STRIPLING. Mr. Scott.
Mr. SCOTT. I believe that question also invades my rights as a citizen. I believe
it also invades the first amendment. I believe that I could not engage in any
conspiracy with you to invade the first amendment.
The CHAIRMAN. Now, we can't tell even from that answer whether you are a
member of the Communist Party.
Mr. STRIPLING. I repeat the question, Mr. Scott: Can you state whether or not
you have ever been a member of the Communist Party?
Mr. SCOTT. I repeat my answer, Mr. Stripling.
The CHAIRMAN. All right, the witness is excused.
(Witness excused.)
The CHAIRMAN. The Chair would like to announce that by unanimous vote of
the subcommittee, the subcommittee recommends to the full committee that
Adrian Scott be cited for contempt and that appropriate action be taken
immediately.
Mr. STRIPLING. Mr. Russell.
Testimony of Louis J. Russell
Mr. STRIPLING. Mr. Russell, you have previously been identified and sworn.
Mr. RUSSELL. I have.
Mr. STRIPLING. As a member of the investigators' staff of the Committee on
Un-American Activities, were you instructed to determine, if possible, whether or
not Adrian Scott is now or was ever a member of the Communist Party?
Mr. RUSSELL. I was.
Mr. STRIPLING. Will you give the committee the result of your investigation?
Mr. CHAIRMAN (pounding gavel). May we have more order, please.
Mr. RUSSELL. In the fall of the year 1944 Adrian Scott was issued 1945
Communist Political Association Card No. 47200. In the spring of 1945 Scott
was a member of the Communist Political Association and held 1944 Communist
Political Association Card No. 46832. In the fall of the year 1945 Scott was
issued Communist Party Registration Card No. 35394 for the year 1946.160

Adrian Scott's statement, the one considered one of “the worst” by The
CHAIRMAN and therefore repressed, contains much of the same didactic energy
of the script of Crossfire. In her book, Langdon quotes part of Scott's unread
statement for what is a succinct encomium for the Hollywood Ten, the aesthetic of
Body and Soul, and the energy of Crossfire itself:

By slander, by vilification, this Committee is attempting to frighten and
intimidate these men and their employers; to silence those voices which have spoken out for the Jewish and the Negro people and other people...This is the cold war now being waged against minorities....We will not be frightened. We will not permit our voices to be put into moulds or into concentration camps. We will continue to lend our voices so that fundamental justice will obtain for Jews, Negroes and for all citizens.161

Humanistic, idealized, statements such as this, which implicate one part of American society while valorizing another, capture the emancipatory and pedagogical energy of blacklist-era films. The films cast in relief the historical details that provide students with a problematic vision of Americanism. As one of my students commented after finishing Crossfire in class, “I don't understand why this would be considered communist propaganda. It's what we believe in today.”
It is the role of the teacher to expand the available storylines students may draw on, to help students identify the complexity and contradiction inherent in the “master narratives,” and to remind students that some stories—especially those that involve social justice—are better than others.162

Chapter Five: Conclusion

Praxis: Addressing Blacklist Film, Media Studies, and Emancipatory Pedagogy in the Modern Classroom

I taught both these films, and their implications, during a unit that encompassed about three weeks in a 9th grade English honors classroom at West Salem High School in Salem, Oregon during February of 2014. The demographics of the class closely match the general demographics of the school: largely white, largely middle class. The gender ratio in the class is a 60/40 split, with girls outnumbering boys. There are thirty-five students in the class. The “honors” designation for West Salem means, informally, that the rigor and pace of the course are accelerated; however, students are able to “self-select” the honors class during the 8th grade, regardless of GPA or teacher recommendation. The class periods are forty-nine minutes long.

The classroom itself is not organized in rows facing a central locality of teacher/white board/projector/clock. Instead, the thirty-six desks are organized into nine “pods” of four desks each, with the students in each pod facing one another. This reconfiguration of the standard classroom pattern (courtesy of the teacher whose room I borrow) sets up a dynamic, collaborative, space where students literally focus on each other rather than the explicator (this obviously
creates some management issues, which are beyond the scope of this thesis). The nine “learning pods” can be remade into three sections of three, or become three discrete areas within the classroom, for activities such as “philosophical chairs,” where students move to “agree/disagree/neutral” spaces within the room. Again, this allows the students to physically separate themselves from a central explicator and offers them opportunities to physically and verbally voice their opinions without the usual dichotomy of space implied through teacher-student separations within the classroom itself.

Just under seventy-five percent of the students in this class have access to smartphones; therefore, they have instantaneous access to the internet and its wealth of both information (valid and not) and various streams of media. The arrangement of the classroom space means that every pod can become its own search engine. It allows students the flexibility and autonomy to verify, contradict, complicate, and enrich what I, as explicator, can bring to them. As explicator/facilitator, this gives me flexibility as well: I do not need to bring expertise or answers; I just need to be able to ask the right questions. Through my students, I have access to information beyond myself and a ready, decentralized, place to draw students into a critical engagement with new media and emancipatory educational practices.

The “blacklist unit” focused in on two primary standards as articulated by the Common Core State Standards. Standard RL.2 (reading literature) asks students to “Determine a theme or central idea of a text and analyze in detail its development over the course of a text, including how it emerges and is shaped and
refined by specific details; provide an objective summary.” The second standard, W.7 (writing), asks students to “Conduct short as well as more sustained research projects to answer a question (including a self-generated question) or solve a problem; narrow or broaden the inquiry when appropriate; synthesize multiple sources on the subject, demonstrating understanding of the subject under investigation.” Each of these broad standards can easily, and profitably, be adjusted to a media-literacy focused approach. More telling, perhaps, is the suggestion in the research standard that encourages students to focus on “self-generated” questions and problems. The blacklist-era, with its complex relationships amongst art, politics, ethics, and citizenship, encourages an emancipatory, decentralized, analysis of personal beliefs and over-arching assumptions.

Because it is the most overtly political and didactic, I chose Crossfire as the first of the two films to engage. Before addressing the text itself, however, I attempted to problematize the text (as suggested by Brauer and Clark) through a number of pre-viewing activities. The first two assignments had more to do with assessing how much (and what kind of) knowledge students had of the stakes of the unit—how much they could generate on their own, without either my or the internet's intercession. Students worked in small groups to compile both definitions for and questions about large-sized issues like politics, media, and propaganda and then shared the results with the class.

For homework, the students were asked to watch two clips on the internet: one, a short educational film made in 1946 for high school students; the second, a
short film featuring the Hollywood Ten, made by a soon-to-be blacklisted director (John Berry) and distributed shortly before most of the Hollywood Ten were sent to prison. The students were asked to focus on “tone/message/technique” for each of the clips. Because both clips are didactic works (one illuminating the dangers of dating for 1946 teenagers going to junior prom, the other a sober voice-over plea for the “innocent” men about to go to prison), both work as introductory approaches to visual “reading,” and both place students within the atmosphere of the political and social environment of the time. Students are able to comment upon the sometimes heavy-handed techniques of each film and begin the problematic encounter with different intensities of “propaganda.” Each clip is, in essence, a primary document of the time as well as an exemplar of media-focused literacy.

For the next class period, the students used their smartphones in a free-form manner, finding definitions on terms such as communism, socialism, film noir, blacklist, and post-war America. I did not direct or censor this activity, asking each pod to come up with two definitions for each term and write them on butcher paper. The only stipulation was that definitions could not repeat those from other pods. This type of work may not have the rigor required for more critical research; but by validating student efforts, no matter how erroneous or biased (One group innocently—perhaps—defined communism as the “worst mistake of the 20th century,” another found the blacklist was initiated by the English king Charles II), I could ascertain the depth of student comprehension of the terms—what does communism mean to a 21st century teenager?—as well as
compile a list that we could then critically return to at the end of the unit. During this period I also introduced students to some of the essential visual and thematic elements of film noir. I created a presentation that uses stills from some of the more influential noir. This allowed the students to both receive the information and begin another key process in the unit: mise-en-scene analysis.

Part of looking at film as literature is understanding the generative elements of the art—the rhetorical devices of the filmmaker. For a “mise-en-scene” analysis, students would need to identify five elements of a shot, elements that can include such “devices” as camera angle, props, lighting, character placement, camera movement, and editing. For film noir I also supplied students with an informal “motif” list to be aware of as they “mise-en-scened,” including shadows, stairs, mirrors, windows, femmes fatale, flashback, and angularity. While we watched Crossfire, each pod of four students was required to keep a four-square note paper, where two members were responsible for mise-en-scenes, and two were responsible for notes on “tone/message/culture” in the film. I reminded students before each viewing that this film was considered “un-American propaganda,” and encouraged them to look for thematic elements that might (or might not) reveal this sub-text. At the end of the three days of viewing, each group presented their best analysis of style and message as they saw it. Students became doubly aware that film making and film viewing is more than setting a camera up and saying “action” or buying a ticket and consuming popcorn.

As homework for that weekend, I asked students for a “freewrite,” an
unedited, unfettered, written response in journal/expository form. The questions, like “What is justice?” were fashioned to transfer the implications of 1947 to 2014, from the fictional and historical to the literal and personal. The questions, some theoretical, some benign (“How do Nike Elites make your life better?”) again allowed me to assess the various levels of student engagement with the texts and with the implications of the texts. The assessment, however, does not stigmatize for a lack of knowledge or an incomplete understanding. Asking fourteen year-olds questions like “Who is in power?” is unusual, and challenging, enough without the additional weight of a “graded response.”

Between the viewing of Crossfire and that of Body and Soul, students wrote a review of Crossfire using New York Times film critic Bosley Crowther's 1947 review as a model. Aside from an opportunity to engage in argumentative writing, this assignment connects directly to the main Common Core standard for the unit: finding the main idea in a work (see Rl.2 above).

For Body and Soul the main thematics (greed in Body and Soul vs. bigotry in Crossfire) and the stylistics of the viewing changed. For each group, I asked for one mise-en-scene, one key (thematic) quote, and one connection to Joseph Campbell's “hero's journey.” For the second day of viewing, I asked students to wear “something political” to class. I told them I was going to wear a “political t-shirt” that day. I wore my “Salem Area Trail Alliance” shirt, a group of volunteer hiking and biking trail builders to which I belong. Only a few students participated with varying degrees of the political. This engendered a discussion of the etymology of the word politics, which in its Greek means “of, for, the
citizens.” I think a few students got the joke when I said, “I know it will be tough, but see if you can wear something with a corporate logo on it tomorrow.”

As the summative assignment, I gave students a list of “Big Questions” loosely and directly affiliated to blacklist films. This is the research component of the unit (see Common Core standard W.7 above), the one in which students use a research database (Gale) and guided instruction by me to turn a “big question” into a more manageable question, one that doesn't simply require a factual Who/What/Where/When/Why retelling of some topic or event, but forces students to narrow in on questions and problems that they create through the process of research. As an example, I took two portions out of my thesis, both relating to the anti-Semitism and bigotry of the HUAC leaders, and showed the students how that research helped me develop my own question: Was the blacklist about political fear or about racial hatred?

I used the students’ resulting short analysis papers, and their attendant research, as the standards-based assessment “product” to meet newly enacted (in spring 2014) Oregon House Bill 2220. In addition to this pragmatic completion of political mandate, and in addition to the various pedagogical threads of the unit itself, the blacklist unit also afforded me the opportunity to query students about the broader issues immanent in this mostly de-centralized approach to teaching and the canon.

In the same informal survey with which I determined the number of smartphones available to students in class, I also asked questions related to media and politics. A slight majority of the thirty-five students (twelve to eleven) picked
“books” as their “favorite” form of media over “social,” with the rest split between “film” and “other.” Of the thirty-five students, thirty had seen five or fewer black and white films in their lives, while only three students had seen more than ten. Twenty-nine of the students chose “a little” when asked what they knew about post-War America. Twenty-five of the students chose “a little” when asked how political their families are. While far from scientifically relevant, these responses do promote the students themselves to begin thinking of how they individually might interact with the themes, arguments, and uncertainties of blacklist film.

Now, after all the assignments have been graded, the lessons have been tweaked, and the unforeseen catastrophes of public education have been temporarily averted, I feel the blacklist unit deserves a continued place in my own curriculum. As an attempt at curricular reform (and compliance) and theoretical praxis, enough went right for me to consider refining and reapplying the unit for future classes.

The stakes of the unit—the aesthetic and political variables essential for a critical pedagogical experience—are a bit above 9th grade students. However, I would rather have students reach and not entirely grasp (with a nod to Joseph Jacotot) than to make the lowest hanging fruit the goal of the pedagogical experience. Some of my students surprised me with their analyses. For example, more than a few were unable to keep the characters of the films straight because, to paraphrase, “Everyone looks the same in black and white.” Others found the ambiguous depiction of the symbolic American soldier in Crossfire to be
especially troubling.

I was also surprised to learn that the 9th grade honors American history class curriculum only reaches the end of World War II, which is troubling on a number of points, most especially as it eliminates cross-curricular opportunities embedded in post-War “film gris” and HUAC.

These quibbles do not camouflage the potential in this type of pedagogical approach. Validating the use of the smartphone as a smartphone has given my students a level of autonomy students even ten years ago could not have achieved. I now “catch” my students researching supplementary information on their own: or, even better, looking up information to contradict me. Introducing students to reading media through classic noir, a genre where much of the language of contemporary film developed, gives them practical media-reading skills and the aesthetic tools to hopefully deepen their appreciation for contemporary film. Applying this aesthetic analysis to the analysis of advertising and other commodified media sources gives students a critical media experience as well.

Finally, working with, as opposed to against, larger mandates like the Common Core liberates the traditional canon and the traditionalist approach to literature/language arts. Students should not see citizenship and literature as outside events or realms for the adult Other. Critical pedagogy demands individual transformations. The 1940’s isn’t solely Stalingrad, and literature isn’t solely Shakespeare. This promotion of individual agency (as manifest in the blacklist films and artists) may best be captured by one student’s written, free write, response to the question “Who is in power?” After our class analysis of the
blacklist, of gender issues and race issues and capitalist/communist issues, I expected a jaundiced (as much jaundice as a 9th grader might muster) reply. Instead, Jenna’s thesis encouraged me to continue pursuing a very non-empirical goal—a decentered, emancipatory, pedagogy. In Jenna’s words, “The most common perception is you don’t have power, but that’s 100% false. You have power over your own actions, and no one can truly control you.”

**Critical Pedagogy Working within Standards-based Education**

Ultimately, emancipation comes with a transferal of agency, which includes both knowledge of the *actual* and knowledge of the *potential*. As a founding voice for critical pedagogy, for emancipatory education, and the general restructuring of multiple educational absolutes, Paulo Freire captures the energies within the praxis of a pedagogy like blacklist film. For Freire, as it should be for us, “One defends democracy by leading it to the state Meinhein calls 'militant democracy'--a democracy which does not fear the people, which suppresses privilege, which can plan without becoming rigid, which defends itself without hate, which is nourished by a critical spirit rather than irrationality.”174 A critical pedagogy, one that gives students agency, complexity, and the tools to work within established structures (like the CCSS) while also questioning those structures, strengthens more than the political advocacy of our country. E.D. Hirsch, Jr. places (likely inadvertently) Freire's vision of democracy in the contemporary and divisive culture of politics as “politicians.” While a blacklist media literacy approach may not be what Hirsch has in mind when he declares, “It is a duty of American schools to educate competent *American* citizens—hence

Hirsch ends his book with a hypothetical: that we should include the names of Thomas Jefferson, Noah Webster, Benjamin Rush, and Abraham Lincoln on the frieze of the Teachers College Building (1901) in New York City—a frieze that contains the names of many *European* educational reformers. In the name of a truly *American* message, I would encourage Hirsch and his reformers to include names like Abraham Polonsky, Adrian Scott, and even John E. Rankin and Edward Dmytryk, as well.
Appendix “A”

Pre-Unit Assessment:

Introduction to Media Literacy: Reading Signs

You and your group should discuss, debate, then correlate a complete response to each of the following questions. Your response may be in the truncated form of bulleted fragments, but it should be fulfilling enough to include both the definition of the concept as you see it as well as any problems or questions the concept evokes. Do not access the interweb at this time.

1. What is media?

2. What is politics?

3. What is consumerism?

4. What is propaganda?

5. What is literacy
Appendix “B”

Intro to Media Literacy: Reading Signs

*Class Notes (generated by students sans Google)*

1. What is media?
   *A product...or different ways/modes to get your “product” out
   *Manipulation of the public...To influence the public
   *Communication...forms of social communication
   *Mass Communication...Entertainment/news/gossip

2. What is politics?
   *affairs of government
   **“polis”...the citizens/the people

3. What is consumerism?
   *Rights of the consumer
   *Buying vs. making
   *Consumption of media
   *Free-flow of money

4. What is propaganda?
   *Biased information to the public
   *Manipulative influence of public opinion
   *Appealing advertisements

5. What is literacy?
   *A way of communicating
   *Reading and writing
   *Understanding the connotation/denotation
Appendix “C”

Watching Blacklist Films

1. Your “gang of four” *(that’s an allusion you can look up on your iPhone if you’d like)* is responsible for compiling very specific notes on the form and content of the films. Be aware; this unit asks you to focus on the *implicit* meanings and messages *implied* by the process of “close reading” the visual texts. Here are the roles/jobs/duties required for EACH viewing of the films:

a. Two members create mise-en-scences, or mises-en-scene...You’ve already been prepped for this; so if you need a refresher, let me know. Each “mise” should reveal the five strongest elements in the shot of your choice, which can be camera angle, lighting, subjects/objects, or movement.

b. Two members generate notes on tone/message/culture...Some of the people who made these films went to prison because of the potential *messages* they were thought to be sending to their audiences. These messages were thought to be Un-American (The committee that questioned these people was called HUAC: The House Un-American Activities Committee). It is your job to listen and look for *implied or explicit* messages that relate to both cultural and political ideas of “American-ness.” Here are a few fake quotes to get you started:

“Hate is like a loaded gun.” Capt. Finley, *Crossfire*

“Yes, this is what I do for a living. I’ve got to eat. What else can a woman do to earn money?” Ginny, *Crossfire*

“You know the type; they’re all the same. Always expecting guys like me to do all the work. Those people should go back to whatever country they came from.” Montgomery, *Crossfire.*
Appendix “D”

Practice some of your fabulous language skills by responding to one of the following prompts in as much detail as you can sustain. Focus in on word choice, punctuation, and sentence fluency. IF you submit anything less than three paragraphs, I will suggest that you are under-performing.

1. What is justice?
2. What is the root of all evil?
3. What will be the defining issue of your adulthood?
4. When is war good?
5. Who is in power?
6. How do Nike Elites make your life better?
7. When will you be political (of, for, the citizens)?
8. What is the difference between art and entertainment?
9. What media messages do you think are the most (or least) harmful?
Appendix “E”

Big Questions

1. Is Hollywood a source of propaganda?

2. What is the role of gender in media?

3. What’s so bad about communism?

4. Can you be political without being able to vote?

5. Who is in power?

6. What are the effects of war on an individual?

7. What is the history of film?

8. Does the KKK still have influence?

9. What is Film Noir?

10. Do you think “poli-tics” means “of, for, the people”?

11. Was the blacklist fair?

12. What happened to any one of the blacklisted artists?

Assignment Broadly Defined

- Narrow one of the big questions down to a workable question through research.
- Find three primary or secondary sources through a specific data base search.
- Turn your question into a thesis: a supportable, opinionated, statement.
- Use the research to build a supported argument.
- Present your argument, with supporting research, in a form TBD.
Appendix “F”

The chairman of HUAC from 1938 to 1944, Martin Dies, was a congressman from Texas. He was also a member of the Ku Klux Klan. New Jersey congressman J. Parnell Thomas, the chairman of HUAC in 1947 (the year the Hollywood Ten were subpoenaed, held in contempt of Congress, and eventually jailed) was a member of the Ku Klux Klan as well (Humphries *Hollywood’s Blacklists 77*).

Committee member John E. Rankin, congressman from Mississippi, made his anti-Semitic and racial views clear repeatedly, proclaiming the need to “save America for white gentile Americans” (Langdon 304), calling columnist Walter Winchell a “communistic little kike” (Langdon 304), and on the floor of the House, denouncing the Jewish-Communist conspiracy in Hollywood in 1945, by “proclaiming that ‘alien-minded communistic enemies of Christianity are trying to take over the motion picture industry and spread their un-American propaganda as well as their loathsome, lying, immoral and anti-Christian filth before the eyes of your children in every community in America’” (Langdon 304-05).

**Question/Claim:** Was the blacklist about politics or was it about bigotry? Was it about saving America from communism or saving white, male, America from non-white, non-Christian, non-male voices?
Appendix “G”

Brainstorm for your Theme/Research Paper: The Blacklist

So, how do you get from the films...to the themes...to your topic/thesis...to your evidence and analysis...and still keep your sanity? Well, honors student, follow me!

- Make your first paragraph an overview of the movie of your choice. Introduce just enough to make the plot and your use of the plot clear.

“In 1947 the Academy Award-nominated film Crossfire was released. The film focuses (see the present tense?) on the anti-Semitic murder of an innocent man. It also focuses on the mental and emotional effects war can have on human beings. (You can now substitute your own focus): It also focuses on the roles of women in society...It also focuses on the power of racial hatred in our country...It also focuses, because of its involvement in the HUAC trials and the blacklist, the role of communism in our society).”

- Make your second paragraph a summation/orientation of the part of the movie you need to support your thesis.

“In Crossfire a group of newly demobilized soldiers lead aimless lives....”
“In Crossfire, women are portrayed only one of two ways--as potential ‘tramps’ or potential ‘angels’....

- Make your third and fourth and maybe fifth paragraphs the transition from the film to your research.

“The role of gender in media is still a powerful topic....”
“Soldiers who are physically whole but emotionally damaged are nothing new, and they are consequences modern society must deal with as well....”

- Make your following paragraphs (4/5/6/7/8?) the analysis paragraphs, where you use your research to address your specific issue/thesis.

“According to this non-biased source, “........”
“According to the obviously slanted position of READMYBLOGANDOBEY.com, “........”

- Make your last paragraph(s) a nice return to the theme/film/thesis.

“Although Crossfire is a rather heavy-handed and one-dimensional vision of....PTSD/gender/hatred/America.....”
Notes

2 Sources use various starting and ending dates for the blacklist. See Langdon, chapter 9.
10 Ibid.
12 Ibid., 35.
13 Ibid., 36.
14 Ibid., 4.
15 Paulo Freire, Pedagogy of the Oppressed (New York: Continuum), 44.
18 Ibid.
21 Freire, Pedagogy, 72.
22 Ibid.
23 Ibid.
24 Ibid., 81.
25 Ibid., 76.
26 Ibid., 81
27 Ibid.
28 Ibid., 83.
29 Ibid., 83-84.
31 Ibid., 55.
32 Ibid.
33 Ibid., 56.
34 Henry A. Giroux, “Bare Pedagogy and the Scourge of Neoliberalism: Rethinking Higher Education as a Democratic Public Sphere,” *The Educational Forum* 73, no.3 (2010): 186.
39 Ibid., 8.
40 Ibid., 23.
41 Ibid., 105.
42 Ibid., 181.
43 Ibid.
44 Ibid., 182.
46 Ibid., 45.
47 Ibid.
48 Ibid., 58.
51 Ibid., 194. (emphasis original)
52 Ibid.
53 Ibid., 18.
55 Ibid., 17.
56 Ibid.

58 Ibid., vii.
59 Ibid., 17.
60 Ibid., 27.
62 Ibid., 8.
64 Ibid., 585.
65 Ibid., 595.
66 Ibid., 591.
69 Ibid.
71 Ibid., 39.
73 Ibid., 67.
74 Lewis, “Image,” 40.
75 Freire, “Education,” 47.
76 Ibid., 83.
77 Lewis, “Image,” 42.
78 Ibid., 41-42.
80 Ibid., 303.
81 Ibid., 311.
82 Ibid., 314.
83 Ibid., 310.
84 Ibid.
86 Ibid., 132.
87 Ibid.
88 Ibid.
89 Ibid., 141.
90 Ibid., 146.
92 Ibid., 10-11.
94 Ibid., 19.
95 Ibid., 20.
108 Wikipedia, s.v. “John Rankin.”
109 Wikipedia, s.v. “John Elliott Rankin.”
111 At my school, for example, Shakespeare is the only author taught at all four grade levels. Currently, a teaching unit on a Shakespearean play takes a minimum of four weeks class time.
113 Ibid.
114 Ibid.
115 Ibid., 296.
116 Ibid., 306.
117 Ibid., 307.
118 Ibid.
121 The “Hollywood Ten” is the designation given to the first Hollywood artists brought before the House Un-American Activities Committee in 1947, of which Adrian Scott and Edward Dmytryk were key figures.
125 Ibid.
130 Ibid.
132 Ibid.
133 Ibid., 37.
135 Ibid.
136 Ibid.
137 McGilligan and Buhle, “Tender,” 482.
139 Ibid.
In this tale of double-crosses and multiple murder, the plot is built on the dying protagonist’s narrative confession, giving the film a sense of inevitable doom.

Langdon, “Crossfire,” 125.


Crossfire.


Crossfire.

Ibid.

Langdon, “Crossfire,” 309.


2-3 (summer/fall 2003): 88.


164 See appendix “A” for the assignment and student-generated lists.


166 This includes Double Indemnity (1944), The Big Combo (1955), Touch of Evil (1958), and Out of the Past (1947).

167 See appendix “B” for details of the assignment.

168 See appendix “C” for list of questions.

169 Crowther, “Review.”

170 See appendix “D” for the assignment.

171 See appendix “E” for sample.

172 See appendix “G” for assignment guidelines.

173 According to the Oregon Department of Education website, “HB 2220 requires schools to do two things: 1. At least one time each year, provide parents with a report indicating their student’s achievement measured against Oregon State standards at the student’s grade level,” and “2. The above mentioned grade must be based solely on the student’s academic performance and cannot be influenced by student behavior.


176 Ibid., 188.
Bibliography


Giroux, Henry A. “Bare Pedagogy and the Scourge of Neoliberalism: Rethinking Higher Education as a Democratic Public Sphere.” *The Educational Forum* 74, no. 3 (2010): 185-196.


UAC.htm (accessed April 1, 2014).


