

THE ROAD MOVIE BOOK

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THE ROAD TO DYSTOPIA

Landscaping the nation in *Easy Rider*

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A man went looking for America and couldn't find it anywhere.
(Ad copy for *Easy Rider*)

In 1988 George Bush proudly noted that the United States had made a successful recovery from the excesses of the "Easy Rider society" of the 1960s (Dowd: A11). In the Reagan-Bush era, reference to *Easy Rider* (1969) instantly conjured up demonic images of the hippie counter-culture with its long hair, experimentation with drugs and sex, and violent social protests. For this more conservative political era, such images represented a permissive degeneracy and destructive militancy that had to be eradicated for the nation to thrive.

Unlike many films from the past, however, *Easy Rider* didn't have to wait for retrospective canonization (however dubious in its motives). It was literally a legend in its own time, serving as an instant emblem of its generation. *Easy Rider's* story featured two hippies named Wyatt/Captain America and Billy (played, respectively, by Peter Fonda and Dennis Hopper), who travel from Los Angeles to New Orleans on their motorcycles only to find dramatically increasing hostility from local citizens along their journey. Budgeted for \$375,000, Hopper's directorial debut made over \$50 million worldwide during its original release and won the 1969 Cannes Film Festival Award for "Best Film by a New Director."¹

While the film generated substantial debate, critics from the alternative and mainstream presses alike generally saw it as a spectacular document of its times that effectively represented the hippie ethos as well as the serious rifts between counter- and dominant cultures. The critic for the *Washington Post* hailed the film as "lyrical and brilliant, the reflection of its generation . . . like a Bob Dylan song on celluloid," while Rex Reed wrote that "by taking up where Kerouac and Lawrence Lipton and all the Holy Barbarians left off, Fonda and Hopper

have produced the definitive youth odyssey of the 1960s" (233). Similarly, in the counter-culture's alternative press, reviewers called *Easy Rider* "the first 'commercial' . . . motion picture to embody the new youth consciousness" (Miller: 16), the "first . . . to deal with aspects of hip life honestly and without exploitation . . . and . . . confront the reality of America" (Glushanok: 20–1).

While it is difficult to pinpoint why certain films are instantly recognized as generational landmarks by their audiences (particularly while others with similar characteristics, such as *Alice's Restaurant*, 1969, fail to be), it is clear that, because *Easy Rider* synthesized so many mainstays of 1960s youth and popular cultures, it had more than a fair chance of being immortalized by those whose interests it seemed to represent. Most obviously, one could point to *Easy Rider's* concentration on hippie life and its twin social themes of freedom and repression. One could also note the film's relationship to popular culture via its use of rock music, allusions to Roger Corman's successful AIP motorcycle and drug-experimentation films (such as *Wild Angels*, 1966; *The Glory Stompers*, 1967; *Hell's Angels on Wheels*, 1967; and *The Trip*, 1967), generic revisionism of the film Western, and deployment of stylistic and narrative techniques associated with the New American Cinema. All of these tied the film firmly to tropes of the counter-culture, from libidinous pleasure, spontaneity, and rebellion to aesthetic hipness.²

But it is abundantly evident from the reception of the film that part of what captivated *Easy Rider's* audiences was simply its depiction of a motorcycle journey across the United States. On the one hand, the film appeared as the apotheosis of the car, motorcycle, and highway cultures that had escalated since the 1950s thanks to factors as various as the National Highway Act of 1956, which created a gigantic system of interstate highways, Beat writer Jack Kerouac's *On the Road* (1957), which deified the experience of cross-country travel by freewheeling male individuals as an antidote to bourgeois complacency, and the highly publicized presence of the Hell's Angels, the pack of "renegade" chopper riders who were a source of public fear and fascination by the 1960s.³

On the other hand, the film related these intersecting features of 1950s and 1960s culture to a commentary on America that brought together the powerful allure of the road with a contemporary cultural critique. The traveling quest, one of the hallmarks of the road movie (Corrigan: 144–5), structured numerous 1960s Westerns (such as *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid*, 1969, and *The Wild Bunch*, 1969), but was also featured more explicitly in such road trip fare as *Two for the Road* (1967), *Alice's Restaurant*, *The Rain People* (1969), *Midnight Cowboy* (1969), and French director Jean-Luc Godard's *Weekend* (1967; shown in the United States in 1969). While films centered on excursions through the countryside were hardly the only source of cultural critique in the cinema during this period, critics were quick to see the allegorical implications afforded by the road movie. The characters' journeys in many of these films directly commented on

the state of contemporary society. More specifically, *Easy Rider* and other US road movies of the 1960s carried a certain message about America during a time when the nation's identity was contested. As one reviewer acknowledged,

The "search for America" undertaken by Captain America and his sidekick Billy is not geographical, it is literally a quest to find out where America's head is at. The people and places represented in that quest are evocative of different states of consciousness co-existing unpeacefully in this country and all over the world. Each stop on the road is an encounter with a different awareness of what is real and what is of value.

(Miller: 17)⁴

Commentators further rooted both the appeal and the message of the film in the "vast discrepancy between the visual beauty of the movie . . . and the ugliness of the climate of life in the late sixties" (Brode: 282). The film juxtaposed "America the beautiful" with "Amerika the ugly": the pristine wilderness of the landscape, representing the great potential of the country's historical past, with the profane sentiments of its fascistic and bigoted inhabitants, threatening the very foundations of democracy in the present.⁵

Reactions to *Easy Rider* at the time of its release focused, then, on how its road trip embodied the counter-culture's attitudes toward the state of the nation. But when located within the context of other portraits of the United States during the late 1960s, the film's depiction of the country is in fact not so straightforward. Placed within the visual discourses on nationhood of the time, *Easy Rider* emerges as a film of conflicted historical and ideological identity.

The example of *Easy Rider*, as a quintessential road movie situated within one of the most tumultuous times in twentieth-century US history, allows us to grasp how the road film, in particular its generically obligatory journey through landscapes and territories, participates within broader creative and cultural efforts to define the nation. This contextual frame complicates what commentators have long seen as *Easy Rider's* transparent personification of late 1960s' rebellious youth consciousness.

Landscaping the Nation

The connection between images of the landscape and the construction of national identity is not new. As Angela Miller says of nineteenth-century US landscape painting, its mission was "to give to nationalism an organic basis, to root it in the geography of the continent" (167). In the 1960s, sources such as *The Saturday Evening Post*, *National Geographic*, *Life*, and *Look* magazines produced pictorial essays about America clearly intended to glorify the nation. As we shall see, these essays, featuring a range of American topographies from the city to the wilderness, acted

as a linchpin for patriotic rhetoric. This rhetoric provided a continuum with traditional nationalism during a time when the very definition of 'America' was being challenged by the Civil Rights and youth movements.

But, as one might suspect, such democratic portraits of America did not monopolize representation. Mass circulation magazines as well as other sources, most notably Pop Art, were busy disarming earlier idyllic and romantic images of America. These sources portrayed apocalyptic, disaster-filled scenarios of modernity via competing depictions of the country's landscape. Through either an ideological identification with the counter-culture or a kind of hysteria born of 1960s political violence, alternative depictions of the nation emerged and flourished alongside the more conventional.

While, as Homi Bhabha points out, nationalist discourses attempt to project "the idea of the nation as a continuous narrative of national progress" via "the narcissism of self-generation," the concept of nation is always deeply ambivalent. It is inflected by numerous differences not the least of which is that between the official attempt to project an appearance of endurance and "a much more transitional social reality" (1). Because the concept of the nation is always caught between these two temporal dimensions, its chief figure is ambivalence, a "wavering between vocabularies," that creates enough of an indeterminacy to produce a "Janus-faced" discourse on the nation during any given time. This duality is bound to affect deeply representations signifying "nationness" (2-3). Because of the uneven development of historical forces during a period, meanings "may be partial because they are *in medias res*; and history may be half-made because it is in the process of being made; and the image of cultural authority may be ambivalent because it is caught, uncertainly, in the act of 'composing' its powerful image" (2-3). One could reasonably imagine that the ambivalent status of the concept of nation, caught between tradition and the transitional forces of the historical moment, would only be exacerbated during times when the nation is under siege, as it was during the 1960s.

At first glance, though, *Easy Rider* seems to escape this complexity. Its treatment of the road appears to generate a clear-cut counter-cultural message about the state of the nation in the late 1960s. As it rewrites the landscape according to the youth and Civil Rights movements of the time, it seems only to document and embrace a transitional nationalism that attacks the presuppositions of a formerly stable Americanism. The journey of the hippie protagonists of *Easy Rider* reveals a geographical regionalism politicized according to the radical movements of the time.

Wyatt and Billy are California hippies, incarnating, respectively, the "cool" existential and wild paranoid hippie types drawn from the state most recognized as a counter-cultural mecca. The terrain most idealized in the film — the Southwest — is at once the land of displaced peoples championed by the counter-

culture (e.g., Native Americans and Hispanics) and the site of iconography for the hippie movement, since hippie clothing and lifestyles mimicked the buckskin naturalism of the early settlers. The Southwest is also the locus of the hippie commune Wyatt and Billy stay in briefly, the commune being one of the chief insignias of the new 1960s alternative youth culture. In the Southwest, the protagonists enjoy the freedom of the road, the hospitality of those they encounter, and the beauty and mystery of the region's wilderness. Conversely, the South, the small-town South in particular, is demonized in *Easy Rider* as the region most identified in the 1960s with militant ignorance, racism, and violence. The South was the land of George Wallace, white separatist governor of Alabama, and the site of bitter and deadly Civil Rights struggles since the 1950s. It was also, as Merle Haggard's hit country tune "Okie from Muskogee" (1969) communicated, not a place that welcomed long-hairs. It is in the South that Wyatt and Billy meet discrimination, violence, and their own deaths: "rednecks" jail them because of their long hair, hurl insults at them at a local café, attack them while they're sleeping (killing George, the American Civil Liberties Union lawyer played by Jack Nicholson), and, ultimately, murder both Billy and Wyatt on the highway (with a shotgun hung on a rack in a pickup truck). While there are idyllic images of cypress trees and the Old South, Southern scenery is dotted with African-American poverty and the intrusive icons of modern life and industrialization (gas stations, refineries, etc.).

On the surface of the film, then, the terms of youth and Civil Rights protest are materialized in the trajectory of the road trip through politically value-laden regions. In addition, *Easy Rider*'s regionalism acted iconoclastically in relation to several previous features of the road movie, thus enhancing its revisionist status and counter-cultural credentials. It reversed populism's faith in small-town America epitomized in Frank Capra's *It Happened One Night* (1934) and the Western's conventional east-to-west trajectory with its promises of freedom and opportunity. Even the comically self-reflexive quest for frontier fortune (e.g., Alaskan gold) in Hope and Crosby's *Road to Utopia* (1946) is reversed as *Easy Rider*'s protagonists 'score' their drug money in the beginning of the film only to lose it in the end.

But, upon closer inspection, we can see that *Easy Rider* is not simply a counter-nationalistic film. To the contrary, it vividly crystallizes the tension between nationalism as a process evolving through time and nationalism as a thing already realized, a thing to be preserved from the assaults of history. This ambivalence becomes particularly clear when the film is linked to other representations featuring the American landscape during the late 1960s. The film's "geopolitics," as well as its use of the American highway and landscape, are intertwined with representations in the mass media and art scene that took America as their subject. *Easy Rider*'s highways and landscapes are positioned between two extremes: the

affirmative patriotisms of Americana in the mass media and the raucously critical demystifications of Pop Art, between the romantic, nostalgic yearnings of the former and the violent, apocalyptic mood of the latter. As a result, *Easy Rider* is a work on “nationness” which is very much in process, riven with conflicts over the meaning of the American icons of the road, the wilderness, and the city.

America the Beautiful

In 1957, *The Saturday Evening Post* published a collection of photographs entitled *The Face of America*. This collection featured the various regions of the country in their rural, suburban, and urban splendors within a seasonal framework (“The Face of America in Spring,” “The Face of America in Summer,” etc.). The collection yielded a sense of the changeable and cyclic, yet constant and enduring characteristics of the land. We see sections of the country and citizens’ activities – from certain ritual moments such as cherry blossom time in Washington, DC and an annual Thanksgiving dinner in Vermont to landscape monuments such as the Grand Canyon to more quotidian events such as a baby parade in Ohio. These pictures, the accompanying copy tells us, demonstrate the “spirit of a free nation” based upon “new images of . . . old enduring values.” While each child born “throws himself with ingenious energy into the challenge of contributing his own personality and vocation to the character of the place where he was born . . . he partakes of a larger vision than that of his local place and his daily job. It is this which makes him a transcontinental citizen of this country” (5–6). No matter how regionally or individually distinct one’s lifestyle may be, one is a citizen of the United States of America, an identity which transcends the particulars of regional and individual loyalties. Thus, *The Face of America* promotes the geographical particularities and diversities of the country, its “riches,” while it situates them within a unified nation – a dual rhetoric unsurprising in the midst of the Cold War.

The beginning of the Cold War had already resulted in proliferating portraits of American democracy in the US media. As Elaine Tyler May has argued about other kinds of images during the 1950s, this tactic sought to differentiate the United States from the communist Soviet Union, showing the superiority of a way of life based on democracy, equality, and freedom. Thus, as in the copy for *The Face of America*, Cold War rhetoric proclaimed the nation’s diversity (as opposed to the alleged homogeneity of the Soviet Union), while demonstrating its unity (in the face of the Communist threat) as a means of defining its superior status as a nation. Idealized photographs of American landscapes were pressed into service as ideological weapons against Communism.

While the Cold War continued to provide the incentive for nationalistic sentiments stressing diversity, unity, and democracy throughout the 1960s, by the

end of that decade massive civil unrest in the form of the Vietnam War protest, the radical youth movement, race riots, and the black liberation movement, as well as the assassination of political figures such as Malcolm X, John F. Kennedy, his brother Robert, and Martin Luther King, dramatically enhanced the instabilities of the Cold War era by questioning the democratic claims that had traditionally served as the basis of national identity. To the counter-culture and Civil Rights workers, democracy was compromised by imperialism, racism, and repression as the United States fought a questionable war in Southeast Asia and battled African-Americans and youth protesters on the domestic front.⁶ The unrest of the 1960s and the continuing Communist threat provided a situation in which a secure national identity was both violently contested and desperately required. Thus, the discourse about America the beautiful had a double duty to perform in relation to the officially perceived threats of the Cold War and protest culture. Magazines endorsed images of America the beautiful to address the instabilities of the period, containing them by contextualizing them within familiar historical and ideological references.

Perhaps the enlistment of color photography to serve the purposes of patriotic rhetoric is nowhere more evident than it is in the pages of *National Geographic* magazine in the late 1960s.⁷ To concentrate for a moment on a particularly representative case, the magazine’s report on the state of Oregon (“Oregon’s Many Faces” by Stuart Jones) demonstrates this rhetoric’s major motifs. The article characterizes Oregon through its landscape, people, and related industry and resources. Oregon’s landscape is varied, “full of scenic marvels” (74) and “elbow room” (77). Further, it exists in vivid connection to America’s past, particularly the pioneer and pilgrim eras. Mount Hood, for example, “signalled journey’s end for pioneers trekking west on the Oregon Trail” (77), while the names of Oregon cities (e.g., Portland, Salem, Newport) echo the names of pilgrim settlements in New England. Contemporary celebrations further invoke the past, such as the “September jamboree” with its “rodeo, chuck wagon dinners, and Indian pageants” (91). Oregon’s people are “an extremely mixed bag with a unifying love for independence of thought, people who would reject the very idea of wearing a label” (77). Moreover, it is a state which has resolved various racial conflicts. Oregon has a policy of “integrating Indian children into the state school system” (90). The Native American population runs the flourishing “Kah-Nee-Ta Vacation Resort” (90). As for the Japanese who had been interred in camps during the Second World War, they state that “wartime scars healed long ago. Oregon has been good to us. We harbor no bitterness” (95). A local commentator on this issue remarks further that the Japanese themselves “deserve great credit, of course, but I like to think that the special spirit of Oregon also played a part. Here a man is judged by what he is, not by his race, religion, or pigmentation” (95). As for industry, Oregon is booming because of businesses such as metallurgy

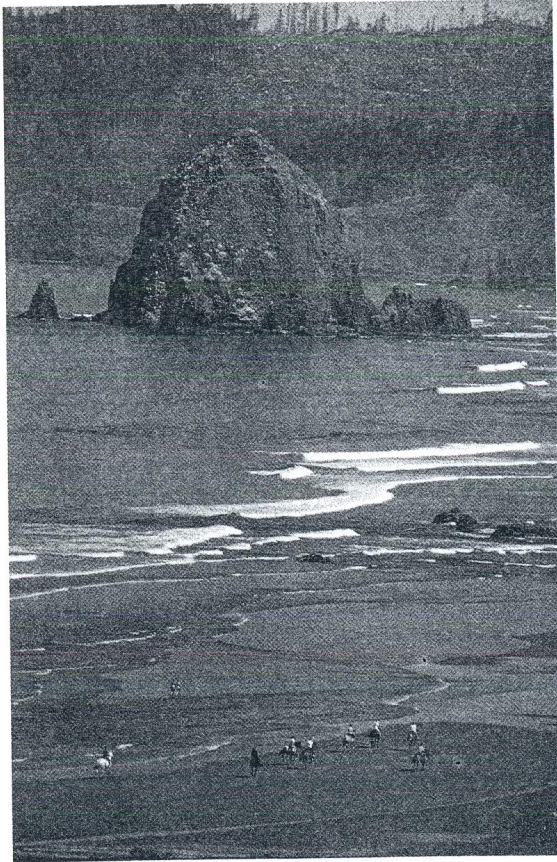


Plate 8.1 *National Geographic* presents one of Oregon's scenic marvels: its mountainous coastline.

and lumber. As the author states, "with 26 million acres of commercial timber – enough to rebuild every house in the United States – Oregon leads the nation in forest products" (92–3).⁸

Throughout this rhetoric the past is reciprocally related to the present in a manner that certifies the heritage of democracy and progressive capitalism based on a sense of the never-ending frontier. The vast space signals the diversity and grandeur of America's physical geography, harkening back to the vistas of the pioneer days, while the state's cities demonstrate affiliations with the first European settlements in New England. Town and country signify historical continuity and the importance of the American past. True to the ideal principles of the frontier, Oregon also embraces egalitarianism in the form of racial tolerance, particularly when its race-citizens contribute productively to advancing the capital profile of the state, as the Native Americans and Japanese have done.

Oregon appears to embrace some Civil Rights platforms (i.e., tolerance and school integration) for non-blacks, but only insofar as these progressive features can be linked to the ideals of frontierism, rather than to an explicit social or political agenda.

That the issue of racial conflict has somehow been magically resolved is particularly clear in *National Geographic's* coverage of Southern cities. In an essay on Atlanta the main references to the Old South are to its restoration from the ravages of the Civil War or to the continuation of its traditions (in the form of the debutante ball, for example). The New South is exemplified through the tropes of progress (e.g., Atlanta as the home of Coca-Cola, an important epidemiological center, and a new municipal showcase). Appreciation of the dramas and charms of the past coupled with a contemporary faith in technology, progress, and the essential fairness of the American character resolve all social inequities and lead to a bright future (Ellis: 246–81). That such discourse could take place amidst proliferating public tragedies of racial violence is a testament to the durability of traditional patriotic rhetoric rooted in idealized frontier ideology.⁹

Pictorial verification of the continued existence of the frontier is key to *National Geographic's* patriotic messages. Essay after essay attempts to demonstrate that the United States is still a frontier – full of new resources and new territories, a vision which Oregon as a state with enough lumber to rebuild every house in the country aptly incarnates. Thus, *National Geographic* features pieces on Alaska's outback, the US Virgin Islands, the ocean (called the "deep frontier"), the moon, and the growing interstate highway system.¹⁰ The magazine relentlessly discovers new frontiers which in turn secure the manifest destiny of the United States.

In 1969, of course, Apollo 11 was launched and Neil Armstrong walked on the moon. Like other magazines, *National Geographic* featured prolific photos of the moon, often in the fold-out page format (which suggested that a typical page could not capture the immensity of the moonscape). The moonscape is forbidding and barren, but a space which represents dreams of new frontiers that are not unlike the old. The moon crater Copernicus "just about matches in size our largest national park, Yellowstone [about 400 miles across]" (Cook: 245). Writers show us what a settlement on the moon would look like (complete with swimming pool) by virtue of the "frontiersmen of the space age" – engineers and technicians who will help colonize the moon (Weaver: 229). The moonscape, compared to Western icons and situated within the rhetoric of discovery, adventure, and expansion, represents the extraterrestrial reach of America's frontier know-how as well as the promise that the frontier is not dead.¹¹

But another, perhaps less expected terrain for the enactment of a neo-frontier expansionist ethos, is the interstate highway system the government had begun funding in 1956 with the passage of the National Highway Act. A 1957 cover article in *Time* magazine calls road building "the American Art," remarking

that the “panorama of road builders stringing highways across the land reflects a peculiarly American genius, one that lies deep in the traditional pioneering instincts of the nation” (“Construction”: 92). Later accounts continue to extol American ingenuity and progress, while ensuring continuities with the glorious past. As the writer for “Our Growing Interstate Highway System” exclaims, “A giant nationwide engineering project – the Interstate Highway system – is altering and circumventing geography on an unprecedented scale.” Highways extend “to the wild green yonder” where we can see “young trailblazers” stopping at a rest stop to get a drink (Jordan: 199). Further, a drive along the Interstate system “provides a vivid lesson in the geography of the U.S. The new highways cut through the brooding forests and silent deserts, they course the endless prairies, skirt rivers that helped shape the destiny of a continent, and knife through high, lonely mountains” (201). To develop the ramifications of this conjunction of geography and the legendary past, the writer adds, “Everywhere you find history too – battlefields, monuments, yesterday’s frontiers” (204). But unlike excursions in the past, the interstates provide all of the amenities – “wide shoulders, easy vision at night, emergency telephones, scenic overlooks and rest areas . . . even underpasses for hikers and wildlife” (197). The photographs of the highways make them appear as spectacular as the naturescapes and cityscapes they transect; roads stretch endlessly through the equally endless American terrain.

Thus, frontierism is tirelessly presented in the pages of *National Geographic* and other sources. The landscape continues to affirm frontierism and the promise of space. It is a space by definition democratic since in theory no class systems or unfair hierarchies exist there; a space then where individual renewal, property relations, and industry can be achieved within a democratic framework.

Easy Rider’s cinematography of the US landscape shares this embrace of The Land. As Rex Reed succinctly puts it, the film “looks like a nature study filmed on an opium trip” (233). The film indulges in picturesque road montages, referred to as “travelogue” sections by its original reviewers, which allowed spectators to “experience the vastness of America’s physical beauty” (Brode: 20). *Easy Rider*’s rapturous portrait of the landscape is further magnified by cinematic strategies emphasizing the protagonists’ *experience* of the landscape via the use of traveling point-of-view shots. Through the use of such dynamic point-of-view shots and exhilarating rock music, that experience is effectively cathected into the viewer.

There are several sequences in *Easy Rider* that rhapsodize the American landscape via the picturesque road montage. The first, supported on the soundtrack by Steppenwolf’s *Born to Be Wild*, depicts the joy of riding through shots of Wyatt and Billy on their motorcycles, followed by panoramic point-of-view shots of the desert Southwest. After having dinner with an Anglo farmer and his Mexican family, *Easy Rider* features extended passages of Southwestern scenery with the Rocky Mountains, forests, deserts, and buttes, including our heroes’



Plate 8.2 Part of a picturesque road montage from *Easy Rider* with Wyatt, Billy, and the Rocky Mountains.

sunset arrival in Monument Valley. These scenes again alternate between objective shots of the riders on their bikes and subjective shots of their experience of the landscapes they pass. The Byrds’ “Ballad of Easy Rider” and The Band’s “The Weight” play over this second road montage. The combinations of road montage and musical passage act as interludes between narrative actions. These devices cue the audience that it is time to watch and take pleasure in the spectacle – in this case, men, motorcycles, the open road, and the beauties of nature.

That the American wilderness is to be admired as a vision is made clear through this assembly of cinematic elements. Moreover, in the second montage sequence, there is nearly a 360-degree pan of the horizon at Monument Valley, a device necessary, the film-maker seems to be saying, to capture the spot’s grandeur reverently and completely. Throughout these montages, the cinematographer, Haskell Wexler, allows sunlight to hit the lens of the camera, flaring the shots with dazzling reflections off the lens and occasional rainbow-effects (an innovation of the New American Cinema). This technique gives the landscape a literal radiance (while also alluding to the enhanced perceptions of the land through the marijuana-influenced view of Wyatt, Billy, and their hitch-hiking companions).

This vision of the wilderness is carefully tied to a sense of US history, at least as it has been immortalized in images from the classic Western. The campfire scenes

in *Easy Rider* self-consciously recall similar scenes from the Western. Instead of staying in motels (where they are not welcome), Wyatt, Billy, their commune-bound hitch-hiker, and George bed down at night like the pioneer adventurers before them. On their first night out, Billy makes the parallel clear when he pretends that they are “fighting Indians and cowboys on every side . . . out here in the wilderness.” True to some of the principles of New American Cinema revisionism, the film-maker updates these past conventions by establishing numerous parallels between the Old and New West. For example, Hopper juxtaposes Billy’s buckskin garb with Wyatt’s motorcycle leathers and horses with motorcycles (particularly when the repair of Wyatt’s motorcycle is compositionally matched to shoeing a horse at the Anglos’ farm). But curiously few signs of modernization affect the depiction of the Southwestern landscape itself.

As Robert Ray and others have noted, revisionist Westerns of the 1960s were remarkable for reversing conventions associated with the frontier ethos, particularly in signaling the closing of the frontier and thereby suggesting that the frontier image was no longer valid (296–325). *Easy Rider*’s west-to-east trajectory would be an example of how this particular film demonstrates the end of the frontier and the hopes it held for individual freedom and national progress. However, the film’s concentration on such celebratory images of the West – beyond indulging in the atavistic romanticism which Ray suggests many revisionist films of the period do – further belies its strategies of reversal. This becomes particularly clear when we place *Easy Rider* within the context of other road movies of the time, as well as the “America the Beautiful” pictorial context surrounding it.

The frontier is alive and well in *Easy Rider*, situated, as it has traditionally been, in the West. Not all road movies of the time embraced the Western landscape in such ecstatic terms. *Alice’s Restaurant* fails to exploit pictorially the physical resources of either the West or the Northeast that serve as a backdrop to its main hippie character’s meanderings. Like *Easy Rider*, *The Rain People* sets out to demystify the sense of purpose and optimism that pervades the conventional road picture. But, unlike *Easy Rider*, it refuses to idealize the American landscape. The road Natalie (Shirley Knight) travels from the East to the Northwest is alienating – it’s a world of plastic motels, roadside phone booths, gas stations, flat farmlands, fast food, obligatory scenic outlooks, claustrophobic small towns, and trailer parks. *Midnight Cowboy* more surrealistically depicts the banality and lurking violence in the heart of the West (Texas), as well as the impersonality and sexual chaos of the city (New York). Its dusty Texas roads, small-time cafés, and traumatic sexual experiences vie with the horrific images of a city occupied with sad “perverts” to yield a sense of a country without any sustaining relationship to a mythic past. Jean-Luc Godard’s *Weekend*, a French film screened in the United States in 1969, offers the most profane vision of individual initiative, the road, and

modern French landscape imaginable with its bickering, murderous bourgeois couple, endless traffic jams complete with burning wreckage, and unspectacular locales that bespeak the modern condition. Thus, the road movie was in no way obliged to offer the viewer extravagant scenery as a part of its allegorical take on the contemporary state of the nation.

In insisting on the continued presence of the frontier and its promises of freedom, *Easy Rider* allies itself rather unexpectedly with the discourses on “America the Beautiful” offered by *National Geographic* and other mass-circulation magazines. While the film inserts the counter-culture into the wilderness, the presence of hippies does not automatically derail the nationalistic symbolism so intimately associated with the grand scenery. Indeed, when hippies were represented positively in the media, it was often through their relation to the early pioneers, rustic living habits, and love of the earth.¹² Thus, the pairing of hippies and national scenery in *Easy Rider* does little to disturb the traditional meanings of the latter, since the media had already co-opted the hippie movement in Old Western terms.

More important, like *National Geographic*, *Easy Rider*’s pictorial strategies function as a travelogue through picturesque America. Through its ultra-photogenic aesthetic, the film advertises the physical grandeur and continued availability of America’s frontier territories, just as it suggests through its protagonists, the Anglo/Mexican family they encounter, the youth commune, and other aspects of their journey through the West, that this territory still promises freedom, diversity and tolerance, and a continuing influx of new pioneers. Since its Southwestern scenes never attempt to demystify the West nor the exhilaration the road can still offer the American male, the film both preserves mythic memories of the historical past and demonstrates their continuing relevance to measuring the health of the American nation.

While *Easy Rider* demonstrates the death of those ideals once the characters leave the frontier and enter civilization, its preoccupation with Western landscape as a marker of our past and present glory perpetuates the fiction of the frontier ideology. When George remarks about the sad state of intolerance in the contemporary United States – “This used to be one helluva good country” – we might very well ask, “when?” The frontier eras represented escape and opportunity for many, but they also involved deprivation, untrammelled violence, and the virtual extermination of Native Americans, among other things. In nationalistic discourses, however, the US landscape becomes a series of landmarks commemorating not only past adventures which have marked the nation’s historical progress, but the daring openness and initiative of the American character itself.

Thus, by creating its counter-cultural message through regionalism, *Easy Rider* participates in a patriotic mythology which obscures the failings of the frontier

myth. Through its vast, unpopulated, unmodernized, romantic vistas of natural Western glories, the film unquestioningly supports one of the foundations of American ideology – frontierism – a myth that had become a virtual lingua franca in traditional nationalistic discourses in the late 1960s. *Easy Rider*'s main difference from *National Geographic* discourse is that it utterly refuses to show the modern West. Modernity is a stigma associated with civilization – in this case, the South. In this sense, the film's atavistic romanticism sustains an even more traditional view of the frontier than its more overtly conservative discursive companions.

If "grand national scenery . . . is the nursery of patriotism" (A. Miller: 8), then *Easy Rider* is a strange bedfellow to the counter-revolutionary strategies of 1960s mainstream magazines and other sources. The images of the West assure the viewing audience of the enduring presence of the historical past and the ideals of patriotism through what amounts to a transcendental view of America as an "idyllic wonderland" which is "untouched by human hands" (Stich: 46).

But while mainstream magazines devoted to traditional nationalism extended their paean to efface regional differences (e.g., connecting the West with the Northeast and the South with the North through images of urban and industrial growth), *Easy Rider*, as we have seen, indulges in a regionalism according to 1960s politics. Not only is the West idealized, but the South is demonized. *Easy Rider*'s South bears the burden for all of civilization's maladies, including small-town racial prejudice, xenophobia, and the negative effects of modernization, urbanization, and industrial growth. We can partially understand this negativity about the South as more generally about civilization, given the film's revisionist Western credentials. That is, in the Western, there is often an ambivalence about the physical and spiritual effects of civilization on the frontier. This ambivalence is updated and additionally emphasized by such 1960s phenomena as the hippies' retreat from the city and the identification of the South with bigotry. But, as in its depictions of the Western landscape, *Easy Rider*'s generic revisionism and counter-cultural position only partially explain its situation within 1960s politics and culture.

The dystopian aspects of the film joined it to negative press accounts about the state of America, as well as to a decade-long interrogation of American icons and myths by Pop artists. These broader connections suggest that *Easy Rider*'s message was a patchwork of traditional and transitional views on the meaning of America within the social melee of the youth revolution.

Amerika: Death, Disaster, and the Apocalypse

After Wyatt and Billy are arrested and jailed for parading without a permit in their first encounter with Southern hospitality, they return to the road, along with George, who has decided to accompany the pair to New Orleans. Following their

release, the road depicts the beauties of the Southern landscape and its open spaces. To the Holy Modal Rounders' "If You Wanna Be a Bird," George and Billy cavort on their cycles, communicating once again the alliance of cycle, landscape, and male freedom.

Soon, though, the mood of the film clearly changes, abruptly signaled by Jimi Hendrix's nihilistic "If Six Was Nine," a stark counterpoint to the more carefree celebrations of the road earlier on the soundtrack. Instead of wilderness, we see cemeteries, Southern mansions, mangrove trees, and small towns decorated with American flags. The road montage also fleetingly depicts the African-American experience in the South by showing shacks and poverty on the outskirts of the towns through which the protagonists pass.

After this montage, Billy, Wyatt, and George suffer more prejudicial treatment at the hands of the locals when they stop for lunch at a café. The locals loudly refer to them as "refugees from a gorilla love-in," among other things. Shortly thereafter George is murdered by "rednecks" as he sleeps. When Billy and Wyatt go on to New Orleans to the House of Blue Lights, where they meet two prostitutes and go on an acid trip during Mardi Gras, the iconography of the city enhances the sense of disconnection from the wilderness. The road montage is replaced by an hallucinogenic fragmentation of the city and its graveyard (with the Electric Prunes' "Kyrie Eleison" on the soundtrack). The religious and funereal imagery of this sequence paves the way for the last scenes on the way to Florida. As mentioned earlier, the Southeastern landscape displays the marks of industry – power lines, gas stations, and refineries. On a road in proximity to the Southern urban landscape, Wyatt and Billy are blown off their motorcycles by shotgun-toting Southern "rednecks." As Wyatt's motorcycle explodes into flames, an aerial shot places the wreckage within the context of a landscape vista to clinch the tragic proportions of the assassination. Roger McGuinn's version of Bob Dylan's "It's Alright Ma (I'm Only Bleeding)" literalizes the apocalyptic dimensions of the final act.

Along with its more affirmative cultural commentary on the state of the nation, *Easy Rider* also partakes of apocalyptic, disaster-filled predictions on the future of the country. While *Easy Rider*'s politicized regionalism centers this apocalypse in the South, it uses the region to depict the closing of the frontier, the death of freedom in a modern landscape contaminated by fascistic intolerance and violence.

In the mass media, images of the closed frontier broadly involve the impact of technology on the environment, the decline of the American city, and the dangers of US highways, among other things. In an essay for *Look* ironically entitled "America the Beautiful," for example, David Perlman outlines the grim future for the globe if technological developments continue to progress unimpeded. Giving us a less than optimistic view of the meaning of space travel, Perlman notes the

“cancer-like” spread of pollution across the world as seen by the astronauts (25). In the United States “four million cars vomit unburned hydrocarbons . . . lead and cancer-causing nickel additives . . . 16 million rubber tires vaporize on the abrading freeways, and invisible but deadly asbestos particles shed from brake linings” (25).

Another essay in the same issue proclaims that our future is in danger because of pollution and careless use of natural resources: “Hardly a century ago, the American landscape seemed equal to our relatively unlimited power to destroy . . . before 50 million buffalo were slaughtered, Indian nations humbled or exterminated, mountains and forests denuded. . . . We have created ugliness where there once was beauty” (Wolf: 32). Picturing a mother and son in gas masks because “urban air stinks” (31), the writer comments that while we “escaped from an Old World into a New Eden . . . there are no New Edens” (32). Similarly, *Life* featured essays on “The Highway as a Killer,” which reported that “each week 1000 Americans die in auto crashes” (“Highway”: 25) and “The Case of Fear in the Cities Beset by Crime” (Rosenthal: 17–23), which detailed the escalation of crime statistics and residents’ changing perceptions of urban life.

Such essays help depict the “Janus-faced” aspect of nationalism – its polarized, unstable, multiple articulations. In this case, alarmism competed with optimism, redefining the United States through a sense of a heritage willfully and violently lost and progress grown out of control. These forces have made the frontier a distant memory in danger of never being resuscitated. Cars destroy the landscape, environment, and public health, while highways contribute to a mounting death toll. The thrill of the ride and the road no longer symbolize a frontier legacy and democratic freedom, nor even the affluence of leisured suburbanites and their teenagers. Instead, they symbolize the irresponsibility of modernity, portending disaster.

Of all of the media forms of the 1960s, Pop Art provides the definitive critique of the romanticism of vehicle, the road, and the US landscape. Within a substantial reworking of American iconography in general, Andy Warhol, Allan D’Arcangelo, Duane Hanson, Larry Rivers, and others treated the underside of the promises of the highway, including speed, mobility, and the experience of the vastness of the American landscape tinged with history. As Sidra Stich writes, Pop Art featuring the highway often attested to the “dominance of the road as an American image and mobility as a characteristic aspect of American life.” But Pop Artists did not see the highway, as had Kerouac and others, “as a metaphor for freedom or an escape route away from the doldrums of the workaday world; the road is little more than a conveyor belt that runs through a repetitive, vacuous, monotonous environment. And travel is no longer an adventure yielding novel perceptions as much as it is an excursion to replicas of the already known and familiar” (Stich: 69). The canvases of D’Arcangelo (*U.S. Highway 1*, 1963; *Full Moon*, 1962)

and Edward Ruscha (*Standard Station, Amarillo, Texas*, 1963), for example, show how the ubiquitous emblems of highway asphalt and the gas station completely dominate the landscape, ultimately effacing it. Via Celmin’s work (*Freeway*, 1966) shows freeways depicted through the windshield of a car from the point of view of the passenger to emphasize the homogeneity and monotony of the landscape and the detached, alienated quality of the motorist’s experience (71–2). In Llyn Foulkes’s painting of Death Valley (*Death Valley U.S.A.*, 1963), inscribed “This painting is dedicated to the American,” the landscape is desolate; any utopian promises of expansionism it may have once held are transformed by an eviscerated, forbidding, completely deromanticized topography (170–1).

Such art arose in reaction to the 1950s growth of motel and fast-food chains, prefabricated housing, suburbanization, and the incursion of small industry, businesses, and billboards on the highway. But Pop Art also reacted to a myriad of incidents in the 1960s, from the escalating war in Vietnam, domestic civil strife, and the dramatic decline of the city to statistics about highway casualties and the media exploitation of traffic accidents. By 1959 at least 1.25 million Americans had died in traffic accidents, exceeding the number of war dead in the United States (Corrigan: 147). In 1969 alone, 56,000 Americans died in such accidents (Stich: 172). In Hollywood during the 1950s and 1960s, Montgomery Clift’s devastating car accident and the deaths of James Dean and Jayne Mansfield in car crashes lent an aura of romantic tragedy to the speed and glamor of being on the road. Marlon Brando’s turn as a motorcycle rebel in *The Wild One* (1954), the spate of 1960s AIP motorcycle films, the notorious quintessence of 1960s outlawry, the Hell’s Angels, and teenage boys’ fantasies about motorcycles and rebellious masculinity, only enhanced the danger and excitement associated with fast wheels, youth, and the freedom of the road. Death in this context could make one a legend, as it did James Dean.

Pop Art responded to the exploitative necrophilia of the press and the overly romanticized Hollywood depiction of road catastrophes through a series of shocking, but removed images of death and disaster on the highway. Duane Hanson’s *Motorcycle Accident* (1969) portrays a lifelike sculpture of dead youth, sprawled on the ground still attached to his motorcycle. Perhaps more than any other Pop Artist, Andy Warhol devoted himself to death and disaster imagery. Warhol silk-screened and painted a series of car crashes from newspaper photographs between 1963 and 1964, vividly exemplifying and critiquing the media’s ghoulish concentration on highway disasters. These include: *5 Deaths*, *White Burning Car III*, *Orange Car Crash 14 Times*, *Green Disaster #2*, *Ambulance Disaster*, *Saturday Disaster*, and *Foot and Tire*. Serial repetition of many of these photo-images renders them mundane, de-spectacularized. They deglamorize the mythos of the car crash as a romantic end to youthful rebellion by depicting the banal gruesomeness and grotesquery of highway accidents. Each victim is

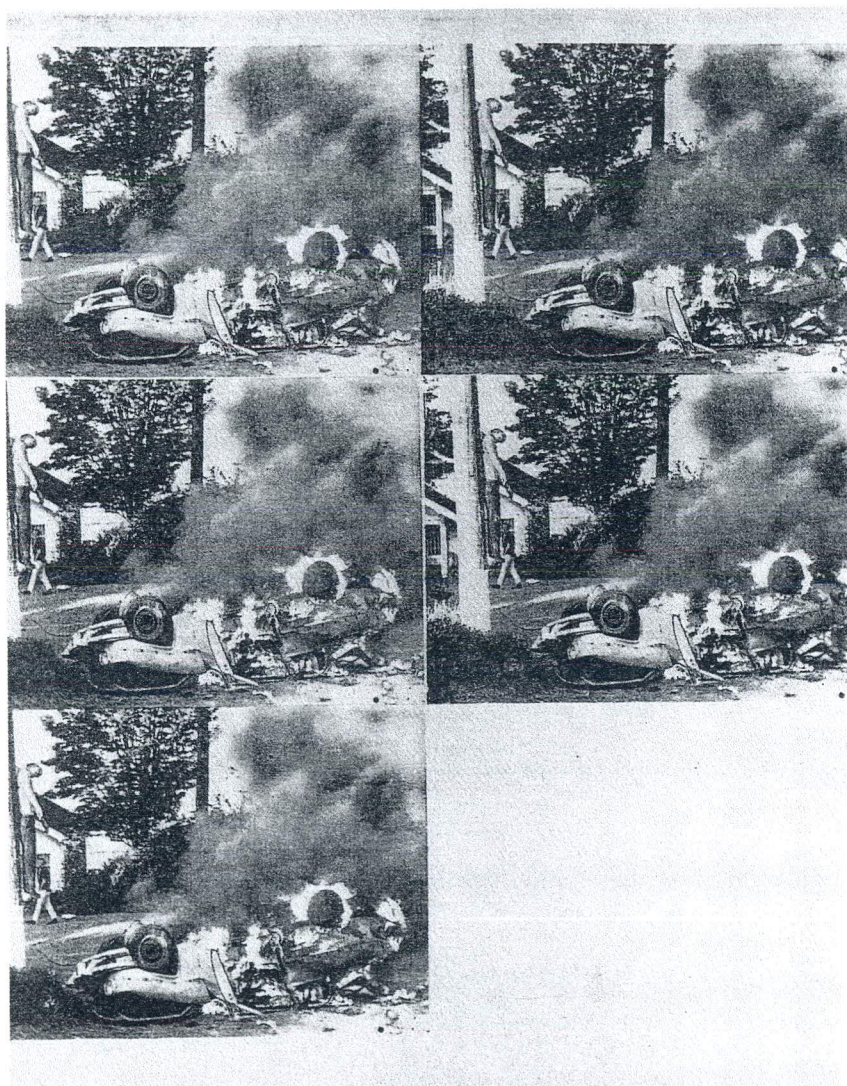


Plate 8.3 Andy Warhol's "White Car Burning III".
The American dream of mobility turned into a nightmare. © 1997 Andy Warhol
Foundation for the Visual Arts/ARS, New York.

transformed into a death-and-disaster still life, variably impaled on telephone pole spikes, hanging out of car windows, trapped beneath cars, and uniformly converted into blood-spattered, human wreckage which blends into the automotive wreckage. The victims are "everyman/woman" in a scenario that turns the "American dream (of social mobility and leisure) into a nightmare" (Printz: 16).

The preoccupation of some Pop Artists with death sought to reflect the omnipresence of violence, particularly against the backdrop of the 1960s, through an unsentimental, deromanticized lens which was clearly at odds with American aesthetic traditions showing the valor in death. As Stich writes, "for the first time in American art . . . death is treated forthrightly as a fearful, alienating counterpoint to idealistic conceptions of the American dream . . . in postwar art death is not related to either spiritual or heroic themes. . . . Rather, death is shown to be a brutal end, a purposeless finality, a haphazard disaster caused not by divine or natural means but by human madness or political strife" (163).

Easy Rider's second half, with its banal small towns, industrialized highways, and fiery vertiginous motorcycle death finale invokes this spirit of revisionist reassessment of the state of the nation, rather than the "red, white, and blue" pronouncements of the affirmative media. In addition, though, while its finale suggests the martyrdom of its heroes, thus invoking a tragic romanticism (again, especially in contrast to *The Rain People* or *Midnight Cowboy*), the abruptness of Billy and Wyatt's roadside assassinations avoids the "freeze frame" and slow-motion hail-of-bullets endings of *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid* (1969) and *The Wild Bunch* (1969), respectively, thus minimizing the legend-making connotations of these devices. However, *Easy Rider* shares little of Pop Art's radical techniques of distanciation with respect to its subjects. While there are affiliations between the alarmism of the mass media and the critical iconoclasm of Pop Art, it is in a more general sense that *Easy Rider* dovetails with the transitional forces redefining America at the time.

Films during the late 1960s helped create what Todd Gitlin has referred to as an "edgy, apocalyptic popular culture" bred by catastrophic political violence (202). As Gitlin has pointed out, the paranoid and apocalyptic culture of the late 1960s was often materialized through extreme filmic violence, as in the endings of *Bonnie and Clyde* (1967) and *The Wild Bunch*, where the protagonists were shot literally to pieces in slow motion. Gitlin calls *Easy Rider* "a lyric on behalf of paranoia, saying to the counter-culture: yes, you'd better fear those ignorant Southern fascist hard-hats." The counter-culture was "transfixed by the image of their demons as they watched this cautionary tale" (202). Films on the left and the right and the music of Bob Dylan, the Rolling Stones, and the Doors "thrived in and reproduced an apocalyptic, polarized political mood." Gitlin's ultimate point here is that the aestheticization of violence in films of the 1960s and the dark



Plate 8.4 *Easy Rider's* version of the apocalypse: the assassinations of Billy and Wyatt on the road by "rednecks," Wyatt's motorcycle in flames.

pulsations of rock music helped create "in ensemble . . . a symbolic environment that was conducive to revolutionism out of context, to the inflation of rhetoric and militancy out of proportion to the possible" (202). In one sense, the left movement got sidetracked from dealing directly with political issues by media images that displaced activism through spectacles of violence offering a negative vision of the potential of the counter-culture and its aims to survive within a repressive society. From Gitlin's point of view, apocalyptic imagery in the media polarized the political struggle so monumentally that effective, radical political action seemed hopeless.

While the fatalism of this imagery may have helped ultimately to compromise the political struggles of the late 1960s, its production of the reverse image of American dreams of freedom, mobility, and individual initiative nonetheless created a public profile of a nation at odds with competing traditions based on America the Beautiful rhetoric. *Easy Rider's* excursions into the dystopian regions of American national identity coupled with its abrupt demolition of its hippie heroes places it firmly within the transitional discourses of the time that were dramatically rewriting the optimism of the frontier ethic.

The Janus-faced Nation

Easy Rider's relationship to the two major national discourses of its time – the traditional and the transitional – reveals that what has appeared to be its clear generational message, its advocacy of the hippie and its denunciation of society, is fraught with inconsistencies and ambiguities. The film's canonization obscures its contradictions, contradictions rooted in the social discourses about nationness in this revolutionary historical moment. The film is at once a travel poster proclaiming the continued presence of the grand Old West and its historical and mythic associations, and a nightmarish portrait of small towns, cities, and the end of the frontier (and the world). It is a celebration of the freedom of the road and the beauty of the landscape and a dissertation on the end of the road and the repulsive banalities and industrial blight that disfigure the scenery. In examining *Easy Rider's* treatment of the road and the landscape, we can see that there is no single "smooth" message offered by the film about its times. *Easy Rider* is a quintessential example of a film caught between two languages. Even as it attempts to fashion itself as a timepiece about the hippie generation and its conflicts, the film moves between the language of traditional patriotism founded in the visions provided by "grand national scenery" and a language of revisionism seeking to dismantle traditional notions of Americanism by detailing the nightmarishness of its roads, inhabitants, and modernized landscapes. *Easy Rider* thus invokes both affirmative and critical visions of 1960s America, making it more of a measure of its times than either its original or later audiences could imagine.

Notes

- 1 *Easy Rider* was also nominated for several Academy Awards, including best supporting actor (Jack Nicholson) and best original story and screenplay (by Peter Fonda, Dennis Hopper, and Terry Southern).
- 2 Each of these areas deserves more discussion, particularly *Easy Rider's* intertextual references to texts that had been embraced by youth culture. The film had multiple ties, for example, to the exploitation film. The stars of the film – Hopper, Fonda, and Jack Nicholson – had all worked for Corman at AIP, as had their cinematographer, Laszlo Kovacs. Fonda had starred in *Wild Angels* and *The Trip*, while Hopper had starred in *The Glory Stompers*. In addition, because of Fonda's previous exploitation film appearances, his best-selling poster (featuring him astride a Harley-Davidson motorcycle), his highly publicized drug bust for marijuana possession, and his status as actor Henry Fonda's son, he was already an icon of youth culture hipness and rebellion.

Easy Rider also belonged to a trend in film production that seemed to revitalize US cinema. Hopper's film was part of the New American Cinema (as was *Bonnie and Clyde*, 1967, another cult film of youth audiences). New American Cinema featured a "spontaneous" style influenced by the French New Wave and a generic revisionism that sought to critique and reverse conventions that had dominated classic Hollywood films for decades. *Easy Rider* invoked the Western through its vistas of

Monument Valley and the Southwestern wilderness, its substitution of motorcycles for horses, and its characters, whose names – Billy and Wyatt – were meant to invoke Billy the Kid and Wyatt Earp, the latter a role previously played by Peter’s father Henry in John Ford’s *My Darling Clementine* (1946). The film also reversed one of the most sacred tenets of the genre – the movement from east to west which had traditionally promised liberty and plenty for all – by having its protagonists travel from California to the Southeast, wherein they encounter increasingly hostile challenges to their freedom leading up to their joint assassinations by Southern “red-necks.”

- 3 *Easy Rider* openly quotes from *On the Road* in several scenes, most notably when a character from the commune asks Peter Fonda why he won’t stay. He replies, “I don’t know, I just gotta go.” This echoes Dean Moriarty’s less existentially cool conversation with Sal in *On the Road*: “Whee, Sal, we gotta go and never stop going till we get there.” Sal: “Where we going, man?” “I don’t know but we gotta go” (237). Moriarty later says, “It’s the world – my god! It’s the world! We can go right to South America if the road goes. Think of it! Son-of-a-bitch! Gawd-damn! . . . Damn! I gotta go!” (277). *Easy Rider* also uses a whorehouse scene as a point of culmination for its traveling heroes, but substitutes the alcohol-driven delirium of *On the Road*’s scene (286) with its own delirium-inducing substance – LSD. While paying tribute to the West, the mystique of the individual, and the awe-inspiring value of the US landscape, *Easy Rider* revises *On the Road*’s tone of exhilaration to produce a cautionary tale about the road, questioning its ability to lead to adventure, potential, and freedom. That Kerouac died in October of 1969, during the film’s initial run, adds a note of poignancy to this end-of-the-road tale. Last, for a sense of the impact of Hell’s Angels during the 1960s, see Thompson.
- 4 For example, one reviewer of Godard’s *Weekend* points out that “traffic jams represent the embodiment of the world state at present” (Arkadin: 12), while another writes that in Godard’s world the Schuykill Expressway would represent not a road at all, but a “symbol and a glorious one. The Schuykill expressway symbolizes the END OF THE WORLD according to Jean-Luc Godard” (Eisenberg: 19). In a review of *Rain People*, the reporter for *Helix* writes that

America seems to have special claims on the journey story about people who are on the run. . . . it’s a very familiar story but still one that’s full of energy and fascination because . . . the very American-ness of the whole song-of-the-road obsession dovetails . . . with the feeling that . . . the public and private sense of national and personal identity have just got to end up running dab smack into each other. . . . *The Rain People*’s journey has an abundance of interesting stops along the way and presents some of the most keenly felt observations to appear in a year of many keenly felt American movies.

(P.H.: 14).

For other examples of this kind of allegorical reading, see Schickel and Milne. Schickel writes, “The road does lead through modern America, and inevitably the [characters] must collide with the casual unthinking brutality of a nation that talks much of freedom but will not tolerate radical personal experience” (241). Milne comments that “the last image of the film is as desolate a condemnation of the errors of civilization as the series of funeral pyres which dot the roadside in Godard’s *Weekend*” (211).

- 5 “Amerika,” as the alternative press liked to call the United States during the late 1960s, signified both a literal and figurative perversion of “America” to address what many saw as the fascist, repressive operations of the country’s government and bureaucracies, evidenced in such phenomena as the nation’s imperialistic engagement in Vietnam, coercive and violent treatment of protesters, racial discrimination, and puritannical attitudes toward sexuality.
- 6 There are numerous books that detail the youth and Civil Rights movements of the 1960s. See for example: Gitlin; Peck; Branch; Blum; Farber; and Anderson.
- 7 For an in-depth analysis of *National Geographic*’s rhetoric in relation to Third World countries, see Lutz and Collins. Other magazines of the 1960s, such as *Life* and *Look*, also eulogized and romanticized the United States through landscape imagery in an attempt to perpetuate the enduring legacy of democracy. For example, *Life* magazine ran a series entitled “To See This Land America,” which featured New England and “the beauty and movement of New York as viewed from a Manhattan apartment.” In an amusing attempt at grandeur that also sought to tame the barbarity of the urban industrial environment through natural references, the writer comments that he can see from his window “a concrete plant more serene than an Alp” (69). In an issue with a flag cover, *Look* magazine ran a piece entitled “American Images.” Like *The Face of America*, this piece displayed a series of images that gave a panoramic view of American cities, prairies, hills, airports, dime stores, and lunch spots to depict the diversity that had arisen from the nation’s original expansionist impulses. As the writer comments, “We came from somewhere else to find a lyric haunting land whose boundless newness offered constant hope for ever better things beyond. Most Americans remain obsessed with our innocence in all its gawky grace and sunburst spontaneity” (Hedgepeth: 22).
- 8 For more of this kind of coverage of the West (and Midwest) in *National Geographic* during the late 1960s, see also Matthews: 668–79; Ellis: 347–71; Fisher: 114–47; Linchen: 157–201; and Graves, “San Francisco Bay, the Westward Gate”: 593–637.
- 9 See also here Graves, “Mobile, Alabama’s City in Motion”: 368–97.
- 10 See, for example, in *National Geographic*: Abercrombie: 540–63. We are told that in Alaska’s outback a “pioneer woman of the 20th century . . . cooks pancakes for her husband . . . who is out checking his traplines” (561). The igloo “boasts an all-electric kitchen” (549). See also Mitchell: 67–103 and Macleish: 139–50. Other feature stories that underscore this mission of the magazine include “New Map Charts an Expanding Nation”, 220–1.
- 11 It should be pointed out that mass-circulation magazines were not univocal, presenting only a flag-waving US frontierism. At times they displayed the same ambivalent feelings about the nation marking the more extreme contrasts between *National Geographic* and Pop Art. Particularly, alarm about urban decay/violence and the effects of progress/technology on the environment temper more positive accounts. See Perlman: 25–7; Wolf: 28–32; and Rosenthal: 17–23.
- 12 See, for example, “The Commune Comes to America,” *Life*’s magazine’s cover story about youth communes. The writer remarks, “Youthful pioneers leave society to seek from the land and one another a new life” (16b); “Their hair and their dress, their pioneer spirit, even their Indian teepees evoke the nation’s frontier beginnings” (20b). The writer also finds that the youth in the communes are “surprisingly pristine” as they practice religion, ban drugs, and uphold “traditional American monogamy” (20b).

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