

AMERICAN NATIONAL IDENTITY AND DISCOURSES OF THE FRONTIER IN
EARLY 20th CENTURY VISUAL CULTURE

by

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in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of
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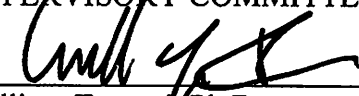
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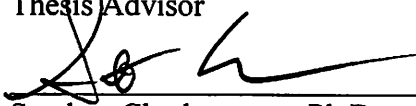
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This thesis was prepared under the direction of the candidate's thesis advisor, Dr. William Trapani, School of Communication and Multimedia Studies, and has been approved by the members of her supervisory committee. It was submitted to the faculty of The Dorothy F. Schmidt College of Arts and Letters and was accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

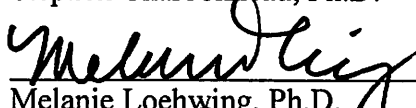
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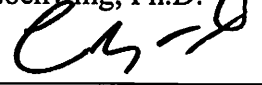
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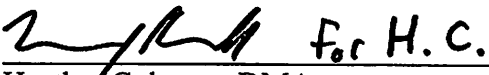
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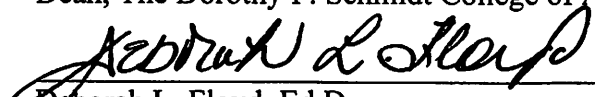
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ABSTRACT

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This thesis examines the rise of image culture in the 1920's and its impact on American national identity. I demonstrate that, perhaps surprisingly, the central figure in these debates was not a past or present prominent American but instead an indeterminate Other which is read in ambivalent ways and for varied purposes. It is the central claim of this project that in order to trace the modern American subject that emerges from the 1920s national rift, one must attend to the ways in which a felt need to view and position oneself in relation to "the Other" was essential to defining the nature and future of the nation. More specifically, I argue that the film *Grass: A Nation's Battle for Life* (1925) offers a solution to this national divide by providing viewers a popular culture form of "evidence" of the Westerner's capacity to exhibit both premodern and modern qualities.

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CHAPTER ONE

“There should be only one nationality here, and that an American nationality.”
- Theodore Roosevelt¹

On March 23, 1909, soon after leaving the presidency, Col. Theodore “Teddy” Roosevelt stepped on to the *Hamburg-American Liner* for a lion hunting expedition into Africa. Crowds cheered as America’s cowboy passed by in an olive green military overcoat; garb reminiscent of the Rough Riders. Many admirers of Roosevelt called out to him shouting, “Good luck, Teddy; come back safe to us” and “Good luck, Teddy! Good luck to you!” Asked if he had any “farewell messages for the American people” he laughed and replied, “not yet” (“Roosevelt Sails” 2). More than a decade after his run-ins with wild beasts on hunting trails, his war career with the Rough Riders and his ascendancy to the nation’s highest office, Roosevelt continued to exude an American idealism anchored in rugged masculinity and the frontier spirit.

Roosevelt, however, was increasingly becoming an anachronism. Indeed, the turn of the century provided new, and no doubt unsettling, developments for the country. Because of the rapid settling and urbanization of the West, in 1891 the U.S. Census Bureau’s declared the American frontier “closed”.² In turn, in the words of Lewis

¹ The above quote illustrates Roosevelt’s rhetoric of a superior American race. For more, please see the article: “Roosevelt Boom Sweeps Saratoga; Lewis Yields To It: Attorney General” *The New York Times* 24 July 1918. Print.

² Leroy Dorsey cites The Census report originally quoted by Ray A. Billington, *The Genesis of the Frontier Thesis: A Study in Historical Creativity* (San Marino, CA: The Huntington Library, 1971),114.

Mumford, “metropolitanism” stood for a “reaction against the uncouth and barren countryside” rather than a production of the “individualistic, self-assertive American pioneer” (Mumford 16-17).

Cities showed promise for entrepreneurial endeavors. Fast machines made for quick manufacturing, turning opportunities for individual efforts into “a collective enterprise of mass production” (Dorsey 1). New developments in technologies, such as innovations with the motion picture camera, for example, or Henry Ford’s contributions to the automobile industry with his affordable Model T, signaled the possibility of a new America. Automobile ownership would quickly move beyond the confines of the well-to-do. Indeed, cars were no longer a “rich man’s plaything,” (“Defends the Rich Buyer” 1), but were necessary machines of the Western world; cars were also used for leisure activities, which caused many consumers to participate in the continual growth of industry.

Indeed, technological advancement became an increasingly important marker of the presumed superior Western society. From the earlier stages of communication such as the telegram to the more advanced telephone, from vaccines to improve longevity of life and even new ways to travel such as the motor powered airplane, technological achievement was at an all-time high. While not dismissing these common day uses of our time, there were also many exploratory devices that “collapsed spaces” between people and far away lands. For example, on July 11th, 1888, the first astronomical observations with the “great telescope” were made at the Lick Observatory in California, studying the deep dimensions of space (“The Lick Telescope” 1). These, among many other

technological advances fed into the desire for exploration and fueled a sense of Western superiority.

Still, many feared that these technologies and the societal transformations they helped usher would cause social dysfunction and instability in the character of the average American. Following a survey of Americans attitudes toward their modern and fast-paced life, Mumford concluded that civilization increasingly busied itself with distractions rather than with fashioning “instruments which would help us . . . mold it creatively a little nearer to humane hopes and desires” (Mumford 9). Leroy Dorsey, citing the work of T.J Jackson Lears, highlights the mental and physical effects of the industrial life, pointing out the “nervous illness” of the time (Dorsey 2). In 1880, the term “neurasthenia,” coined by neurologist George Miller Beard in his work *American Nervousness*³, explained that the neurotic behaviors of the American public during the late nineteenth century were still emerging, but sprung from a fast-paced society full of complexities and inconsistencies.

Lears, elaborating on Beard’s notion, argued that though Americans were “tortured by indecision and doubt,” the neurasthenic “seemed a pathetic descendant of the iron-willed Americans who had cleared forests, drained swamps, and subdued a continent”(Lears 50). According to this diagnosis—and the fear that accompanied it—compared to his rugged and resilient predecessor the modern American was a weak shadow of its former self. Inundated with exposure to fast information in a rapidly changing society Americans had simply lost the ability to slow down.

³ Beard, George Miller. *American Nervousness, Its Causes and Consequences: A Supplement to Nervous Exhaustion (Neurasthenia)*. Putnam, 1881.

Suggested by some to be an overly sophisticated and feminized way of life, industrialism was said to be a byproduct of such effects. Seen as causing a number of medical drawbacks, to include (presumably) sexual dysfunction, the new America was believed to have caused social anxiety over “fears of a decline in masculinity among American men” (Dorsey 1). To put it another way, the old American distrusted “the thinker” and saw him as “non-productive”:

But in the pioneer community leisure cannot exist, even for the few; the struggle is too merciless, the stake — life itself, possibly — too high. The pioneer must almost of necessity hate the thinker, even when he does not despise thought in itself, because the thinker is a liability to a community that can afford only assets; he is non-productive in himself and a dangerously subversive example to others. (Stearns 136)

This struggle for an American identity at the turn of the century was heightened by the increased waves of immigration entering the country, further complicating an understanding of what unique characteristics constituted the nation’s own. Frederic C. Howe outlined the paradox this way:

But the free lands were all gone about 1890. The Western drift of peoples, which had been in movement since the earliest times, came to an end. Population closed in on the Pacific. Cities grew with unprecedented rapidity. Factories needed men. Employers looked to Europe. They sent agents abroad who employed them in gangs. Often they were used to displace American-born workers. They were used to break up labour organizations. The aliens were mixed to prevent them organizing. Wages were temporarily at least forced down. For some years our

immigration policy was shaped by the big industrials who combined with the steamship companies to induce immigration. (343)

The result of all of these changes was a country fraught with tension and overworked to the point of exhaustion. Throughout, there was a constant concern that greed would erase the hard-won skills and maturation offered by frontier life; a concern frequently voiced by Roosevelt as part of his nationalist rhetoric. Dorsey, for example, points to one of Roosevelt's speeches in 1899 ("The Strenuous Life") in which the leader sounded alarm about America's lost connection to its heritage. The ex-President reveled in nostalgia, cherishing "how the pioneers fought against impossible odds to tame a savage wilderness" (Dorsey 5). It was clear that men and women were now made equal in terms of intellectual pursuits, however the "phenomenon is not a sharing but a capitulation. The men have been feminized" (Stearns 143). The new direction of a modern and fast-paced America threatened to erode ideals that Americans had held on to for decades.

In order to take stock of these discourses and of the environment in which they were created, this project explores the discursive fashioning of American national identity at the beginning of the 20th century by considering the representation of indigenous persons as they were portrayed in American visual culture during the era. These displays, I will argue, performed important work in a national debate between forces that made competing claims to know the authentic American self and its necessary course of action in light of the changes and challenges presented the country. As the opening passages illustrate, there were many that followed the "Roosevelt path" – seeking a return to traditional values and to the treacherous terrain of the frontier in order to forge a more

adventurous and self-reliant self. Still, others emulated the direction personified by Ford and the industrialists; embracing the future and “reconciling their traditions and values” with changes in “the economy, politics, technology, and culture” (Shindo 1).

To be sure, then, the early decades of the 20th century were a time of great change and turmoil in America. World War I had left the country victorious, however, there was a growing concern over changes in America due to significant events such as the extraordinarily high numbers of immigration and the transformations within the mechanics of traditional society, including the repositioning of women’s place in the workforce and in private life, the development of a more corporate/consumer based economy, or even the idea that the efficiency from capitalist endeavors produced a greater sense of democracy.

The uncertainty of American life brought on by early 1900s industrialization, technological change, and the consequent changes in economic and social structures opened a public debate over the nature of the American character and the future of the country. Over the course of the project, I demonstrate that, perhaps surprisingly, the central figure in these debates was not a past or present prominent American, but instead an indeterminate Other read in ambivalent ways and for interested and varied purposes. Indeed, it is the central claim of this project that in order to trace the “America” that emerges from the 1920s national rift one must attend to the ways in which a felt need to view and position oneself in relation to “the primitive Other” was essential to defining the nature and future of the nation.

To satisfy this desire, I will argue that America turned to popular culture depictions of indigenous groups. I will show that these depictions on one hand facilitated

a comparison of the modern advancements of the Westerner with a purportedly backwards Other. I suggest that these depictions, on the other hand, highlighted a universal similarity among peoples, for example in the commonly depicted display of women congregated together or taking care of young children.

Throughout the course of this project, I attempt to read the contours of this debate by exploring the portrayal of the eastern Other as primitive in films. I will detail the ways in which that figure was situated at the nexus between this pull that Americans witnessed—those seeking a nostalgic return to a more rustic and rugged era and those that sought to usher in a different future based on industrialization and cosmopolitan urban living. More specifically, I argue that the film *Grass: A Nation's Battle for Life* (1925), offers a solution to this national divide by providing viewers a popular culture form of evidence of the Westerner's capacity to exhibit both pre-modern and modern qualities. Rhetorically, I argue, the film suggests that Americans are exceptional, a hybrid of sorts, that possesses a superiority unlike the Other. If we understand, as I aim to show, that the 1920s was riven with discord and drawn to representations and displays of Others, I suggest that it is the work of *Grass* that closes that debate not by “settling the question” so much as satiating the desire to see the Other. Put differently, *Grass* effects a closure of the national debate in that its inherent ambivalence allows all viewers to see (and get) what they need in the film.

It is with an awareness of the crucial importance of image and visual culture that this project considers the construction of American national identity. Over the course of the project I demonstrate that the early 1900s were marked by a felt need amongst Americans to view indigenous peoples and to understand the latter's practices as a way of

making sense of the changing nature of American society. With the uncertainty of American life brought on by rapid industrialization and technological change, as well as the consequent changes in the economic structures as well as social structures for both the private and public spheres, Americans constantly looked for a balance between the new understandings of the place of the modern American subject.

By considering the display of indigenous peoples through a rhetorical lens, the project raises a number of other specific questions, central among them being how we understand the rhetoric of recognition at work in producing the modern American subject through the Other, and how American identity is formed not through forgetting the past, but through adaptation of “tradition that fit with the modern” (Shindo 38). More specifically, I ask the value of how the Other becomes both essential and irrelevant - a strategic prop - through various visual discourses in America visual culture.

If the Westerner is able, through the representation of the indigenous as Other, to satisfy their desire to know themselves it is because recognition is never autonomous; it always depends on some “other” that serves a verifying function. We can understand the effects of visual culture through the interpellation⁴ of the viewer (or subject) and how that viewer is inherently produced as a product of social and ideological forces. Ideology, of course, is understood as a system of ideas that are of a shared collective agreement of a societal structure. It is also understood that ideology enables interpellation, allowing the subject to participate in the discourse that addresses him or her. This project looks at how the interpellated American spectator invokes traditional (rugged) masculine gender codes of American national identity.

⁴ For more information on interpellation of the subject, please see pg. 115 of “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses” by Althusser.

More specifically, I am interested in how the rhetorical situation of the early 20th century era's sense of "gender panic" invokes participation in this discourse. The result is the birth of a new American subject who claims to embody both traditional (frontier) and modern (technological) characteristics. Interpellation is significant in this respect to visual and national identity scholarship because visibility invites spectators to participate in these national discourses, explaining how a nation creates new faces for its character (Charland 138).

I understand desire to be a structured feeling that compensates for a "lack" the Westerner experiences, hence, turning to history becomes a viable option to fulfill that lack within the Western's identity (Biesecker, *Rhetorical Studies and the "new" Psychoanalysis* 224). But, also I understand through scholars such as Foucault, that this desire can also be subjected to historical and regulated practices⁵, meaning that the desire to know one's self is only understood through mediations of the past (288). As such, the way I approach these questions in relation to visibility and desire is useful because of how recognition is traceable through acts of seeing and/or visualization. Visibility plays a significant role in identity construction both for individual and/or collective understandings. In this way, the project reminds national identity scholars to consider the

⁵ Note the differences between the Lacanian and Foucaultian notions of desire. Joan Copjec notes in *Read My Desire: Lacan against the Historicists* that historians ground subjectivity in appearance and do not consider the effects of desire outside of discourses. On the other hand, Lacanians ask that desire be used as a window in understanding the positive or negative effects of discourses (14). In terms of this project, I look at how the Foucaultian desire to know one's self is indeed grounded in history, however I more so look towards the Lacanian desire to understand why Americans desired to "be better than history." Americans continually went back to the frontier to search for something else beyond what was already found.

ways in which visuality can carry historical value and attend to the many ways of understanding nation recognition.

Rhetorical scholars, such as Lester Olson, have become increasingly interested in the ways in which the visual presents “visual evidence” of the past and present (Olson 2). It is clear that visuality plays a powerful role in how we understand national historical accounts more so now as we move towards an increasing visual society. This turn acknowledges that rhetorical studies needed to expand the scope of what it considered “text” because traditional approaches did not “account for contemporaneous endeavors to influence beliefs and actions in public life” (Olson 2). With these new insights, visual studies emerged as a mechanism of understanding public discourse and changes in American culture. No doubt, “America” is constructed and understood, in large part, through the speeches of authoritative figures, or even family narratives, however, our society is, of course, increasingly reliant on material visual culture. The point here is really not to justify that the visual takes preeminence in rhetorical studies, it is merely to point out that while the study of visual rhetoric is still fairly new, we have been dealing with the visual for centuries.

As the contours of this project suggest, images play a powerful role in how a nation is induced to partake in certain actions and performances of national identity politics. While it would no doubt be a worthy study to consider the accuracy and effect of indigenous representations on indigenous peoples, here I am concerned with its effects on the American public in terms of national rather than indigenous identity politics.

Contextualizing these accounts within historical situations, the project examines the

importance of the Other as an “object” that is, paradoxically, both excluded and yet that lies at the heart of the nation.

American National Identity in Rhetorical Studies

Rhetorical scholars have long tried to understand the ways in which national identity is fashioned. For many in the field, national identity is a collective construction of fictitious ideologies—aspects of nationalism, citizenship and collective imagination, enforced mostly by historical materialism, authoritative figures, or even popular and commemorative culture. National character studies are increasingly common as rhetorical scholars move towards thinking about how political decisions are made and how a constructed “idealized character” is understood.

In the 1970’s, for example, the field looked towards ideology studies to understand national personhood through a collective lens. More direct, national identity was studied as the collective agreement amongst groups based on the constructive histories that preceded them, as well as the “laws” and “regulations” which created them. An example of this can be found in the work of the late Michael Calvin McGee. While not explicitly focusing on national identity, his work alludes to the explication of collective formation of “persons” to the “people.” In discussing the “false consciousness” of political myth and belief, McGee identifies the way the impression of a collective is represented back to the people (245). More recently, rhetorical scholars such as M.L Bruner, have examined the ways that national identity is constructed from institutional discourses. Here, the discursive nature of identity can contest and impede (or at the same time invest in) these properties.

Despite the appearance of stability and reassurance such materiality appears to convey, Bruner notes, national identities are not stable; they are constantly negotiated with shifting discourses that move and respond to challenges experienced by the nation and its citizens (1). In other words, national identity is the effect of a “never-ending and politically consequential rhetorical struggle”, something that assumes roles of “fictions,” constructed by historical traces that are constantly negotiated by national advocates, or rather “public authorities,” with sometimes contesting narratives (Bruner 2-3).

Similarly, scholars who study collective memory look at the ways in which national identity is preserved through public remembrance. Jie Gong, for example, uses public memory as a conceptual framework toward understanding national identity. In his essay, “Re-Imaging an Ancient, Emergent Superpower: 2008 Beijing Olympic Games, Public Memory, and National Identity,” he argues that collective memory is used as a vehicle for the rhetorical manufacture of a new national character. Borrowing from Barbara Biesecker, Gong notes, “A rhetorical investigation of public memory enactment can deepen our perception of important communal phenomena, such as social rituals, cultural traditions, public memorializations, and political events” (Gong 195). Gong cites Biesecker as she urges the use of commemorative studies: “rhetorical critics and theorists and teachers [should] critically engage these extraordinarily popular and rapidly multiplying commemorative rhetorics in whose renovated narratives of national belonging our future may (not) lie” (Gong 195).

Other rhetoricians who focus directly on American national identity, such as Mary Stuckey or Vanessa Beasley, consider the ways in which these “authoritative” governmental institutions work as rhetorical agencies to enforce common notions of

American character. Beasley studies how character sensibility emerges, “how they are defined and understood and how they thus constitute the ‘knowledge culture’ that is assumed to accompany American national identity” (45). Considering presidential discourse in *You the People: American National Identity in Presidential Rhetoric*, Beasley examines the role of the American president in defining “authentic” citizenship. Mary Stuckey examines the ways in which the role of presidential figures, act as a “dominant interpretive force,” a fundamental institutionalized edifice and ideological component of identity construction (288).

Leroy Dorsey and Rachel M. Harlow have argued that presidents often act as “advocates,” for example as in their work’s focus on President Roosevelt’s campaign to persuade his countrymen (and those new to the country) that immigrants could adapt and learn how to be an American. As Dorsey and Harlow note, for Roosevelt, the expectations of the “new blood” would be for them to integrate fully into American culture and to leave their old culture behind (Dorsey, Harlow 56-57).

Looking at Roosevelt’s “The Winning of the West,” one finds similar narratives of the struggles faced by those that endured the American frontier and Western expansion. Here, Roosevelt suggests that the stories of settlers “illustrate lessons in personal qualities and moral values that, in his estimation, accounted for early Americans’ success in settling the nation” (Dorsey, Harlow 57). These characteristics, according to Roosevelt, are main points of a perception that notes the American race as “superior” which is only gained through “hard and dangerous endeavors” of struggle, achieving “true national greatness” (Dorsey, Harlow 58).

While rhetorical studies has scholars such as McGee, Bruner, Stuckey, Dorsey and others that trace the moves of national character, there are a great number of scholars from other disciplines who adopt non-discursive approaches. These scholars lean more towards identifying characteristics that provide clear-cut definitions of national character, rather than looking at the ways in which discourse shifts and moves over a period of time.

Ross Poole, for example, considers national identity as providing citizens with a home, “a history,” a “privileged access to a vast heritage of culture and creativity” (69). The concept of citizenship, Poole argues, respects the geographical location of birth as foundational, figuring national identity as an inescapable and unavoidable part of human existence. The late political science professor Samuel P. Huntington, on the other hand, identified America’s national character as historically constructed through two primary components: culture and creed. The first component, culture, emphasizes the use of the English language as an important aspect, amongst other “traditions concerning relations between church and state and the place of the individual in society” while the second component, creed, identifies notions of liberty and equality, amongst other “American” ideals (Huntington 28).

Although Poole and Huntington’s assessments of national character are written from a non-rhetorical perspective, the identification of those seemingly definitional characteristics nevertheless provide important cues into how rhetorical scholars might productively begin examining the discursive fashioning of American personhood. A country’s national character can be formed out of any substance that citizens are encouraged to believe in which binds their nation together. While some common threads

exist such as an appeal to a common language or heritage etc., national identity can be derived from any source audiences might chose to invest in.

Narrative Criticism as Methodology

Walter Fisher, quoting Alasdair MacIntyre, claims that the essence of man is a “story-telling animal,” making narrative criticism an appropriate rhetorical lens in understanding the “basic and essential genre for the characterization of human actions” and reactions to visual culture (*Narration as a Human Communication 2*). These narratives can be used as to examine the rhetorical effects of symbols and images of both historical and contemporary times. This observation raises questions about how we relate to narratives, how central they are, how we use narratives in human communication, and even, how they shape important aspects of our identity when we encounter the visual. Narratives offer a means of identification by reminding us of our own experiences and making it possible to align ourselves with specific figures or ideals while distancing ourselves from others.

Fisher describes narrative as foundational in human reasoning (*Narrative as Human Communication 2*). While some scholars might argue that the narrative approach will not be sufficient for every text⁶, others would counter that any form of rhetorical communication is reliant on narratives that speak to audiences in specific ways, creating a conception of how that audience is to see themselves in relation to the world around them⁷. This is why I choose narrative criticism as a complimentary component when looking at visual culture of the early 20th century for its rhetorical significance and effect.

Narratives speak to our desires for “the imaginary,” while helping us to identify

⁶ See Warnick, Lucaites and Condit and Rowland.

⁷ See Grossman.

with the rational realm of “the possible” (White 8). With visual texts, these narratives help to acquaint audiences with familiar settings, characters and information presented in a logical and coherent manner; all the components necessary for a good and effective story. In the terms of this project, to inquire into how narratives function in visual culture raises certain questions: How does the visual maintain or produce new forms of identity discourse through a compelling rhetorical voice? How do narratives act as effective mechanisms in the functioning of discursive identities? Finally, how might historical “evidence” act as a rhetorical trope to solidify these narratives?

To understand the concept of the self, I look towards Hayden White’s connection between the nation and its historical discourse. To those ends, I borrow from Marshall Grossman’s essay, “The Subject of Narrative and The Rhetoric of the Self” to understand the formation of personal narratives in *Grass* and in the commemorative and museum displays which arise from the emergence of the Western frontiersman character. Grossman explains that narratives are initial responses to demands, which “grow out of the perceived discontinuities between self and world, and, indeed between self and self”(402). Grossman argues:

At any given moment, the constitution of a narrative represents an attempt to totalize the interpretation of a set of events by relating them to a proposed end. In this way the set of contingent events which make up experience is naturalized and articulated as a function of the continued temporal process of the subject, while, inversely, the subject derives his sense of self-identity and self-consistence through his ability to render his experience as a function of his subjectivity. Thus the subject appropriates his experience by finding it a place in his on-going story,

he reduces the contingent to the significant by arranging for it a demand within *his* discourse (402-403).

To put it another way, narratives emerge to bridge the gaps between the contextualization of our historical world and where we stand in relation to it. While White's initial connection between "historical discourse" and "discourse of desire" are not fully explained in his essay, further explanation through the work of other psychoanalytical scholars seems to call even more attention to the persuasive nature of the text(s), explaining the moves of American identity discourse and its relationship to Americans' needs in establish binary relationships with other cultures, forces the audience to reassess their world collectively (White 23-24).

Chapter Descriptions

In Chapter Two, "National Narratives: The Importance of Narrative Criticism as a Rhetorical Lens for Understanding National Identity," I explore narrative criticism to understand how the method operates. This chapter will explore a literature review of narrative criticism scholarship, particularly paying attention to the ways in which the method has been used and developed over the years. My hope in this chapter is to present the method as valued to how scholars can better understand national identity discourse through visual texts.

Chapter Three, "Materializing the National Imaginary: The Reemergence of the Westerner in American Visual Culture," examines the rise of visual culture, connecting the visual to our understanding of national identity. I examine debates surrounding displays of the indigenous in The American Museum of Natural History and consider the

role those discourses played in transforming the immigrant and working-class public into ideal American subjects.

Toward better understanding and framing this debate, I examine the ethnographic film, *Grass: A Nation's Battle for Life* (1925) because it so directly puts the question of whether America is still a “frontier” on the national table. In assessing the film, I explore the film’s narrative elements, looking specifically at the rhetorical significance of the Western exploration in a post-imperialist time. *Grass*, I suggest, offers a way for the debate between the old rustic America and the new progressive era to dissolve. I argue that the film assures audiences they need not be concerned about the modern age due to their inherent superiority.

Ultimately, I suggest, *Grass* offers a way out of industrial chaos by allowing its audience to fashion a definitive (albeit hybridized) identity in a time where the Western image was formerly perceived as wavering (Griffiths 86).

Chapter Four, “Beyond Exceptional: *Grass* and the Sublime American Subject,” concludes the project by taking stock of American identity at the turn of the 20th Century. With the changing terrain of the image in a new technological age, the engagement with the Other becomes more accessible to American audiences, allowing the Westerner to participate in new public narrative of America as an exemplar of all worlds, whether it be the exotic frontier or the urban landscape. Put differently, I argue that texts such as *Grass* offered the Western audience a solution to this national divide by providing viewers “evidence” of the Westerner’s capacity to exhibit both pre-modern and modern qualities.

CHAPTER TWO:
NATIONAL NARRATIVES: THE IMPORTANCE OF NARRATIVE CRITICISM AS
A RHETORICAL LENS FOR UNDERSTANDING NATIONAL IDENTITY

Storytelling is not only part of the human experience, but it is an essential part of human existence. Narratives bring cohesive sense making to the things we see and encounter in our daily lives. As Josh Hanan argues, the narrative paradigm is used to uncover the discursive function of how we perceive reality (19). While much of the groundbreaking scholarship in rhetorical studies on narrative criticism, such as work by Walter Fisher, Barbara Warnick and Robert Rowland,⁸ was conducted many years ago, narrative criticism continues to be a principal method of rhetorical analysis.

Narratives are vehicles for identification, however, not all narratives produce identification. Taking my cue from Kenneth Burke, I recognize this identification as at the core and as the simplest form of human persuasion.⁹ This identification reminds us of either our own experiences or creates some sort of vision of ones self that does not particularly exist. This makes it possible to align ourselves with specific figures or ideals

⁸ Most notable works are Fisher's essays, "Narration as a Human Communication Paradigm: The Case of Public Moral Argument" (1984), "Clarifying the Narrative Paradigm" (1989), and his book, *Human Communication as Narration: Toward a Philosophy of Reason, Value, and Action* (1987). Also, Warnick's "The Narrative Paradigm: Another Story"(1987) and Rowland's "On Limiting the Narrative Paradigm: Three Case Studies" (1989).

⁹ More on the concepts of Burkean identification can be found in "The Rhetoric of Hitler's 'Battle'."

while distancing ourselves from others. These narratives help to acquaint audiences with familiar settings, characters and information presented in a logical and coherent manner; all the components essential for a good and effective story

In this project I employ narrative criticism to understand national identity, and in this chapter I explicate how that method operates. Specifically, I look at how narrative criticism functions as a lens in thinking about the discursive formations of national character. Given that the memories of a nation are built from a constructed historical past, narrative becomes an apt and most effective tool in understanding those fragments. National identity scholars study national character through all sorts of avenues by considering how elements such as citizenship, economic systems, borders, the law, the rhetoric of presidential leaders, gender, and ideology are arrayed and described. Through an analysis of narrative techniques such as those found within constructions of historical events for example, the critic is able to understand how the American citizen-subject is formed as an effect of those discourses. This chapter will outline narrative criticism scholarship, paying particular attention to the ways the method has evolved over the years. Throughout, I aim to demonstrate the value of narrative analysis especially as it pertains to texts that shape national identity and through visual and image-based discourse.

Narrative Paradigm: A Review of Literature

As one of the first rhetorical theorists and critics to embrace narrative analysis, Fisher's work continues to shape the scholarship that has emerged in relation to the method and its practice. Fisher believes that we are "story-telling animals" whose narratives are based on our own "history, biography, culture, and character," elements

that are a part of an individual's and nation's identity (*Narration as a Human Communication* 5). Put another way, narrative defines and characterizes our rationalities and our relations to the world. Hence, we can tell a lot about a public based on the stories it tells. In the United States, for example, many of our stories circulate around concepts of the "American Dream" or the "Bootstrap Myth." The constant circulation of these commonly told stories are both collectivizing and tell us something about who we are as a nation. We choose these narratives. We are constantly engaging with these narrative frameworks to create our identities that give meaning and frameworks to our lives.

Rational World Paradigm

Fisher identifies the rational world paradigm as a competing paradigm, arguing that Western thought has valued this "calculated" paradigm over the use of stories. The rational world paradigm is epistemological and "depends on a form of society that permits, if not requires, participation of qualified persons in public decision-making" with probable knowledge (*Narration as a Human Communication* 4). For Fisher, the rational world paradigm does not explain common human communication and, worse, it gives the impression that only "experts" can assess claims and their validity, all of which delegitimizes "non-experts" and their ability to judge those same claims. In this way, the paradigm secludes reason to "specialized studies" and demotes "everyday argument to an irrational exercise" (*Narration as a Human Communication* 5). As Fisher characterizes it, the rational world paradigm assumes that:

- (1) humans are essentially rational beings;
- (2) the paradigmatic mode of human decision-making and communication is argument—clear-cut inferential (implicative) structures;
- (3) the conduct of argument is ruled by the dictates of

situations—legal, scientific, legislative, public, and so on; (4) rationality is determined by subject matter knowledge, argumentative ability, and skill in employing the rules of advocacy in given fields; and (5) the world is a set of logical puzzles which can be resolved through appropriate analysis and application of reason conceived as an argumentative construct (*Narration as a Human Communication* 4).

More specifically, Fisher argues that the rational world paradigm pays too little attention to human emotion and its role in decision-making. Here, Fisher cites John Herman Randall to explain his concern:

The major practical issue still left between the two types of naturalism concerns the treatment of values. The philosophies starting from physics tend to exclude questions of value from the field of science and the scope of scientific method. They either leave them to traditional non-scientific treatment, handing them over, with Russell, to the poet and mystic; or else with the logical empiricists they dismiss the whole matter as "meaningless," maintaining with Ayer, that any judgment of value is an expression of mere personal feeling. The philosophies of human experience—all the heirs of Hegel, from dialectical materialism to Dewey—subject them to the same scientific methods of criticism and testing as other beliefs; and thus offer the hope of using all we have learned of scientific procedure to erect at last a science of values comparable to the science that was the glory of Greek thought. (*Narration as a Human Communication* 5)

Fisher never dismisses the need for the rational world paradigm, but instead suggests that there is a better mechanism for understanding the human condition.

Fisher's Move to the Human Narrative

Fisher defines narrative as something with symbolic actions of meaning for “those who live, create, or interpret them” (*Narration as a Human Communication* 2). For scholars such as Lucaites and Condit (“Re-constructing narrative theory”), Warnick (“The Narrative Paradigm”), Rowland (“On Limiting the Narrative Paradigm”) and others, the narrative paradigm has been praised and scrutinized because of its explanatory promise.

One of the most essential essays on the effects of narrative structures is Fisher and Richard Filloy's work “Argument in Drama and Literature.”¹⁰ However, for a grounded use of the method for this project, I find it more productive to look at how Robert Rowland determines the outcome of narrative messages. Rowland's systematic approach explains that by using narrative as a rhetorical lens the critic will be able to determine the work's (1) overall message; (2) verifies the reliability of the work's narrator, characters and description of scene; (3) questions the story's believability; and lastly, (4) tests to see if the story is an accurate portrayal of the real world so that it can act as a guide for “beliefs, attitudes, values, and/or actions” (*The Narrative Perspective* 123). To these ends, the critic is able to determine the authenticity and persuasive nature of the story and how it fits its societal setting.

The following sections will expand on the uses of the narrative approach by Fisher and the paths that other scholars take in critiquing, redefining and building on the approach. The following section will also examine the importance of the paradigm in

¹⁰ Fisher, Walter R., and Richard A. Filloy. "Argument in drama and literature: An exploration." *Advances in argumentation theory and research* (1982): 343-362.

recent rhetorical scholarship. More than just a simple literature review of the uses of narrative criticism, this section is designed to look at how other scholars' approaches to narrative can be borrowed to enhance my own approaches to the method and in turn to this project.

Foundational Literature

Not all scholars are equally convinced of the utility of narrative criticism. Lucaites and Condit ("Re-constructing narrative theory") for example, suggest a more exhaustive study of the effects of narrative criticism, while Barbara Warnick ("The Narrative Paradigm") has authored a much more extensive critique of Fisher. Warnick advances the claim that narrative rationality gives us "a guide for distinguishing the reliability, trustworthiness, and desirability of rhetorical narratives," noting that Fisher's notion of a "value system," or rather assessment of a story through logics of "reason," fails to address the questions about people that choose "bad stories." She believes that scholars became interested in the paradigm because of its "intratextual reality of an account" that "is shaped by its employment of characters and events" (Warnick 172). From my perspective, Warnick's claims do not undermine the central truth that narration is effective for persuasive efforts. Regardless of the story, even the difficult story of Hitler's *Mein Kampf* she turns to as an example, the narrative is constructed in a way to make the audience believe any story, regardless of their judgment. Warnick also claims that the "narrative probability"—the clear center of Fisher's argument—is in fact absent from the narrative paradigm. Warnick considers narrative probability as an inadequate standalone method with much of Fisher's work leaving "ambiguities" unresolved (177).

Arguing that the narrative paradigm can be "loose and problematic," a claim also

made by McGee and Nelson ("Narrative reason in public argument"), Warnick, just as Lucaites and Condit do, reject the notion of a universal audience, as Fisher emphasizes the importance of context used to analyze narrative. Rowland finds problems with the narrative paradigm being a universal tool, "a model that can be applied to all discourses" (*On Limiting the Narrative Paradigm* 40). Rowland notes that he is unsure whether one approach that addresses all forms of rhetoric is particularly useful because not all forms of discourses have coherent narratives within them. Rowland notes that the critic might spend so much of their energy looking for examples to test Fisher's narrative rationality that they might miss other insights to the text.

In response to his critics, Fisher revisits his original formulation of the paradigm in a follow-up essay "Clarifying the Narrative Paradigm," which outlines a more modest approach to narrative analysis by identifying what the paradigm does not do. Fisher explains that the paradigm is meant as a "foundation on which a complete rhetoric needs to be built," and states that the structure gives "a comprehensive explanation of the creation, composition, adaptation, presentation, and reception of symbolic messages" (*Clarifying the Narrative Paradigm* 56). Fisher states the paradigm can be used in uncovering the rhetoric of messages, but that it "does not explore the ways in which the rhetorical critic thinks or writes" (*Clarifying the Narrative Paradigm* 56). Emphasizing that he is not denying the power of other methods such as the use of ideological criticism, he also notes that such methods would serve the narrative analyst well as a partner to complete a whole method (Hanan 10). Regardless of what method is used, "their appearance is always in the context of ongoing stories" (Fisher, *Clarifying the Narrative Paradigm* 57).

National Myths, Narratives and Citizens

Many forms of remembrance, such as national monuments portraying the heroism of soldiers or presidents that changed the course of a nation, can outline a collective understanding and response of a nation through the use of visual narrations. To put it another way, accompanying these monuments and commemorative displays are narratives of heroic acts performed by common men, women and leaders of the country shows in a sense a map as to how citizens and even foreigners that desire to be citizens are to be. For example, when a citizen walks up what seems to be a never-ending flight of stairs of immortality and witnesses the large white pillars of national strength of the Lincoln Memorial to see a larger than life marble structure of a national leader placed as an anchor of democracy it explains how a nation sees itself. While the Lincoln memorial celebrates the legacy of one of the greatest leaders of the free nation, the memorial is also a national beacon that represents hope and strength. These visual narratives are “myths” of a particular kind, “seductive fictions” in its form that materialize into a shared reality amongst a “people” (Charland 138).

While it is difficult to fully articulate the fragments that construct a nation’s character, I open this section with a metaphor by James R. Andrews in regards to American football and its many parallels to American way of life. In that example, Andrews looks towards Paul Bryant and his use of the aphorism “football is life” to articulate one of the many uses of rhetoric to define a nation’s character and is a good example of how narratives are taken up and enacted. These American athletes (characters) take away certain values from American discourses (national narratives) that

are instantly applied to how and why they play. These Americans deal with demands that are placed on them to win as they meet the physical demands of their bodies to hold a certain physical stamina, and the mind set that is equipped to come up with a strategy which displays “determination, and occasionally heroic bursts of enthusiastic drive to reach his goal” (Andrews 316). The American hero knows that to “win is essential, and in this process he may feel compelled, at times, to gouge, kick, and even cheat”(Andrews 316).

While this comparison is obviously gendered, it is clear that even American sports relishes in the national residue of the mantra “to win is to be American.” In many ways this story tells us many things about how Americanism is a strategy. One must endure trauma and struggle before they can win. Narratives such as these are part of the American work ethic. Working hard is tied to physical labor in which one breaks his own body until he can be a true American. It is here that the connection with the physical, the ability to endure harsh environments, and the rejection of leisurely activity are all forged as a strategic initiative to become more American.

While I would not suggest that narrative analysis is essential for all rhetorical inquiry, I believe it is clear that it has the capacity to help us understand these national myths and their effects. While differences exist between narrative and mythic criticism both rely on stories to produce the identification effect that we experience when encountering national discourses. With that in mind, the following section resources examples from both narrative and mythic analysis in order to better understand the nation and its citizenry.

Janice Rushing’s “The Rhetoric of The American Western Myth”, for example,

looks at the reemergence of the Western Myth and considers the fundamental values of the Western myth as based on a tension between what we consider to be an American ideal of individualism and how that individual deals with communal conformity after settlement (Rushing 19). This project does not employ mythic criticism as such, however myth and narrative criticism are closely aligned and entail many of the same assumptions about the relationship between communication and the production of the social. Thus, this is why such work focusing on myth and nation will be so useful to this project.

Rushing speaks of an important “meeting point” between oppositions of the old frontier: savagery and civilization. It is here where we see the Roosevelt character described in the previous chapter as the romanticized version of the ideal American subject, the “cowboy”, in many forms the same ideal that raises his head in popular American culture even still today. This American hero, as William F. Lewis argues, is usually a dominant white male “hero [that] rescues the country from a time of great trouble” (Lewis 281). While that can be said of the cowboys Rushing refers to, Lewis applies the myth to political leaders such as U.S. Presidents. As Lewis states in his work on Reagan’s rhetorical narratives, the President was (as any President would be) a dominant force in swaying the American public towards certain political and foreign policies. Lewis notes that Reagan does not just use story-telling as a “rhetorical device;” his messages were stories and his stories were packaged as messages (Lewis 281). It is through Reagan’s narratives about America’s greatness that the public is compelled to take part in that fantasy.

Referring back to Rushing’s essay, we can see how important this central American figure is in defining national discourses. Rushing argues that in order for this

cowboy to survive in the “the harshness and savagery of the frontier environment, he must above all be a rugged individualist. However, in order to settle and civilize the frontier, he must continually face the demands of the community for cooperation and conformity” (Rushing 16). While Rushing speaks about this paradox, I find important to this project these points of tension because it puts into perspective my own understandings of the male explorer, not only someone who can conquer the frontier with their own bare hands but someone who is exceptional enough to do it through modern means as well. Like Rushing, I am less interested in focusing on any one element of the narrative – say the way the Bakhtiari community organizes themselves for the journey or of the way that individual skill is demonstrated from time to time - but rather I am interested in the narrative as a whole and the rationality that emerges from the totality of the story.

While Rushing discusses the importance of American figures, Dorsey and Harlow remind us of how the non-American also becomes a vital element in determining “Americanness.” America’s narratives have always suggested that as a people we have struggled with immigration because of the “threat” posed on the purity of the American race (Flores 362). However, we stick with these narratives to claim some sense of security in who we are. Moving forward, Leroy Dorsey and Rachel Harlow remind us of the American hero, however with a different spin on the means of acquiring American citizenship. With the growing number of immigrants coming to America in the later part of the 19th century, Dorsey and Harlow look at how Theodore Roosevelt and his “alien rhetoric” introduced the non-American as the center of the Frontier Myth (Dorsey, Harlow 58). In his writings Roosevelt asked that his readers would,

embrace immigration and remember the lessons of the frontier experience that so shaped settlers of early America; in adopting their personal qualities and moral values, both native and foreign-born could be melded into a singular group of people with the capacity to fulfill America's destiny as a thriving and powerful nation. (Dorsey, Harlow 58)

It is here that Dorsey and Harlow argue that Roosevelt's *The Winning of the West* tried to sway the audience towards a positive outlook on immigration. Promoting the values of assimilation, Roosevelt argued immigrants possessed the ability to fight both environmental and human evil, that they had endured the "crucible that gave form and substance to the American *nation*" (Dorsey, Harlow 58). In the eyes of Roosevelt, the immigrants were America's destiny and the "true heroes of American history" (Dorsey, Harlow 58).

Just as we define and redefine a nation's character we also process how narratives define us individually and collectively as citizens. Commemorative texts, for example, array and produce citizens, as Barbara Biesecker points out, through a "naturalization of traditional logics and matrices of privilege" (*Remembering World War II* 406). To put it another way, commemorative and memorial structures are constructed by how a nation chooses to remember itself. While, for example, some war memorials represent the service and sacrifice of female soldiers or the nation's women, many do not, but in either case the reconstruction of history will be framed by the means of "service of another ideological agenda." Here Biesecker sides with Phelan in warning us that despite the common assumption that "increased visibility equals increased power"¹¹ in this and in other cases

¹¹ Phelan, Peggy. *Unmarked: The politics of performance*. Routledge, 2012.7.

visibility can operate as a trap (*Remembering World War II* 403).

Given this, it is not a surprise that “immigrant and criminality are so closely connected rhetorically that the slippage from immigrant to criminal seems almost natural” (Flores 363).¹² How we remember a nation is often difficult to articulate given that our notions of what an ideal (or not ideal) citizen is constantly changes. For instance, Lisa Flores argues that the rhetoric of national borders emerged over immigration debates in the U.S. Specifically through the denigrated narratives of Mexican/Americans circulating in mediated representations, these narratives tend to cause shifts in national borders, ultimately redefining and altering what immigrants (or non-citizens) mean to the public.

New Revivals in Visual Narratives

This section details how the narratives that emerge from film texts can be examined for the way they promote communal, social and political understandings of a group. Scholars such as Catherine Paquette, for example, asks the question, “How do narratives establish the meaning of ordinary life?” when looking at the 2004 film *Garden State* (3). She examines how the rhetorical artifact’s narrative establishes the importance of ordinary life not only to the story world but also to the audience in their own life. Toward those ends, she identifies events that are significant in establishing what she refers to as a “whole life.” Like Paquette, I find it useful to connect narratives back to the audiences’ own life circumstances. As I argued at the beginning of this chapter, such connections establish identification with the audience, thus making the narrative’s

¹² The author cites the work of Ono, K. A., & Sloop, J. M. (2002). *Shifting borders: Rhetoric, immigration, and California’s Proposition 187*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.

message persuasive. Paquette concludes that the rhetorical efficiency of the narrative structure and its characters produce themes that have “the ability to help us explore some of the biggest questions of human existence, such as the “meaning of life”(22).

Examining *Lars and the Real Girl* (2007), Meredith Bazzoli looks at how the film’s narrative structure transforms common understandings about the myth in Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*. Besides illustrating the close relationship between ideas of myth and narrative, the author implies that through the film’s reconstruction of the myth’s initial narrative a change in form takes place producing new understandings and new arguments of the mythos of humanism. The author asserts that besides the transformation of an original text, the change signals to the film audience the importance of community and to “love one another, to compassionately respond to the mentally ill,” making note that, while using the words of Janice Rushing, “stories can transform our society” (Bazzoli 21). As Bazzoli shows, narratives like these can help teach a people how to be a community or even a nation.

Other scholars, such as Jennifer Wood, underscore the significance of narratives by looking at parental narratives as a “social force.” The author suggests that parental narratives “create interpretive contexts for social action, especially those concerning children” (Wood 116). Wood concludes that the passing on of family stories to children helps them to develop their own “inherited awareness.” For my purposes, Wood’s conclusions remind of how our own personal narratives are passed down to us by family and how much of our own national identities are situated around those narratives.

Applying the Narrative Elements

Rowland argues that while narrative criticism can be useful, the method is

problematic when analyzing persuasive texts. (*The Narrative Perspective* 124). Because of this, Rowland developed what he calls a systematic approach that gives the critic the ability to discover a narrative pattern in any form of genre. Rowland argues that narrative should be understood as a form of discourse rather than a complete paradigm which, in his mind, would help scholars preserve the difference between works that “actually told stories and works that describe a topic or make arguments” (*The Narrative Perspective* 125). Following this more discreet approach, Rowland suggests, creates a “systematic” slant for a rhetorical critic’s approach to narrative analyses, one that would assist our understanding of the narrative from its *form* to the *function* it fulfills to, finally, an *evaluation* of the narrative’s effectiveness of persuasion with its audience (*The Narrative Perspective* 126).

The first step in Rowland’s revised narrative analysis is to identify the four elements evident in any story: characters, plot, setting and themes. Once these elements are established the critic moves into identifying the rhetorical functions that the narrative achieves. The four functions that are listed by Rowland are as follows:

(1) Does the narrative energize the audience?; (2) Does the narrative create a sense of identification between characters or the narrator and the audience?; (3) Does the narrative transport the audience to a place or time different from contemporary life?; (4) Does the narrative tap into basic values or needs of the audience? (*The Narrative Perspective* 129)

Considering the ways that theories can evolve over a period of time, I take Rowland’s systematic approach to be most useful because it preserves Fisher’s argument about narrative rationality while providing a clear mechanism for accessing narrative

rationality.

Characters

Narratives tend to have special traits about them and the identification with the main character(s) is one of them. Sonja Foss explains that, when analyzing characters within a narrative, the rhetorical critic is to identify how the character moves the story forward. We can identify this marker by asking the questions: How do the characters interact with others within the story? Is there character development from the beginning to end of the story? Foss also notes the traits of the characters and asks how they are presented:

Are they flat or round? A flat character has one or just a few dominating traits, making the behavior of the character highly predictable. Round characters, on the contrary, possess a variety of traits, some of them conflicting or even contradictory. Their behavior is less predictable than that of flat characters because they are likely to change and continue to reveal previously unknown traits. (402)

As Rowland has noted, characters within a narrative “provide role models to emulate,” or—put differently, “an ordinary person with whom the audience will identify” (Rowland, *The Narrative Perspective* 133). A good demonstration of these effects can be found within Roderick P. Hart’s criticism of Nixon’s 1952 “Checkers Speech,” with a reference to the establishment of familiarity to the characters in the story. Here, Hart’s note of the connection of the President’s hard-working and selfless characters in his story. These “hard-working” narratives are familiar because they are constantly heard within national discourses. Hart’s suggests the description of Nixon portrays him as just another

hard working American. He describes Nixon as his own character, obviously telling his own story, but one that is a “reluctant narrator” of an “uncontrived narrative” (Hart 95). Nixon’s story pours “out of his soul, not out of his head,” making the narrative genuine and humanizing to the American public (Hart 95). His characters establish a sense of coherence, something that creates some sense of reality for the audience. Here, the audience has a better chance of being influenced by the story simply because they can imagine themselves in the President’s shoes.

Plot

The plot of a story—attention grabbing or not—obviously has a beginning, middle and an end which consists of a main character that encounters a series of events that can cause conflict in their lives. Foss calls the major events in the storyline, kernels, uncover the critical points in the story (404). These events raise a host of important side questions: How do these kernels move the story in a particular direction? What makes them critical points of the narrative? How does the character develop through the use of these major events or do they not? Understanding the kernels of a narrative is important because if the major events are left out, the narrative will lack coherence. The minor events, or satellites, “are the development or working out of the choice made at the kernel. Their function is to fill out, elaborate, and complete the kernels” (Foss 404). While satellites will not be missed if taken out of the narrative, the narrative will still shift both the narrative’s rhetorical impact and in form if taken out. The temporality of the event(s) are important to establish. How is the main character interacting with others within the past/present/ future tense of events and how do they differ? Is the character recalling the events via a flashback or flash-forward and how is the story being told in

time? Most importantly, one should think about how these events, major or minor, establish a greater sense of identification between the story being told and its character or the character and the audience. The narrative critic should look at how these events function in relation to the character and if it is a consistent flow of events and should look at how the events help to develop the characters of the story and forward the narrative.

Setting

To explain the effects of setting in a narrative, I believe the best possible example would be the Teddy Roosevelt story in the previous chapter. I walked through a story about the ex-President who rejected the modern modes of the early 20th century America to go back into a wild where men could be men. From the time the ex-president steps onto the boat to leave American soil, the change in setting establishes a duality found within Roosevelt's character. The American people see him as a leader, an extension of themselves and an example of how they are supposed to embody the spirit of the nation, be good people and good citizens. But when Roosevelt steps on that liner, the change of setting transforms him into just another man looking for adventure. While he is still seen as the ex-president the trip transforms his personality, and thus the people's, by adding rugged masculinity, something that was lost during the industrial era. Here, the critic should notice that the change of setting in this story is important because it transforms the main character and through identification, the audience.

Questions that a critic should ask are how the setting might act as a context for the character or character's identity? What is the effect of the setting on the audience and how does it allow them to understand or renegotiate the understanding of themselves or the reality in which they live in?

Theme

Establishing the theme of a narrative is the last step before connecting all of the elements together to establish the values of the narrative to the assumed actions that the text might be asking the audience to take. First, one is to establish the major theme of the narrative. What does the narrative mean in the context of this theme? What does it invite the audience to do? How are the already established elements of the narrative connected together to form a clear theme (Foss 404)? For Nixon, or Roosevelt for that matter, the themes were simple. Nixon's narrative exemplified a theme that spoke to the American audience about the All-American hard work ethic, while Roosevelt reconnects the audience to the more "masculine" nature of the national personhood, a story that centered on the struggle between man and nature.

This chapter has been an attempt to identify and understand the mechanics of narrative analysis, the method's status in rhetorical studies and also how its uses can be applied successfully to national identity narratives and visual rhetorical texts. Now I turn to "Materializing the National Imaginary: The Reemergence of the Westerner in American Visual Culture" to understand how ethnographic films, and specifically an analysis of *Grass: A Nation's Battle for Life* to consider the textual elements and logic on display there.

CHAPTER THREE

MATERIALIZING THE NATIONAL IMAGINARY: THE REEMERGENCE OF THE WESTERNER IN AMERICAN VISUAL CULTURE

Decade after decade, West after West, this rebirth of American society has gone on, has left its traces behind it, and has reacted on the East. The history of our political institutions, our democracy, is not a history of imitation, of simple borrowing; it is a history of the evolution and adaptation of organs in response to changed environment, a history of the origin of new political species. In this sense, therefore, the West has been a constructive force of the highest significance in our life. -Frederick Jackson Turner¹³

In this chapter, I begin to build the case that the ethnographic film *Grass: A Nation's Battle for Life* (1925) offers audiences an ambivalent rendering of the Western/Other relation. This polysemy, in turn, provides Americans of even vastly different viewpoints a productive revitalization of an American sensibility that imagines itself up to the task of even the most daunting challenges to the nation's populace or character. In that film a group of American explorer's document, as well as take part in, the biannual migration efforts of the Bakhtiari tribes of Persia as they journey to find land that will keep their livestock from starving. The film not only represents evidence of the tribe's successes and struggles with this migration, but also argues for the explorers' extraordinary abilities to conquer the same foreign land without pain or struggle.

Towards understanding the implications of such representation, the chapter

¹³ Turner, Frederick Jackson. "The Problem of the West." *Atlantic Monthly* 78.September (1896): 289-97.1

examines 1920s ethnographic film and its depiction of far-away lands that audience would likely not have had any other opportunity to see. Such films held a seductive appeal to audiences facing an otherwise dreary and alienating city life or an increasingly dilapidated rural community. For modest cost and even less effort these films offered encounters with other cultures to outsiders without the need for the “inner adventurers” to travel elsewhere.

Robert Flaherty’s *Nanook of the North* (1922), for example, was one of the era’s first films that “strikingly demonstrated the commercial viability of documentaries about exotic cultures and locales” (Benelli 182). The films that followed *Nanook’s* success followed the same commercial model that banked on tapping into Western curiosity about the unknown. It is hardly surprising then that in addition to the seductive lure of the exotic, Hollywood marketed ethnographic film as prime opportunities to witness depictions of bare-breasted women and violence (Benelli 182). As a result despite their grounding in often laudable scientific and cultural ambitions, ethnographic films constantly struggled, as Alison Griffiths puts it, with their status as “films that trade on notions of ethnographic objectivity while responding to the commercial imperatives of a burgeoning film industry” and uses of a country’s “colonial propaganda” (*To the World* 282-283).

As the pioneer era drew to a close, ethnographic films turned towards the romantic origins of colonial cinema: “the chronicles of travelers, the political or idealistic visions of the documentary filmmakers, and the occasional forays of anthropologist whose major commitment was the other methods” (MacDougall 116). For some time the genre was able to get by without the state-of-the-art technology or a great deal of

sophistication “if filmmakers could successfully convince the public that their films offered, instead, compellingly authentic (and the more exotic the better) reality to paying customers” (Benelli 182). However, with the changing nature of the American audience, it was becoming increasingly difficult to keep their attention. From the more notable scientific uses of the travelogue era before the 1920s, ethnographic films moved towards romantic depictions of filmmaking. As a result, the once brief forms used for scientific discovery became an outlet for longer, more cinematically sophisticated and dramatic depictions of the subjects, such as “the happy primitive” (Bruner, *Tourism* 158).

I understand this period of cinema as a crucial part of a larger modernist struggle fueled by changing national, political, and demographic landscapes and shifting notions of the American self. The indigenous image evolved in visual culture during a time when other amusement and recreation options were also trying to find ways to attract the American mass audience. These films were not the first, of course, to show indigenous cultures; they entered an environment already awash in indigenous images (Griffiths, *Wondrous Difference* 73). As a result museums, libraries, science galleries and other institutions began paying increasing attention to the design of venue and display spaces to meet the larger volume of entertainment oriented patrons even as they attempted to educate their visitors (Griffiths, *Wondrous Difference* 3). But spectators were not solely attending these locales and their displays to learn anthropological or historical details of a distant people, they were seeing themselves as patrons and citizens in the process. Indeed, they were recognizing themselves as the type of person that might attend such displays. Thinking through Jonathan Crary’s notions on spectatorship, Rosalind Krauss notes:

This double effect, of both having the experience and watching oneself have it

from outside, characterized the late nineteenth-century fascination with the spectacle in which there was produced a sense of being captured not so much by the visual itself as by what one could call the visuality-effect. (275).

This idea of spectator duality can also be read through Crary's depiction of modernity and its transformations over various periods of time. Detaching itself from any ideas of "progress or development," Crary argues that the relationship between modern "technology" and the evolving modern subject should not be the center of understanding.

Modernity should instead be understood as a reaction to the evolving modern subject as a "self-perpetuating creation of new needs, new production, and new consumption" (Crary, *Unbinding Vision* 22). Modernity corresponded with knowledge of the evolving modern subject. But observers vary and have faults, seeing different elements of an object such as variations in hues, textures, shapes and so on. Vision, as one example of modernization, became normalized for our own uses as vision is identified through the observer's processes. Thus observers had to be trained, or rather directed, to a certain position. More directly, "seeing" became understood as a trait that needed to be focused; neither assumed nor taken to be natural. Seeing, then, is only attainable through subjective processes. The more vision became more attracted to spectacular images the more those images were, in turn, adjusted to fit those needs of the observer. Thus, vision is always in a state of transformation or, as Crary puts it, in a constant state of crisis:

It is possible to see one crucial aspect of modernity as a continual crisis of attentiveness, to see the changing configurations of capitalism pushing attention and distraction to new limits and thresholds, with unending introduction of new

products, new sources of stimulation, and steams of information, and then responding with new methods of managing and regulating perception (*Unbinding Vision 22*).

More directly, there was always a need for image production to naturalize, creating a universal practice of teaching. Thus, facilitating the subject's becoming became a common practice and goal of institutions.

The chapter works to advance the claim that the varying visual displays of indigenous primitivism were central to the constitution of American national character at the time.¹⁴ Recalling the divide between the understandings of the national character as well as the utility of narrative criticism in interpreting the construction of national identities, I consider the films' depictions of the primitive Other and Westerner, and in particular of the inherent capacities aligned with each. Accordingly, I open the chapter by recalling "one of the most productive sites for historical and theoretical investigation"—the American Museum of Natural history—not to highlight its historical, cultural and scientific significance that enriched American history, but to highlight that institution's ties to representation of the primitive and because of American ethnographic film's roots embedded within the museum (Griffiths, *Wondrous Difference 3*).

The museum, supported by the elite of New York City, functioned as a significant leader of "public and scientific education in late nineteenth-century New York City and beyond, operating with the explicit goal of bringing scientific rationality and enlightenment to city's new industrial and immigrant working class" (Griffiths,

¹⁴ Such work can be noted in Philip J. Deloria's *Playing Indian* (1998) and Susan Scheckel's *The Insistence of the Indian: Race and Nationalism in Nineteenth-Century America Culture* (1998).

Wondrous Difference 5). The museum's mission was to offer working-class spectators a form of recreation that was "both elevating and educational" (Griffiths, *Wondrous Difference* 5). The curators of the American Museum of Natural History and other museums sought to bring discovery of unknown worlds to curious spectators in the modern world to make sense of their own. Just as New York possessed one of the most beautiful parks in the country, the public expected nothing but the "finest and largest museum" incomparable to others ("The American Museum" 436).

Indeed, as many saw it, the museum provided the opportunity to learn about other cultures and their conditions in ways other educational endeavors could not match. These contributions were valued for expanding scientific discovery and the history of mankind, as well as impacting the intellectual dialogue and debate among New York's public. With exploration efforts now moving into other parts of the world, American museum visitors for the first time had the opportunity to "study in detail the essential and salient features of the culture of a very large number of tribes"(Dorsey, *The Anthropological Exhibits* 584). Many in the museum industry praised the Museum's accomplishments and, in particular, the development of the Museum's anthropology department.

Still, others questioned the need for the museum, its contributions to the public, and the scientific competency of the directors and their ability to establish a worldly museum out of "the futility of amassing fragile collections" ("The American Museum" 436) As just one example of this criticism, a number of anthropologists, including the well-known naturalist George A. Dorsey, took the museum to task for their "Eskimo Exhibit" and for what the scientists took as its failure to pay appropriate care for the authentic display of indigenous objects. Still, even with this criticism, many in the public

lauded the exhibit for its portrayals of the Inuit and the way it depicted the “village life of the Central Eskimo” (“The Anthropological Exhibits” 584).

What stands out from these early debates about the American Natural History Museum has less to do with whether one faction or the other approved of its exhibitions, but the way in which those discussions showcase a near universal interest in seeing and discussing figures. To those ends, the museum is best understood as a prime example of rhetoric that constitutes American subjects through their interests and displays. From that vantage, it is not surprising that the integration of scientific evidence into popular culture satisfied the public’s fascination¹⁵ to see and understand other cultures and their practices. The displays organized through a Western eye and for Western audiences, might have been conceptualized as an educational tool by creators, but it was also an effective mechanism for drawing attention to American perceived superiority.

A closer look at the debates surrounding the museum give even more demonstration of the ways in which displays ostensibly about the Other were, in fact, about the American subject itself. At the heart of this chapter are questions of recognition that are geared towards how the Westerner “sorts out” his American identity especially as it is accomplished in relation to a display of and comparison to the Other. America’s attraction to images of the primitive was a symptom of a country stuck between an idealized past and an uncertain future. With the uncertainty that came with the terrains of a new modern country, Americans tried to manage a balance between new and old understandings of the nation. By considering the rhetoric of recognition the chapter

¹⁵ See Tobey’s *The American Ideology of National Science, 1919-1930* on 1920s public interest in, and concern over, scientific endeavors.

argues that images of the primitive Other are at the center of this struggle, uncovering a new understanding of national discourse.

The Rhetoric of *Grass*: A Nation's Battle for Life

The significance of *Grass* as a rhetorical artifact is rare and offers insight into the era's constitution of American national identity. By exploring the position of the Other in visual culture and particularly in *Grass*, I detail the ways in which the Other operates as an artifice that directs the nation toward a future that embraces the metropolis or that suggests a return to the frontier to satisfy the needs of the country. More directly, I argue that *Grass* offers its viewers proof of America's abilities to thrive in both worlds. The film not only attempts to romanticize the ingenuity of the Bakhtiari tribe, it portrays the Westerner as a complete whole, a separate entity that lacks nothing. Over the course of the analysis, I demonstrate that the concept of the Other helps to trace and define the "America" that emerges in the 1920s and I pay particular attention to demonstrate that regardless of the success (or failure) of the tribe, the Westerner is portrayed as exceeding their accomplishments.

Through the following analysis, I argue that the film implicitly invites Westerners to reflect on their identity and to do so through a framework that insists on the Other as a foil against which to measure oneself. I will also consider the portrayal of gender and the way in which both the construction of masculinity and femininity participate in fashioning a particular understanding of national identity. Lastly, I consider the film's closing scene and suggest that, at least for that moment in time, the Westerner no longer needs the Other to see himself.

Transformation of Land and the Frontier

As one of the most defining characteristics in *Grass*, I turn towards land and landscape, understanding them as central to how both the representation of the Other and the Western nation function. Given that discussions of land seem to be “overlooked” rather than examined sufficiently in popular texts (Mitchell vii), the first part of the text analysis will look at land as a signifier of how the primitive Other and the Westerner perform in the same space.

Land is more than just a mere backdrop, it is where wars are fought, nations are forged and histories are made.¹⁶ Landscape can function as a medium for expressing value and can act as a tool of communication between individuals or a people (Mitchell 15). Rural space, for example, is essential to the overall “naturalization” of a culture and connects cultures to their “authentic roots” (Fowler, Helfield 5). Territory, in turn, is at the heart of nationhood, and can tell us a great deal about how a people understand their nation’s past, present and future. It can also play a role in defining (and restricting) the people who occupy that space. For all of these reasons, it is not surprising that territorial characteristics lie at the center of ethnographic films.

Land, Magnitude and the American Sublime

One of the most important features of *Grass* is the film’s showcase of size – of portraying the tribe and their efforts through a lens that turns upon tropes and elements of the excessive. The film’s focus on the vast landscapes, the giant towering mountains,

¹⁶ As cited in the Introduction of *Representating the Rural: Space, Place, and Identity in Films About the Land*, Fowler and Helfield use the ideas of Paul Willemsen to understand land as weighted the same as character and plot development. See “Importance of the Land”, 7.

monstrous rivers and the massive scope of challenges facing the equally large groups of people are all attributes of size.

In the following section, I consider the film's depiction of land and its magnitude in order to argue that the size of those elements alone fashions a romanticized impression of the tribe's efforts. Moreover, I will argue that for its given audience back in American theaters the scale on which that drama plays out stages a likely encounter with the indescribable feelings of the sublime that could unsettle/elevate them in significant ways. Ultimately, I suggest, the Westerner male explorer is figured as superior above all others in ways that suggest it is that subject, and not nature or an Other, that is sublime.

Magnitude is, of course, not just something that we can witness in some displays or artifacts, indeed it is at the very heart of rhetoric and rhetorical force.¹⁷ One might plausibly claim that "magnitude" is another name for rhetorical force in that it speaks to the degree in which something is perceived. Put differently, if speakers, films, monuments, protests, or any of the other countless rhetorical forms do not impress us, do not weigh on us, then they will have failed any possibility of attaining rhetorical force. As such rhetors seek depth, plenitude, the infinite, etc. as rhetorical tropes that lead to a greater understanding of a place, a people, or an event.

Understanding the rhetorical work magnitude accomplishes, is certainly all the more important given the setting of the film. Bringing this element in can also assist in our understanding or how period America romanticized unsettled, unfamiliar and exotic territories. Ultimately, I will argue, the presence of magnitude tenders to the audience a feeling of sublimity, a sense of awe that is so powerful. The sublime is brought forth by

¹⁷ The effects of magnitude were first noted by Aristotle when describing the dramatic nature of a tragic plot (*Poetics* 77).

the film's magnitude and can surface with constant "exposure to the identifiable conceptual figures in which magnitude makes its appearance" (Farrell, *The Weight of Rhetoric* 473).

The film opens with an establishing wide angle shot of a flat, dry and dead landscape. Expansive in its appearance, what seems to be an unsettled territory is occupied by a single file line of animals. These animals are not identifiable, just mere silhouettes on the earth. Following an animated map's outline, the journey begins alongside the height of a mountaintop. The characteristics of the landscape are continuously changing with the progression of the film. The "bleak plains", as described by one of the film's intertitles, is a good way to imagine the spacious degree of the terrain and the depth that it provides to its subjects that choose to interact with it.

The scope of the terrain is apparent as Harrison (the American female traveler) traveling by horse and buggy, disappears into the empty land trailing down long flat dirt roads leading to high rocky mountains at all corners of the unsettled earth. No civilization can be seen from this distance and no ending destination to where the group seems to be headed. This overwhelming sense of emptiness is highlighted as the travelers attempt to find shelter from the violent ejaculations of a blinding desert storm with little refuge or obvious means of escape. Far off and distant, Harrison and the Bakhtiari traveler are barely recognizable— part of the backdrop the landscape represents and controls. Given that the magnitude of the land "articulates a sense of scale and importance, however vague in a given case," the size of the land becomes accountable for the symbolic significance of Harrison and her Bakhtiari partner in relation to the space (McDaniels 92).

The spacious fields of dust and death swallow the barefooted Bakhtiari as they tread up steep, blood drawn rocks of all sizes in hopes of reaching to the top of the mountain. The magnitude of the tribe and the thousands upon thousands of goats, bulls and other animals have to face crossing the mammoth Karun River with unbearable currents that swallow many of the members of the tribe. Even after the deaths of many, the tribe continues to cross the river through the horrible currents trying to save their cattle. The tribe knows that past the peak of the mountain lie the vital and healthy grassland they require so they push onward.

For audiences lured into theaters on the promise of viewing distant and exotic lands, no doubt the enormity of the uncharted land in *Grass* would likely capture the attention and awe of the audience. As James McDaniel has put it, “what could be more recurrent in the American experience than the wish for new, uncharted territory” (McDaniels 92)? Indeed, the presence of land in this film is an extraordinary experience, something that we wish for, “new frontiers vividly as their conditions of possibility disappear and as they are freshly imagined” (McDaniels 92).

However, magnitude risks overwhelming its spectators. Magnitude enables a sensation of being taken over, “overwhelmed by the sheer weight and scale of things, the things over which we have no control” (Farrell, *The Weight of Rhetoric* 486). Rhetorically, magnitude works to keep its audience interested, where the audience is “to engage it, and to act upon it; what consequences will weigh most heavily upon their prospective deliberation; what priorities will finally tip the balance in their judgment; and what appetitive attachments will need to be overcome for rational reflection to be feasible” (Farrell, *The Weight of Rhetoric* 472). Magnitude, in other words, is ocular-

centered and has a “profound awareness of scale, proportion and distance” (Farrell, *Sizing Things Up* 7).

Métis and the Other

A feature of representation that many focused on during the colonial era were the ways indigenous peoples adapted to their environment. Looking at how civilized societies viewed these societies, Stanley Diamond notes:

The fact (startling as it may seem to a civilized mentality) is that the majority of men for the greater portion of human history and pre-history have found Other societies economically, socially, and spiritually (or, as we would say, ideologically) viable” (205).

Put another way, the primitive’s natural instincts and skills possessed in their exotic and native land were frequently idealized and desired by many of the Western world. These abilities or traits are known as the Ancient Greek term *métis*, which is defined as animal like and cunning instincts that enable the primitive Other to survive in his surroundings.

Invoking the concept of *métis* in his studies of disability discourses, Jay Dolmage recalls the story of Hephaestus, the Greek God who embodied skill and wisdom even though his body was disabled. While his physical being was broken, Hephaestus still possessed “the cunning intelligence needed to adapt to and intervene in a world of change and chance.”(Dolmage 57). We can think about the representation of the primitive Other in this same light. Because this representation offered possibilities to an America that, for some, was unsure of its future, *Grass* becomes an example of such rhetorics. While not disabled, the portrayal of the primitives’ bodies were commonly represented as beastly savages that either adapted or died because of the changing and challenging environment.

To witness the tribe hiking the mountain is incredible; to watch them do it barefooted is incomprehensible. In this way, the tribe's display of *métis* ensures that at the least the audience craved watching them and, more likely, would also wish to have the same abilities and fortitude that they have.

When explaining the complexities of *métis*, Dolmage employs Marcel Detienne and Jean-Pierre Vernant's definition of *métis* as "a type of intelligence and of thought, a way of knowing" and a set of skills that are "complex but very coherent" and a "coherent body of mental attitudes and intellectual behavior" (Dolmage 61). For the people who embody *métis* are those who are resourceful through their "experience acquired" (Dolmage 61). We should understand *métis*, then, not as a tool in and of itself," but as "multiple knowledges and literacies, and the cunning ability to utilize them" when encountered with multiple situations and "discursive environments" (Dolmage 63). Films like *Nanook of the North* (1922), where the representation of the Other such as Nanook and his family are portrayed as so cunning as to outsmart the harsh weather of the Arctic, are one of many examples of how the West romanticized Others and their ability to adapt to whatever nature throws at them.

As a rhetorical strategy in *Grass*, the embodiment of *métis* is illustrated through the tribe's use of every "natural" material and would likely be a desirable "way of thinking" for the Westerner to survive in the same environment (Dolmage 63). Even after the deaths of many, the Bakhtiari continues to cross the Karun River through the horrible currents trying to save their cattle. From what is left of the tribe, some of the tribe's men are seen inflating goatskins as if they were modern day balloons. The men gather the goatskins together in groups, creating large floating devices to fit nearly twenty people

with plenty of room for the animals to travel across the dangerous water. Such technologies, while not advanced, were quickly acquired skills of the Other and were learned in order to survive. Like many of the animals that attempted to swim across the mouth of the river, the unbearable currents continued to swallow many of the members of the tribe and animals. These skills are nothing new to the Bakhtiari given that the migration is not their first. While they seem to demonstrate “cunning intelligence,” however, through the film’s portrayal the tribe is depicted as animals that know their territory, never changing their habits or ways of traveling the land.

Given their circumstance and the surrounding debates it would hardly be surprising if the audience were impressed by the challenges the tribe faced in their migration. Indeed, were the tribe not able to demonstrate a certain level of flexibility and ingenuity in their response to unpredictability and inherent threat of the natural environment they would almost certainly face death and the ruin of their people. For certain, the tribe is fostered through its collective action to travel as one such as an animal pack, rather than as individually like the tribe’s Western counter. The animals are massive in size and outnumber the tribe’s people, yet the people seem to be able to account for each animal, one by one, as if they were one of their own. The point of this section has been to read the rhetorical positioning of the Other as a figure that must adapt to fit his environment and to stage a contrast with the film’s portrayal of the Westerner; the latter figured as a subject capable not only of survival but suited to control the environment to fit his own ends.

Myth, History and Supplement

While the previous section explains the significance of the indigenous *métis* enabled within their environment, this section looks at how the extraordinary American is constructed through myths and narratives. American citizens, according to Leroy G. Dorsey and Rachel M. Harlow, have long experienced the anxieties caused by the wilting origins of American national identity and character due to the nature of its changing fabric though out the course of history (55).

Some scholars, such as Ronald Carpenter, concern themselves with the rhetorical implications of the historical frontier thesis¹⁸ and its influence on the nation psyche, to see how “history’s presentation of the past molds myths which are bases of action for the future” (118). With this in mind we can turn to scholars such as Michael Osborn, who builds upon the work of Janice Rushing and the way her scholarship highlighted the changing nature of national discourse due to the role of myths as both a cherished piece of social discourse (reassuring an “idealized projection” for a people) and fashioning the rhetorical ends of warranting the “codes of behavior that in turn mold specific programs of action” (Osborn 149). Myths, Osborn continues, are a fundamental aspect of culture and can be dangerous if misused. Through time the origins of national identity have seemingly faded, but the broad core ideas of nationhood are still used such as “defining

¹⁸ Frontier myth can be traced back to historian Frederick Jackson Turner and his thesis of more than a hundred years ago suggesting that American Identity depends on such a myth. Here, Turner suggested that the “...frontier modeled the historical trajectory of the nation...” (Clementi 37). At an American Historical Association conference in 1893 he argued that American national customs and character were products of frontier experiences. Suggesting that America was principally influenced by “the wilderness” went against “traditional logic” however resulting in negative responses from his audience. Still, the thesis received positive reactions nationally through the essay’s first publication in 1894 (Carpenter 117).

the self as civilized by denigrating an Other as savage, and balancing the individual with the communal” (Jones 230). Such narratives of savage beasts walking the unchartered plains have long been at the core of America and its myths.

In regards to the recognition in play, this chapter has considered how a fascination with the Other platformed the realization and identification of an American self. This identification is the outgrowth of a historical desire for the Westerner to know themselves. To further explicate this identificatory relation, I will argue that this recognition relay serves a fantasy structure that, in turn, compensates for an essential lack of a concrete American identity and the clear historical narratives that might provide such that origin.

Having argued that land’s magnitude is a central focus of *Grass*, in the remaining pages of this section, I will argue that same grand force provides insight into how American national identity would likely be understood as a superior and sublime force during the era. Through the Derridean notion of the supplement, the film rhetorically illustrates that the Westerner’s absence and reappearance in the film suggests that the Other (to include Harrison) are no longer needed as the male Westerner is whole on his own.

Supplement Theory

The rhetoric of *Grass* can also be understood by employing Jacques Derrida’s thinking on the concept of the supplement, in particular toward understanding the rhetorical effects of the actual evidence presented at the end the film. A supplement is a secondary object that fulfills some sort of essential lack within the original source. To put it in another way, the supplement is an addition to the original object without which that

presumably primary object would be incomplete. This extension is necessary — it is the only mechanism by which the object can operate as a whole, nevertheless because of this necessity the supplement takes on a surplus value beyond its measure.

As an example, Derrida points out, speech is contingent on the very writing it seeks to exclude, “if supplementarity is a necessarily indefinite process, writing is the supplement *par excellence* since it proposes itself as the supplement of the supplement, sign of a sign, taking the place of a speech already significant” (Derrida 281). In the same way, Jonathan Culler explains signature, a similar concept, in its relation to the object it frames:

Writing has frequently been treated as a process of appropriation, by which the author signs or signs for a world, making it his vision or his thing; but effects of signature, traces of the proper name/signature in the text, produce a disappropriation while they appropriate. (44)

Derrida critiques the work of Rousseau, where he describes the supplement as everything that is opposed to Nature or anything that is natural—everything that is “romantic, sexual, sentimental, historic, formational, educational, political and cultural as supplement” (Deutscher 39). Derrida argues that the ideal purity Rousseau seeks is not possible.

But, one might wonder, if the concept of an “original” does not exist, then how are we supposed to talk about authenticity in terms, for example, of identity? As Culler argues one should think about identity construction as a “chain of supplements” or rather a chain of “lacks,” constantly trying to supplement one another (Culler 104). He writes, “What these writings maintain is not that there is nothing outside the empirical texts—the

writings—of a culture, but that what lies outside are more supplements, chains of supplements, thus putting in question the distinction between inside and outside” (Culler 105). In order for the “natural” to be untouched, there must be no impurities to threaten it, meaning this purity is always doubtful because purity is always soiled by what it tries to escape. As Derrida points out, the ideal is never really defined clearly, primarily because what is deemed original is always in a state of fluctuation and always split in terms of its own definition, never detaching from its binary. The binary alters alongside its ideal whenever dimensions of the ideal change or are challenged.

As previously stated, to think of the sublime is to think of something that is presumably formless, lacking any defining contours, ends or beginnings. The logic of the supplement can be applied to one of the most apparent examples in the representation, or rather lack of representation, of the two Western male filmmakers/explorers Cooper and Schoedsack. Preceding the opening establishing shot of a spacious landscape, the Western explorers claim part of this “great migration” as their own. The film introduces “two men and a women who sought and found the Forgotten People...,” with a caption below reminding the audience that the male explorers will be behind the cameras for the duration of the migration. Cooper and Schoedsack’s contributions to the film are evident to the audience, as both of the explorers are introduced first as key figures in the conception of the exploration and the filmmaking process in general. Both Cooper and Schoedsack are rakish in their appearance, as Harrison, alone in the next shot, is beautifully framed by illuminating light.¹⁹ Harrison will be the only Westerner filmed

¹⁹ For more on female objectification please see Laura Mulvey’s work, “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema.” *Feminisms: An Anthology of Literary Theory and Criticism* (1997): 438-48 or Ann E. Kaplan’s book, *Women & Film*. Routledge, 2013, p. 205

throughout the journey. This is the last the audience will see of the Westerner until the end of the journey.

It is only in the last moments of the film that the audience is treated to the reemergence of the Westerners. Indeed, following the tribe's successful arrival in green pastures and as the film comes to a close an intertitle noting that a local official certified that not only did they complete the journey, but that they were the first Westerners to have done so. The final shot before the credits is of the certificate verifying the Westerner's accomplishment. In the mere seconds it is on the screen in the last moments of the film this supplement, this certified document, reorients the logic of the film away from its primary romanticization of the Other and toward the audience's likely amazed realization and affirmation that they are in fact superior to the rest. At this moment in the film absence can be read as a moment of transcendence for the male explorers.

I understand the Westerners' presence/absence/presence in the film as something that signifies a type of "higher power," or as I have previously stated, a transcendence that goes beyond anything the world can offer. The film shows that the Western male subjects are not confined by the laws that others face because they are better than the rest. In a sense, the film conveys that the Western males need nothing else from the rest of the world to show them that they are above all.

While Derrida has noted that interdependence contaminates all objects, this moment in the text is notable for its implicit assurance that the Westerner no longer requires his supplement. Of course this sovereignty is a fantasy; the sense of "completeness" or "wholeness" is only something that is of the Western world's imagination. I understand this supplement as a statement that devalues the importance of

the Western male's binary pairs: the Other and the Western woman. There is nothing left for the Westerner males to fear which also means there is nothing left of interest to them.

The American Women

Harrison, interestingly not labeled as an explorer but instead as a traveler, is constantly filmed throughout the journey. The fact that she makes the journey signals that, perhaps, she is a symbol of the "new woman" of the modern America which was infiltrating the male dominated public sphere of the era. This underscores Charles Shindo's point who argued that with "the increased opportunities brought about by the vote, education and jobs created a minority of American women looking to rebel against the Victorian morals of their mothers" (52).

Indeed, the gender and sexual politics of the era were rife with upheaval. With the prevalence and success of many women's movements, women gaining the right to vote and becoming active in politics, and with an increasing presence in the workplace, women began to redefine themselves outside of the private sphere (Dumenil 98). The balance between "modern aggressiveness and traditional submissiveness" was hardly an easy task (Shindo 59). Shindo suggests that one way these implicit threats to men were contained was that the woman could appear in the same scene (workplace, e.g.) and yet were imagined to be so imminently inferior in status and capability that they offered little in the way of a challenge to masculine authority. For the most part, these women did not come under public scrutiny because they posed no real threat to the established order; they merely became more a part of it by taking on the economic role of worker along with the social role of wife and mother (Shindo 53).

The fact that Harrison was filmed matters for two reasons: she either acts as a model for the modern progressive women to be in the same space as men or she can act as a lesson for the less progressive audience by “putting her in her place”; forced to spend the movie mixed in with the tribal family, children and animals. She blends into the scenery rather than stands apart from it; she too becomes part of the landscape. This is significant as this can be seen as a taming of the role that women might have in the public sphere. Serving as an insignificant character in the film because of her passive and domesticated placement with the Other, Harrison matters because of what she is not. She can be capable like the Bakhtiari however, the Westerner males will always be understood to be superior.

Conclusion

This chapter has explored the changing terrain and demands of visibility placed on the American observer. The American Museum of Natural History was highlighted as a paradigmatic example of how the indigenous was represented and how that representation observed changed over time during the development of a modern America. I have argued that even more than its contemporary texts equally imbricated in these display efforts, the ethnographic film *Grass* romanticizes the Other and their skill at surviving the harsh terrain. Indeed, by attending to the way in which territory was framed, the cunning nature of the primitive’s *métis* was put on display, and finally the film celebrates the transcendence of the Western male, I have tried to demonstrate the film participates in a colonial and (from the American perspective) self-serving logic.

The central aim of this chapter has been to perform an identification and analysis of the most central elements of the text. These characteristics, however, are merely the

beginning of a full-blown and complete narrative analysis of the film. Even at this stage it is clear to see how the film smuggles in a heralding of the Westerner based on their extraordinary success completing the journey. In the next chapter I connect these implications of a supreme Westerner as embodying traits of both the pre-modern and modern America back to the troubled context of the era in order to assess how the film might alter the political, economic and cultural dynamics of the age.

CHAPTER FOUR

BEYOND EXCEPTIONAL: *GRASS* AND THE SUBLIME AMERICAN SUBJECT

Over the course of this project, I have traced the social, economic, cultural and political turmoil that beset America in the early decades of the 20th Century. While the 1920's were a period of relative peace and economic expansion, they were also a time of significant challenges that resulted in deep divisions among citizens over their respective understanding of the nation, its character and the future it ought to pursue.

Modernism and progressive national thinking created a problem of national uncertainty, especially among the American male population, which needed to be addressed. Those who seemed to be the frontrunners of American society started to feel overrun by those who were labeled as less than worthy. In part because their privilege had gone largely unchallenged prior to this age and in part because so many of the notable events and uproar of the era were constituted as direct challenges to the authority of white men (women's suffrage, immigration, e.g.) I have also worked to trace the way these debates over national identity were also framed and experienced through the lenses of gender, race, national origin and the capabilities of various subjects. This polarization between the traditional and nostalgic views of America and its modern and progressive counterpart highlighted the fissure among citizen-subjects as they considered their own place within the nation and the identity traits needed to perform that role.

I have argued that portrayals of indigenous people in popular culture, and particularly in ethnographic films and especially in the ethnographic film *Grass*, offered a convenient salve to these identity crises. The reason I have turned to that film in particular is not because of the Bakhtiari tribe that is represented, but rather because of the appearance of the American “whole” that the film offers as assurance to settle this anxiety. Following the implicit argument of the film, Americans could rest assured that whether they believed the country’s future lay in its frontier-centered past or a modern future, they saw they would be able to rise to and exceed any challenge just as they had before.

In this way, although the film was ostensibly about an exotic Other and their own challenges, I have argued that given the era and the period fascination with indigenous peoples *Grass* is more properly understood as rhetorically functioning to render moot the national debate about its core values. In order to make that claim I have employed the protocols of narrative criticism and paid particular attention to the representation of land and territory, the portrayal of the male Westerners, and the display and of the Bakhtiari throughout the film.

Fisher saw human rationality as dependent on the event’s narrative probability and fidelity. Probability can be described as the narrative’s coherence (or sense making), while fidelity determines if the narrative coincides with the subject’s experience and known truths. Narrative rationality is best understood as providing a base for all narratives to be compelling and believable, not only because the story holds together on its own, but also because it fits a frame of common beliefs for those who encounter them. I not only pay attention to the rationality that emerges from the story of the Bakhtiari

tribe's life-threatening journey and the brave Westerners who followed them, but also the textual elements that take part in producing a believable narrative. For example, recalling the magnitude of space as a textual element illustrates this heroic narrative by amplifying the dangers faced by taking part in this migration. Of course, for a nation that was built on stories of western expansionism and larger than life figures that conquered the wilderness, it seems likely that an American audience would find such a narrative compelling.

Despite the heroic and romanticized efforts of the tribe's struggle with and eventual completion of their annual migration, I have argued that it is the depiction of the Westerner as an exceptional and sublime subject *regardless* of whether they become a rugged frontiersman or an urban businessman relying on the latest technology that is crucial to the film's successful revitalization and belief in America and its future.

In this chapter, I aim to show that the logic the film employs settles this early 20th Century debate. By taking stock of the larger American picture of the time, I argue that the film is likely to suggest that the audience not to be anxious about the new modern world. With this, the film shows that reclaiming white masculinity is possible, showing confidence in that the new progressive woman will continue to be contained in non-threatening ways and finally suggesting that the American's desire to look at the Other is no longer needed because he found himself once more.

Having worked through an analysis of the text in Chapter Three, in this chapter I more formally apply the protocols of narrative criticism in order to determine the rationality that undergirds the film. As I have suggested, despite principally being centered around showing the tribe's migration. I understand *Grass* to be a film that tells

an important story about America to its American audience. Employing narrative analysis of the text is particularly useful given that many narratives about struggle and perseverance have revolved around American discourse (Lewis 284).

Although narrative analysis has been used for some time in rhetorical studies, there is still a great deal of potential for utilizing narrative methodologies for national identity studies. Stories, as I have shown, are rhetorical vehicles that explicate political, social or worldviews. Narratives are used to ground points of view and are rhetorically structured to inspire its audience to take action in whatever cause the narrative champions (Lewis 286). For any rhetorical critic, narratives provide a rich source for understanding the beliefs a population tells about itself. Indeed, such accounts provide vital clues to a culture's sense of self including characteristics such as its origin stories, its values, and a sense of how the population is expected to behave.

While historical texts can often be reduced to "simple sources of information on the level of content analysis"(Lacapra 38), it is important to see these texts less as specific tangible forms of evidence and instead for the role they play in a larger set of discourses and contexts. How then might narratives help a public to rethink a nation's symbolic nature in regards to identity? Given that America has a short history, Louis Hartz suggests that Americans are in fact conditioned by their historical lack. This "absent history" is what shapes Americans, they are made from the cloth of "a history they abandoned on another continent" (Norton 125)²⁰. So it is from here that Americans tend to engage in national fantasies that are centered on notions of exceptional rankings,

²⁰ As quoted in "Engendering another American identity." *Rhetorical Republic*. Amherst: University of Massachusetts (1993).

powerful statuses and the like in relation to other nations.

Hayden White notes that history is mistakenly misunderstood as “discourse,” however he acknowledges that there is a discursive nature to how a nation can adapt or adopt a history. Put in a different way, much of a culture’s historical renderings are tailored to fit the needs or assumptions of a nation’s discourse. History is a constructed system built around these critical events (White 27). Narratives speak to our desires for imagination while helping us to identify with the rational realm of “the possible” (White 8). We desire the real of substance, something stable and complete. Given this, we do not think of history as being constructed through narrative; we think of history as history – as something objectively real.

Narratives provide the structuring cover, or mask, of the “imaginary” of history for that which we “never experience” yet are led to feel as if we have (White 24). While White’s Lacanian language is apparent, he only uses terminology like “desire” and “the real” to illustrate a nation’s attachment to the idea of an identity and its appeal.²¹ This imaginary creates an ideal citizen, a product of what Evans identifies as the subject’s

²¹ Referring back to White and his understanding of narrative, I believe it is possible that perhaps he misses the important connection between national narratives and the psychic life. I find significance in psychoanalysis because fantasies are a useful way to access identities, even of nations with the constant regulation of a national symbolic. National character is built upon a sense of shared lack amongst a nation’s people. Perhaps the understanding of the Lacanian lack can explain what types of enjoyments we get out of certain ideologies that lay at the center of national narratives, or in fact why the Imaginary is where the citizen comes to love his “better” self. With what seems to be an increasingly common approach in rhetorical studies, such as the work of McDaniels, Biesecker and others, I think of the psychic life as a potentially important pathway in understanding the effects of national narratives on a nation’s citizens.

“imaginary projection” (Evans 52).²² Narratives help citizens to occupy this imaginary space and in turn we act out the truth of our projections through our daily actions or national ambitions. The value of narrative, therefore, is significant in understanding not only the formation of the nation but also how a nation’s citizen-subjects are projected through the frame of a collective imaginary the nation shares.

Setting: The Frontier, American Male Explorers, and the Primitive Other

To begin, this section looks at how setting impacts the audience’s perceptions of how the narrative unfolds and particularly how the audience is to understand the importance of the story’s characters. Land and space have become a central focus in the work of many rhetorical scholars who look at national myths and narratives as a text to understand national identity. Land as setting, both as a rural and industrial space, is a very important part to how the audience understands the American subject and its relationship to the settled territory. What is interesting about the presence of land in *Grass* is that it plays as much of an important part in the film as does the film’s characters. The breathtaking setting and its native people, the can-do-ness and can-do-better-ness of the rugged Westerners that defeated the unspeakable dangers of the unfamiliar are all apart of a larger story—the story of American exceptionalism and the nation’s will to rise above any difficulties faced.

As a wild and unsettled space, life on the frontier has been known to be a

²² The “ideal citizen” is pulled from Evan’s definition of the Lacanian ideal ego: The ideal ego, on the other hand, originates in the specular imagine of the mirror stage; it is a promise of future synthesis towards which the ego tends, the illusion of unity on which the ego is built. The ideal ego always accompanies the ego, as an ever-present attempt to regain the omnipotence of the preoedipal dual relation. Though formed in primary identification, the ideal ego continues to play a role as a source of all secondary identifications (52).

revitalization point for many men to build strength, character and self- confidence. As Frederic L. Paxson puts it: “Men still live whose characters have developed under its pressure” (3). To put it another way, Westerners that survive the unforgiving terrains of the frontier are imagined to be able to survive anything and to succeed at any challenge however grave.

Identification with certain characters is probably the most significant part of any narrative analysis because it keeps the audience connected to the important parts of the story. In the case of *Grass*, for some of the audience they are in awe of the primitive’s will, and abilities to face such grave circumstance of nature, however for the audience, the point of identification is with the male American explorers. To explicate this relationship, I use Edward Said’s term “Orientalism” as an umbrella term for many of the post-colonial insights employed throughout the remainder of this section. I find these theories useful in understanding the ways in which the relationship between the Westerner and the Other is constructed and framed to audiences. Indeed, it helps us to better understand how the binary relationship presented in the film helps the American (white male) audience reconcile themselves with their imaginary conception of an idealized American history.

From the identification point being the Westerner to the use of the camera as an instrument of authority, the (re) presentation of land in *Grass* brings to mind the land conquests that comprised so much of the colonial era; the West overseeing and governing a now colonized space and its inhabitants (Said 95). Of course, this recalls the large body of scholarship in postcolonial studies such as the work of Edward Said²³, Gayatri

²³ *Orientalism* (1979) and *Culture and Imperialism* (1993).

Spivak²⁴, Homi Bhabha²⁵, and Leela Gandhi²⁶ that analyzes the production of the Occident through its overdetermined Oriental pair. When we consider the ways in which this relationship is illustrated in *Grass* it is not surprising that the difference between the Westerner and the Other can be framed through the question “I am therefore you are?” (Said 31-32).

While it seems that this question is more definite than not, the relationship is a bit more complex or rather ambivalent. The Westerner’s relationship to his binary Other is one that is of occasional admiration, but was never to be understood as superior to the Westerner. Americans were faced with the changing image of the “American” and feared that such changes in the modern world, for example with immigration, would end up “diluting” the American race. Some during the early 20th century felt that America was weakening its superior civilization, given the “wave after wave of immigration” access to “his homogeneity” (Stuart 479). The immigration laws did not settle this anxiety felt amongst some Americans. The laws were too lax as “the percentage of rejections under these selective laws was not great. Of the 1,200,000 aliens who came to the country in 1914 only one and one-third per cent were denied admission by the immigration authorities (Howe 344). So where does the country turn to escape this anxiety? With knowing their capabilities of being able to settle in far off lands elsewhere, America adapts to the new metropolis world because they know that if needed they have the choice to go elsewhere.

²⁴ *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason: Toward a History of the Vanishing Present* (1999) and *In Other Worlds: Essays in Cultural Politics* (2012).

²⁵ "Of Mimicry and Man: the Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse"(1984), *The Location of Culture* (1994) and *Nation and Narration* (2013).

²⁶ "Postcolonial Theory and the Crisis of European Man"(2007).

To use the phrase “bigger and better,” as Lewis Mumford does, the future of the American metropolis became over populated without the necessities to expand the quality of everyday life for its citizens. As Mumford states the expansion of public and institutional spaces such as educational institutions, leisure entertainment venues and common meeting places such as parks was non-existent and caused a significant feeling of over population. Mumford explains:

The fact that in 1920 we had sixty-four cities with more than 100,000 population, thirty-three with more than 200,000, and twelve with more than 500,000 does not mean that the resources of polity, culture, and art have been correspondingly on the increase. The growth of the American city has resulted less in the establishment of civilized standards of life than in the extension of Suburbia (14-15).

Indeed, while many were excited about the possibilities of growth, many were anxious about the less than civilized quality of life that the new modern space brought them. While these goods were just leisure privileges of a modern society, the need for such outlets became increasingly less than attainable. If these goods were seen as a way to understand and mold Americans into citizens by way of education and popular culture than the public became anxious for how they were to know themselves. The city became a breeding place for faceless people and identities.

The unique element about *Grass* is that the Bakhtiari tribe fascinates the audience even as they are forced to occupy an inferior position. Taking their cue from Homi Bhabha, Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin define ambivalence as a: complex mix of attraction and repulsion that characterizes the relationship

between colonizer and colonized. The relationship is ambivalent because the colonized subject is never simply and completely opposed to the colonizer. Rather than assuming that some colonized subjects are ‘complicit’ and some ‘resistant’, ambivalence suggests that complicity and resistance exist in a fluctuating relation within the colonial subject (12).

Striking a note crucial to the reading I have undertaken throughout my analysis, they conclude by noting that the identity of the Other is “compelled to be ambivalent because it never really wants colonial subjects to be exact replicas of the colonizers—this would be too threatening” (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin 12).

Again, despite the fact that the overwhelming amount of screen time is afforded to the Bakhtiari and their quest, it is clear from the outset that, as far as American audiences are concerned, the explorers are in control of the scene. They are the first figures seen in the film, they operate the camera, narrate the intertitles and, throughout, have a quiet, relaxed, and confident air about them. Indeed, although only seen briefly, the men are exhibit very masculine features and traits. Cooper, with his explorer’s hat pipe appears deep in thought as if he were in command of the expedition and was conceiving a plan of action for the upcoming journey. Schoedsack never makes eye contact with the camera as he engages with Cooper’s plan. Both are engaged with the other planning and charting the expedition – never interacting with the tribe in any meaningful sense.

From the aerial shots of the massive river that killed so many of the tribe’s members, or the long shots of the never ending steep and dangerous mountains that the tribe struggled to get passed, the Westerns (as the audience will soon learn) complete the same journey but seemingly without struggle or harm. Once audiences realize from the

final title screen that the Westerners themselves made the trip then what once had been amazement with the Bakhtiari likely turns into national pride for having accomplished the journey seemingly without harm or effort.

Even, then, with mere seconds of screen time a compelling case can be made that for all of the interesting lessons that the film may communicate about the will and ingenuity of the Bakhtiari people, it is first and foremost a film about Westerners, their abilities and their place in the world. The Westerners' absence and rather effortless attempts at making the journey suggests that the Westerner is exceptional once he steps away from the communal constraints of society. The men are separately filmed from others, including the woman explorer who is seen in the next scene as if they were off limits from the rest of the characters.

The Other and Modern America

Stories about America as the great nation of all nations are frequent rhetorics spoken by U.S. presidents and other important political figures. These types of narratives assume a collective nature, one that pushes a nation along even in times of weakness. *Grass* helps the audience to address these moments of weakness associated with the coming of the modern age by giving us certain images of the West and the rest of the world which help us to handle the transitions of modernity.

What was remarkable about the 1920's was the move, by some, to resurrect old national values. From the days that were inflected with the "Rough Rider" ethos, I refer to this time mainly through the language of Norman O'Gorman's characterization of the American sublime. While the strands of O'Gorman's American sublime are equally important, for the purposes of the chapter's argument, I will focus on the *metonymic*

version of the sublime that favors the notion of the “Great Individual” and in particular on how this subject presents and acts as a savior in times of a national crises. It is no mistake, for example, that national figures such as U.S. Presidents fulfill this heroic position even with the danger that the risk of the hero’s demise “can mean the death of an identity” (O’Gorman 50).

What should this mean for the heroic American subject that emerges from the film? How are Americans supposed to understand themselves having internalized the logic of the films narrative? To address those questions I further explore the consequences of engaging in an imaginary that fashions oneself (and one’s nation) as sublime. What, then, would it mean if the imaginary construction of a people and how that group sees themselves were impacted by the “rhetorical, aesthetic, and historical shifts and alterations,” toward a shared dominant discourse of national sublimity (O’Gorman 47)?

Grass appears at a moment in national history when everything the (male) citizen knows about their country begins to change. Increasingly, the country seems organized by laws and political endeavors that feed the demands of capitalism regimes. The resource that had formerly seemed inexhaustible, the frontier and all the promise it offered, is recently closed and the cities are increasingly populated with immigrants with different customs and values. Gender dynamics are thrown askew and the entire political machinery has been thrown into question with a sudden doubling of the voting pool. For all of its promise America is looking increasingly like other countries: replete with corruption, greed, labor crises and the alienating exploitation of work. The

exceptionalism that had once been assumed to be uniquely American is now, perhaps, more difficult to imagine.

It was in that context that Americans might have found renewed hope and new frontiers through their fascination with the Other and the ethnographic films such as *Grass*. Indeed, the journey the tribe takes to provide food for their livestock offers a new direction an assurance of the American audience. From the barefooted feet of the women traveling up the steep mountains to the drowning of many in the dark trenches of the Karun River, the struggles of nature that the Bakhtiari face and yet manage to still survive becomes an image of hope for the American populous is likely to encourage the audience to reconnect with the America's national core, of a country which exhibits strength, humanity and sense of community.

Recalling the nature of the supplement, the Western men becoming "whole" in the film answers the anxiety faced and calls on the nation to "be whole." Through the documentation of the Westerners completing the journey, the film invites the audience to be the heroes that America thinks makes the country stronger; the ones who must do the impossible in order to achieve strength and greatness and to do it better than others which is what being American has been constituted by.

Conclusion

Over the course of this project, I have argued that *Grass* speaks to American audiences facing an uncertain national future. Even more, I have suggested that the film offers insight into the American character that, in turn, would assure the country they were up to any challenge.

With the nation's varied transformations and their consequences for citizens bearing down on the country the film enables a sense of national accomplishment with

the audience. Though American life and the citizen populace was changing, *Grass* provides evidence that likely alleviated concerns about immigration. Having already experienced multiple immigration waves the American filmmakers' generation was as capable as those before them. In showcasing this evidence, *Grass* provided needed proof for Americans to restore their sense of superiority to the rest of the world.

While American women's visibility in the public sphere implies an equality of traits and abilities, the film likewise reassures its audience, in this case arguing that American women could become more engaged in public affairs but remain productively at a second-tier status. In turn, *Grass* offers a story that demonstrates a dual masculinity for American men. He is both rugged and strategic in which any environment can adapt to fit his needs. Because of this, *Grass* pleases the Modern Man as well as the Explorer in the audience; despite a threat of Others, whether it is immigrants or women, men are assured that they retain the place of pride and supremacy.

Grass becomes an important text through its ambiguous nature about Americanism and how it is defined. For the new American subject, there is not a need to look towards other worlds to know him. More than just exceptional figures, the Western males showed the audience that they are above the challenges of any environment.

While *Grass* offers a story about America maintaining its position of power even through times of anxiety, the film shows the audience that change is inevitable. Seasons come and go and only the fit and clever societies survive. It is here where *Grass* helps its audience to rediscovery a sense of self and nation through this survival and that starts with the America's relationship to the Other.

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