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## Artful Manipulation: The Rockefeller Family and Cold War America

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**Artful Manipulation: The Rockefeller Family and Cold War America**

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**A Dissertation presented to the Graduate Faculty  
of the College of William and Mary in Candidacy for the Degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy**

**American Studies Program**

**The College of William and Mary  
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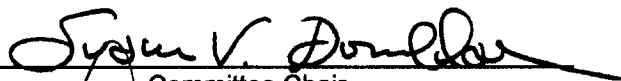
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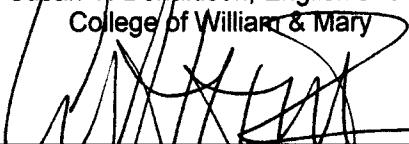
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the requirements for the degree of


Doctor of Philosophy


  
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## ABSTRACT

My dissertation, "Artful Manipulation: The Rockefeller Family and Cold War America," examines how the Rockefeller family used the Museum of Modern Art, Colonial Williamsburg, and the Abby Aldrich Rockefeller Folk Art Collection to shape opinions about America, both at home and abroad, during the early years of the Cold War. The work done at Colonial Williamsburg tied the Rockefeller name to the foundations of American society and, later, to the spread of global democracy in the Cold War world. The establishment of a new museum for the Abby Aldrich Rockefeller Folk Art collection in 1957 renewed the narrative that American folk art was the basis for American modern art, thus creating a legacy of creative cultural production that could match America's Cold War economic and military power. A close reading of the Museum of Modern Art's famous 1955 Family of Man exhibition shows how the Rockefellers promoted America as the head of the post-war global family. The show, a large scale photography exhibition, glorified universal humanism as the only option for global peace after World War II. The implicit message of the show, which traveled nationally and internationally through 1962, was that Americans would lead the free world in the second half of the twentieth century. In their insistence on shaping American society in their view, the Rockefellers shut out dissenting opinions and alternative narratives about American culture. A consideration of James Baldwin and Richard Avedon's 1964 photo-text *Nothing Personal* is then offered as a rebuttal to the narrative of modern American culture endorsed by the Rockefellers. In *Nothing Personal*, James Baldwin's essays and Richard Avedon's photographs signify on the narrative of white domination, the same narrative evoked across the Rockefellers' institutions. Juxtaposing *Nothing Personal* against the hegemonic work of the Rockefellers' cultural organizations offers readers a consideration of how narratives of exclusion necessitate and give life to narratives of resistance.

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**To my parents and sister: We are a force.**

## Introduction

“A prophet has found honor in his own country”: The Rockefellers and the Making of Modern American Culture<sup>1</sup>

This dissertation considers the Rockefeller family’s use of three cultural institutions—the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA), Colonial Williamsburg (CW), and the Abby Aldrich Rockefeller Folk Art Collection (AARFAC)—to shape opinions about American cultural modernism at home and abroad during the early years of the Cold War. MoMA’s traveling exhibitions on modern art and modern living and the 1953 decision to keep a permanent collection established the museum as the authority on American modern culture. John D. Rockefeller III’s Cold War cultural programs at Colonial Williamsburg tied the Rockefeller name to the promotion of global democracy after World War II. The re-introduction of the Abby Aldrich Rockefeller Folk Art Collection in 1957 renewed the narrative of American modern art stemming from American Folk Art. Through these institutions and their Cold War agendas, the Rockefellers attempted to spread the message that American culture was going to lead the Cold War world into the second half of the twentieth century.

A close reading of the Museum of Modern Art’s famous exhibition *The Family of Man* suggests that the Rockefellers saw America as the head of the postwar international family. The exhibition relied on its audience’s ability to read narratives from photographs, something viewers were accustomed to because of their familiarity with widespread publications like *Look* and *Life* magazine. In their insistence on shaping

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<sup>1</sup> “At last a prophet has found honor in his own country.” Opening line of a press release for the *Machine Art* exhibition, held March 1934 at the Museum of Modern Art. Department of Circulating Exhibition Records (CE), III.17/10(10.375). The Museum of Modern Art Archives, New York (hereafter designated MoMA Archives, NY).

American culture to their view across their institutions, the Rockefellers promoted a version of American modernism that favored the white, affluent, nuclear family and in *The Family of Man* the medium of photography was used to spread that message globally. In their 1964 photo-text *Nothing Personal*, James Baldwin and Richard Avedon directly challenge the vision of American society presented in popular photo-texts like *Life* and *The Family of Man*. In *Nothing Personal*, Baldwin and Avedon signify on the popular photo-text format and in doing so disrupt the values and vision of white affluence supported by the Rockefellers. The implications of looking at *Nothing Personal* against the cultural works of a family with immense wealth and influence exemplifies the necessity of alternative narratives in the breaking down of the white elitism on which the country was founded and continues to rest.

The Rockefellers' Museum of Modern Art was founded in 1929 by Abby Aldrich Rockefeller and, in the words of her grandson John D. Rockefeller IV, "a couple of other very rich ladies."<sup>2</sup> The museum was dedicated to "[t]he establishing and maintaining in the City of New York a museum of modern art, encouraging and developing the study of modern arts and the application of such arts to manufacture and practical life, and furnishing popular instruction."<sup>3</sup> Mrs. Rockefeller's vision was to create a distinct cultural modernism that was defined by the marriage of modern art and design to modern living; the desire to spread cultural modernism via MoMA was expressed in the

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<sup>2</sup> "American Experience: The Rockefellers," accessed January 3, 2012, <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/introduction/rockefellers-introduction/>

<sup>3</sup> Russell Lynes, *Good Old Modern: An Intimate Portrait of The Museum of Modern Art* (New York: Atheneum, 1973), 16.

museum's Provisional Charter, written by director Alfred H. Barr Jr. Barr's vision for the museum was to explain modern art and further "to encourage...the practical arts of daily living."<sup>4</sup> Painting and sculpture were shown, of course, but the museum also exhibited architecture and film. By the 1940s MoMA was, in the words of Edward Steichen, the "only institution in the world which [had] frankly recognized photography's potentialities as an art medium."<sup>5</sup> In addition to mixing the exhibition of traditional art forms with new innovations, the museum circulated exhibitions across the United States in order to reach audiences outside of New York City.

The Museum of Modern Art's circulating exhibitions program extended the museum's influence across the United States. Looking more closely at the traveling exhibitions dedicated to design provides insight into how the museum shaped modern American culture and demonstrates the wide-reach of the Rockefeller family's institutions. The museum first started circulating exhibitions in 1931, just two years after its doors opened. In 1933, an official Department of Circulating Exhibitions (CE) was established. MoMA was an institution that saw as part of its mission the duty to "instruct and improve taste" and thus its circulating exhibitions became "the Museum's most influential instrument of tastemaking."<sup>6</sup> As described in a bulletin that recapped the work

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<sup>4</sup> Jennifer Marshall, "Our Folk: A Tradition of Modernism, A Taste for Modernity" (master's thesis, University of California, Los Angeles, 1999), 8.

<sup>5</sup> Edward Steichen quoted in Minutes of The Junior Council of the Museum of Modern Art's 5<sup>th</sup> Meeting, May 24, 1949, folder 1424, box 145, series L, Record Group (RG) 4, Rockefeller Family Archives, Rockefeller Archive Center, Sleepy Hollow, New York (hereafter designated RAC).

<sup>6</sup> Lynes, 189, 107.

of Circulating Exhibitions from 1931 to 1954, the museum envisioned itself not just as a “metropolitan center” but “as the major institution working exclusively in the contemporary, international field” which “should have a ‘missionary’ responsibility for promoting an understanding of what it regards as the most vital art being produced in our time.”<sup>7</sup> Department stores, colleges and universities were CE’s most frequent customers.

As per MoMA’s charter, the art disseminated was more than just painting and sculpture. As A. Joan Saab explains in her book *For the Millions: American Art and Culture between the Wars*, Abby Aldrich Rockefeller and Alfred Barr “very consciously tried to create a new type of art institution, one that included not only the traditional fine arts of painting and sculpture but also posters, photographs, and cups and saucers.”<sup>8</sup> The result was a “blurring” of lines between high and low culture that made “art more democratic and more accessible to a wider public.”<sup>9</sup> Ultimately, Saab argues, the museum created a “pedagogy of cultural consumption,” which tied the aesthetically informed purchase of selected industrial goods to a functioning democracy.<sup>10</sup>

A key link between art, design and consumption was the museum’s Department of Industrial Design.<sup>11</sup> The department, formed in 1932 via a partnership between Alfred

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<sup>7</sup> Department of Circulating Exhibitions Bulletin, *Circulating Exhibitions, 1931-1954* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1954), 4-5.

<sup>8</sup> A. Joan Saab, *For the Millions: American Art and Culture between the Wars*. (Philadelphia, Penn.: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), 88.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

<sup>11</sup> For a concise overview of the goals of the Department of Industrial Design and its relation to creating an “American breed of Modernism” particularly in the 1930s, see

Barr and architect Philip Johnson, celebrated utility as the most important quality of “modern” industrial design, whereby “modern” meant “homogenous and harmonious...a background for living.”<sup>12</sup> Through the Department of Industrial Design the museum started a series of exhibitions on “Useful Objects.”<sup>13</sup> The first of these exhibitions, *Useful Household Objects Under \$5.00*, opened on September 28, 1938.<sup>14</sup> The show exalted the machine aesthetic; precision, modern form, new materials, absence of ornament, and economy of means were necessary in the selected design objects.<sup>15</sup> The show was up at MoMA for one month and then was sent out to travel around the U.S. A checklist that accompanied the traveling exhibition listed the contents of the show—“glassware, accessories, kitchenware, [a] handmade string rug, wire glove dryers, [a] wood lamp base, [and a] glass pitcher.”<sup>16</sup> The *Rockefeller Center Weekly* reported specifically on the co-mingling of art and consumerism: “Art lovers and early Christmas shoppers are bumping into each other these days making the rounds of the Museum of

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Irene Sunwoo, “Whose Design? MoMA and Pevsner’s Pioneers,” *Getty Research Journal*, 2 (2010): 69-82.

<sup>12</sup> Saab, 99.

<sup>13</sup> There were nine “Useful Objects” exhibitions in total: *Useful Household Objects under \$5.00* (1938), *Useful Objects of American Design under \$10.00* (1940), *Useful Objects of American Design under \$10* (1940), *Useful Objects Under \$10* (1941), *Useful Objects in Wartime under \$10* (1942), *Useful Objects, 1945* (1945), *Useful Objects, 1946* (1946), *100 Useful Objects of Fine Design (available under \$100.)* (1947), and *Christmas Exhibition: Useful Objects Under \$10* (1948).

<sup>14</sup> “Exhibition History List,” Museum of Modern Art, accessed February 8, 2015. [http://www.moma.org/learn/resources/archives/archives\\_exhibition\\_history\\_list](http://www.moma.org/learn/resources/archives/archives_exhibition_history_list)

<sup>15</sup> CE, III.17/3(10.f202). MoMA Archives, NY.

<sup>16</sup> CE, III.17/3(10.f239). MoMA Archives, NY.

Modern Art's current exhibition of Useful Objects under \$5.00."<sup>17</sup> The exhibition intended to show viewers what good design looked like and that it could be purchased for the average American home. MoMA's reach into architecture, interior design, and home furnishings makes emphatically clear that the museum was interested not only in influencing modern America's taste in art but also in the way Americans lived their everyday lives.

In December of 1938, *Useful Household Objects Under \$5.00* made it to Kaufmann's Department Stores in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. It was noted by one observer that because of the exhibition "many more Pittsburghers now know of the fine work of the Museum of Modern Art."<sup>18</sup> When the exhibition was installed at Skidmore College in Saratoga Springs, New York, it provoked "exceptional interest" from both the local population and the college students and faculty. More importantly, it was noted by the exhibition organizer that "[p]eople are constantly inquiring where and how they may purchase certain articles in the exhibition."<sup>19</sup> What MoMA deemed both useful and of good design was making its way across the country and into people's homes. Department store managers, understanding that the "Useful Objects" exhibitions were "proving a definite sales factor" for the items exhibited, went out of their way to make sure the objects promoted by MoMA were in stock.<sup>20</sup> Through the Circulating Exhibition

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<sup>17</sup> CE, III.17/3(10.242). MoMA Archives, NY.

<sup>18</sup> CE, III.17/3(10.f239). MoMA Archives, NY.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>20</sup> CE, III.17/2(10.f189). MoMA Archives, NY. Marjorie M. Reich of Kaufmann's Department Stores writes, "Useful Objects under Ten Dollars is proving a

Department's work, the museum's name became associated with products essential to the modern American lifestyle. By October of 1938, MoMA had over 60 exhibitions in circulation that had been shown in 662 locations across 100 cities in the United States, Canada, and Hawaii.<sup>21</sup>

In 1939 *Useful Objects of American Design under \$10.00* opened and then circulated across the country through 1941 (even stopping in October of 1940 for exhibition at the College of William and Mary). The press release accompanying the exhibition stated: "In a gallery adjacent to its great exhibition of painting by Picasso, the Museum displays these utilitarian contemporary objects of art. As the Christmas season is upon us, these objects are shown by the Museum not only for the enjoyment of the public but for the guidance of the shoppers."<sup>22</sup> The exhibition intentionally linked good taste, good design, and good consumers. Because Circulating Exhibitions extended MoMA's influence far beyond New York City, the museum was building its reputation as a national authority on American cultural modernism. In its first ten years the Museum of Modern Art set itself up to be an, or rather *the*, arbiter of modern American taste and style.

On the occasion of the museum's tenth anniversary in 1939, the President of the United States, Franklin D. Roosevelt himself, praised MoMA's traveling exhibition

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most interesting exhibit. I only hope that we can look far enough ahead of the exhibit next Christmas to make certain that we have all of the merchandise in our stock. We do have about one-third of the items and the exhibit is proving a definite sales factor with these items."

<sup>21</sup> CE, III.17/3(10.f0199). MoMA Archives, NY.

<sup>22</sup> CE, III.17/2(10.f121). MoMA Archives, NY.



program. Broadcast from the White House via the National Broadcasting Company Network, the Mutual Broadcasting System, and the Columbia Broadcasting System, the president's address declared that the Museum of Modern Art would elevate American culture by using its traveling exhibitions to "invigorate our cultural life by bringing the best of modern art to all of the American people."<sup>23</sup> Further, Roosevelt claimed that "the proposed traveling exhibitions and nationwide shows will make all of our people increasingly aware of the enormous importance of contemporary industrial design, architecture, including the great social art – housing – which by its very nature is one of the most formidable challenges to a democracy."<sup>24</sup> The endorsement of MoMA by the President of the United States affirmed the museum's stature as an American institution. MoMA found every way possible to guide American life.<sup>25</sup>

World War II gave MoMA an opportunity to link modern art and living to social progress, much in the way President Roosevelt called for the museum's help in housing planning. The exhibitions circulated by the museum linked modern artistry to patriotism and democracy. For example, in 1941 MoMA's Department of Industrial Design in collaboration with the United States Treasury Department and Army Air Corps held a

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<sup>23</sup> "Roosevelt's Message to the Art Museum," *New York Times*, May 11, 1939, reproduced in Michelle Elligott, "One and the Same: Celebrating the Union of Democracy and Modern Art," *Esopus*, no. 16 (2011): 118.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>25</sup> A particularly idiosyncratic exhibition that was exemplary of MoMA's efforts to insert itself into every facet of modern culture was a show called *Are Clothes Modern?* The show opened at MoMA in the winter of 1945 and then traveled all over the U.S. from Massachusetts to Minnesota to Colorado and California. The show linked fashion to architectural design, ever broadening the reach of MoMA's taste-making influence (CE, III.19/1(11.f69). MoMA Archives, NY).

“National Defense Poster Competition.” The application form stated that MoMA believed “that the artist can render specific and valuable services to the nation in times of national emergency.” Two types of posters were solicited: one to promote the buying of defense bonds in support of the Treasury Department and the other to act as a recruiting tool for the United States Army.<sup>26</sup> The winning poster was first displayed on a forty-eight by thirty-eight foot billboard on the corner of Fifth Avenue and Forty-Second Street in New York City and then it appeared across the country.<sup>27</sup>

In 1944 MoMA took up Roosevelt’s concern with housing and presented an exhibition called *Look at Your Neighborhood: An Exhibition on Neighborhood Planning*. *Look at Your Neighborhood* circulated for six years, everywhere from Illinois to Virginia to Texas. The exhibition was concerned, as stated in the press release, with “the need for comprehensive planning to make the postwar world a better living place for the individual, the family and the community.”<sup>28</sup> MoMA was praised for partaking in the reshaping of America’s city and suburbs. Cleveland Rodgers, a member of New York City’s Planning Commission, stated, “It is altogether fitting that that the Museum of Modern Art should provide leadership in furthering modern City Planning, which may

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<sup>26</sup> CE, III.18/7(10.584). MoMA Archives, NY.

<sup>27</sup> “Hand Over Fifth Avenue and 42<sup>nd</sup> Street,” Museum of Modern Art, accessed February 14, 2015, [https://www.moma.org/momaorg/shared/pdfs/docs/press\\_archives/724/releases/MOMA\\_1941\\_0061\\_1941-08-14\\_41814-60.pdf](https://www.moma.org/momaorg/shared/pdfs/docs/press_archives/724/releases/MOMA_1941_0061_1941-08-14_41814-60.pdf)

<sup>28</sup> “Press Preview of Look at Your Neighborhood,” Museum of Modern Art, accessed October 1, 2013, [http://www.moma.org/momaorg/shared/pdfs/docs/press\\_archives/928/releases/MOMA\\_1944\\_0014\\_1944-03-28\\_44328-12.pdf?2010](http://www.moma.org/momaorg/shared/pdfs/docs/press_archives/928/releases/MOMA_1944_0014_1944-03-28_44328-12.pdf?2010)

become the greatest and most useful of modern art manifestations.”<sup>29</sup> Far away from New York City in Charlotte, North Carolina, MoMA was reported by the *Observer* to be “the voice of authority” when it came to matters of urban planning.<sup>30</sup> Traveling exhibitions were used by the museum to insert itself into every aspect of modern American life. So tied was MoMA’s name to the very conception of midcentury American culture that its role as an “authority” went unquestioned.

Exhibitions like the “Useful Objects” series and *Look at Your Neighborhood* were part of an overarching series of shows that MoMA later categorized under the label of “Good Design.”<sup>31</sup> Officially, the “Good Design” series started in the 1950s with the arrival of curator of design Edgar J. Kauffman Jr. Greg Castillo writes about the Cold War context of the “Good Design” project in the book *Cold War on the Home Front: The Soft Power of Midcentury Design*. Castillo argues that MoMA, under Kauffman, sought “to influence consumer behavior by inserting museum curatorship into the mechanisms of wholesale and retail trade.”<sup>32</sup> The “Good Design” project married museum attendance to the consumer experience. The inauguration of “Good Design” followed MoMA’s twentieth anniversary in 1949. *Modern Art in Your Life*, a large exhibition that connected

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<sup>29</sup> CE, III.51(25.307). MoMA Archives, NY.

<sup>30</sup> Clipping from Charlotte N.C. *Observer*, 12/10/44. CE, III.51(25.f181). MoMA Archives, NY.

<sup>31</sup> Roberta Smith, “The Ordinary as Object of Desire,” *New York Times*, June 4, 2009, accessed February 15, 2015, [http://www.nytimes.com/2009/06/05/arts/design/05desi.html?pagewanted=all&\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2009/06/05/arts/design/05desi.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0)

<sup>32</sup> Greg Castillo, *Cold War on the Home Front: The Soft Power of Midcentury Design* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010), 112.

modern art to Americans' daily environment, opened in October to celebrate the occasion. The exhibition was "designed to show that the appearance and shape of countless objects of our everyday environment are related to, or derived from, modern painting and sculpture, and that modern art is an intrinsic part of modern living."<sup>33</sup> MoMA saw itself as necessary in explaining the transference of modern art to modern living. The exhibition catalogue explains, "Modern art plays an important part in shaping the world we live in. Sensitive to the conditions of the modern world, it has transformed and remade much of the outward appearance of familiar scenes. Whether we are aware of it or not (and whether we like it or not), it helps to produce the environment of our daily lives."<sup>34</sup> Not only did the museum exhibit modern design, but it also explained to its audiences how modern design appeared in their everyday lives. The museum set itself up as both the source of and authority on modern American living.

The Department of Circulating Exhibitions also sent exhibitions abroad. Lynn Spigel explains that international circulating exhibitions were to act as an "antidote to the idea (widely held overseas) that America, while an economic superpower, was nevertheless a cultural wasteland."<sup>35</sup> After World War II, MoMA had the freedom to circulate exhibitions curators felt best expressed the "special contributions" American art

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<sup>33</sup> Robert Goldwater, *Modern Art in Your Life* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1949), 23.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>35</sup> Lynn Spigel, "Television, The Housewife, and the Museum of Modern Art," in *Television after TV: Essays on a Medium in Transition*, ed. Lynn Spigel and Jan Olsson (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2004): 355.

and culture could make to “enhance the vigor of cultural life throughout the world.”<sup>36</sup> By 1952, it became clear that the museum would benefit from a department solely dedicated to the distribution of international exhibitions; as a result the museum formed the International Council. The Rockefeller Brothers Fund worked with Nelson Rockefeller and the museum’s board to negotiate a five-year deal in which MoMA would receive \$125,000 per year to fund the circulation of exhibitions abroad.

From Nelson Rockefeller’s perspective “The United States government, unlike those of other countries, had not yet recognized the need for this form of cultural exchange, but it was hoped that the Museum’s initiative might ultimately lead to governmental support of a comparable program.”<sup>37</sup> Rockefeller had previously been involved in the creation of the Office of the Coordinator of Inter-American Affairs (CIAA). Helen M. Franc, in her detailed account of the Council’s formation, “The Early Years of the International Program and Council,” explains, “In 1937, in connection with the large oil holdings in Venezuela of the Creole Petroleum Company, of which he was a director, Rockefeller and a group of business associates made a twenty-nation tour of Latin America, which they found to be in a state of social unrest that made the region highly vulnerable to totalitarian influence.”<sup>38</sup> The CIAA was formed to protect Latin America from totalitarianism and arguably to ensure that the economic interests of the

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<sup>36</sup> John Hay Whitney quoted in “Art Exchange Plan is Financed By Rockefeller Brothers Fund,” *New York Herald Tribune*, Apr. 7, 1953.

<sup>37</sup> Helen Franc, “Early Years of the International Program and Council,” *The Museum of Modern Art at Mid-Century: At Home and Abroad*, Studies in Modern Art, no. 4 (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1994), 109.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 110.

United States in Latin America were not threatened. From 1940-1944, Nelson Rockefeller ran a program that offered scholarships, film viewings, concerts, art exhibitions, and good-will tours. This was the first time that the United States provided “official monetary support for an American propaganda program.”<sup>39</sup> Rockefeller held several other government posts after his time with the CIAA, and in 1952 he became Special Assistant to President Dwight D. Eisenhower for Cold War Strategy.<sup>40</sup>

The Museum of Modern Art was well-suited to endorse Eisenhower’s “soft power” approach to winning the ideological Cold War. Greg Castillo elucidates the advantage of “soft power” as lying in “its capacity for requisition and reuse by foreign recipients to advance their own interests, but in ways that ultimately benefit the donor nation.”<sup>41</sup> Exhibitions like *American Home Furnishings* and *American Design for Home and Decorative Use* were sponsored by the U.S. State Department in the early 1950s and traveled all over Europe spreading MoMA’s “gospel of global modernism.”<sup>42</sup> One of the most important partnerships made between MoMA and the U.S. Cold War propaganda

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<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.* For more on Nelson A. Rockefeller’s work in Latin America see Marcos Cueto, ed., *Missionaries of Science: The Rockefeller Foundation in Latin America* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992) and Gerard Colby with Charlotte Dennett, *Thy Will Be Done: The Conquest of the Amazon: Nelson Rockefeller and Evangelism in the Age of Oil* (New York: Harper Collins, 1995).

<sup>41</sup> Castillo, xi-xii.

<sup>42</sup> Castillo notes that “*American Home Furnishings* traveled to Stuttgart, Berlin, Munich, Amsterdam, Paris, London, Milan and Trieste under Marshall Plan sponsorship” and *American Design for Home and Decorative Use* was produced by MoMA for the U.S. Information Agency and “visited cities in Finland, Sweden, Norway, Denmark, Belgium, and Italy from 1953 to 1955” (111).

effort was the museum's purchase of the U.S. pavilion for the *Venice Biennale*. Since the *Biennale's* creation, all national governments involved owned their pavilions, except for the United States, which has never owned its pavilion. The International Council purchased the U.S. pavilion in 1952 and was responsible for the art exhibited there until 1962. The museum was able to purchase the pavilion with funds made available by the Whitney Trust, later revealed to be a "dummy" foundation for Central Intelligence Agency (CIA).<sup>43</sup>

The Museum of Modern Art's collaboration with the CIA was the basis for a critical movement formed in the 1970s that critiqued the institution for selling out modern art, namely abstract expressionism, as a tool of American soft power, or, propaganda. Studies like Frances Stonor Saunder's *The Cultural Cold War: The CIA and the World of Arts and Letters* (2001), Penny M. Von Eschen's *Satchmo Blows Up the World: Jazz Ambassadors Play the Cold War* (2006), and Hugh Wilford's *The Mighty Wurlitzer: How the CIA Played America* (2009) explain clearly the links between the U.S. government and the cultural Cold War. Both Saunders and Wilford focus on the CIA, with the former paying most attention to the CIA's funding of the Congress for Cultural Freedom and the latter suggesting that though the CIA had a hand in several different organizations, the actual reach of its programs was not as far as the government would have hoped. Von Eschen's *Satchmo Blows Up the World* explores in detail how jazz musicians were sent abroad by the State Department to exhibit a purely "American" contribution to music and culture. When one considers the deep involvement of the

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<sup>43</sup> Mary Anne Staniszewski, *The Power of Display: A History of Exhibition Installations at the Museum of Modern Art* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1998), 256.

American government in the dissemination of cultural production across the globe, it is reasonable to understand how the discovery of CIA links to art and culture could lead to a “revisioning” of the success and use of MoMA’s traveling art exhibitions and the championing of abstract expressionism as a purely American art form.

In the article “Revisiting the Revisionists,” Michael Kimmelman calls into question the work of historians that shifted the study of modern art away from the formalism of art critics like Clement Greenberg and Michael Fried toward a study of the political, economic and social circumstances of postwar art production and consumption. Max Kozloff’s 1973 essay “American Painting During the Cold War” was the first of several articles in the periodical *ArtForum* to link, as Eva Cockroft argues, “‘American cold war rhetoric’ and the way many Abstract Expressionist artists phrased their existentialist-individualist credos.”<sup>44</sup> William Hauptman’s article “The Suppression of Art in the McCarthy Decade” (*ArtForum*, October 1973) came next and then Cockroft herself published “Abstract Expressionism: Weapon of the Cold War” in the June 1974 issue of *ArtForum*. Two major book length studies about abstract expressionism’s connection to advancing the global Cold War cultural policies of the U.S. followed: Serge Guilbaut’s *How New York Stole the Idea of Modern Art: Abstract Expressionism, Freedom and the Cold War* (1983) and Francis Francina’s edited collection *Pollock and After: The Critical Debate* (1985), which included versions of Kozloff’s and Cockroft’s articles. The second edition of Francina’s book, published in 2000, includes several new

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<sup>44</sup> Eva Cockroft, “Abstract Expressionism, Weapon of the Cold War,” *Pollock and After: The Critical Debate*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, ed. Francis Francina (New York: Harper and Row, 2000), 148.



essays—including Kimmelman’s— that were written in response to the revisionist histories of the 1970’s.

The main point of Kimmelman’s work is that “to link as one” the United States Information Agency and the International Council of the Museum of Modern Art “is a generalization that simplifies the byzantine cultural politics of the era.”<sup>45</sup> However, while the revisionist histories of the 1970s may have leaned too far to the left in their criticisms of the museum’s associations with the government, it is undeniable that the work of the International Council was influenced by government officials and that many of the shows sent abroad were motivated by the desire of the museum to shape opinions about American culture abroad, including *The Family of Man*. For example, on May 12, 1955, George F. Kennan gave the keynote address at the “Symposium for the International Exchange in the Arts at the International Council of the Museum of Modern Art.” Kennan, father of America’s postwar policy of containment, stressed to the audience that America must send only outstanding works of art abroad as representations of its culture. For Kennan, the ideological battle of Communism versus democratic capitalism was as hot as the physical conflict he worked to contain just after World War II. He was also aware that though Americans exerted great economic and military power in the Cold War world, the same could not be said of America’s cultural prowess. Kennan lamented, “Here I, whose training has been in the political field, would say that I believe that many of the feelings about us which other people would think are political have their origins in the impression that we are a nation of vulgar, materialistic *nouveau riches*, lacking in

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<sup>45</sup> Michael Kimmelman, “Revisiting the Revisionists,” *The Museum of Modern Art at Mid-Century: At Home and Abroad*, Studies in Modern Art, no. 4 (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1994), 49.

manners and in sensitivity, interested only in making money, contemptuous of every refinement of feeling.”<sup>46</sup> He then asked the members of the Council to think more deeply about what they sent abroad, and argued, “We must not make the mistake of thinking that any sort of cultural product will do for interchange, as long as it is American, and that the content of our contribution is a matter of secondary importance.... [W]e can be selective. So when we deliberately enter into this sort of exchange, let us by all means see to it that what we send is the best we can muster.”<sup>47</sup> Kennan advocated for a “smart” exchange of culture that would work to show the refined nature of American creative expression. This, he said, was the best weapon in the war on totalitarianism.

Kennan’s speech reinforces how the Museum of Modern Art saw its role in the Cold War world. It was an institution that was to set the boundaries of U.S. modern culture and to show off to the rest of the world the sophistication of American culture. MoMA institutionalized its role as both exhibitor and expert in modern art and culture on February 15, 1953, when MoMA’s Chairman of the Board of Trustees’s John Hay Whitney announced that the museum would keep a static permanent collection.<sup>48</sup> The

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<sup>46</sup> George F. Kennan, “International Exchange in the Arts,” *Americans for the Arts*, April 26, 2012, [http://www.artsusa.org/pdf/advocacy/kennan\\_headline.pdf](http://www.artsusa.org/pdf/advocacy/kennan_headline.pdf). Though Kennan gave his speech in 1955, the text was not published until 1956.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>48</sup> The question of how the museum would handle works in its collection is as old as the institution itself. One of the museum’s founders, Lizzie P. Bliss, died in March of 1931 and left most of her extensive collection of art to MoMA. Ms. Bliss’s works became the nucleus of what could be called a permanent collection; however, this collection, as president of the museum A. Conger Goodyear put it, was not “unchangeable.” He explained that the collection would have “somewhat the same permanence a river has. With certain exceptions, no gift will be accepted under conditions that will not permit of its retirement by sale or otherwise as the trustees may think advisable.... The Museum of Modern Art should be a feeder, primarily to the

museum's previous policy enabled the sale of works in the collection when curators saw fit. Having built up the reputation of being the authority on modern art and living, the trustees "now believe[d] it essential for the understanding and enjoyment of its entire collection to have permanently on public view masterpieces of the modern movement, beginning with the latter half of the nineteenth century."<sup>49</sup> Michael Kimmelman describes the establishment of the permanent collection at MoMA as the moment when "the modernist canon became physically enshrined in the Modern."<sup>50</sup> Furthermore, Carol Duncan and Alan Wallach describe the "aura" surrounding the permanent collection as "unmatched by any other collection of modern art."<sup>51</sup> They sum up their argument as follows:

Educated opinion literally identified MoMA's collection with the mainstream of modern art history.... From the time of its founding, MoMA's trustees, led by the Rockefellers, promoted an image of glamorous modernity and liberalism that contrasted sharply with older types of museums and their nineteenth-century ideologies.... Increasingly, after World War II MoMA's view of modern art achieved institutional hegemony in academic art history, art education, and the

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Metropolitan Museum of Art, but also to museums throughout the country. There would always be retained for its own collection a reasonable representation of the great men, but where yesterday we might have wanted twenty Cézannes, tomorrow five would suffice" (Lynes, 83).

<sup>49</sup> Robert Goldwater, *Modern Art in Your Life*, 2<sup>nd</sup> revised ed (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1953), 3.

<sup>50</sup> Kimmelman, 45.

<sup>51</sup> Carol Duncan and Alan Wallach, "The Museum of Modern Art As Late Capitalist Ritual: An Iconographic Analysis," *Marxist Perspectives* 4 (Winter 1978): 32.

higher reaches of the gallery world and art press. The image of the collection as the unique embodiment of modern art history remains established.<sup>52</sup>

The shift from keeping a collection that moved with the current of the times to a fixed collection reflected the shoring up of the Rockefellers' narrative of modernity. The creation of a permanent collection at MoMA is the clearest example of the Rockefellers' desire to create and control a single narrative of American modernism.

In addition to the work being done at the Museum of Modern Art, the Rockefellers used Colonial Williamsburg and the Abby Aldrich Rockefeller Folk Art Collection to affirm their vision of America society, both past and present. Chapter one examines in-depth how the restoration of Colonial Williamsburg by John D. Rockefeller Jr. and the later Cold War cultural programs of his son, John D. Rockefeller III, were used to tie the family name to the foundation of American society. John D. Rockefeller Jr. created a history that privileged the planter elite and its role in the formation of American democracy. The Rockefellers favored a narrative of white domination, a story reinforced by the segregation of Williamsburg in the late 1920s and early 1930s in order to accommodate the physical space of the restoration. When John D. Rockefeller III became chairman of Colonial Williamsburg in 1949, he continued his father's work of tying the family name to American ideals of freedom and democracy by instituting several programs that were meant to aid in America's efforts to win the ideological Cold War. He created a Special Survey Committee that went around the world for a year to gather data on the state of Communism and opinions about America. When the team returned to Colonial Williamsburg programs were created that targeted foreign dignitaries

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<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 32-33.

and graduate students. These programs were meant to influence current and future global leaders with pro-democratic capitalist ideals. Despite growing racial tensions in the U.S., the planter elite continued to symbolize the American public at Colonial Williamsburg. The story of the colonists that settled in America and fought bravely against the British to win their independence was meant to serve as a timeless story of American hard work and self-determination. The result of the war for independence in the American colony was a society built on choice—what the Rockefellers believed to be an alluring narrative for the nations newly decolonized after World War II.

Chapter two considers the creation and use of the Abby Aldrich Rockefeller Folk Art Collection by the Rockefellers to change opinions about American art's place in the Cold War world. America's economic and military strength was unquestioned, especially after World War II, but American culture continued to be derided by the international community. Abby Aldrich Rockefeller began collecting American folk art at about the same time that she formed the Museum of Modern Art and that her husband started the restoration at Colonial Williamsburg. With the help of Edith Gregor Halpert and Holger Cahill, Mrs. Rockefeller amassed a large collection of American folk art. In 1932, Mrs. Rockefeller's collection was shown anonymously at the Museum of Modern Art in the exhibition *American Folk Art: The Art of the Common Man in America, 1750-1900*. The show overtly linked Americana to the aesthetics of modern art by championing American folk art's loose forms, bold uses of color, and distorted patterning. Such calculated phrasing and rewriting of American folk art into the art historical narrative asserts Abby Aldrich Rockefeller's interest in the dominance of American culture. The Abby Aldrich Rockefeller Folk Art Collection had renewed

importance during the Cold War; it was given a new home in 1957, in a building erected in Colonial Williamsburg solely for its display. Reaffirming American folk art's link to the rise of modern art gave American culture much needed cultural and historical weight in the ideological Cold War.

The Rockefellers used their cultural institutions to create a particular version of American history and culture that justified the family's wealth and power. More importantly, the Rockefellers used these institutions to influence opinions about America at home and abroad. Chapter three explores the creation and distribution of the exhibition *The Family of Man* and the way the show worked to reinforce the Rockefellers' broader narrative of American dominance in the Cold War world. The exhibition was made up of over five hundred photographs that pictured people from all over the world doing things common to all humanity—eating, playing, laughing, crying, giving birth, and mourning the dead. I argue that curator Edward Steichen conceived of the exhibition first as an homage to American culture. The proposed exhibition was called *Image of America*, but that exhibition never came to fruition. Instead, *The Family of Man* was made. *Image of America* is an important antecedent to *The Family of Man* that has been unacknowledged in previous accounts of this exhibit's formation. *The Family of Man* opened at the Museum of Modern Art in 1955 and then spent several years traveling the world due to a collaboration between MoMA's International Council and the United States Information Agency. Audiences across the globe believed they were viewing an exhibition that touted inclusivity and universal humanism when in fact they were accepting a globalized version of American culture that reinforced U.S. dominance in the second half of the twentieth century.

*The Family of Man*'s successful reception had much to do with the readability of its photographic narrative. The exhibition was in part based on the format of *Life* magazine, which by the 1950s had millions of readers. Like *The Family of Man*, *Life* magazine claimed inclusivity but its depiction of Americans was limited, relying generally on white, middle-class, heterosexual families to symbolize the nation.<sup>53</sup> In 1964, James Baldwin and Richard Avedon published *Nothing Personal*, a photo-text that directly challenged the exclusionary conception of American identity promoted by *Life*, *The Family of Man*, and the Rockefeller family. Michael Omi and Howard Winant explain in the introduction to the 2015 edition of their important text *Racial Formation in the United States* that race and racism were essential in founding the American nation-state because the interests of the powerful "white settlers, slave owners, colonial and later national elites" necessitated racial theories of discrimination for the purposes of rule; this is the same narrative reasserted by the Rockefellers. However, the need "to comprehend and explain the modern world extended beyond the oppressors to the oppressed." The result is that "since race and racism involve violence, oppression, exploitation, and indignity, they also generate movements of resistance and theories of resistance."<sup>54</sup> In *Nothing Personal*, Baldwin and Avedon use photo-text to conceive of a truly inclusive American identity. Baldwin and Avedon's *Nothing Personal* acts as synecdoche for the multitude of writers, artists, and activists that railed against the modern American culture the Rockefellers so hoped to push forward.

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<sup>53</sup> Wendy Kozol, *Life's America: Family and Nation in Postwar Photojournalism* (Philadelphia, Penn.: Temple University Press, 1994), ix.

<sup>54</sup> Michael Omi and Howard Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (New York: Routledge, 2015), 3.

In the chapters that follow I attempt to show how the Rockefellers used their personal wealth, political reach, and cultural institutions to influence the construction of American identity at midcentury. Their influence was not totalizing, however. The early years of the Cold War coincided with the beginning of the civil rights movement, evidence that hegemonic narratives of white affluence were already beginning to break apart. In the late 1950s and early 1960s *The Family of Man* circulated the globe spreading what looked like a message of American good will via a photo-narrative on universal humanism. In contrast, racial tensions and the demand for equality grew in the United States. Soon after *The Family of Man* ended its world tour *Nothing Personal* dismantled the liberal humanist sentiment of the exhibition in the same language upon which it was based.

All of the Rockefellers' projects included in this dissertation seem to be inclusive—the spread of democracy at Colonial Williamsburg, the lauding of American folk art made by the common man and woman, and the universal humanism of *The Family of Man*. However, in their careful construction, each of these narratives either necessitates whiteness in order for one to be included or they assume to be able to speak for everyone, which intends to silence dissent. I hope to show that reading *Nothing Personal* against the Rockefeller family's cultural projects makes clear how voices of difference made themselves heard.



## Chapter One

### “That the Future May Learn from the Past”: Colonial Williamsburg’s Cold War Cultural Programs

In 1959, Russell Lynes, editor of *Harper’s* magazine and author of popular works such as *Highbrow, Lowbrow, Middlebrow* (1949) and *The Tastemakers* (1954), was invited to speak in Colonial Williamsburg, Virginia. The occasion was the “Third Williamsburg International Assembly;” the theme was “The American Dream – Myth or Reality,” and Lynes was to be one of the “cultural authorities” to speak on the subject. The author was a good friend of the Rockefeller family and familiar with their philanthropic works.<sup>1</sup> The Assembly was part of a series of programs created during the Cold War at Colonial Williamsburg (CW). The event brought together forty-nine graduate students from thirty-eight foreign countries, as well as eight American graduate students planning to work aboard, to discuss the idea of the American dream.

When Lynes returned from Colonial Williamsburg and The International Assembly to his work at *Harper’s* in New York City, he wrote about his trip in the column “Mr. Harper’s After Hours.” He explained to his audience of everyday readers: “I have often laughed about the anachronism of Williamsburg with its quaint dedication to the past, but it is not a bad background against which to have to explain the present. It insists on putting the American experience in perspective.”<sup>2</sup> In a time of consensus-

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<sup>1</sup> Lynes would later write *Good Old Modern: An Intimate Portrait of the Museum of Modern Art* (1973), which chronicles the creation of the Rockefellers’ Museum of Modern Art.

<sup>2</sup> Williamsburg, Virginia, Colonial Williamsburg Foundation Archives (hereafter designated CWFA), Pamphlets box P-54, Williamsburg International Assembly 1959-60. Article reprinted from *Harper’s Magazine* for file.

building that anticipated the social and political turmoil of the 1960s, the American experience presented at Colonial Williamsburg was heavily constructed to reflect the desires of the family to which the restoration owed its success: the Rockefellers. From Colonial Williamsburg's inception as a living history museum, the Rockefeller family presented a sanitized version of American democracy that tied the freedom of choice to the affluent lifestyle of the planter elite. By doing so, the Rockefellers aimed both to ingratiate the family name into the common understanding about the nation's founding and influence the public's understanding of the "American experience" to favor their own vision of American culture.

The restoration of Colonial Williamsburg began in 1926 when John D. Rockefeller Jr. (John D. Jr.) was convinced by the rector of Bruton Parish Church in Williamsburg, Virginia, Reverend Dr. W. A. R. Goodwin, to invest millions of dollars in the preservation of the historic district. John D. Jr. felt that the living history museum at Colonial Williamsburg could teach its visitors lessons about the "patriotism, high purpose, and unselfish devotion of our forefathers to the common good." Williamsburg was one of the most important cities of Colonial America. From Williamsburg, as stated in promotional material from the mid-twentieth century, came "the leadership and initiative which resulted in the Declaration of Independence... [and] our Bill of Rights."<sup>3</sup> When John D. Jr. invested his time and money in Colonial Williamsburg he hoped to tie the family name to America's formation as an independent and successful country.

Connecting the family's wealth and power to the foundations of American society

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<sup>3</sup> "Williamsburg Background," November 1, 1949, folder 1405, box 165, series C, Record Group 2, Rockefeller Family Archives, Rockefeller Archive Center, Sleepy Hollow, New York (hereafter designated RAC).

would attach weight and seriousness to the Rockefeller family name, rather than with the “taint” of new money associations made by the general public.<sup>4</sup> The restoration at CW was a way for the Rockefellers to “celebrate their newly won preeminence and [also]...to construct a retrospective lineage for themselves by buying their way into the American past.”<sup>5</sup> Eric Gable and Richard Handler, anthropologists known for their work on Colonial Williamsburg, explain that sites of historic preservation are often seen as “cultural salvage,” a way to restore a traditional cultural and national identity that can be seen by the general public as threatened by current social and political conditions. Thus, heritage sites become “arbiters of marketable authenticity.”<sup>6</sup> In this way, Colonial Williamsburg became a place where the Rockefellers could redefine their relationship to the American present by restoring the past. As CW became a publicly recognized repository for the American values of hard work, integrity, and freedom in a beautifully cultivated landscape, John D. Rockefeller Jr. hoped the family name would become associated with those same values.

From the mid-nineteenth century on, most history museums were constructed by

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<sup>4</sup> See Eric Gable and Richard Handler, “Public History, Private Memory: Notes from Ethnography of Colonial Williamsburg, Virginia USA,” *Ethnos* 65, no. 2 (2000): 240. Gable and Handler write, “Rockefeller's various biographers suggest other motives on the part of the man who not only paid for the restoration but came to inhabit one of the town's antebellum plantation households. In their analyses we get a sense of one of America's plutocrats concerned with erasing popular memories - those of his family's plebeian origins and of the taint ‘new money.’”

<sup>5</sup> Mike Wallace quoted in Eric Gable and Richard Handler, “Persons of Stature and the Passing Parade: Egalitarian Dilemmas at Monticello and Colonial Williamsburg,” *Museum Anthropology*, 29 no. 1 (2006): 17.

<sup>6</sup> Eric Gable and Richard Handler, “After Authenticity at an American Heritage Site,” *American Anthropologist* 98, no. 3 (1996): 568.

members of the dominant class and embodied interpretations that supported their sponsors' privileged positions.<sup>7</sup> As argued by Mike Wallace in his book *Mickey Mouse History and Other Essays on American Memory*, Colonial Williamsburg "commemorated the planter elite, presented as the progenitors of timeless ideals and values, the cradle of the Americanism that Rockefeller and the corporate elite inherited and guarded."<sup>8</sup> In order to create a vision of planter elite life, Williamsburg had to undergo massive reconstruction, an endeavor that segregated what was a remarkably integrated town for the beginning of the twentieth-century. Linda Rowe describes the process of relocating black and white community members in her essay "African Americans in Williamsburg, 1865-1945." She writes, "Relocating displaced residents, black and white, established racially segregated residential areas along lines unknown in pre-restoration days."<sup>9</sup> Further, Andrea Kim Foster's oft-cited dissertation, "'They're Turning the Town All Upside Down': The Community Identity of Williamsburg, Virginia Before and After the Reconstruction," gives an in-depth look at the effects of the restoration on race relations in Williamsburg. While African Americans living in Williamsburg supported the restoration because of the job opportunities provided, the reconstruction reinforced white

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<sup>7</sup> Mike Wallace, *Mickey Mouse History and Other Essays on American Memory* (Philadelphia, Penn.: Temple University Press, 1996), 4.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.

<sup>9</sup> Linda Rowe, "African Americans in Williamsburg: 1865-1945," in *Williamsburg, Virginia: A City Before the State 1699-1999*, ed. Robert P. Maccubbin (Williamsburg, Va.: 300<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Commission, 2000), 127.

dominance and minority subservience.<sup>10</sup> In order to restore the town to a semblance of its eighteenth-century composition, the town where “whites and African Americans lived side-by-side” was pulled apart and segregated.<sup>11</sup> Streets where African Americans lived in cabins and houses became horse pastures and parking lots. John D. Rockefeller Jr.’s vision for Colonial Williamsburg was limited; his version of the past incorporated only the white men that led the nation and not the black servants that helped to sustain their livelihood.

So committed were the Rockefellers to glorifying the glamorous aspects of the planter elite that a major part of the population at Colonial Williamsburg – the slaves – were left out of the reenactment completely until the 1970s.<sup>12</sup> Such an unsavory history did not fit with the sterilized narrative presented at CW. As Wallace explains, “Planned, orderly, tidy, with no dirt, no smell, no visible signs of exploitation.... Colonial Williamsburg was the appropriate past for the [Rockefellers’] desired future.”<sup>13</sup> The restoration was to present to the public what John D. Rockefeller Jr. believed was an

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<sup>10</sup> Andrea Kim Foster, “‘They’re Turning the Town All Upside Down’: The Community Identity of Williamsburg, Virginia Before and After the Reconstruction” (PhD dissertation, George Washington University, 1993), vii-viii.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, xvii.

<sup>12</sup> Stuart D. Hobbs, “Exhibiting Antimodernism: History, Memory, and the Aestheticized Past in Mid-twentieth-century America,” *The Public Historian*, 23 no. 3 (Summer 2001): 39-61. On page 60, Hobbs writes it was not until the 1970s that “officials at Colonial Williamsburg began to interpret the social and cultural history of the town, including, most controversially, slavery. Over the next two decades, the staff revised and reworked their education plan, guided by the idea that, as staff member Christy Coleman Matthews wrote, ‘the history taught in the Historic Area had to become more complex and, most importantly, relevant.’”

<sup>13</sup> Wallace, 15.

ideal image of American progress, ingenuity, and affluence and it would tie that image to the family name.

Bringing back to life the city where the seeds of American democracy were planted was a “public service” John D. Jr. was able to enact because of his great fortune. Peter Dobkin Hall explains that while the Rockefellers claimed they were “servants of progress—midwives, as it were, of the new industrial order,” the family also wanted to fuse their name to America’s origins in order to justify their control of “vast resources and to legitimate that control as part of the natural scheme of things.”<sup>14</sup> By aligning themselves with the visible tradition of Colonial Williamsburg and the birth of the nation, John D. Jr. hoped to ease his own anxieties and the public’s about the family’s wealth and power. His father, John D. Rockefeller Sr. (John D. Sr.) founded the Standard Oil Company, which monopolized every facet of the oil trade in the United States in the late nineteenth century and gave the family its enormous wealth. The company was disbanded in 1911 after it was found in violation of the Sherman Antitrust Act. While John D. Sr. dedicated the latter part of his life to more philanthropic efforts, his robber-baron reputation stuck to him and his family.<sup>15</sup> The terrible deaths of two women and

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<sup>14</sup> Peter Dobkin Hall, “The Empty Tomb: The Make of Dynastic Identity,” in *Lives in Trust: The Fortunes of Dynastic Families in Late Twentieth-Century America*, ed. George E. Marcus and Peter Dobkin Hall (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1992), 259.

<sup>15</sup> As explained in Waldemar A. Nielsen’s *The Golden Donors: A New Anatomy of the Great Foundations* (New York: Truman Talley Books, E. P. Dutton, 1985), “It is a paradox deserving of some reflection that the donor, John D. Rockefeller Sr., the most generous, creative, and effective philanthropist in American history, was also the most notorious of the great nineteenth-century ‘robber barons.’ From the late 1870s through World War I his name was associated with greed, rapacity, cruelty, hypocrisy, and corruption. Ida Tarbell in her landmark book *The History of the Standard Oil*

eleven children during a 1914 strike at the Colorado Fuel and Iron Company mine in Ludlow, Colorado, owned by John D. Jr., did nothing to help the family's reputation as greedy, money-hungry, soulless capitalists that cared only about themselves and their personal fortunes. Restoring the past was a way that the Rockefellers could get a hold on their present place in American society. As Simon J. Bronner argues in *Explaining Traditions: Folk Behavior in Modern Culture*, "Tradition allows participants in culture to be directed towards the future because it provides a place to start, a foundation for adaptations and diversification that naturally occurs as people adjust it to their own needs and situations."<sup>16</sup> Aligning the family name with the over-arching and malleable ideas of democracy and freedom would allow the Rockefellers to control their current public image and influence the future of America by shaping its past.

Like his father, John D. Rockefeller III (JDR), tried to use the restoration at Colonial Williamsburg to carve out a place for himself in the Rockefeller family and to make his mark on American culture. Answering the call put out by Henry Luce in his 1941 *Life* article, "The American Century," to create an American internationalism that shared with the world our "Bill of Rights, our Declaration of Independence, our Constitution, our magnificent industrial products, [and] our technical skills," JDR started to put together programming in 1949 that would bring international students and scholars

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*Company* published in 1904 saw him as the 'supreme villain of his age'" (84).

<sup>16</sup> Simon Bronner, *Explaining Traditions: Folk Behavior in Modern Culture* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2011), 21.

to Virginia to learn about democracy.<sup>17</sup> Hoping to make “Colonial Williamsburg an international beacon for the family’s benefits,” John D. Rockefeller III found a way to have Colonial Williamsburg fight the Cold War.<sup>18</sup>

JDR had a complex and difficult relationship with his father.<sup>19</sup> John D. Sr. believed his money was given to him by God. He was an intensely religious man who believed he was chosen as a special individual to do God’s work—as he said in 1905: “God gave me my money.” He thought that his ability to manipulate money was meant to be used to make even more money: “Having been endowed with the gift I possess, I believe it is my duty to make money and still more money and to use the money I make for the good of my fellow man according to the dictates of my conscience.”<sup>20</sup> John D. Sr. believed that his fortune represented an “entirely new historical force” and rather than “seeking legitimacy in the past, [he] sought it in the future.”<sup>21</sup> This strong belief in legitimizing the family name by shaping the future was then passed down to John D. Jr.

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<sup>17</sup> Henry Luce, “The American Century” *Diplomatic History* 23 no. 2 (Spring 1999): 168. Luce’s article originally appeared in the February 17, 1941 issue of *Life* magazine. Luce was the publisher of the magazine.

<sup>18</sup> Anders Greenspan, *Creating Colonial Williamsburg: The Restoration of Virginia’s Eighteenth-Century Capital* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 97.

<sup>19</sup> For extensive insight into John D. Rockefeller III’s anxieties related to pleasing and impressing his father, see John Ensor Harr and Peter J. Johnson’s *The Rockefeller Century* (Charles Scribner’s Sons: New York, 1988), especially section III, “The Third Rockefeller, 1912-1929) and chapter 25, “Colonial Williamsburg.”

<sup>20</sup> Hall, 260.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 259.



and JDR.<sup>22</sup>

JDR used his philanthropic efforts to continue his grandfather's mission of shaping the future.<sup>23</sup> In 1949 he accepted the position of chairman at Colonial Williamsburg and immediately started working on a way to make the restoration relevant. America's cultural Cold War was, as argued by John Fousek in his book *To Lead the Free World: American Nationalism and the Cultural Roots of the Cold War*, "profoundly shaped by an ideology of 'American nationalist globalism,' an ideology that was deeply rooted in historic notions of 'chosenness, destiny, and mission' and that found expression in a postwar triad of powerful beliefs in national greatness, global responsibility, and anticommunism."<sup>24</sup> John D. Sr.'s belief in being chosen to serve God was passed down to his son and grandson. The Rockefellers were chosen to have great wealth and were destined to influence American culture. The mission at Colonial Williamsburg was to use a Rockefeller philanthropic enterprise to bolster the family's ties to a created past and shape the future of America in the ideological Cold War. The mainstays of the

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<sup>22</sup> "American Experience: The Rockefellers," accessed January 3, 2012, <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/introduction/rockefellers-introduction/> In this video on the Rockefellers, biographer Peter Collier explains, "For John D. Rockefeller Jr., it was little different. His father, who was a kind of God to him, gave him his money. And ah, but he, he carried the same kind of theological charge, go and do good with this money, and do God's work." The implicit meaning is that God's work, for John D. Jr. was his father's work.

<sup>23</sup> John Ensor Harr and Peter J. Johnson, *The Rockefeller Century* (Charles Scribner's Sons: New York, 1988), 4.

<sup>24</sup> John Fousek, *To Lead the Free World: American Nationalism and the Cultural Roots of the Cold War* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2000), xv. Note: The capitalization of "Communism" is not consistent; I chose to capitalize "Communism." I also chose to reflect the original presentation of "Communism" in any quoted material.

ideological Cold War were about perception management, which was exactly what the Rockefellers were concerned with as they moved away from being seen as cruel capitalists toward being seen as benefactors and protectors of America's culture. The Cold War was the perfect stage for a project that aligned the Rockefeller name with the safeguarding of American heritage and insurance of America's social and political future.

John D. Rockefeller III believed Colonial Williamsburg was an "international landmark, a city that would contain the world's hope for freedom of all mankind." A "committed internationalist," JDR felt that CW could help both Americans and citizens of the world "appreciate what [we are] for" rather than simply saying what we are against: "communism, militarism, totalitarianism, Nazism, and the like."<sup>25</sup> By 1949, over \$25,000,000 had been spent on the restoration, upwards of 20,000 school children in classroom groups were visiting the restoration each year, and over 6,000,000 people had seen the film "Eighteenth Century Life in Williamsburg." Colonial Williamsburg was already making its mark on the world as a popular vacation destination recommended by magazines such as *Harper's*, *The American Mercury*, *Holiday*, and *National Geographic*. JDR wanted to harness and combine the popularity of Colonial Williamsburg with programming that taught democracy to international students and foreign delegates. He would fund the research and development of the new Cold War programs himself, hoping to affect the general world positively and to please his father with his important cultural

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<sup>25</sup> Greenspan, 95, 97; "Williamsburg Background," November 1, 1949, folder 1405, box 165, series C, RG 2, Rockefeller Family Archives, RAC.

work.<sup>26</sup>

At the end of 1949, John D. Rockefeller III sent a memo out to his staff that stated effective on February 1, 1950, a new program called the “Special Survey Committee” (SSC) would begin, which he would personally finance.<sup>27</sup> The job of the SSC, a two-man team made up by Kershaw Burbank and John C. Goodbody, was to “first attempt to identify those ideas or concepts of eighteenth-century Virginia which are most timely today” and then develop a “long range interpretive program” for CW and “the Williamsburg story.”<sup>28</sup> The ‘Williamsburg story’ was meant to be shared not only domestically but internationally as well. The SSC was to initiate activities and to create materials that would “reach those who cannot visit the city” via “collaboration with the

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<sup>26</sup> John D. Rockefeller III wanted his staff to make sure they knew he was funding the Special Survey Committee with his own money – the Rockefeller “resources available.” He said to his staff in the 1950 memo: “this is a distinctly new activity which should not be financed either by the operating budget or our capital budget. Since I have been so largely responsible for initiating this inquiry, I want to assume personal responsibility for the undertaking in every respect – administratively, financially, and otherwise. Whatever expense may be involved in this undertaking will not conflict in any way with present budgets or with contemplated or necessary projects” (CWFA, Special Survey Committee General Correspondence – Formation of Special Survey Committee – John D. Rockefeller III Memo to Staff, Circa 1950).

<sup>27</sup> CWFA, Survey Committee (Special) 1950 (Gen Corr – Recs Retained), – Formation of Special Survey Committee – John D. Rockefeller III Memo to Staff, Circa 1950. On June 1, 1951, the name of the SSC changed to the “Project Committee.” This name was in effect until November 26, 1952, when the projects that were running were absorbed into the Division of Interpretation (CWFA, “Survey Committee (Special)” Summary of Special Survey Committee. March 23, 1973). For ease of reading, I will label the work of both the Special Survey Committee and the Project Committee as the work of the SSC.

<sup>28</sup> CWFA, Special Survey Committee 1943: 49-51, John C. Goodbody to Mr. A. Whitney Griswold, March 1, 1950.

programs of other organizations with objectives comparable to ours.”<sup>29</sup> The ultimate goal of the SSC was to create programs at and about CW that would encourage the growth of democracy outside of the United States, a political aim in line with the rest of America’s Cold War foreign policy.<sup>30</sup>

A draft of the “Preface,” which explained the purpose of the SSC, makes clear the power JDR felt his family’s institutions could wield. John D. Rockefeller III wrote in the “Preface” that “it would be presumptuous for [CW] to assert its ‘significance’ but refrain from using it.”<sup>31</sup> The language of the draft expresses a call to duty that echoed the Rockefellers’ larger sentiment about using their philanthropic institutions to shape American culture. Like JDR’s identification with Luce, the planned cultural work at CW echoed Secretary of State Dean Acheson’s emphasis on the people of America spreading the word about democracy:

We must use every means we know to communicate the value of freedom to the four corners of the earth. Our message must go out through leaflets, through our

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<sup>29</sup> CWFA, Survey Committee (Special) 1950 (Gen Corr – Recs Retained), Draft of Report, March 23, 1951.

<sup>30</sup> The methodical approach of John D. Rockefeller III and his Special Survey Committee reflected America’s growing professional managerial class (PMC) after World War II. James S. Miller argues in his 2006 article for *The Public Historian*, “Mapping the Boosterist Imaginary: Colonial Williamsburg, Historical Tourism, and the Construction of Managerial Memory,” that the restoration “served to reimagine the mass-marketed heritage site itself as a kind of stage for the exhibition and enactment of new forms or professional experience” (55). The programs of the Special Survey Committee were not open to the general public, and thus mirrored the PMC: the SSC created workshops and talks that were given to a select group of leaders, who then spread the knowledge they received to their constituents.

<sup>31</sup> CWFA, Survey Committee (Special) 1950 (Gen Corr – Recs Retained), Draft of “Preface” to the report, April 23, 1950.

free press, radio programs and films, through exchange of students and teachers with other countries, and through a hundred other ways. And this doctrine of freedom will carry conviction because it comes not out of the government alone, but out of the hearts and souls of the people of the United States. Because it is the authentic voice of America, freedom will ring around the world.<sup>32</sup>

Relying on private citizens and foundations to push the ideological agenda of the government was a way to proliferate pro-American ideals without showing the heavy hand of propaganda behind its distribution. As Robert F. Arnove explains in the introduction to *Philanthropy and Cultural Imperialism: The Foundations at Home and Abroad*, “Philanthropic foundations, since their origins at the turn of the century, have played the role of unofficial planning agencies for both a national American society and an increasingly interconnected world-system with the United States at its center.... [F]oundations are able to influence world views of the general public as well as the orientations and commitments of the leadership which will direct social change.”<sup>33</sup> For example, Lieutenant General Walter B. Smith stated that Colonial Williamsburg “could play a ‘tremendous role’...and that one of the strongest forces in improving the dissemination of information to freedom seekers lay in such independent agencies as Colonial Williamsburg.”<sup>34</sup> Smith’s encouragement substantiated JDR’s feeling that any

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<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>33</sup> Robert F. Arnove, *Philanthropy and Cultural Imperialism: The Foundations at Home and Abroad*, (Boston, Mass.: G.K. Hall & Co., 1980), 17.

<sup>34</sup> CWFA, Survey Committee (Special) 1950 (Gen Corr – Recs Retained), Draft of “Preface” to the report, April 23, 1950.

“bit of available creative thinking and intelligent leadership” was “under obligation” to aid in asserting America’s power in the postwar world.<sup>35</sup>

The Cold War programming at Colonial Williamsburg paralleled the work being done at other non-government entities to promote Americanism and combat anti-Americanism. Inderjeet Parmar explains in the essay, “Challenging Elite Anti-Americanism in the Cold War: American Foundations, Kissinger’s Harvard Seminar and the Salzburg Seminar in American Studies,” that “foundations financed privately funded public diplomacy that sought to counter foreign elites’ ‘anti-Americanism.’”<sup>36</sup> For example, the Salzburg Seminar in American Studies, first held in 1947, brought together young Europeans in Austria to be educated about America and introduce them “to the ideas and research techniques of American Studies as it was practiced in the United States.”<sup>37</sup> Richard Pells describes the work of the seminar succinctly in his book *Not Like Us: How Europeans Have Loved, Hated, and Transformed American Culture Since World War II*: “After listening to lectures on American history, literature, politics, economics, and law, the students would presumably return home as newly minted experts

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<sup>35</sup> John D. Rockefeller III quoted in Harr and Johnson, 421-22.

<sup>36</sup> Inderjeet Parmar, “Challenging Elite Anti-Americanism in the Cold War: American Foundations, Kissinger’s Harvard Seminar and the Salzburg Seminar in American Studies,” in *Soft Power and US Foreign Policy: Theoretical, Historical and Contemporary Perspective*, ed. Inderjeet Parmar and Michael Cox (London: Routledge, 2010), 109.

<sup>37</sup> Richard Pells, *Not Like Us: How Europeans Have Loved, Hated, and Transformed American Culture Since World War II* (New York: Basic Books, 1997), 109.

on American institutions and policies.”<sup>38</sup> The Salzburg Seminar was founded by three Harvard students and after its first successful year secured long-term funding from the Rockefeller Foundation, the Ford Foundation and the Commonwealth Fund.<sup>39</sup>

In the United States Henry A. Kissinger’s Harvard University International Summer Seminar aimed to create a spiritual link “‘between the younger generation of Europe and American values’ as Europeans were frustrated with the collapse of ‘traditional values’ and the rise of a seemingly unsympathetic USA, ‘a bewildering spectacle of economic prosperity and seeming misunderstanding of European problems.’” The loss of “traditional values,” argued Kissinger, could open the door for European support of Communism. The seminar, funded by the Central Intelligence Agency conduit the Fairfield Foundation and later the Ford Foundation, would “assist in counteracting these tendencies, by giving inwardly alive, intelligent young Europeans an opportunity to study the deeper meaning of U.S. democracy.”<sup>40</sup> A similar intellectual gathering was also coming together in the west in Colorado, where Chicago businessman Walter Paepcke formed the Aspen Institute. Paepcke envisioned Aspen as the “ideal gathering place for

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<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>39</sup> An examination of monies distributed by the Rockefeller Foundation during the Cold War in support of private organizations is outside of the scope of this dissertation. For more on the Salzburg Seminar in American Studies, see Oliver Schmidt, “No Innocents Abroad: The Salzburg Impetus and American Studies in Europe,” and Reinhold Wagnleitner “Here, There and Everywhere: Introduction” in *“Here, There and Everywhere”: The Foreign Politics of Popular Culture*, ed. Reinhold Wagnleitner and Elaine Tyler May (Hanover, N.H.: University Press of New England, 2000): 64-79, and Reinhold Wagnleitner, *Coca-Colonizations and the Cold War: The Cultural Mission of the United States in Austria after the Second World War*, trans Diana M. Wolf (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1994).

<sup>40</sup> Parmar, 111.

thinkers, leaders, artists, and musicians from all over the world to step away from their daily routines and reflect on the underlying values of society and culture.”<sup>41</sup> The first institute, attended by prominent intellectuals, artists, members of the international press, and 2,000 additional guests, was held in 1949 in celebration of German poet and philosopher Johann Wolfgang von Goethe’s 200<sup>th</sup> birthday.

Perhaps John D. Rockefeller III was thinking about these other institutes and seminars as he was trying to figure out how CW could play a role in the fight against Communism. In a handwritten note from his home files, he jotted down “Why Williamsburg for job – presumptuous,” and then he attempted to answer his own question. He listed these reasons as possible answers: “Rich historical past – springboard; Physical existence – building to dramatize; Resources available; National acceptance.”<sup>42</sup> The note makes it clear that JDR believed in his cause and was attempting to prepare answers for skeptics – including his father – about the programming at Colonial Williamsburg he was planning to introduce. The note also shows that JDR recognized and was ready to use the power of the Rockefeller family and its philanthropies to make an impact on American culture – the “resources available” were not just the buildings and the people who worked in them, but the Rockefeller money that was at JDR’s disposal to fund his projects. The “national acceptance” of CW points to the historical importance of the site, the acceptance of the Rockefellers as mid-century

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<sup>41</sup> “History,” *The Aspen Institute*, accessed March 11, 2015, <http://www.aspeninstitute.org/about/history>. See also Sydney Hyman, *The Aspen Idea* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1975).

<sup>42</sup> Note, ND, folder 250, box 42, series 3, RG 5, Rockefeller Family Archives, RAC.



philanthropic moguls, and a future national acceptance of the ideas that would be spread from CW. It should be noted that the archival folder where this little scrap was found also contained several articles about the Korean War and the infiltration of Communism in Korea. It is evident that JDR's increasing concern about the Cold War and the ways the conflict was manifesting itself globally influenced his vision for Colonial Williamsburg. JDR saw the dangers Communism posed to his world and was ready to make CW a key component in the ideological Cold War.

As John C. Goodbody and Kershaw Burbank prepared CW's mission statement in relation to the Cold War world, they met with several influential historical and cultural thinkers to discuss how to spread the message of democracy both within and outside of the United States—Kenneth Murdock, Perry Miller, Arthur Schlesinger Jr., and Arthur Schlesinger Sr., whom Goodbody called “one of our most valuable consultants.”<sup>43</sup> This group prepped the SSC on the reception of American democracy abroad and the kinds of programs that might best spread CW's message. Notably, these men were also leading figures in the discipline of American Studies, the same field of study promoted by the Salzburg Seminar and Kissinger's Harvard University International Summer Seminar. The consultants that helped JDR create the Special Survey Committee's programs were part of a larger cultural push to emphasize abroad a unified, prosperous, and democratic America.<sup>44</sup> Again, this was a way for JDR to link his family's name to the fabric of

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<sup>43</sup> CWFA, Special Survey Committee 1943: 49-51, John C. Goodbody to JDR, November 19, 1950.

<sup>44</sup> It should be noted that F. O. Matthiessen, a leading figure in the formation of American Studies and a participant in the first Salzburg Seminar, was critical of America's place in the postwar world. Matthiessen took his own life in April of 1950 in

American culture while creating a future that suited the Rockefellers.

The places and purposes of the SSC's visits were mapped out in conjunction with several government officials. Edward Barrett, Assistant Secretary of State for Public Affairs, Carlisle Humelsine, Deputy Assistant to the Secretary of State, Foy Kohler, Director of the "Voice of America" series, George Kennan, Roscoe Hillenkoetter, Director of the CIA, and several ambassadors and former members of European intelligence agencies were consulted in creating the itinerary for the SSC. Through introductions made by the State department, government agencies, and personal friends, the SSC would visit "representative areas in representative countries so that something may be seen at first hand of the problems in these places." The term "representative" is emphasized because Kershaw and Burbank could not possibly visit all of the places in the world the State Department believed were threatened by Communism. It was the hope of the SSC that "the future program of Colonial Williamsburg will offer opportunities for service to these areas – whether through publications, radio features, or an 'indoctrination program' developed cooperatively with the State Department or foreign government agencies."<sup>45</sup> The men were supposed to get a general idea of how Communism worked in these various countries, and then they were supposed to come back to CW and create

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part because he was persecuted by the House Un-American Activities Committee. For more of Matthiessen's critique of Americanization abroad, see *From The Heart of Europe* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1948). For more context on Matthiessen's view of American Studies in the early years of the Cold War, see Arthur Redding, *Turncoats, Traitors, and Fellow Travelers: Culture and Politics of the Early Cold War* (Jackson: University of Mississippi, 2008).

<sup>45</sup> CWFA, Survey Committee (Special) 1950 (Gen Corr – Recs Retained), Itinerary. Goodbody and Burbank would visit these countries: Philippine Islands, Malaya, Indonesia, Indo-China, Thailand, Burma, India, Pakistan, Iran, Turkey, England, France, Germany, Austria, Italy, Yugoslavia, Finland and Sweden.

programs that would combat any overarching problems they saw.

The main concerns of the SSC were to help the government and citizens of the United States “more effectively meet the challenge of the Communists in the cold war,” to make “democracy so vital and real to the people of this country that they will rally to its banners and be prepared to sacrifice or even die for it if necessary,” and to encourage people that had programs already set up with the goal of spreading freedom and democracy to hold their events at CW.<sup>46</sup> When one thinks of the cultural Cold War and the perception management associated with both positive and negative propaganda, self-sacrifice is not part of that general rhetoric.<sup>47</sup> The SSC eagerly took on the challenge of using the ideals of American society to foster the same feeling of patriotism in the ideological battle as one would feel if there was a threat of physical harm to the nation and its people. While the programs eventually created by the SSC were targeted toward foreign participants, the speakers and key figures at CW’s Cold War conferences and assemblies would be picked for their ability to promote American ideals and dispel anti-

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<sup>46</sup> CWFA, Survey Committee (Special) 1950 (Gen Corr – Recs Retained), Draft of “Preface” to the report, April 23, 1950.

<sup>47</sup> The overall effort of American propaganda during the early years of the Cold War was to sway international opinion about America via soft power tactics such as consumerism and entertainment. See: Laura A. Belmonte, *Selling the American Way: U.S. Propaganda and the Cold War* (Philadelphia, Penn.: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008); Greg Castillo, *Cold War on the Home Front: The Soft Power of Midcentury Design* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010); Jack Masey and Conway Lloyd Morgan, *Cold War Confrontations: US Exhibitions and their Role in the Cultural Cold War* (Baden, Switzerland: Lars Müller Publishers, 2008); Kenneth Osgood, *Total Cold War: Eisenhower’s Secret Propaganda Battle at Home and Abroad* (Lawrence: University of Kansas, 2008); Penny M. Von Eschen, *Satchmo Blows Up the World: Jazz Ambassadors Play the Cold War* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2006); Hugh Wilford, *The Mighty Wurlitzer: How the CIA Played America* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2009).

Americanism abroad.

In preparation for their information gathering travels abroad, Burbank and Goodbody developed three specific goals that were to ignite the fire for democracy. First, they were to “search out the positive qualities of faith which are sustaining those who resist totalitarianism and to see how these qualities of faith can be used to inspire others.” Second, the men were “to see at first hand the successes and failures of communism, and to evaluate the reasons which make for either success or failure.” Finally, they were “to benefit Colonial Williamsburg’s program with knowledge gained from the experience of those abroad who share a common heritage of freedom with America.”<sup>48</sup> These trips would give the men an idea of how Colonial Williamsburg could be used as a medium through which to transport the message of democracy to the nations they visited. In order for JDR’s plans for strengthening his family’s name and institution in the Cold War world to be successful, the SSC had to get a real world sense of how different governments were functioning across the globe. On-the-ground research would prepare the men to create the most action-inducing programs possible.

Goodbody and Burbank finally set out to tour the parts of the world where democracy did not exist, or seemed to be threatened: the Philippine Islands, Malaya, Indonesia, Indo-China, Thailand, Burma, India, Pakistan, Iran, Turkey, England, France, Germany, Austria, Italy, Yugoslavia, Finland and Sweden.<sup>49</sup> The reasons for visiting

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<sup>48</sup> CWFA, Survey Committee (Special) 1950 (Gen Corr – Recs Retained), Draft of “Explicit State of Purposes of Trip,” March 27, 1950.

<sup>49</sup> CWFA, Survey Committee (Special) 1950 (Gen Corr – Recs Retained), Itinerary.

each of these countries varied. For example, the members of the SSC were to visit the Philippines because the islands, though a strong place of American authority and influence in Asia, were threatened by Communism through political corruption and by the large Chinese population.<sup>50</sup> Declared independent in 1945, Indonesia was to be checked out to see how Communism might be affecting the nation's transition between a colonial and independent state and in order to gauge overall attitudes toward the U.S. The SSC was supposed to find out about higher education in China, figure out what happened to long-standing American associations in Iran, and learn about the political background in Indochina.<sup>51</sup> France was a "key country" to study for the SSC because Communists had made "inroads" among independent French minds during and immediately after World War II. The SSC believed it was an ideal place to see how propaganda worked on "all levels."<sup>52</sup> While the motive to visit each country was different, JDR's aim was consistent: he needed to know what the international landscape looked like before creating his own "American internationalism."

The descriptions of some of the Communist nations the SSC visited makes it clear why the men believed in the importance of their work and the necessity of American internationalism. For example, the "cold grip" of Communism in Southeast Asia scared Goodbody to the core. It is worth quoting Goodbody at length because his descriptions of these disturbing visits make his fear palpable to the reader. He writes about the beauty

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<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>51</sup> CWFA, Special Survey Committee 1943: 49-51, John C. Goodbody Report from Hong Kong, June 1950.

<sup>52</sup> CWFA, Survey Committee (Special) 1950 (Gen Corr -- Recs Retained), Itinerary.

of Hong Kong at night, where he felt it was easy to forget about Communism. But in the daytime, explains Goodbody,

Meeting men and women who have somehow managed to cross the 17-mile no-man's-land from Communist China, [makes forgetting about Communism] impossible. On the other side of the barbed wire is a land of which Americans can scarcely imagine. I'm afraid that most of us back home were so busy pin-pricking the economic or political fallacies of the Reds in China that the human suffering was obscured. All resistance is being wiped out. All foreigners are being ousted. All foreign reading matter is being burned or banned. It is a war on the mind, conducted in a great controlled vacuum.

Goodbody makes the divide between the theoretical Cold War and the actual violence occurring in Southeast Asia clear. Fears that had been parlayed into science fiction and film noir existed in the everyday lives of the Southeast Asians. It was no different in Indochina. Goodbody declares

Indochina scared the hell out of me.... Hanoi is a fairly quiet spot – for Indochina. As soon as you get near the unofficial frontier, though, you see what Communism means in Asia – villages wiped out, not only to the man but to the last stone. Not even chimneypots left standing. In the south, Saigon is a damned uneasy jewel of the orient, French postcards to the contrary. They have been lobbing in about ten mortars a night, and the fine art of terrorism and political assassination has rarely been so effective. Here again, I suppose I never really accepted the pervasive ruthlessness of Communism.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> CWFA, Survey Committee (Special) 1950 (Gen Corr – Recs Retained), Letter

While Goodbody's firsthand experience lent an urgency to the programming in Colonial Williamsburg, his shock at the conditions in Saigon emphasizes the ideological nature of the cultural Cold War. The distance between the safety of America and the danger of Communism may have been shortened for Goodbody, but generally there was no real physical threat to Americans. Goodbody's horror makes it clear just how theoretical the Cold War was to citizens of the United States. Part of the SSC's job was to make real for Americans the war being fought on the other side of the world by making Communism into an all pervasive and incontrovertible threat.

Kenneth Chorley, President of Colonial Williamsburg, was fully behind JDR's vision for CW as "Cold Warrior." In a letter to JDR, Chorley summed up the findings of the SSC: "I am sure you have noticed, as I have, that throughout all the memoranda which we receive from the Special Survey Committee, reporting on interviews held, there appears again and again, in one form or another, the indication that 'the great threat to our Democratic way of living is Communism.'"<sup>54</sup> JDR and the SSC may not have been able to recreate the terrifying bombs in Indochina for the American public, but they could still use CW to fight the idea of Communism. The SSC planned to emphasize the pleasure of the planter elite, show audiences how a democratic capitalist society thrived on choice and abundance, and prove that these ideals were natural because they were tied to the founding of the nation.

After their extensive travels abroad, the SSC prepared an exhaustive report that

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to Kershaw Burbank from John C. Goodbody, July 4, 1950.

<sup>54</sup> CWFA, Survey Committee (Special) 1950 (Gen Corr – Recs Retained), Memorandum to Mr. John D. Rockefeller III from Kenneth Chorley, March 22, 1950.

identified the ideas “developed in eighteenth-century America and which have special meaning or vitality in our crisis period today,” including “individual liberty,” “the ideal of opportunity,” “the value of reason,” and “the right to self-government.” The list of ideas corresponds to the iteration of democratic capitalism – the conflation of democratic government with a free market economy – that had evolved during the Cold War, in this case tying liberty to economic opportunity. Their post-travel report declared: “These ideas, incorporated in the flexible and dynamic tradition of democracy, are central in the present struggle of the free world for survival. The Committee examined them in the context of the heritage of all free people, and contrasted them with concepts central to Stalinist communism.”<sup>55</sup>

For each section that detailed the positive work of American society, the report stated the opposing forces at work. For example, a section on “Some Important Concepts of the Common Heritage Between Free People” is followed by “Some Basic Concepts of Stalinist Communism” and “The Appeal of Communism.” The report details “Key Point Now at Issue in the Ideological War Between Democracy and Communism,” and forcefully declares:

The citizen of the USSR and its satellites has little or no choice in the organization to which he may belong. He can join only such organizations as are approved by the government (i.e., the Communist Party). Any attempt to form an independent organization or to join one not approved by the Communist Party would lead to quick imprisonment and possible death. The free nations offer the

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<sup>55</sup> CWFA, Special Survey Committee 1943: 49-51, Draft of SSC Report, March 23, 1951.



individual the right of formation of and association with various and differing educational, religious, economic, and political organizations without fear of direct or indirect control or of compulsion by the government or other agencies.<sup>56</sup>

The SSC recognized the major determining factor that could get men on the side of democracy was the right to organize according to their own beliefs. The SSC's vision was to invite foreign students and dignitaries to CW and to provide them with information about the founding of America and the perseverance of the founding fathers' ideals, including the freedom of choice that was the basis for the Rockefellers' version of democracy. The programming at CW would "dramatize what slavery of the mind can mean; to build a democratic faith in which the free spirit of man is central, and oppose this to the purely materialistic philosophy of a monolithic state." And while the "materialistic" aspects of Communism would be derided by the SSC, one of the most important goals of the programs created by the SSC would be to "emphasize that the free nations control three-fourths of the productive capacity of the world" and are therefore much better able to offer economic security than Russia [and] to point to the policy of the U.N. majority and the U.S. to offer aid to build up depressed economic areas, the exact opposite of demonstrated Russian policy."<sup>57</sup> Here the SSC clearly links "free" with open markets and American economic prosperity. In addition, connecting general freedoms to democratic capitalism provided a reframing for the origins of the Rockefellers' wealth

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<sup>56</sup> CWFA, Survey Committee (Special) 1951 (Gen Corr – Recs Retained), "Special Survey Committee/COLONIAL WILLIAMBSURG/Confidential," February 20, 1951.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*

and power. If the SSC could successfully promote a version of democracy to foreigners that incorporated the possibilities for individual monetary success, participants in their programs would have no better example of what one could achieve through a capitalist system than the Rockefellers themselves.

In 1952, the first major program produced at Colonial Williamsburg as a result of the work by the SSC, with the help of the National Committee for a Free Europe, was the “Prelude to Independence.”<sup>58</sup> The program started in mid-May and continued through to the Fourth of July with several special events held to commemorate the Declaration of Independence.<sup>59</sup> The keynote event was a symposium where the “Williamsburg Declaration” was signed by “leaders in exile from countries now under Communist dictatorship and held in Soviet bondage behind the Iron Curtain.” Participating countries included Albania, Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania and Yugoslavia . Representatives from these countries

pledged [that] the tyranny over the mind of man shall be abolished from our countries.... We undertake, further, with the help of Divine Providence and of those loyal citizens who today suffer under the yoke of Communism, to ensure that, once these rights and principles are embodied in the new constitutions of our peoples, they shall be safeguarded and respected, for the common good of

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<sup>58</sup> CWFA, Project Committee 1951 (Gen Corr; Recs Retained), Notes from Meeting #6, November 20, 1951.

<sup>59</sup> Richard Handler, *The New History in an Old Museum: Creating the Past at Colonial Williamsburg* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1997), 64.

European civilization, and for the cultural heritage of mankind.<sup>60</sup>

It is not clear from archival documents or local news sources what happened to the leaders who signed the Williamsburg Declaration. It is clear, however, that ‘the Williamsburg story’ was being used as an incentive to free international peoples from tyranny. Using its past to assert its place in the present, Colonial Williamsburg, in the moment of the signing, was attempting to redefine the political power structures of the Cold War world. The purpose of the Prelude and the signing of the Declaration was to stop the spread of Communism abroad and to provide security to the signer via the weight of the foundations of American democracy, the restoration of the nation’s founding city and, implicitly, the great wealth and global influence of the Rockefeller family.

In attendance at The Prelude were about fifty world leaders, from both the United States and foreign countries, all gathered together to question the state of democracy and tackle pressing foreign policy issues.<sup>61</sup> The success of the inaugural “Prelude to Independence” and the signing of the “Williamsburg Declaration” led to subsequent spectacular productions. At the following year’s Prelude activities, President Eisenhower gave the keynote address.<sup>62</sup> In 1953, President Eisenhower also participated in the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration of the Rockefellers’ Museum of Modern Art (MoMA). United Nations Secretary-General Dag Hammarskjold also took part in MoMA’s 25<sup>th</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> CWFA, Pamphlets box P-54, Williamsburg International Assembly Folders 1-4.

<sup>61</sup> Greenspan, 101.

<sup>62</sup> CWFA, Pamphlets box P-54, Prelude to Independence, May 15 to July 4.

anniversary celebration and was the keynote speaker at the 1956 Prelude of Independence at Colonial Williamsburg. The involvement of key figures such as the President of the United States and the U.N. Secretary-General “helped to bolster Colonial Williamsburg’s reputation, thereby increasing the interest in the restoration of both Americans and others across the globe... making [CW] an important player in world affairs.”<sup>63</sup> The attendance of the President and the Secretary-General at two events at different cultural institutions owned by the Rockefellers showcased the power and reach of the Rockefeller family. JDR’s idea that he could shape the future of the Cold War world was not fanciful; his wealth and connections suggested his ideas would be taken seriously. If the President of the United States wanted to associate himself with both CW and MoMA, then one can assume the agenda at both institutions was backed by the full weight of the United States government.

The annual symposium continued to draw important political, cultural, and economic leaders, proof that Colonial Williamsburg was understood as a legitimate place to enact Cold War diplomacy and pro-democratic propaganda. For example, in 1954, Secretary of State John Foster Dulles delivered a speech on “The Challenge to Freedom,” and in 1956 United Nations Secretary-General Dag Hammarskjold gave a speech on “The International Significance of the Bill of Rights.”<sup>64</sup> In his speech, Hammarskjold tacitly applauded the role CW was playing in influencing the spread of democracy by reiterating the importance of positive action: “If, at long last, the recognition of human dignity

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<sup>63</sup> Greenspan, 101.

<sup>64</sup> CWFA, Pamphlets box P-54, Prelude to Independence.

means to give others freedom from fear, then that recognition cannot be simply a question of passive acceptance. It is a question of the positive action that must be taken in order to kill fear.”<sup>65</sup> Hammarskjold’s speech was referring to the mission of the U.N. as written in the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which was based on the Bill of Rights. At the same time the Secretary-General was also pointing out the hard work of the program developers at CW. Dean Acheson, Lester B. Pearson, leader of the liberal party of Canada and winner of the Nobel Peace Prize, and Dr. Glenn T. Seaborg, Chairman of the Atomic Energy Commission, also spoke at the Prelude.

Another long running program established because of the SSC targeted foreign graduate students and American graduate students that were going to study abroad. The purpose of the “International Assembly,” the event described at the beginning of this chapter by Russell Lynes, was to teach foreign students about the humble beginnings of the great nation known in the 1950s as the world’s greatest super power. If a democratic government combined with a capitalist economy could transform the United States from a colony into a superpower, surely the same could happen in other countries. In 1957, over forty foreign graduate students who were studying in American colleges and universities came to Williamsburg to hear “authoritative speakers on aspects of the national scene and to exchange their own view of this country and its ways.”<sup>66</sup> The idea was that exchange students would attend the assembly after finishing their degrees, just before returning to their native countries. The program curators at CW would provide the

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<sup>65</sup> CWFA, Pamphlets box P-54, Prelude to Independence, May 15 to July 4.

<sup>66</sup> CWFA, Pamphlets box P-54, Williamsburg International Assembly Folders 1.

last word on American social and political life for foreign students to “recall when thinking of their American adventure.”<sup>67</sup> American students planning to study abroad could also attend the assembly; the information disseminated would ensure that these student-ambassadors would have a positive mindset about American cultural life as they traveled in Europe and Asia. As participants in the assembly wandered the globe, the hope was that they would praise not only democratic capitalism but also the restoration at Colonial Williamsburg, what the Rockefellers believed to be the perfect example of American ideals – hard work and prosperity.

The students who attended the first International Assembly represented forty nations, including nine that had “won independence since World War II. Sixteen of the students [were] from western Europe, twelve from Asia and the Far East, six from the Middle and Near East, four from Latin America, three from Africa and one from Canada.” Furthermore, the students all held positions that would influence their communities at home. The Colonial Williamsburg News reported on the composition of the body of students in that first year:

A third of the students are women, including representatives from Israel, Egypt, Jordan, Turkey and Nepal. More than 25 percent of the entire group hold responsible positions with government or private industry in their homelands. More than half are doing graduate work for teaching, training teachers or guidance work in their native lands, while a fourth are either entering or are already members of the diplomatic service or other branches of their

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<sup>67</sup> CWFA, Pamphlets box P-54, Williamsburg International Assembly Folders 1-4.

governments.<sup>68</sup>

Working with students involved in government and education ensured that the spread of CW's message would influence current and future prominent thinkers in these foreign countries.

Participants in the inaugural event included former director of the Metropolitan Museum of Art Francis Henry Taylor, President of the Institute of International Education in New York City Kenneth Holland, editor and publisher of *Fortune* magazine Ralph Delahey Paine Jr., and head of the National Urban League Julian A. Thomas. The men were representatives of major culture-making industries. Collectively, these men represented businesses that shaped American culture; the implication was that they hoped to shape foreign culture, too. It is significant as well that Urban League leader Julian A. Thomas was present at the first International Assembly. Including a voice of social progress was important on the Cold War stage. Racial discrimination in a supposedly free nation was a mainstay in anti-American propaganda. Therefore, it was key for the organizers of the International Assembly to include a civil rights representative in order to exemplify America's commitment to racial equality.

In the opening year of the International Assembly, Frank P. Graham, United Nations Mediator, gave the keynote speech, which centered on the idea that the world should unite in a "human brotherhood under God in this age of peril and hope." He "suggested that 'what America does in her states about freedom may determine what the

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<sup>68</sup> "Assembly To Attract Outstanding International Students" from May 1957 "Colonial Williamsburg News" (vo. 9, num. 12, pg. 1), folder 1430, box 164, series E, RG 2, Rockefeller Family Archives, RAC.

United Nations does in the states of the world.”<sup>69</sup> Graham made it very clear that the United States was the model that the U.N. would follow. The importance of Williamsburg was implicit in Graham’s assertion: the U.N. would naturally look to Williamsburg, birthplace of the modern United States, and modern democracy, to base its own structure and regulations.

Goodbody, who had moved from the SSC to the position of CW’s Director of Project Planning, wrote of the assembly in that first year, “It is reassuring to find one authority convinced that the Assembly was ‘a perfect expression of Williamsburg’s inner meaning and purpose,’ and another writing that ‘your little town with its creative interpretation and re-interpretation of history can and will become a dynamo of power in the new world age.”<sup>70</sup> JDR and the SSC had turned the restoration at Colonial Williamsburg into a “massive cold war enterprise...a patriotic shrine” that intended to shape its guests into freedom-loving consumers of American culture.<sup>71</sup> The graduate students in attendance at the International Assembly would become global operatives for American nationalism and democracy.

The historical America presented at Colonial Williamsburg was cleaned-up and quaint, and what visitors saw was a “stable, essential meaning [housed] in some golden

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<sup>69</sup> CWFA, Pamphlets box P-54, Williamsburg International Assembly Folders 1-4. *Richmond News Leader*, “Pleas Made to Mankind In Dr. Graham’s Speech” by Courtney Ward, June 13, 1957.

<sup>70</sup> CWFA, Pamphlets box P-54, Williamsburg International Assembly Folders 1. Report on the first International Assembly, October 1, 1957.

<sup>71</sup> Wallace, 18.



past.”<sup>72</sup> The cultural exchange, as argued by Laura A. Belmonte in *Selling the American Way: U.S. Propaganda at the Cold War*, “preserved America’s international prestige...[by defining] the United States as a nation of affluence, progress, and personal fulfillment.”<sup>73</sup> For example, Courtney Ward reported in the *Richmond News Leader*, that “The United States walked off with straight-A grades as some 42 foreign graduate students met here today for the first session of the Williamsburg International Assembly.”<sup>74</sup> Here we see Williamsburg as synecdoche for America. According to Ward, Miss Bhind Swari Malla, a young woman from Nepal who had recently completed her master’s degree in International Affairs at the School of Advanced Studies at Johns Hopkins, came to the conclusion that “Americans are genuinely concerned about others.” Miss Malla “planned to remain in her homeland for at least two years.” This note hammers home the point that the students educated in Colonial Williamsburg at the International Assembly would then spread their new knowledge in their native countries. Miss Malla would return to a country where over 98 percent of the population was illiterate but also where a broader educational system was forming. More importantly, a

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<sup>72</sup> Daniel J. Walkowitz, *City Folk: English Country Dance and the Politics of Folk in Modern America* (New York: New York University Press, 2010), 4. See also John Brinckerhoff Jackson, *The Necessity for Ruins and Other Topics* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1980). In the essay “The Necessity for Ruins” Jackson argues that “much of our enthusiasm for historical preservation” stems from nostalgia for a “vernacular past,” where “history means less the record of significant events and people than the preservation of reminders of a bygone domestic existence and environment,” when an innocent and simplistic “golden age prevailed” (88-89, 98).

<sup>73</sup> Laura A. Belmonte, *Selling the American Way: U.S. Propaganda and the Cold War* (Philadelphia, Penn.: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), 50.

<sup>74</sup> CWFA, Pamphlets box P-54, Williamsburg International Assembly Folders 1. Assorted clippings.

few months after Miss Malla's return, the "first election of [Nepal's] constitutional monarchy" was scheduled to be held.<sup>75</sup> The assumption the newspaper makes is that Miss Malla would influence the educational and political future of Nepal with pro-American ideas.

Reporting on the Cold War programs happening at Colonial Williamsburg shored up public support for the international exchanges. The *Richmond News Leader* made sure to declare that the International Assembly was a victory for U.S.-global relations. In an article titled "Williamsburg Gets International Flavor as Foreign Students Begin Study of America," several photos of foreign students happily cavorting in Williamsburg and Jamestown visually reinforced the success of the event.<sup>76</sup> In addition to garnering public support, program coordinators at CW ensured the success of future assemblies by continuing to book important cultural figures as headline speakers. Publishing maven Alfred Knopf and historian/author Arthur Schlesinger Sr. attended the assembly in 1959; MoMA director Rene d'Harmoncourt attended in 1961; in 1968 George Kennan and philosopher/activist Noam Chomsky were on the bill; and in 1971 public intellectual Arthur Schlesinger Jr. continued the work of keeping CW relevant in local and world affairs.

Outside of Colonial Williamsburg, the project planners at CW worked with the New York State Board of Regents and the State Department to spread 'the Williamsburg story.' In the early 1950s, the New York State Regents formed a Committee on

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<sup>75</sup> CWFA, Pamphlets box P-54, Williamsburg International Assembly Folders 1. *Richmond News Leader*, "Williamsburg Gets International Flavor as Foreign Students Begin Study of America," June 10, 1957.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*

International Understanding, with the goal of improving the teaching of “America and its place in the world; America and its international friends and enemies; America and its role in the present crisis.” The project planners at Colonial Williamsburg were included in an outside advisory group formed by the Regents. Goodbody saw two ways that Colonial Williamsburg could be involved in New York’s educational programming: first, in the planning stage, where the Regents were “most anxious” to use the working notes compiled by the Special Survey Committee, in particular the “key points at issue in the ideological war between democracy and communism”; and second, as a “graphic laboratory... for possible collaboration in publications, films, radio, of TV programs, etc.” Part of the mission defined by John D. Rockefeller III was to reach those with ‘the Williamsburg story’ that might not make it to Virginia. A collaboration with the New York State Regents offered a major opportunity for CW to bring its story north. Working with the New York State education system meant access to huge audiences: over 2,000,000 students of various religious and ethnic backgrounds, 900,000 aliens of mostly Italian and German descent, an active adult education program, and a program in the works to “start teaching the truth about communism on the fourth, fifth, and sixth grade level – having in mind the success which communists have had with children of this age in Russia and the satellite countries.”<sup>77</sup> The SSC would leave no stone, or pupil, left unturned. Like the pay-it-forward intentions of the International Assembly programming, a partnership with the New York State education board would mean exponential proliferation of the Rockefellers’ version of America’s founding ideals.

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<sup>77</sup> CWFA, Survey Committee (Special) 1951 (Gen Corr – Recs Retained), Memo on NYS Regents.

Once again, press reception of the Rockefellers' Colonial Williamsburg with the New York State Regents was enthusiastic. CW's plan for revamping New York State schools' history program made headlines in the October 19, 1950, issue of the *New York Times*: "Schools Map War on Reds' Ideology." The special committee, in which Goodbody and Burbank were involved, made plans "for enlisting the state's public and private high schools in the ideological war against communism."<sup>78</sup> The new curriculum aimed to provide a single and clear-cut interpretation of what the *New York Times* called the "present world crisis." It would be sent to every secondary school in New York State - public, private and parochial - and would include teaching materials to reinforce the curriculum. Chancellor William J. Walling of the Board of Regents explained the necessity of the updated curriculum: "All too often...teachers are afraid to talk about communism because of the touchiness of the topic.... As a result of the new project...students will be able to contrast the rights of citizens in a democracy with the lack of privileges in a totalitarian country."<sup>79</sup> Like the original report written by the SSC, the Regents planned a program that juxtaposed democracy with Communism and supposedly let students come to their own conclusions about each ideology. Making the choice to understand democracy as the better of the two ideologies mimicked the act of democratic government, being given a choice and making it for oneself. Ultimately, the students would understand "what makes a nation great"- the ultimate purpose of the work

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<sup>78</sup> Leonard Buder, "Schools Map War on Reds' Ideology," *New York Times*, Oct. 19, 1950.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*

of the Special Survey Committee.<sup>80</sup>

The program developers at Colonial Williamsburg worked with student groups in other ways by bringing the winners of the Voice of Democracy program to the restoration in 1949. Four high school students from across the United States were “awarded prizes...for essays on the theme of democratic government.”<sup>81</sup> Almost ten years later another program for high school students was instituted: “Williamsburg Student Burgesses.” In its inaugural year, 1959, the students heard Mohammed Ali, Pakistan’s Ambassador to the United States, speak at the House of Burgesses about the dangers of Communism and its relationship to young people. The theme of the gathering was “Democratic Leadership in the World Today: A Challenge to Youth.” Ali delivered this message: “The major responsibility for overcoming the moral and spiritual poverty which breeds Communism will fall upon the young people of the world.” Fittingly, Ali told the students that the “challenge of the future” would be to create “a world in which all nations can live in harmony and without fear.”<sup>82</sup> The creators of educational programming at Colonial Williamsburg believed America’s youth were “perhaps the most likely to be swayed by communism.”<sup>83</sup> Programs targeting junior high school and high school students intended to teach America’s youth at an early age why a democratic capitalist system was superior to Communism by emphasizing what the SSC believed to

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<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>81</sup> Greenspan, 100.

<sup>82</sup> Feb. 1958 “Colonial Williamsburg News” (vo. 10, num. 9, pg. 1), folder 1431, box 164, series E, RG 2, Rockefeller Family Archives, RAC.

<sup>83</sup> Greenspan, 101.

be basic American beliefs: individual and national freedom, choice of religious faith, and the right to property ownership.<sup>84</sup>

The SSC extended its reach outside of the United States via information distributed internationally by the State Department. The co-operative program between Colonial Williamsburg and the State Department was already underway as the Special Survey Committee dispatched its reports to John D. Rockefeller III. In 1951, there were increased efforts to create more joint activities, such as “taking ‘the Williamsburg story’ abroad through the State Department’s information program – by means of radio and television; motion pictures, slides, and film strips; newspaper and magazine articles and/or photographic releases; and books and exhibits.”<sup>85</sup> After World War II, the information-campaign created by the United States was to spread “a fair and full picture of American life.” However, Goodbody notes that in response to prolific communist propaganda, “the policy [of American propaganda] has shifted.” Emphasis was now also placed on discounting Communism rather than just glorifying the American way of life. The two aims of State Department outposts were to “expose Communist claims... [and] to emphasize that ‘we are all in the same boat.’”<sup>86</sup> In the ideological Cold War, the forms the threat of Communism could take were often left unspecified so that American

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<sup>84</sup> Belmonte, 59.

<sup>85</sup> CWFA, Survey Committee (Special) 1951 (in Gen Corr; Recs Retained), Memo: “State Department-Colonial Williamsburg Co-operation” for the files written by John C. Goodbody, August 23, 1951.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*

propagandists could turn Communism into whatever beast suited their latest campaign.<sup>87</sup>

What was most important to define was what America could bring to the global community: industrial progress and economic affluence made possible through a democratic government.

To make the message a viable one for a global audience, Goodbody emphasized to the State Department that the overall raising up of democracy had to be tailored based on “the varying social, religious, and historical contexts of various areas of the world.”<sup>88</sup> For example, self-government was stressed in Asia, economic rehabilitation was the focus in Europe, and in New Delhi pro-democracy books and documents were supplied to help frame the new Indian constitution. Both the SSC and the State Department saw opportunities to use Colonial Williamsburg as a tool to spread pro-democratic ideas internationally, and they could shape the understanding of the restoration into whatever

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<sup>87</sup> One event that the SSC suggested take place at CW was a gathering of American scientists to combat the possibility of brainwashing done by communists. Goodbody suggested that several different kinds of U.S. scientists meet in Williamsburg so that they could come up with a “dramatic and definitive” statement about the possibilities of Russian psychological warfare. In 1954, Goodbody wrote to the State Department about the idea: “One theme which the [National Committee for a Free Europe] is emphasizing is the calculated scientific use of such things as food as a weapon by the Communists. In other words, Pavlov’s experiments and others of present Russian scientists are actually being applied to human beings. If rats will run through certain gates when made desperate by lack of food, the Russians may calculate the breaking point in human beings in similar circumstances whether inside or outside the Iron Curtain. The NCFE quite properly holds that this calculated tyranny is of a nature quite different from that of past history – even the ruthless raping and pillaging of the Huns” (CWFA, Microfilm CC-003.110 re “Project Planning 1953-56.” Letter to Mr. Alexander from John C. Goodbody, July 14, 1954). While the event did not make it into CW’s programs, Goodbody’s letter deserves to be shared as a showcase of his passion for JDR’s cause and his innovative Cold Warrior ideas.

<sup>88</sup> CWFA, Survey Committee (Special) 1951 (in Gen Corr; Recs Retained), Memo: “State Department-Colonial Williamsburg Co-operation” for the files written by John C. Goodbody, August 23, 1951.

these nations needed it to be. The point was that peoples outside of the United States were choosing to use democratic ideals to shape their nations rather than communist ones. Whether modeling a constitution, or figuring out the application of States' rights, America became the model which other nations would emulate, which raised the political status of the nation via Colonial Williamsburg in the Cold War world.

Williamsburg was included in a publication created by the Institute of International Education (IIE) called *Meet the U.S.A.*, which was the standard manual prepared by the IIE for all foreign students studying the States.<sup>89</sup> The Department of Defense purchased several copies of the film "Decision at Williamsburg," a dramatization of the causes and events of the American Revolution, with the intention of having a copy on hand at every major Armed Forces Film Library.<sup>90</sup> The film "Eighteenth Century Life in Williamsburg, Virginia" was shown broadly overseas, everywhere from India to Norway to Israel to Peru.<sup>91</sup> The *Richmond News Leader* even reported on the widespread consumption of the film in a news article titled "Film on

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<sup>89</sup> CWFA, Project Committee 1951 (Gen Corr; Recs Retained), Notes from Meeting #6, November 20, 1951.

<sup>90</sup> CWFA, Microfilm CC-003.110 re "Project Planning 1953-56." Letter to Mr. Frank S. Hopkins from John C. Goodbody, April 12, 1954. "Society News," *Dixon Evening Telegraph* (April 9, 1954): 5, <http://www.newspapers.com/newspage/7685954/>.

<sup>91</sup> CWFA, Project Committee 1951 (Gen Corr; Recs Retained). August 9, 1951. "Eighteenth Century Life in Williamsburg, Virginia" was shown in India, Belgium, Denmark, Egypt, France, Finland, Greece, Norway, Netherlands, Iran, Iraq, Philippines, Turkey, Italy, Sweden, Iceland, Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Cuba, Ecuador, England, Israel, Mexico, Thailand, Venezuela and Austria. There was "no report" from Burma, Poland, Yugoslavia, Lebanon, Hungary, Indonesia, Pakistan, Peru, Uruguay, Ceylon, and Bolivia. The largest number of people who saw the video were in Belgium, Philippines, Italy, Turkey, Thailand, and Ecuador. The screenings listed took place between January 1 - June 15, 1951.



Colonial Williamsburg Appeals to Yugoslavian Crowd.” Reporter Will Whiteside explains that “Tito’s Yugoslavia is a long way from Williamsburg, Va., but the entire population of this small Adriatic town tried to get in to see a film picture of life in the colonies in the eighteenth century.... Yugoslavs are extremely curious about all phases of American life. The pictures serve a double purpose of free entertainment and enlightenment.”<sup>92</sup>

Films and booklets about the restoration and life in CW were sent out and put to use through Radio Free Europe (RFE) and in “releases and pamphlets prepared by the Crusade for Freedom.”<sup>93</sup> RFE was founded in Berlin in 1950 under the auspices of the National Committee for a Free Europe, which was run by the Central Intelligence Agency.<sup>94</sup> RFE was known for “soliciting the service of information behind the Iron Curtain, monitoring Communist broadcasts, underwriting anti-Communist lectures and writings by western intellectuals, and distributing its ‘research’ internationally to scholars and journalists (including those affiliated with the Congress for Cultural Freedom).” The Crusade for Freedom acted as the “fund-raising arm” for the RFE.<sup>95</sup> The use of materials prepared by Colonial Williamsburg by two major U.S. propaganda agencies showcases the influence of John D. Rockefeller III and his Special Survey Committee.

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<sup>92</sup> CWFA, Project Committee 1951 (Gen Corr; Recs Retained). *Richmond News Leader*, “Film on Colonial Williamsburg Appeals to Yugoslavian Crowd” by Will Whiteside, August 6, 1951.

<sup>93</sup> CWFA, Project Committee 1951 (Gen Corr; Recs Retained), Notes from Meeting #6, November 20, 1951.

<sup>94</sup> Frances Stonor Saunders, *The Cultural Cold War: The CIA and the World of Arts and Letters* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2000), 91.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, 132.

The relationship between CW and the U.S. government continued into the 1980s, as CW served as a rest stop for visiting foreign dignitaries. When former Deputy Under-Secretary of State Carl Humelsine took a place in Colonial Williamsburg's administration as Executive Vice President in 1953, "the White House and State Department realized official foreign visitors would be enchanted with Colonial Williamsburg, and that guests would always be graciously and professionally welcomed and entertained."<sup>96</sup> Humelsine cultivated a "strong liaison between Washington and Colonial Williamsburg," the latter of which entertained "more than 130 foreign leaders on separate occasions as well as five U.S. Presidents – Eisenhower, Johnson, Nixon, Ford, and Reagan" between 1953 and 1985.<sup>97</sup> Visitors were ushered through the historic triangle and given the opportunity to admire the "glittery and glamorous and prosperous" nation that sprang up from the settlements at Williamsburg, Jamestown and Yorktown.<sup>98</sup> The "great bourgeois rituals and political ceremonies" enacted for foreign dignitaries sent down from the nation's capital affirmed that Colonial Williamsburg had made it as a site of importance in the Cold War.<sup>99</sup>

John D. Rockefeller III saw an opportunity to use Colonial Williamsburg to both spread pro-democratic capitalist ideas in the global postwar world and to increase his own stature within his family. JDR's vision for CW, the funding and formation of the

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<sup>96</sup> CWFA, Don Gonzales, *Host to the World* (Unpublished manuscript), 2.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>98</sup> Richard M. Fried, *The Russians are Coming! The Russians are Coming!: Pageantry and Patriotism in Cold War America*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 102.

<sup>99</sup> Wallace, 20.

SSC, and the implementation of the knowledge the SSC gained into Cold War cultural diplomacy made Colonial Williamsburg an important site for Cold War culture making. However, JDR's actual time at CW was short. It should be noted that in 1953 JDR resigned as chairman of CW to become chairman of the Rockefeller Foundation because of a conflict with his father. JDR himself admitted he did not know exactly what went wrong at CW. In a letter to John D. Jr. JDR wrote, "[M]ay I be perfectly frank and say that it is not clear to me what the disagreement is between you and me as to the education program, or, I would go even further and say, as to the program and policies of the Restoration generally."<sup>100</sup> JDR saw the potential of the restoration to boost the global perception of America and its founding ideas in the Cold War world. His father, however, believed Colonial Williamsburg should solely be used to recreate the past for the public. Translating that experience into contemporaneous Cold War politics meant deemphasizing the teachings of the past and the alignment of the Rockefeller name with America's "silk stocking patriots."<sup>101</sup> Both father and son wanted to add gravitas to the Rockefeller name by soldering the visitors' experience at Colonial Williamsburg to the Rockefellers' presentation of the past. However, they did not agree on the best way to achieve their mutual goal.

The planter elite narrative supported by the Rockefellers focused on the role of successful white laborers, entrepreneurs, and political leaders in the formation of American democracy. While JDR supported this narrative, he also wanted to create a

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<sup>100</sup> Letter from John D. Rockefeller III to John D. Rockefeller Jr., June 19, 1952, folder 249, box 42, series 4, RG 5, Rockefeller Family Archives, RAC.

<sup>101</sup> Eric Gable, "Making a 'Public' to Remake the Past at an American Heritage Site," *Museum Anthropology* 21, no. 1 (1997): 58.

more equal working environment for black laborers at Colonial Williamsburg. While there is little evidence in the archives of the conflict, it has been suggested that JDR was in part dismissed from his role at Colonial Williamsburg because he was uncomfortable with the racial segregation – separate dining and housing accommodations were provided for workers of color – that was practiced at the restoration. In his book *The Rockefellers at Williamsburg: Backstage with the Founders, Restorers and World-Renowned Guests*, Donald J. Gonzales blames the Jim Crow laws that pervaded the Deep South for continued segregation in the 1940s and 1950s at Colonial Williamsburg.

As explained by Gonzales, John D. Rockefeller III decided to desegregate Colonial Williamsburg when he became chairman in 1949. In a draft of a statement to be read at the House of Burgesses, JDR wrote “In answer to questions we have been asked by many people, we now therefore say that all who come here to draw inspiration from this Restoration will be welcomed and housed and fed in the facilities of Colonial Williamsburg without regard to race, creed or color.”<sup>102</sup> The statement was never read, however, because John D. Jr. changed the language, substituting “insofar as that is reasonably possible” for “without regard to race, creed or color.” Gonzales claims that John D. Jr. had “deep pro-minority, liberal feelings on the issue” but believed more strongly in abiding by “the Commonwealth’s customs and rules.”<sup>103</sup> Harr and Johnson explain in *The Rockefeller Century* that “Junior may well have been irritated by JDR’s

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<sup>102</sup> Donald J. Gonzales, *The Rockefellers at Williamsburg: Backstage with the Founders, Restorers and World-Renowned Guests* (McLean, Va.: EPM Publications, 1991), 140.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*

raising of the matter [of segregation].... There is no record of their discussion on the racial question, but in the end JDR felt he had no choice but to accede to his father's judgment."<sup>104</sup> Just as John D. Jr. supposedly felt beholden to the rules of the state, JDR's top priority, it seems, was appeasing his father.

Gonzales's books brings up another interesting question about race relations at Colonial Williamsburg. Gonzales argues John D. Jr. was progressive because of the major financial assistance he had given to African Americans. Grants to black Southern schools and the Hampton Institute at Hampton, Virginia, as well as support given to the Urban League and the United Negro Fund supposedly showed the Rockefellers' investment in progressive race relations. Giving money to minority groups was not the same as promoting equal rights. In its essence John D. Rockefeller Jr.'s monetary support of blacks without pushing for parity implicitly reinforced the policy of separate but equal: while he may have offered limited aid to the black community, he certainly did not actively promote equality.

Jim Crow laws were often a source of "embarrassment" for United States officials trying to persuade the international community that America was the land of freedom and democracy.<sup>105</sup> Racial tensions at Colonial Williamsburg were hidden from visitors by the restoration's focus on the narrative of the planter elite. As told by Colonial Williamsburg, hard work and diligence could lead to great social change; white colonists

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<sup>104</sup> Harr and Johnson, 495.

<sup>105</sup> John David Skrentny, "The Effect of the Cold War on African-American Civil Rights: America and the World Audience, 1945-1968," *Theory and Society* 27.2 (April 1998): 238.

were able to organize, fight, and resist their colonizers to create a new democratic world. JDR and the museum organizers were able to “duck” prying questions about race relations by connecting all social movements to the American Revolution.<sup>106</sup> While black people in Williamsburg may have, as Gonzales claims, “benefited directly from employment on restoration activities and income generated from them,” their role as laborers institutionalized race and class divisions at Colonial Williamsburg. Even JDR’s vision of an American internationalism promoted a democratic-capitalist system ruled by the planter elite. He may have wanted to desegregate Colonial Williamsburg, but he was firmly tied to the exclusionary narrative endorsed by the restoration.

Despite JDR’s early dismissal from CW, his vision influenced both the programs created by CW and the reception of CW in the Cold War world for decades after his resignation. After his work on the SSC, John C. Goodbody became an assistant to the Director of Interpretation, Edward P. Alexander. Goodbody had “duties ‘very largely of a planning nature, designed chiefly to improve [the] interpretation program outside Williamsburg.’” As detailed in this chapter, Goodbody worked on broad programs with the State Department, the Democracy Workshop and the Prelude to Independence. When the 350<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the settlement of Jamestown drew close, Goodbody became heavily involved in the planning for a new information and lodging complex and coordinating “The Story of a Patriot” project, which was an orientation film to be shown

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<sup>106</sup> Greenspan, 74. In the essay “The African-American Community in Williamsburg (1947-1998),” part of a collection produced in conjunction with Williamsburg’s 300<sup>th</sup> Anniversary, Rex M. Ellis writes that John D. Rockefeller Jr. “insisted from the outset of his financing of the town’s restoration that facilities operated by Colonial Williamsburg be integrated” (236). This statement contradicts the information presented in the work of Harr and Johnson and Gonzales.

at the new information center.<sup>107</sup>

Educational programming at CW like “Prelude to Independence” and the “International Assembly” was just part of the restoration’s overall Cold War project. Former Chairman and President of Colonial Williamsburg (2000-2014) Colin Campbell stated in the Christmas newsletter of 2004 that Colonial Williamsburg had “written some instructive history of its own.” The ownership Campbell took of Colonial Williamsburg’s active writing of history, of telling its own story, is indicative of the power of the restoration and its influence on perceptions of American culture. Campbell frames the work of the Special Survey Committee as responding to the “clash of communism and self-determination [that] began the Cold War.” One of the primary purposes of the Special Survey Committee was to “detail threats” to the “American concepts advanced early in Williamsburg.”<sup>108</sup> John D. Rockefeller III saw an opportunity for Colonial Williamsburg to play a larger role in the creation of American Cold War ideology by showing how communist threats attacked the core American ideals showcased in the restoration: tenacity, perseverance, and prosperity. After surveying the state of Communism around the globe, Kershaw Burbank and John C. Goodbody, under JDR’s direction, wrote a report that laid the foundation upon which CW’s education agenda was based for the next several decades. The goal of that agenda was to create and spread a new kind of American internationalism that would assert America’s economic,

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<sup>107</sup> From “Chronology: John C. Goodbody (JCG) at Colonial Williamsburg (CW)” created by CWFA April 7, 2011; last updated April 20, 2011.

<sup>108</sup> Colin G. Campbell, “Opportunities and Responsibilities,” *Colonial Williamsburg Foundation*, accessed January 2013, <http://www.history.org/Foundation/journal/Christmas04/president.cfm>

political and cultural power in the second half of the twentieth-century.

When John D. Rockefeller Jr. first started the restoration of Colonial Williamsburg, his intention was to revitalize the city where the foundation of American democracy was laid. The restoration of America's past through Colonial Williamsburg via the millions of dollars spent by John D. Jr. and his son JDR was intended to improve the family's reputation. John D. Rockefeller III's insistence that Colonial Williamsburg take part in the ideological battles of the Cold War made it clear that the Rockefellers would be associated with the new American internationalism that would dominate the postwar world. John D. Rockefeller III's efforts to construct Colonial Williamsburg as a site for Cold War culture-making realized the family's goal of tying the "American experience" – past, present, and future – with the Rockefeller name.



## Chapter Two

### What's Old is New: The Abby Aldrich Rockefeller Folk Art Collection and American Modern Art

In 1957, a new building for the Abby Aldrich Rockefeller Folk Art Collection opened in Williamsburg, Virginia. The museum was located on South England Street, just next to the restored area of John D. Rockefeller Jr.'s Colonial Williamsburg. The collection did not quite fit the eighteenth-century scheme found just a block over; nevertheless, the museum was kept at Colonial Williamsburg because it played an important role in the Rockefellers' project to shape the past in order to influence the future. At the museum's opening reception, Mitchell A. Wilder, Vice-President of Colonial Williamsburg and Director of the Abby Aldrich Rockefeller Folk Art Collection, contextualized the building's contents by dedicating the "*new* building to a *renewed* purpose [sic]."<sup>1</sup> In the 1930s Abby Aldrich Rockefeller had championed American folk art as the precursor to American modern art. The opening of the new building in 1957 renewed the narrative of American folk art providing the foundation of modern art as a part of the Rockefellers' larger Cold War plan to shape modern American culture.

At the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in New York City and through the restoration of Colonial Williamsburg (CW), the Rockefeller family attempted to influence twentieth-century American culture by managing the presentation of the past. Their aims with the Abby Aldrich Rockefeller Folk Art Collection were no different.

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<sup>1</sup> Williamsburg, Virginia, Colonial Williamsburg Foundation Archives (hereafter designated CWFA), Block 42, #32, AARFAC – Opening – March-Dec 1957, "An Address by Mitchell A. Wilder," March 15, 1957.

With help from two specialists in American folk art, Holger Cahill and Edith Gregor Halpert, Abby Aldrich Rockefeller amassed a collection of folk art that was offered as inspiration for modern American artists such as Yasuo Kuniyoshi and Charles Sheeler. As she first put together her collection in the early 1930s, Abby Aldrich Rockefeller was fascinated by the aesthetic links between American folk art and the art works being collected for her newly founded Museum of Modern Art. As time went on, it became clear to Mrs. Rockefeller that American folk art could be viewed as the inspiration for American modern art. While the world believed American modernists were inspired by European artists, Mrs. Rockefeller, Cahill, and Halpert shaped the narrative that modern art in America was born of its native culture.

Rather than locating the roots of American modern art in folk art, art historians often look at 1913 as the year modern art came to America. This was the year of the “The International Exhibition of Modern Art,” or more commonly, the “Armory Show.” The show, which opened in New York and then traveled to Chicago and Boston, included works from the most advanced movements in European art and is credited with changing the art market in America.<sup>2</sup> In the same year as the Armory Show of 1913, the first lady of the United States redid the president’s bedroom as the “Blue Mountain Room,” decorating it with homespun rugs and coverlets. Mrs. Woodrow Wilson’s choice of interior design implicitly linked folk and folk craft with the spirit and governance of

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<sup>2</sup> For more on the effects of the 1913 Armory show on art collection in the United States, see Peter Watson, *From Manet to Manhattan: The Rise of the Modern Art Market* (New York: Random House, 1992) and Elizabeth Lunday, *The Modern Art Invasion: Picasso, Duchamp, and the 1913 Armory Show that Scandalized America* (Guilford, Conn.: Lyons Press, 2013).

America.<sup>3</sup> While one part of the art crowd was swooning over cubism, another set felt that the first lady's decorations reinvigorated folk art's legitimacy and cultural value. These two stories exemplify Americans' search for a distinctive culture, or what Van Wyck Brooks termed in his 1915 treatise *America's Coming-of-Age*, a "useable past." Brooks represented a generation of young writers that envisioned a "new art, distinctively modern and American." However, they felt there was no "intellectual understanding of, or visual forms for, a modern national identity," so American tradition would have to be redefined in a way that suited their creative endeavors.<sup>4</sup> Similarly, American artists were looking to Europe for inspiration while American art collectors were finding ways to glorify the homespun culture already in existence.<sup>5</sup> The institutionalization of folk craft and the rise of modern art were parallel occurrences that simultaneously shaped American modern culture. Abby Aldrich Rockefeller was part of both narratives, championing modern art at her museum in New York City and uplifting humble

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<sup>3</sup> Simon J. Bronner, *Explaining Traditions: Folk Behavior in Modern Culture*, (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2011), 143.

<sup>4</sup> Wanda Corn, *The Great American Thing: Modern Art and National Identity, 1915-1935* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), xv.

<sup>5</sup> For more on the discovery of folk culture, see Henry D. Shapiro's *Appalachia on Our Mind: The Southern Mountain and Mountaineers in the American Consciousness, 1870-1920* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1978) and David Whisnant's *All That is Native and Fine: The Politics of Culture in an American Region* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1983). Both Shapiro and Whisnant consider the calculated construction of an Appalachian identity based on romantic notions of indigenous mountain culture. Shapiro's account focuses on writers in the second half of the nineteenth century that invented an Appalachian identity distinct from the rest of the U.S. Whisnant considers the destruction of true mountain culture by social agents in the late nineteenth and early twentieth-centuries and the resultant fabricated Appalachian culture meant to appeal to the genteel masses.

American folk art with her expansive collection.

If “modern art was a protest” against industrialization, as Simon J. Bronner argues in his book *Explaining Traditions: Folk Behavior in Modern Culture*, then “folk craft stood for the preindustrial.”<sup>6</sup> Both types of artworks worked toward the same goal, to imbue the viewer with a sense of security in rapidly changing times. The modern artist’s creations shared the anxieties about the modern world with viewers, while folk art became the symbol of simpler times. Folk art in many respects was a medium that “romanticized” the past. Eugene Metcalf explains in his essay “The Politics of the Past in American Folk Art History” that folk artists were the “epitome of the American common man, gloriously unaware of the constraints of higher civilization, and acting out their lives in harmony with the natural American landscape.”<sup>7</sup> The imagined values of the folk artist, those of the hardworking yet free-spirited man, were representative of the industrious and creative spirit of the American patriot.

The first straightforward definition of folk art was published in October of 1930 by Lincoln Kirstein, in a pamphlet that accompanied an exhibition of American folk painting organized for the Harvard Society for Contemporary Art in connection with the Massachusetts Tercentenary Celebration. The exhibition, as Beatrix T. Rumford details in her essay “Uncommon Art of the Common People: A Review of Trends in the Collecting and Exhibiting of American Folk Art,” “was designed to stress the continuity

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<sup>6</sup> Bronner, 148.

<sup>7</sup> Eugene W. Metcalf, “The Politics of the Past in American Folk Art History” in *Folk Art and Folk Worlds*, ed. John Michael Vlach and Simon J. Bronner (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1986), 41.

of American art by calling attention to the modern look of earlier pictorial material.”<sup>8</sup> Kirstein and his colleagues strove to connect folk art to the aesthetic of European modern art. Like many others, Kirstein was responding to the opportunity presented after World War I for the United States to triumph in visual arts in tandem with its new role as a global economic leader.<sup>9</sup> The interwar competition for artistic mastery was paired in the United States with a fierce rise in nationalism. Rumford explains that folk art glorified the “simple life of the folk and an intellectual climate rife with democratic or nationalist ideas.”<sup>10</sup> From this perspective, anyone could make folk art; it was an accessible to all. At the same time each work reflected individual character, another key element in the argument for a democratic society.

In the 1920’s the Arts and Crafts movement – a resurgence of handicraft as hobby in the industrial age – raised up America’s “simplicity and ruggedness” and the “democratic ideology of everyman as his own creator.”<sup>11</sup> In *Explaining Traditions*, Bronner makes clear the link between folk art and modern art: popular magazines at the time related handmade furniture and craft “to a special vernacular American contribution

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<sup>8</sup> Beatrix T. Rumford, “Uncommon Art of the Common People: A Review of Trends in the Collecting and Exhibiting of American Folk Art,” in *Perspectives on American Folk Art*, ed. Ian M.G. Quimby and Scott T. Swank (New York W. W. Norton & Company, 1980), 25.

<sup>9</sup> Erika Doss, “American Folk Art’s ‘Distinctive Character’: The Index of American Design and New Deal Notions of Cultural Nationalism,” in *Drawing on America’s Past: Folk Art, Modernism, and the Index of American Design*, ed. Virginia Tuttle Clayton (Washington, D.C.: National Gallery of Art, 2002), 61.

<sup>10</sup> Rumford, “Uncommon Art of the Common People,” 13.

<sup>11</sup> Bronner, 143.

to high art.” Searching for a “distinct American design to rival Europe,” tastemakers found an answer in folk art: unsophisticated paintings and sculptures that championed both egalitarianism and individuality.<sup>12</sup>

John A. Kouwenhoven strengthens the link between folk art and democracy in his important 1948 book *The Arts in Modern American Civilization*. In the chapter “What is Vernacular,” Kouwenhoven writes that American folk art was made by “the first people in history who, disinherited of a great cultural tradition, found themselves living under democratic institutions in an expanding machine economy” resulting in a form of art Kouwenhoven calls the “democratic-technological vernacular.”<sup>13</sup> The artistry of the vernacular could be found in “tools, machines, buildings, and other objects for use in the routine of daily life.”<sup>14</sup> Most importantly, Kouwenhoven links the vernacular—which can be understood as the art of everyday life—to modern American culture: “[B]ecause America is—for a number of fortuitous reasons—the only major world power to have taken form as a cultural unit in the period when technological civilization was spreading throughout the world...the arts in America reveal, more clearly on the whole than the arts of any other people, the nature and meaning of modern civilization.”<sup>15</sup> Kouwenhoven ties together folk and vernacular arts with both the nation’s democratic values and the importance of modernity in the composition of its culture.

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<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>13</sup> John Kouwenhoven, *The Arts in Modern American Civilization*, 1948 (New York: W.W. Norton, 1967), 13.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 13-14.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

The interest in folk art that started in the early 1920s and experienced a resurgence at midcentury had much to do with America searching for its own heritage. Folk art gave Americans an aesthetic to build from, one that paired well with the abstraction of modern art and worked seamlessly with the values championed by the Rockefellers at Colonial Williamsburg: hard work, integrity, and freedom. The democratic and can-do attitude of folk art, along with its odd shapes, skewed perspectives, and often misshapen figures, told the story of an artistic American culture that had been making beautiful and interesting things, in its own way, since the birth of the nation. This heritage was especially important in the 1950s because abstract expressionism, the other art form touted as giving voice to individual expression while championing democratic values, was viewed by many Americans as unfamiliar, foreign, and communistic.

Abstract expressionism is often thought of as the quintessential midcentury American art, with its anything-goes attitude as representative of the freedom of expression encouraged in American society. In contrast to the Fascist condemnation of artistic expression, Hitler's denouncement and destruction of abstract art, and Stalin's insistence on art produced in the social realist style, abstract expressionism seemed like the perfect medium to promote America's freedoms. However, many Americans did not agree that abstract expressionism represented the best of U.S. culture, with some even believing that it was communistic. For example, the U.S. Department of State via the Office of International Information and Cultural Affairs put together the 1946 exhibition "Advancing American Art" and planned to send the collection of abstract works abroad to promote American art and culture. The exhibition's touring schedule was cut short

because of outcries that the artists presented, such as Adolph Gottlieb and Ben Shahn, were left-wing liberals and possibly communist sympathizers.<sup>16</sup> Most famously, President Harry Truman was quoted as saying “If that’s art, I’m a Hottentot,” in response to a painting by Yasuo Kuniyoshi.<sup>17</sup> Alfred H. Barr Jr., the Museum of Modern Art’s first director and at the time “Director of Collections,” went so far as to write a piece for the *New York Times Magazine* denying that modern art had any connections to Communism.<sup>18</sup>

In contrast, no one was afraid of folk art. Critic and folk art collector Aline Saarinen said in 1954, “The special flavor of American primitives seems to me to be essentially a super-emphasis on the quality of factual forthrightness which was present in all.... Americans like facts: and these were visual facts. They were reassuring records of how one looked, what one did, what one possessed.”<sup>19</sup> American folk art spoke loudly and clearly to the consuming public: it was a record of both America’s material and artistic life. In its Cold War presentation, folk art produced a type of cultural nationalism

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<sup>16</sup> For more information on the controversy surrounding “Advancing American Art” see Taylor D. Littleton and Maly Sykes, *Advancing American Art: Painting Politics, and Cultural Confrontation at Mid-Century* by (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1999) and Georgia Museum of Art, *Art Interrupted: Advancing American Art and the Politics of Cultural Diplomacy* (Athens, G.A.: University of Georgia Press, 2012).

<sup>17</sup> Greg Barnhisel, “*Perspectives USA* and the Cultural Cold War: Modernism in Service of the State,” *Modernism/Modernity* 14, no. 4 (2007): 735.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.* Barr’s article, “Is Modern Art Communistic?” appeared in the December 14, 1952 issue of the *New York Times Magazine* on pages 22-23 and 28-30.

<sup>19</sup> Elizabeth Stillinger, *A Kind of Archaeology: Collecting American Folk Art, 1876-1976* (Amherst, Mass.: University of Massachusetts Press, 2011), 304.



that reflected a cohesive America in its artistic heritage and its democratic sense of self.

The values associated with folk art at midcentury were the same values that drove Abby Aldrich Rockefeller to start collecting in the first place. Mrs. Rockefeller became interested in salvaging the neglected arts of America's past as her husband John D. Rockefeller Jr. began to invest in the restoration of Colonial Williamsburg.<sup>20</sup> Her beginning interest in folk art also coincided with her founding of the Museum of Modern Art in 1929. Edith Gregor Halpert, owner of the Downtown Gallery in New York City, and Holger Cahill, curator at the Newark Museum, helped Mrs. Rockefeller piece together her collection. Both Halpert and Cahill were interested in the aesthetic and cultural worth of folk art, and they introduced Mrs. Rockefeller to the value of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century American art. Knowing Mrs. Rockefeller's tastes in modern art, Cahill and Halpert showed her just how closely linked her beloved contemporary American artists were with the American painters and crafters of the past.

Mrs. Rockefeller patronized, for example, American artists including Charles Sheeler, Robert Laurent, and Yasuo Kuniyoshi. She saw in objects created by nineteenth-century amateurs the same "highly original and unselfconscious use of various media, bold color, and imaginative surface patterns" found in the work of the American modernists. Mrs. Rockefeller's interest in folk art worked double duty; she found a new body of works to collect, and "a fresh insight into the American past" that matched her

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<sup>20</sup> Beatrix T. Rumford, *The Abby Aldrich Rockefeller Folk Art Collection* (Williamsburg, Va.: The Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, 1975), 5.

husband's interest in American history.<sup>21</sup> Folk art also allowed Abby Aldrich Rockefeller to increase the importance of her collection of American modern art. While some were linking American modern art to the Armory Show of 1913, Halpert, Cahill, and Rockefeller began to spread the narrative that the methods of American modernists came from an earlier American tradition.<sup>22</sup> Ultimately, the introduction of European modern art to the American public led to the idea that American folk art could be called the inspiration for American modern art.

By 1932, Abby Aldrich Rockefeller's folk art collection was so extensive that the Museum of Modern Art was able to put up a major exhibition called *American Folk Art: The Art of the Common Man in America, 1750-1900*.<sup>23</sup> The show, curated by Cahill, lauded folk art for both its common properties and its aesthetic relationship to modern art. While jugs and weathervanes were championed for their good design, the attention to form, palette, and patterns in the portraits and landscapes linked the works to the presiding aesthetics of distorted representation and strong color in modern American and European art. The show gave the average American an opportunity to see, and become comfortable with, the vernacular and folk art of the everyday. As art scholar Jennifer Marshall put it, "the show served the purpose of teaching the common man how to

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<sup>21</sup> Beatrix T. Rumford and Carolyn J. Weekly, *Treasures of American Folk Art from the Abby Aldrich Rockefeller Folk Art Center* (Boston, Mass.: Little, Brown and Company, 1989), 8.

<sup>22</sup> Rumford, "Uncommon Art of the Common People," 23.

<sup>23</sup> Mrs. Rockefeller's exhibition was featured heavily in the 1931 folk art show at the Newark Museum of Art, also curated by Holger Cahill. The success of this show encouraged Cahill to present Abby Aldrich Rockefeller's folk art collection at MoMA during his time as acting director.

appreciate common things.”<sup>24</sup> The more important underlying message was that this art, while common, could be seen as inspiration for American modernist painting, sculpture, and design.

While the *American Folk Art* exhibition featured diverse works, the owner of all but one of the pieces displayed was the same – Mrs. Rockefeller. This was a secret kept from the viewing public.<sup>25</sup> Mrs. Rockefeller’s efforts to remain anonymous were successful, and only a few people realized that she was the unidentified owner of the collection.<sup>26</sup> What good would it do to display the arts of the common man with the knowledge that all the pieces were owned by a very uncommon woman? Keeping the single ownership of the pieces quiet also stopped premature questions about the motivation behind the show; instead of the exhibition being seen as a rich art collector’s latest whim, it was understood to be a serious statement about the origins of American art. In order to make viable the narrative that modern American art was rooted in the nation’s folk art people had to see folk art for what it was and not as Mrs. Rockefeller’s latest hobby.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Jennifer Marshall, “Our Folk: A Tradition of Modernism, A Taste for Modernity,” (master’s thesis, University of California, Los Angeles, 1999), iv.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 21.

<sup>26</sup> Rumford and Weekly, *Treasures*, 10.

<sup>27</sup> In the essay “Folk Art, Museums, and Collecting the Modern American Self,” in the collection *Contemporary American Folk, Naïve, and Outsider Art: Into the Mainstream?* (Oxford, Ohio: Miami University Art Museum, 1990), Eugene Metcalf argues that because of the shift in America in the 1920s to a consumer-driven society, collectors were celebrated rather than artists themselves. The collector gave meaning to whatever she collected. If the public associated the *American Folk Art* show with Mrs. Rockefeller, the folk art would be outshone by its provenance (13).

The mystery of ownership did not affect the popularity of the 1932 *Art of the Common Man* exhibition. The show was “remarkably well attended,” accounting “for about half the season's total attendance.... [It was] the most popular show [MoMA] held until a 1935 exhibit of Van Gogh.”<sup>28</sup> The attendance totals tell the same story: “Over one hundred thousand people attended the exhibition: the largest number for any one show recorded in the Museum's brief history.”<sup>29</sup> Cultural historian Erika Doss explains the phenomenon of folk art’s popularity succinctly: the *Art of the Common Man* show “elevated [folk] arts to museum status and implied that modern cultural institutions were now...keenly interested in the artifacts and essence of the common American.”<sup>30</sup> Appealing to the common American as artist and as museum patron was working for MoMA. Even more people saw the show as it traveled to six other museums in 1933-34 and proved itself successful in introducing broad audiences to American folk art.<sup>31</sup> In the

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Further, when the collection moved to the Paradise House in Colonial Williamsburg in the 1930s and the owner of the collection was revealed, a hostess at the Paradise house recorded that one of the main reasons patrons came to see the collection was because “The collection belongs to Mrs. Rockefeller personally” (CWFA, Block 18, #7, Ludwell-Paradise House-Management 1935-1934, “For Mr. James L. Cogar – Paradise House Report,” January 23, 1935).

<sup>28</sup> Marshall, 5.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

<sup>30</sup> Doss, 70.

<sup>31</sup> Rumford, “Uncommon Art of the Common People,” 37. *Art of the Common Man* was displayed in Philadelphia at the Pennsylvania Museum of Art; in Providence, Rhode Island, at the Rhode Island School of Design; in Boston at the Museum of Fine Arts; in Kansas City, Missouri, at the William Rockhill Nelson Gallery; in Greenwich, Connecticut at the Greenwich Public Library; and in White Plains, New York, at the Westchester County Center.

show's famous catalogue, heralded by art historians as one of the defining texts on folk art, Holger Cahill explained, "The work of these men is folk art because it is the expression of the common people, made by them and intended for their use and enjoyment.... It does not come out of an academic tradition passed on by schools, but out of craft tradition plus the personal quality of the rare craftsman who is an artist."<sup>32</sup>

Cahill's definition of folk art knits together America's democratic spirit with its artistic tradition. Not only did folk art provide a connection for artists and art critics to modern art, but it also reinforced one of the basic tenets of American identity – freedom of expression. Furthermore, the show encouraged the "common man" and woman to walk into the Museum of Modern Art. MoMA's desire to expand its audience speaks to the goal of increasing the Museum's influence over a larger portion of society.

The Museum of Modern Art was a place for the Rockefellers to influence people's perceptions about modern art and modern American living. When Abby Aldrich Rockefeller started the Museum of Modern Art, she was determined to change the climate for modern art.<sup>33</sup> With help from Cahill and Alfred Barr, Mrs. Rockefeller increased the modern American works in the collection, as well as the number of folk works from both the United States and Latin America. It was their belief that over time the majority of the museum's collection would be composed of works from the Americas, with works from the United States and Mexico featured prominently (figure 1). This

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<sup>32</sup> Holger Cahill, *American Folk Art: The Exhibition of 1932* (1932 reprint Williamsburg, Va.: Abby Aldrich Rockefeller Folk Art Collection, 1968) 8.

<sup>33</sup> Diane Tepfer, "Edith Gregor Halpert and the Downtown Gallery Downtown, 1926-1940: A Study in American Art Patronage," (dissertation, University of Michigan, 1989), 145.

approach supplemented the acceptance of modern art as naturally coming from the Americas. Adding American folk art to the mix created a continuous and important role for American art to play in the larger art historical narrative.

In the introduction of the book *The Invention of Tradition*, Eric Hobsbawm defines “invented tradition” as “a set of practices, normally governed by overtly or tacitly accepted rules and of a ritual or symbolic nature, which seek to inculcate certain value and norms of behavior by repetition, which automatically implies continuity with the past [and] where possible, they normally attempt to establish continuity with a suitable historic past.”<sup>34</sup> At the Museum of Modern Art, Abby Aldrich Rockefeller invented the tradition of looking at American folk art as the precursor to American modern art, starting with the exhibition of her personal folk art collection. MoMA’s *Art of the Common Man* exhibition was just the first in a series of folk art shows held at the museum.<sup>35</sup> In 1932 Alfred Barr took a leave of absence from his position as MoMA’s Director. Cahill stepped in, and with him came a “flood of Americana.”<sup>36</sup> The repeated

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<sup>34</sup> Eric Hobsbawm, “Introduction: Inventing Traditions,” in *The Invention of Tradition*, ed. Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ragner (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 1.

<sup>35</sup> Folk art exhibitions that followed *Art of the Common Man* include *American Painting and Sculpture, 1862-1932* [MoMA Exh. #20, October 31, 1932-February 11, 1933]; *American Sources of Modern Art (Aztec, Mayan, Incan)* [MoMA Exh. #29, May 8-July 1, 1933]; *Westchester Folk Art Exhibition* [MoMA Exh. #34e, June 23-July 9, 1934]; *American Folk Art* [MoMA Exh. #71, February 2-March 7, 1938]; *Three Centuries of American Art* [MoMA Exh. #76a, May 24-July 31, 1938] For a complete list of exhibitions held at the Museum of Modern Art, see [http://www.moma.org/learn/resources/archives/archives\\_exhibition\\_history\\_list#1929](http://www.moma.org/learn/resources/archives/archives_exhibition_history_list#1929)

<sup>36</sup> Russell Lynes, *Good Old Modern: An Intimate Portrait of the Museum of Modern Art* (New York: Atheneum, 1973), 107.

showing of folk art was meant to make normal and accepted the message that American folk art was the precursor to American modern art.<sup>37</sup> Cahill's ambitions were complemented by the work and vision of Edith Halpert. Halpert, a modern art dealer, displayed modern artworks at her Downtown Gallery alongside those of American folk artists in the 1930s and thus further reinforced the connection between the two genres.

In 1931 Halpert established The American Folk Art Gallery, which, in its publicity materials, claimed to “[demonstrate] concretely the kinship between the unconventional phase of early American art and our progressive art of today.”<sup>38</sup> Halpert, in a small brochure about the Folk Art Gallery, explained: “During the past decade, the genuine public interest has firmly established folk art as an integral part of our cultural history.... The work of our eighteenth- and nineteenth-century folk artists is now displayed in museums together with long acknowledged masterpieces of international reputation.”<sup>39</sup> Examples of the museums that bought paintings and sculptures from Halpert's folk art gallery include the Museum of Modern Art, the Whitney Museum, the Art Institute of Chicago, the Detroit Institute, and the Santa Barbara Museum. Halpert also made sure that her customers knew they were getting the very best of American folk

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<sup>37</sup> Cahill was perhaps the most influential champion of American folk art in the early twentieth century. Later, Cahill went on to direct the Index of American Design program of the federal Works Progress Administration while continuing to advise Abby Aldrich Rockefeller on potential folk art acquisitions. Cahill's work with the Index affirms his investment in the importance of American folk art and his insistence on its place in modern America.

<sup>38</sup> “American Folk Art Gallery,” ND, folder 5, box 1, series C, Record Group 4, Collection: III, Rockefeller Archive Center, Sleepy Hollow, New York (hereafter designated RAC).

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*

art; the objects offered for sale were what Halpert considered “‘Masterpieces in American Folk Art,’ worthy of preservation in museums and major collections, and priced accordingly.”<sup>40</sup> Halpert hoped to create a visual narrative that rediscovered American folk art as its true self, the ancestral paintings and sculptures of modern art. For example, in a 1936 show of bird sculptures, Halpert placed modern works of art in the middle of her gallery and lined the walls with works of folk art.<sup>41</sup> In this way she could visually link the past and the present, whereby William Zorach's sculpture *Spirit of the Dance* (1932) was paired with an early American sculpture of a wooden eagle credited to William Schimmel (figures 2 and 3). Halpert wanted the viewer to see the similar lines of the Zorach figure's draped cloth and the lines of the eagle's wings.<sup>42</sup> She wanted the viewer to see how the present was linked to the past.

Edward Hicks's *The Peaceable Kingdom* was another work Halpert used as an example of the connection between America's folk art and America's modern art (figures 4 and 5). When French artist Fernand Léger saw *The Peaceable Kingdom* for the first time in 1931, he was moved by its relation to “primitivism – interest in the art of Africa, Oceania, and other third world cultures.”<sup>43</sup> Primitivism was a key influence on the European modernists; Léger's connection suggests American folk art acted in the same way for American artists. It should also be noted that Edward Hicks painted at least sixty

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<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>41</sup> Marshall, 38.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>43</sup> Tepfer, 164-5.



versions of *The Peaceable Kingdom*. Art critics could claim that Hicks anticipated the Dada movement in his repetition of the same subject. The Dada movement, which started in 1915, was a reaction to World War I and its atrocities. Proponents of the Dada movement railed against materialism and produced art that they claimed was not art. Dada “debunk[ed] the canons of reason, taste and hierarchy, of order and discipline in society, of rationally controlled inspiration in imaginative expression” and “resorted to the arbitrary, to change, the unconscious and the primitive.”<sup>44</sup> Hicks’s repetition and variation on the same subject, over and over, could be viewed as a degradation of his theme, a comment on materialism since the works were not truly originals, or a remark on the inability of the artists to get it right—all elements of Dada. Hicks’s *The Peaceable Kingdom* allows us to see how American folk art could, and did, insert itself into the modern art lexicon.

In the early 1930s, folk art achieved greater status in American culture through its display at MoMA, Halpert’s galleries, and other major American art institutions like the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston and the Pennsylvania Museum of Art in Philadelphia. In the later 1930s, folk art took on new significance via the Index of American Design. The Index was a major artistic endeavor of the Federal Arts Project, a New Deal program started in late 1935 that supplied “emergency labor relief to the country’s artists.”<sup>45</sup> The results of the work of Index artists were “18,000 water color renderings of American folk

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<sup>44</sup> Robert Short, *Dada & Surrealism* (New York: Mayflower, 1980), 7.

<sup>45</sup> Doss, 62.

[and] popular art.”<sup>46</sup> The United States government used programs like the Index to shape cultural nationalism by “reacquainting modern, twentieth-century Americans with their folk and decorative art traditions.”<sup>47</sup> As far as the efforts of Abby Aldrich Rockefeller and her cohort were concerned, the Index served a great purpose in forwarding the acceptance of American folk art as part of the new art historical narrative. In her book *Drawing on America’s Past: Folk Art, Modernism, and the Index of American Design* Virginia Tuttle Clayton argues that the founders and administrators of the Index were modernists who “wanted to assemble visual resources for artists and designers to use in creating a distinctly American modernism in the fine and applied arts...[in order] to support its future development.”<sup>48</sup> Though the Index was made up of copies of antiques and folk art, it was called the “Index of American Design,” explains Clayton, because it was meant to show Americans a consistent aesthetic that linked older art works to contemporary art.<sup>49</sup> Another goal of the Index was to inspire distinctively American design products, “suitable for manufacture, which stemmed from, and enriched, the nation’s folk traditions and popular arts.”<sup>50</sup> The Index promoted nationalism and made American-designed works recognizable to the masses. Like the introduction of folk art in Halpert’s Downtown Gallery and in the *Art of the Common*

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<sup>46</sup> Virginia Tuttle Clayton, “Picturing a ‘Useable Past,’” *Drawing on America’s Past: Folk Art, Modernism, and the Index of American Design*, ed. Virginia Tuttle Clayton (Washington, D.C.: National Gallery of Art, 2002), 3.

<sup>47</sup> Doss, 63.

<sup>48</sup> Clayton, 2.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>50</sup> Doss, 64.

*Man* exhibition at MoMA, the Index packaged folk art and offered it to the public as the standard of American artistic culture.

Between the exhibition of Abby Aldrich Rockefeller's folk art collection and the work of the Index, the carefully crafted narrative that folk art was a proud part of America's culture took hold. In 1935, Julia Sully wrote about Mrs. Rockefeller's collection, on display in Colonial Williamsburg, in the *Richmond News Leader*:

The discovery that America could boast a school of 'Primitives' is a comparatively new one, but here we have before our eyes a large collection of painting, sculpture, modeling, executed not by foreign artists, but by men and women for whom art was not a vocation, but an avocation and though many of the pictures in this collection are such as we have been familiar with here and there in old houses, or packed away in attics, the importance of them could not be appreciated until a number of examples could be brought together, studied, compared and classified.<sup>51</sup>

Sully's remark – that the idea of American primitives was new – points to the reclassification of American folk art. The Index aided in the recontextualization of the works and gave Americans a reference guide on how to look for design elements in American antiques. These works were no longer to be hidden in alcoves and barns, but were to be pitted against other indigenous and native works that served as the influences for the great American and European painters of the modern movement. As Edith

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<sup>51</sup> CWFA, Publicity Releases 1935 (Gen Cor). *Richmond News Leader*, "American Folk Art Exhibit is Attractive: Rockefeller Collection Now on View at Williamsburg" by Julia Sully, April 13, 1935.

Halpert put it in her catalogue of the Abby Aldrich Rockefeller Folk Art Collection in 1940, "It rounds out our cultural history."<sup>52</sup> A noticeable increase in both the collecting practices associated with folk art and in the consumption of American art followed the *Art of the Common Man* exhibition, the Index of American Design, and the exhibition of Mrs. Rockefeller's folk art collection at Colonial Williamsburg.<sup>53</sup> In a 1944 letter to Nelson Rockefeller, Halpert laments the stress associated with the new popularity of American art—presumably because of the work she was doing both at the Downtown Gallery and the American Folk Art Gallery—"At the moment I am at my summer home relaxing from a strenuous season (I suppose you have heard of the boom in American art), but expect to be in New York tomorrow to attend to some urgent business."<sup>54</sup> Halpert's success at promoting American art drove her to exhaustion.

In addition to Halpert and Cahill, Abby Aldrich Rockefeller cultivated other relationships that gave weight to her insistence on the importance of American folk art. Stephen Clark, heir to the Singer Sewing Machine Company fortune and benefactor of the Farmer's Museum in Cooperstown, New York, was the major source of funding behind the New York State Historical Society's folk art collection.<sup>55</sup> Clark was a founding trustee of the Museum of Modern Art and is famous for giving the Museum its

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<sup>52</sup> Edith Halpert, Abby Aldrich Rockefeller Folk Art Collection Catalogue, June 1940, folder 134, box 154, series E, Record Group 2, Collection: III, RAC.

<sup>53</sup> See Stillinger, *A Kind of Archaeology* and Eugene W. Metcalf, "Folk Art, Museums, and Collecting the Modern American Self."

<sup>54</sup> Letter from Edith Gregor Halpert to Nelson Rockefeller, July 17, 1944, folder 5, box 1, series C, Record Group 4, Collection: III, RAC.

<sup>55</sup> Bronner, 145-147.

first major painting, Edward Hopper's *House by the Railroad* (1925) (figure 6).<sup>56</sup> Clark also served as chairman of MoMA's board of trustees from 1939 to 1946.<sup>57</sup> Like Mrs. Rockefeller, Clark exemplified to the public the pairing of folk and modern American art. Contemporary American painter Charles Sheeler was hired by Abby Aldrich Rockefeller to depict the "domestic interiors and folk art" at Colonial Williamsburg. Sheeler was an artist praised for his use of American folk art as inspiration for his modern works.<sup>58</sup> Sheeler's aesthetic was the perfect blend of past and present, a reassertion of folk art's relationship to the look of American modern art.

The relationship between folk art and the Rockefeller family deepened when Abby Aldrich Rockefeller's folk art collection was made a permanent fixture in Colonial Williamsburg. After touring the United States via the Museum of Modern Art, Mrs. Rockefeller's paintings and sculptures were installed in the Ludwell-Paradise House in the heart of Colonial Williamsburg and opened to the public on January 16, 1935.<sup>59</sup> While a majority of Mrs. Rockefeller's works were at Colonial Williamsburg, forty-eight pieces were still at the Museum of Modern Art, where the most important folk objects

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<sup>56</sup> Harriet S. Bee and Michelle Elligott, eds., *Art in our Time: A Chronicle of the Museum of Modern Art* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 2004), 32.

<sup>57</sup> "Stephen C. Clark, Art Patron, Dead," *New York Times*, September 18, 1960, accessed October 21, 2014, <http://www.bobkestrut.com/images/stephenclark.pdf>

<sup>58</sup> Doss, 71.

<sup>59</sup> The collection did not become property of CW until 1939, when Mrs. Rockefellers gave it to the foundation as a gift.

were kept on view until 1947.<sup>60</sup> As discussed earlier, the Museum entered into a contract with New York City's Metropolitan Museum of Art (Met) that specified when a work of art became old enough—when it was considered a “classic—it would be offered to the Met for purchase.”<sup>61</sup> Sixteen of the forty-eight folk works held by MoMA were purchased by the Met for \$28,950 and the remaining thirty-two pieces were added to the collection at Colonial Williamsburg.<sup>62</sup> The Abby Aldrich Rockefeller Folk Art Collection remained on view in the Ludwell-Paradise house until the early 1950s, when Colonial Williamsburg started to make significant changes to increase the restoration's and the collection's visibility in preparation for the 350<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Jamestown settlement to take place in 1957.

The anniversary would be celebrated all year and as a result Virginia's historic triangle—Williamsburg, Jamestown, and Yorktown—would be receiving significant media attention. England's Queen Elizabeth was slated to visit, and a marked increase in tourism was also expected. In 1953, talks began at Colonial Williamsburg about creating a new reception center where the nearly half-a-million visitors who came to the restoration each year could learn more about what attractions awaited. The reception

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<sup>60</sup> Letter from William A.M. Burden, President of MoMA, to Mr. John D. Rockefeller Jr. April 16, 1954, folder 1337, box 153, series E, Record Group 2, Collection: Rockefeller Family, RAC.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.* In addition to the works given to the Met from the AARFAC, around twenty-five paintings and sculptures from late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century masters such as Cézanne, Seurat, and Gauguin were also handed over. Most of these classic works came from the Lillie P. Bliss Bequest.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*

center would also provide information about hotels, restaurants, and facilities.<sup>63</sup>

Unlike the main restoration, the reception center would present itself in the present, and would provide tourists with a “psychological break in the narrative emphasizing the story of Williamsburg.”<sup>64</sup> The placement of the reception center outside of the restored areas of CW was purposeful: when a visitor toured Colonial Williamsburg, he was to be transported back in time. As described previously in chapter one, the restoration was curated to present the narrative of the successes of the planter elite to visiting audiences. The reception center would provide a self-conscious break from the story told on the dirt streets of Colonial Williamsburg.

It was suggested that the Abby Aldrich Rockefeller Folk Art Collection, at the time housed in the restoration, take up a new residence in the reception center because it was already a place separate from the narrative constructed on Colonial Williamsburg’s streets. CW’s president Kenneth Chorley made it clear to John D. Rockefeller Jr. that “there is unanimous opinion that the [Abby Aldrich Rockefeller Folk Art Collection] should not remain in the restored area.”<sup>65</sup> Mrs. Rockefeller’s folk art collection spanned the years from 1750-1900, making it old but not quite old enough to be consistent with the presentation of the eighteenth-century restoration. Although the idea of putting the collection in the reception center was thrown out, the question of how to highlight the

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<sup>63</sup> CWFA, Block 33, Hotel and Reception Center 1952-54, “Summary of Reception Center Objectives and Experiments,” November, 1953.

<sup>64</sup> CWFA, Block 33, Hotel and Reception Center 1952-54, “New Information Center: Exhibition Space Requirements,” September 21, 1954.

<sup>65</sup> CWFA, Block 42, #32, AARFAC 1953, Letter from Kenneth Chorley to Mr. John D. Rockefeller Jr. August 10, 1953.

collection remained.<sup>66</sup> Upon John D. Jr.'s insistence, the collection would stay in Colonial Williamsburg. He would create and finance a small corporation that would construct a new building for the permanent exhibition of the whole of his late wife's collection.<sup>67</sup> As plans for the new Abby Aldrich Rockefeller museum were made, John D. Jr. did his best to reunite the original collection. He was able to secure the works from the Museum of Modern Art and pay for the objects that were owned by the Met; the complete collection would be on display at Colonial Williamsburg.<sup>68</sup>

The process of reuniting the collection created a renewed national interest in folk art, exemplified by the May 1950 "Folk Art Issue" of *Antiques* magazine.<sup>69</sup> The issue

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<sup>66</sup> CWFA, Block 33, Hotel and Reception Center 1952-54. In several of the early planning documents (1952/3), descriptions of the AARFAC as part of the new reception center are crossed out.

<sup>67</sup> CWFA, Block 42, #32, AARFAC 1953, Letter from John D. Rockefeller Jr. December 15, 1953. John D. Rockefeller Jr. ensured the creation of the museum and its future care by giving Colonial Williamsburg 14,500 shares of Standard Oil Company of California and 7,500 shares of Socony-Vacuum Oil Company, Inc., "to enable Colonial Williamsburg, Inc., to house, on a site adjacent to the Williamsburg Inn grounds also conveniently accessible to the Lodge, and adequately to maintain, exhibit and add to, as it may see fit, the collection of Folk Art given to the Restoration in 1939 by Mrs. Abby Aldrich Rockefeller."

<sup>68</sup> It is important to note that Alfred Barr wanted to keep the folk art pieces owned by MoMA in New York City. Barr writes, "I still feel as I did in 1932 when the Museum put on its exhibition of your mother's collection of American Folk Art that the best objects were so important that they should remain here in New York." Barr's desire to keep some of Abby Aldrich Rockefeller's folk works at MoMA reinforces the importance of folk art in the narrative of modern art presented at the Museum. Letter from Alfred Barr to David Rockefeller, March 17, 1955, folder 1340, box 154, series E, Record Group 2, Collection: III, RAC.

<sup>69</sup> CWFA, Block 42, #32, AARFAC – Opening – March-Dec 1957, "An Address by Mitchell A. Wilder," March 15, 1957. Mitchell A. Wilder gave the collection credit for sparking folk art's renaissance, telling guests at the reception for the new museum, "Prompted, I believe, by the opening of our new building, much has been written in



featured a symposium called “What is American Folk Art?” where several important art figures defined folk art as the catalyst for American modern art. Contributors included Edith Halpert; Holger Cahill; John A. Kouwenhoven; John I. Baur, Curator of Paintings and Sculpture at the Brooklyn Museum in New York; Jean Lipman, author of *American Primitive Paintings* and noted folk art expert; and E. P. Richardson, Director of the Detroit Institute of the Arts. The conclusion of the contributors, over and over, was that folk art was the most pure form of American art in existence and that it influenced all other American arts that followed. Kouwenhoven reiterated the thesis of his book *Made in America*, stating that “In the vernacular, often crude but always vigorous, we can discover the sources of artistic forms which belong to our own time and place.” Richardson offered that folk art was “the product of the child within us.” Baur clarified that folk artists created works that were an “innate part of our western vision.” Lipman explained that folk art “was American to the core. It was indeed a free artistic expression of the very spirit of the flowering of American democracy.”<sup>70</sup> The picture of folk art presented was one of creativity and longevity, the truest expression of the American spirit, a spirit that was tied to the nation’s flourishing democracy.

Folk art was made by the everyman and woman, individuals, and, the participants in the symposium argued, their products gave us a picture of American life that celebrated the possibilities of living in a democratic nation. In her book, *A Kind of*

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recent days about American folk art and the early days of its rediscovery by the art world.”

<sup>70</sup> John A. Kouwenhoven, John I. Baur, Jean Lipman, E.P. Richardson, “What is American Folk Art?,” *Antiques* 57, no. 5 (May 1950): 361, 355, 359.

*Archaeology: Collecting American Folk Art, 1876-1976*, Elizabeth Stillinger argues that folk art reinforced America's dominance after World War II and celebrated "aspects of the American character that so recently triumphed over the dark, predatory force of both Europe and Asia."<sup>71</sup> Mrs. Rockefeller's collection may not have fit into the timeline presented at Colonial Williamsburg, but the message of the collection was in sync with the midcentury purpose of the restoration: democracy triumphed over tyranny, in both colonial times and in the Cold War.

Folk art expert Nina Fletcher Little, who was also included in the symposium "What is American Folk Art?," was asked to research and catalogue the collection before it moved into its new home. The result was a 1957 publication that pictured 164 of the 424 objects held in the museum.<sup>72</sup> The catalogue reflected the importance of the permanent installation at the museum: just as the Museum of Modern Art was able to claim authority over the boundaries of modern art when it introduced its permanent collection in 1953, the museum at Colonial Williamsburg could claim the rights over how to interpret folk art with its definitive assemblage of paintings and objects. The catalogue was designed to serve as a reference guide, intended for distribution among folk art experts as well as students and teachers. Mitchell A. Wilder, the director of the collection, made sure the reference book was reasonably priced to ensure its distribution

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<sup>71</sup> Stillinger, 304.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, 250-1.

as a teaching and learning tool.<sup>73</sup> It was important for the catalogue to be accessible and widely read. The folk art collection could claim to be the standard for understanding folk art only if it was consumed by a wide public.

Mrs. Rockefeller's collection was recognized as one of the premier assemblages of folk art from its first viewing, but up until this point it had not been presented as enough to fill a museum by itself. The jump from displaying the collection to creating a museum for the collection shows just how important folk art had become at midcentury. After joining the American Association of Museums in 1954, Wilder made alliances with other powerful folk art museums in order to increase the visibility of the new museum.<sup>74</sup> For example, he worked with the director at the Museum of National Folk Art in Santa Fe, New Mexico, to disseminate the name—"the Abby Aldrich Rockefeller Folk Art Collection in Williamsburg, Virginia"—to audiences far from the Eastern Shore.<sup>75</sup> Press releases for the opening of the new museum circulated that claimed "For most of a century, folk art lay unheralded, until the growing artistic sensitivity of the nation re-discovered this important phase of its past as an intimate portrait of our social history."<sup>76</sup> Creating a strong sense of national identity was a large part of the ideological Cold War. America's global economic power had been recognized since the end of the nineteenth

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<sup>73</sup> CWFA, Block 42, #32, AARFAC 1953, Memo to Carl Humelsine from M.A. Wilder.

<sup>74</sup> CWFA, Block 42, #32, AARFAC 1954, Letter from M.A. Wilder to Mr. Jones, March 22, 1954.

<sup>75</sup> CWFA, Block 42, #32, AARFAC 1954, Letter from M.A. Wilder to Mr. William Lippincott, Director of Museum of National Folk Art, December 13, 1954.

<sup>76</sup> CWFA, Block 42, #32, AARFAC – Opening – March-Dec 1957, Press Release.

century and acknowledgement of the military strength of the United States came after World War I; however, it was only after World War II that America became “a fully matured great power, dedicated to realizing freedom through-out the world and prepared to usher in a new golden age in its own image.”<sup>77</sup> The “re-discovery” of folk art played a large part in fashioning a national sense of self that enabled American culture to match its power on the global stage. Folk art gave Americans a “useable past,” a rich artistic history that reflected the common man and woman’s belief in the material benefits of hard work and his/her right to freedom of expression.

On the night of the Abby Aldrich Rockefeller Folk Art Collection’s 1957 opening, Mitchel A. Wilder gave a speech to his guests that framed the collection as part of America’s national consciousness. Using the Armory Show of 1913 as a catalyst, Wilder claimed that the uproar caused by the show led “the most advanced and self-conscious artists...to discover the aesthetic values of the naïf – of craftsmen, artisans, and children of whose existence they were scarcely aware.”<sup>78</sup> Wilder then placed folk art squarely in the center of a sovereign American national identity, a cultural identity that was strong enough to stand on its own: “Many people saw [in the rediscovery of folk art] for the first time the inheritance which was theirs – without strings and without ideas borrowed from abroad. Moreover, this insight was comprehensible in American terms,

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<sup>77</sup> John Fousek, *To Lead the Free World: American Nationalism and the Cultural Roots of the Cold War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000), 2.

<sup>78</sup> CWFA, Block 42, #32, AARFAC – Opening – March-Dec 1957, “An Address by Mitchell A. Wilder,” March 15, 1957.

for it spoke of a grass roots America which was a part of our common experience.”<sup>79</sup>

Wilder’s speech positioned folk art, and its representative, the Abby Aldrich Rockefeller Folk Art Collection, as the artistic origin of modern American culture.

During his speech, Wilder purposefully called the works housed in the museum a collection of “American primitives.”<sup>80</sup> This term was used when folk art first came onto the scene in the early part of the twentieth century but had gone out of fashion when Holger Cahill made it clear the term “folk” should be used to describe non-academic American art. “Primitive” pointed to aboriginal communities, as referenced in the works of artists like Pablo Picasso. Cahill felt the word “primitive” alluded too much to race.<sup>81</sup> In “Our Folk: A Tradition of Modernism, A Taste for Modernity,” Jennifer Marshall explains that Cahill preferred to use descriptive works like “untutored,” the “unconscious,” and the “naïve” to describe American folk art.<sup>82</sup> Tying folk art to race or class would limit its perception as a democratic art for all to enjoy. Distancing American folk art from the term primitive also carved out a space for American artists that was different from the origins of European modern art. Primitive references in works by artists like Picasso, Henri Rousseau, and Max Ernst were inextricable from the fabric of European modern art. The origins of American art were distinct and indigenous to its own people; no outside influences were needed. It should be clear that when Wilder described the collection in 1957 as a collection of “primitives” he was replacing the

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<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>81</sup> Cahill, 7.

<sup>82</sup> Marshall, 20.

position of aboriginal primitives in the narrative of European modern art with American primitives as the source of American modern art.

By the late 1950s, folk art was widely accepted as the precursor to American modern art. For this reason folk art was sent to the 1958 Brussels World Fair as representative of American culture. Five paintings from the Abby Aldrich Rockefeller Folk Art Collection were loaned to the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, D.C., for international exhibition, most notably *Baby in Red Chair* (figure 7).<sup>83</sup> While the connections to modern art were clear—similar form, color and composition—the themes and meanings behind American folk works were understood to be unquestionably democratic. Unlike abstract expressionism, folk art was a well-mannered ambassador for the United States. Folk art expert and former director of the Abby Aldrich Rockefeller Folk Art Collection Beatrix Rumford describes *Baby in Red Chair* as such: “The heart-warming likeness is individual in style and unselfconsciousness. Its composition is simple, with emphasis on bold color, strong outlines, and flat, shadowless, two-dimensional shapes.”<sup>84</sup> Though Rumford is describing a piece of folk art, she uses language commonly used in descriptions of modern art. *Baby in Red Chair* represented all the values important to American culture makers at midcentury: it could be described in terms of modern art, thus reinforcing America’s claims to cultural supremacy, while also celebrating the long legacy of an American’s right to individual expression.

Abby Aldrich Rockefeller recognized America’s need for a useable artistic past

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<sup>83</sup> “American Folk Art...A Collection” from May-June 1958 “Colonial Williamsburg News” (vo. 11, num. 1, pg. 2), folder 1431, box 165, series E, RG 2, Collection: Rockefeller Family, RAC.

<sup>84</sup> Beatrix Rumford, *The Abby Aldrich Rockefeller Folk Art Collection*, 5.

and created one by giving value to folk art through her private collection and later its public exhibition. She gave American art a future by creating the Museum of Modern Art and then linking folk art to modern art by suggesting twentieth-century artists were influenced by primitive American arts. In the 1950s, when America was struggling to define its cultural identity during the ideological battles of the Cold War, folk art was given, to use Mitchell A. Wilder's term, a "renewed" purpose. Folk art gave gravitas to the commonplace and elevated American modern art by giving it a history that rivaled the story of modern art in Europe. Most importantly, Abby Aldrich Rockefeller's folk art collection opened doors for the success of other folk arts in America and their display by the Rockefellers' institutions. In a very similar fashion, the Rockefellers were able to use *The Family of Man* exhibition at their Museum of Modern Art to spread a tale about common men and women the world over that placed America, and the Rockefellers, at the head of the imagined Cold War family.

## Chapter Three

### “Everyone Would Want to become Like Us”: The Museum of Modern Art’s *The Family of Man*

In the summer of 1936 the Museum of Modern Art presented a one-week flower show featuring hybrid delphiniums bred by Edward Steichen. Steichen, explains Russell Lynes in *Good Old Modern: An Intimate Portrait of the Museum of Modern Art*, “was a friend, an influence in the art world, a master photographer, and, presumably, he wanted more people to admire his hobby than he could entertain at his place in Connecticut, [so] his friends at the Museum obliged him.”<sup>1</sup> Steichen’s close relationship with the Rockefellers and the trustees of the Museum continued for many years; he curated several wartime photographic exhibitions for MoMA and eventually became Director of the Department of Photography in 1947.

Edward Steichen’s most famous photographic exhibition, *The Family of Man*, opened at the Museum in January of 1955. The show used images of people from all over the world in an attempt to represent a global family. Despite *The Family of Man*’s outward insistence on inclusivity, I argue, the show’s underlying message was that America presided over the family of man. Steichen loved America, and believed that “everyone would want to become like us [Americans].”<sup>2</sup> His view worked in concert with the Rockefellers’ support of American economic, military, and cultural superiority

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<sup>1</sup> Russell Lynes, *Good Old Modern: An Intimate Portrait of the Museum of Modern Art* (New York: Atheneum, 1973), 142.

<sup>2</sup> Eric Sandeen, *Picturing an Exhibition: The Family of Man and 1950s America* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1995), 70.



in the Cold War world. Audiences at home and abroad may have viewed *The Family of Man* as a symbol of universal good will in a war-torn world, but what they were really reading was a grand narrative of American cultural dominance supported by a Rockefeller institution.

*The Family of Man* was incredibly popular with both American and international audiences. An estimated ten million people saw the exhibition.<sup>3</sup> Between January 24 and May 8, 1955, more than 270,000 people walked through the show when it was installed at MoMA. Another 1,200,000 persons saw it on its tour of the United States and Canada. Between 1955 and 1962, as *The Family of Man* traveled the world via the United States Information Agency, over eight million people attended the travelling show over the course of its 85 stops.<sup>4</sup> As Eric Sandeen notes in his essay “The International Reception of *The Family of Man*,” “[Edward] Steichen trusted that the photographs would draw together all viewers of the exhibition through bonds of sympathy established by a common recognition of representative moments in one fundamental, virtually pre-cultural unit of humankind, the family.”<sup>5</sup> The statistics prove Steichen was correct in his assumptions: people liked to look at photographs of other people, especially ones who appeared to be doing things familiar to the audience.

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<sup>3</sup> “Historical Summary,” *Edward Steichen: The Family of Man UNESCO Memory of the World, Centre Nationale de l’Audiovisuel*, accessed January 3, 2015, <http://www.steichencollections.lu/en/the-family-of-man>.

<sup>4</sup> International Council/International Program Exhibition Records. Steichen Archives: SP-ICE-10-55. The Museum of Modern Art Archives, New York (hereafter designated MoMA Archives, NY).

<sup>5</sup> Eric Sandeen, “The International Reception of *The Family of Man*,” *History of Photography* 29, no. 4 (Winter 2005): 348.

The general subject grouping of the photos in the exhibition – childbirth, children playing, learning, labor, agriculture, eating, drinking, religion, hard times, death – were visual representations of everyday life.<sup>6</sup> Like the subject matter of the folk art in Abby Aldrich Rockefeller’s collection, the pictures that made up *The Family of Man* exhibition reflected the daily practices common to all people. The familiar subjects of the photographs created a feeling of accessibility and comfort to audiences that might have otherwise felt alienated by looking at modern art. *The Family of Man* gave its local and global viewers an easily understood visual catalogue of everyday life. In the 1930s, Abby Aldrich Rockefeller’s insistence on the relationship of folk art and modern art created a bridge over MoMA’s threshold that the common man and woman could, and did, cross. MoMA continued to encourage general audiences into its halls through the “Good Design” exhibitions, and in the 1940s photographs that came straight from newspapers and popular magazines like *Look* and *Life* were displayed in exhibitions meant to boost spirits during World War II.

Worldwide photojournalism had by 1955 already made photography a vehicle with which to express emotion across language barriers. Steichen said photography was able to communicate ideas “equally to everybody throughout the world. It is the only universal language we have, the only one requiring no translation.”<sup>7</sup> *The Family of Man*, as envisioned by Steichen, was to act as a photographic Rosetta stone, decoding the

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<sup>6</sup> Fred Turner, “*The Family of Man* and the Politics of Attention in Cold War America,” *Public Culture* 24, no. 1 (2012): 77.

<sup>7</sup> Steichen quoted in Turner, 60.

mysteries of human life to all.<sup>8</sup> Nelson Rockefeller lauded the inclusivity at the heart of the exhibition by declaring that the *Family of Man* “demonstrates that the essential unity of human experience, attitude and emotion are perfectly communicable between all people through the medium of pictures.... Everyone in the world can savor and be nourished by the food and drink at the simple repast in India, France and Russia, at the Hot Dog stand in America, or from the lunch pail of the workmen perched on the towering skeleton on a skyscraper of steel.”<sup>9</sup> The implication of Nelson Rockefeller’s words was that Americans knew the idiosyncrasies of global cultures better than those cultures knew themselves. The result was that MoMA could create a comprehensive and all-encompassing exhibition that spoke for everyone in the world.

Documentary-style photographs, like those used in *The Family of Man*, allowed for the “subjective interpretation” of each image by audience members. Viewers, Stuart Hall explains, would see each documentary photo as truthful because the images were once “seen” by another person, the photographer: “The representations that the photographer produces are related to his or her personal interpretations of the events and subjects which he or she chooses to place in front of the camera lens. They are validated

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<sup>8</sup> In a meeting with the Junior Council of the Museum of Modern Art, Steichen described photography as “a sprawling, sometime obnoxious and noisy medium from which not only the literate but the illiterate population of the United States gets its prevailing ideas.” He continued, saying photography’s “success demonstrates that it comes nearer to being a universal language than anything the world has ever known.” Minutes of The Junior Council of the Museum of Modern Art’s 5<sup>th</sup> Meeting, May 24, 1949, folder 1424, box 145, series L, Record Group (RG) 4, Rockefeller Family Archives, Rockefeller Archive Center, Sleepy Hollow, New York (hereafter designated RAC).

<sup>9</sup> Sound Recordings of Museum Related Events (SR), 55.1 D, MoMA Archives, NY.

by the fact that the photographer experienced or ‘witnessed’ the events or sentiments which they portray, and thus lay claim to a wider truth.”<sup>10</sup> The truth-bearing quality of documentary photography helped audiences to feel that they were interpreting, and participating, in the world around them. *The Family of Man* used the assumed veracity of photography to engage viewers. The viewers were encouraged to become citizens of the world by reading the photographs around them as pictures that were supposed to extend their own feelings across international boundaries.

It is helpful to understand Steichen’s desire to create an exhibition that showed “mankind as one” by looking at his work through the framework of human rights discourse.<sup>11</sup> The United Nations issued The Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948; the declaration was based on Western values but claimed universality. Mark Hannam argues that though human rights are often thought of as moral, they are in fact political: “Human rights are best understood as claims based on human agreements, notably public declarations, treaties, laws and constitutions. This is not to say that they are not also moral concepts; they might be. Rather it is to say that their primary usage is in the making of political claims.... Human rights, then, are specific types of political claim, which challenge the established arrangements and demand that a new settlement

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<sup>10</sup> Stuart Hall, *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices* (London: Sage, 1997), 146.

<sup>11</sup> Eric Sandeen, “*The Family of Man* at the Museum of Modern Art: The Power of the Image in 1950s America” *Prospects* 11 (1987): 369.

be brought into being.”<sup>12</sup> Furthermore, James Griffin explains in *On Human Rights* that human rights are dependent upon the societies in which people live, thus discounting the notion that diverse peoples all have need for the same universal human rights.<sup>13</sup>

Recognizing human rights as political rather than natural, universal, or moral fact is important because we can then see the ability for these rights to be manipulated to suit a particular nation’s needs. For example, James Peck claims in *Ideal Illusions: How the U.S. Government Co-opted Human Rights* that human rights discourse in the United States has often been used “as an impassioned language of good intentions, and as an invocation of American idealism.”<sup>14</sup> In the same way, Steichen’s “American vision of a one-world order” assumed American values as the basis for universal values.<sup>15</sup>

In *The Power of Display: A History of Exhibition Installations at the Museum of Modern Art*, Mary Anne Staniszewski quotes Steichen’s assistant Wayne Miller describing the kind of effect Steichen believed *The Family of Man* could have: “In *The Family of Man*, he was emphasizing the fact that war is not an answer and we have to think about peace.... Look that time, it was a different world, but then the show was meaningful and there were real struggles going on.... Steichen was a romantic. He

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<sup>12</sup> Mark Hannam, review of *On Human Rights*, by James Griffin, *Democratizal Dissent* 15 (Winter 2008): 119-120.

<sup>13</sup> James Griffin, *On Human Rights* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 49.

<sup>14</sup> James Peck, *Ideal Illusions: How the U.S. Government Co-opted Human Rights* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2010), 1.

<sup>15</sup> Sandeen, *Picturing*, 70.

wanted to sing the American dream.”<sup>16</sup> Steichen assumed his view of humanism was universal, but his vision of the world was always tied to his belief in and love of America. While he wished to create an exhibition that could influence world peace, the origins of that vision stemmed from his belief in the goodness and power of American society. Steichen’s western values cannot be discounted when considering the impact of *The Family of Man* on American and international audiences.

Assuming a work of art or literature could speak for all world cultures is a presumption common to those who wish to manage culture and society in their view. It is possible, then, to see *The Family of Man* as a grand narrative about humanity. Grand narratives, explains Jean-François Lyotard in *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, are used by those in power, “the decision makers,” to “allocate our lives for the growth of power.”<sup>17</sup> Photographs that picture human rights are particularly suited to creating grand narratives because nostalgia can replace what is real. Susie Linfield argues in her book *The Cruel Radiance: Photography and Political Violence* that “The idea of human rights represents our attempt to *conquer* our natures, or at least our histories, in the hope of creating a more bearable future; in this light, the human-rights movement seeks to create something new and artificial rather than returning to something

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<sup>16</sup> Mary Anne Staniszewski, *The Power of Display: A History of Exhibition Installations at the Museum of Modern Art* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1998), 251.

<sup>17</sup> Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, trans. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi, *Theory and Literature* 10 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), xxiv.

old and authentic.”<sup>18</sup> This echoes what Lyotard calls “a way of forgetting.”<sup>19</sup> In *The Family of Man* cultural tragedies and triumphs were erased in service of a generic human past. Jean Baudrillard explains in *The Precession of Simulacra* that once nostalgia is able to take over “There is a proliferation of myths of origin and signs of reality.”<sup>20</sup> The result is a grasping of nostalgia in an attempt to hang on to what was perceived as real. The photographs in *The Family of Man* looked real and thereby enabled viewers to self-identify with their subjects. But the whole exhibition was a façade, a pieced together narrative with the express purpose of influencing its viewers to feel as if they belonged. Once a viewer was taken in by the story told in the exhibition the nostalgic, or sentimental, story of *The Family of Man* replaced each person’s discrete history by allowing the exhibition to speak for all viewers. The story of each particular culture changed into the story of the world, which was the story Steichen was telling his audience.

Steichen relied on two ideologies in order to reach his audiences’ emotions: liberal humanism and sentimentality. The works on display at the Museum of Modern Art also oscillated between these two ideologies. In the Architecture and Design section of the Museum, a chair might be on display to showcase the clean lines of manufactured goods in modern America. At the same time, one might find an exhibition of Mexican

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<sup>18</sup> Susie Linfield, *The Cruel Radiance: Photography and Political Violence* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2010), 35.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, xii.

<sup>20</sup> Jean Baudrillard, “From *The Precession of Simulacra*” in *The Critical Tradition: Classic Texts and Contemporary Trends*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., ed. David H. Richter (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin’s, 2007), 1939.

folk art in another wing of the Museum, a representation of the non-academic works of native peoples that was meant to connect the humanity of different cultures together in its display of primitivism. The viewer's emotional tie between these two types of exhibition subjects relied on liberal humanism and sentimentality. In her book *Sentimental Modernism: Women Writers and the Revolution of the Word*, Suzanne Clark defines liberal humanism as "valuing the individual, intrinsic value, emotion or pathos, the endorsement of niceness and cooperation, and the family farm," and the sentimental, or the pathetic appeal, as "the appeal to the emotions, especially pity, as a means of moral distinction and moral persuasion."<sup>21</sup> MoMA appealed to the humanist and sentimental side of its audiences by putting on display objects that had emotional significance to viewers. The hypothetical chair on display could have been part of MoMA's "Good Design" series, and a viewer could imagine how that chair might fit into her home décor. Similarly, the ceramic pots in the folk art show could remind a visitor of a long-held family heirloom.

MoMA's sentimentality banked on universal human emotions while disguising these feelings as singular; this is how the sentimental appeal works. As Clark observes, "the sentimental also grounds the moral appeal to respect individual difference."<sup>22</sup> The emotions audiences felt seemed to be singular, felt by the viewer in real-time, yet the act of feeling those particular emotions was not unique. In her 1955 review of *The Family of Man*, "The Theme Show: A Contemporary Exhibition Technique," Barbara Morgan

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<sup>21</sup> Suzanne Clark, *Sentimental Modernism: Women Writers and the Revolution of the Word* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991), 12, 20.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 22.



details just how the 500-plus pictures in the sweeping exhibition evoked simultaneous feelings of universality and individuality from its audience:

In comprehending the show the individual himself is also enlarged, for these photographs are not photographs only – they are also phantom images of our co-citizens; this woman into whose photographic eyes I now look is perhaps weeding her family rice paddy, or boiling a fish in coconut milk. Can you look at the polygamous family group and imagine the different norms that make them live happily in their society which is so unlike – yet like – our own? Empathy with these hundreds of human beings truly expands our sense of values.<sup>23</sup>

Self-identification made through the overarching life-stages presented in the exhibition caused viewers to feel like part of the exhibition themselves. The emotion felt when looking at, for example, a mother caring for a sick child, would evoke similar feelings across audiences regardless of the race or culture of the mother and child pictured, or the audience member taking in the scene.

Furthermore, identifying with the idea of “family” evoked a particular type of sentimentality that Christina Klein argues shaped the postwar world. She writes, “The family has long served as a metaphor for the nation; in the postwar decades, it became widely used to represent the principle of international interdependence. Within sentimental discourse, the family has traditionally stood as the most prized form of community.... [T]he family, whose members are knit together by a selfless concern for

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<sup>23</sup> Barbara Morgan, “The Theme Show: A Contemporary Exhibition Technique,” *Aperture* 3, no. 2 (1955): 26.

each other, institutionalizes the sentimental values of compassion and sympathy.”<sup>24</sup> The family was used as a tool to reinforce a feeling of togetherness in the early Cold War years. Viewers of *The Family of Man* felt they were choosing to be part of the new vision of a world community because their individual emotions connected them to the global family. Steichen’s wielding of sentimentality ensured that audiences would choose to embrace *The Family of Man*.

In the years before *The Family of Man*, multiple photographic exhibitions - curated by Edward Steichen - were mounted at MoMA in an effort to bolster America’s spirit during, and just after, World War II. Shows like *Road to Victory* (1942), *Airways to Peace* (1943), *Power in the Pacific* (1945), and *Korea: The Impact of War in Photographs* (1951) were meant to move viewers with their realistic photographs of war. Mary Anne Staniszewski gives a detailed account of these exhibitions, which she calls “political persuasion shows,” in *The Power of Display*. Staniszewski explains that the success of the shows relied on the audience’s familiarity with “the big photo-essays in the newspapers and the development of magazines such as *Life* and *Look*.”<sup>25</sup> Not only, Staniszewski continues, did “MoMA’s galleries [become] venues for the kind of photography that was flourishing in American picture magazines,” but the photographs themselves “were often installed without mats in dense and varied arrangements reminiscent of the types of layouts found in newspapers and magazines.”<sup>26</sup> These

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<sup>24</sup> Christina Klein, “The Sentimental Culture of Global Integration,” *Minnesota Review: A Journal of Committed Writing*, 55-57 (2002): 162-63.

<sup>25</sup> Staniszewski, 215.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 105.

exhibitions turned the gallery space into a three-dimensional picture magazine, which meant anyone could understand the pro-American message of the exhibitions as easily as they understood their weekend reading: *Power in the Pacific* was sponsored by U.S. Camera; *Korea* was composed of pictures taken by photographers for *Life*, The Associated Press, ACP, and International News Photos; the photographs in *Road to Victory* were from government agencies and press or news services, which would have provided the same photographs for newspaper and magazines.<sup>27</sup> Most importantly, the photographs in these exhibitions were not meant to be looked at individually. *Road to Victory* and *Power in the Pacific*, like *The Family of Man*, were exhibitions that were more than the sum of their parts; they held a meaning and conveyed a message above that of a single picture.<sup>28</sup> Viewers were manipulated by the didactic nature of the war-themed exhibitions and left the Museum not with an appreciation for the craft of photography but with a moral lesson learned about America's supremacy during war.

Key in the success of the wartime photography shows was the exhibition design of German Bauhaus designer Herbert Bayer. At MoMA, Eric Sandeen explains, Bayer used "his techniques exploiting peripheral vision, three-dimensional collage, and engineered perspectives to create an overwhelming effect on the viewer."<sup>29</sup> Bayer's

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<sup>27</sup> "Chronology of the Department of Photography," *Museum of Modern Art*, May 1964, accessed June 8, 2012, [www.moma.org/docs/press\\_archives/3242/releases/MOMA\\_1964\\_0029\\_1964-05.pdf?2010](http://www.moma.org/docs/press_archives/3242/releases/MOMA_1964_0029_1964-05.pdf?2010); "Korea – The Impact of War," *Museum of Modern Art*, February 1951, accessed June 8, 2012, [www.moma.org/docs/press\\_archives/1497/releases/MOMA\\_1951\\_0015\\_1951-02-08\\_510208-11.pdf?2010](http://www.moma.org/docs/press_archives/1497/releases/MOMA_1951_0015_1951-02-08_510208-11.pdf?2010); Staniszewski, 215.

<sup>28</sup> SR, 55.1 D. MoMA Archives.

<sup>29</sup> Sandeen, *Picturing*, 44.

design was particularly striking because he created very specific narratives for his viewers. Mary Anne Staniszewski notes that Bayer's narratives "were arranged for maximum psychological and emotional impact. Simple determinants such as image size enhanced the narrative of the drama."<sup>30</sup> The literature MoMA disseminated that described the politically motivated photography exhibitions designed by Bayer encouraged one to read the exhibitions as one would read literature: "Each room is a chapter, each photograph a sentence."<sup>31</sup> The result was that the exhibitions were organized, Staniszewski argues, as "national folk tale," with linear stories, obvious messages, and sentimental and militaristic overtones.<sup>32</sup> The exhibitions relied on traditional wartime images that were easily identified and understood by viewers.

The composition of *The Family of Man* was very similar to the political persuasion shows of the 1940s and early 1950s. Steichen was influenced by Bayer's design in his creation of a total environment within the walls of the exhibition. Steichen also relied on the audience's familiarity with *Life*, *Look*, *Saturday Evening Post*, or *National Geographic* and used a format similar to a photo-essay in his exhibition design. Photojournalism, Monique Berlier explains in her essay "*The Family of Man: Readings of an Exhibition*," helped readers visualize and understand what the new, postwar world would be like. More importantly, readers of magazines that relied on the photo-essay were given a Western perspective from which to view the world, a perspective that was

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<sup>30</sup> Staniszewski, 220.

<sup>31</sup> *Bulletin of the Museum of Modern Art* 10, nos. 5-6 (June 1942), 19, quoted in Staniszewski, 210.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*

transposed onto the photo-narrative shows at MoMA.<sup>33</sup>

Understanding the world from an American perspective was the very basis for *The Family of Man* exhibition.<sup>34</sup> In the foundational analysis of the show *Picturing an Exhibition: The Family of Man and 1950's America*, Eric Sandeen says that “According to Steichen’s own account, he had already thought of the concept of this exhibition before [World War II] started. He had seen an exhibition of Farm Security Administration photographs in New York’s Grand Central Terminal and had been taken with the idea of presenting an exhibition commenting on the American Dream to a mass audience.”<sup>35</sup> Staniszewski builds on this idea, writing that according to Wayne Miller, the FSA show made Steichen want to do “a big show on America—the spirit of America, the face of America.”<sup>36</sup> In a September 1949 letter to Dorothea Lange, Steichen wrote, “I presume Wayne Miller has told you about the tentative plans for a national exhibition on Human

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<sup>33</sup> Monique Berlier, “The Family of Man: Readings of an Exhibition,” *Picturing the Past: Media, History, and Photography* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1999), 216.

<sup>34</sup> For more on the origins of *The Family of Man*, see Katherine Hoffman “Sowing the Seeds/Setting the Stage: Steichen, Stieglitz and *The Family of Man*,” *History of Photography* 29, no. 4 (Winter 2005): 320-30 and Kristen Gresh, “The European Roots of *The Family of Man*,” *History of Photography* 29, no. 4 (Winter 2005): 331-343. Hoffman argues that *The Family of Man* exhibition sprung from Steichen’s relationship with Alfred Stieglitz and European Romantic and Symbolist elements. Gresh claims *Post-War European Photography* acted as the catalyst and basis for *The Family Man*.

<sup>35</sup> Sandeen, *Picturing*, 43.

<sup>36</sup> Staniszewski, 219.

Relations and Human Rights. It is all still in the research stage.”<sup>37</sup> Steichen proposed a show for the Museum of Modern Art two years later in June of 1951 that had the working title *Image of America*. Museum director René d’Harnoncourt also sent the proposal to the Ford Foundation in order to find backing for the show, and the museum’s department of photography. The show was never actually realized because museum administrators thought an international exhibition on human rights, rather than one that focused just on the United States like *Image of America*, would bring in more money.

In the late 1940s and early 1950s, MoMA’s department of photography struggled to find backers; the result was the necessity for the department to “earn its way” into a stable existence. John Szarkowski, MoMA’s Director of Photography from 1962 to 1991, writes, “the evolution of the idea for *The Family of Man* had been slow and convoluted. In the end it was the expression not only of Steichen’s romantic idealism and heroic ambition but also of the Museum’s pragmatic efforts to find financial support for the department of photography.”<sup>38</sup> Rene d’Harnoncourt’s solicitation of high revenue exhibitions capitalizing on Steichen’s “talent for dramatization,” like the wartime political persuasion shows, suggests *Image of America* was expanded to a world view in order to reach a wider funding base.<sup>39</sup>

Hoping to find outside funding for the department Monroe Wheeler, Director of

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<sup>37</sup> John Szarkowski, “The Family of Man,” *The Museum of Modern Art at Mid-Century: At Home and Abroad*, Studies in Modern Art, no. 4 (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1994), 21.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 19.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 21.

Exhibitions and Publications, wrote to the Economic Cooperation Administration (ECA) – the agency responsible for the policies of the Marshall Plan – and proposed they back “an exhibition on human rights, executed in a style something like that of ‘The Road to Victory.’” While the particular project Wheeler suggested did not pan out, the ECA did say that a human rights show would work in the future if the exhibit was “prepared on an international rather than a purely American basis, for showing in all the free nations, and especially to the simpler laboring people in factories and market places.” In a subsequent meeting, Wheeler, d’Harnoncourt, and Steichen discussed alternatives to Wheeler’s original proposal – it could look like “a picture of American life, or with international content.”<sup>40</sup> For the Rockefellers and the administrators at the Museum of Modern Art, national and international context were interchangeable because the exhibition’s core was the promotion of American culture. Outside funding never did materialize for *The Family of Man*; Steichen believed it was Nelson Rockefeller “who finally bit the bullet and agreed to guarantee the exhibition’s costs.”<sup>41</sup> The in-house funding for the show allowed Steichen to create a story about the global community that was in line with the Rockefellers’ vision of America’s place in the Cold War world. As Louis Kaplan puts it in *American Exposures: Photography and Community in the Twentieth Century*, theirs

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<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 22.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 23; René d’Harnoncourt Papers (RdH), IV.217. MoMA Archives, NY. Letter from Edward Steichen, 12/20/55 to “THE FAMILY OF MAN” Photographers: “Any further income we receive from the publication of THE FAMILY OF MAN will be set aside to finance the future activities of our Department of Photography.”

was an “ideological agenda that ‘put America first.’”<sup>42</sup> The exhibition blurred the lines between cultures while defining the attributes that the Rockefellers, and Steichen, believed made America exceptional—a democratically run government, a stable and prosperous economy, and the freedom of choice and expression for all its citizens.

The proposal for *Image of America* is strikingly similar to the press release for *The Family of Man*, which outlined the composition and intentions of the exhibition. The first paragraph of the proposal for *Image of America* reads:

Ever since the United States has become a world power, it has been seen and judged largely by its astonishing material achievements. People the world over know about our skyscrapers, our fabulous production record of motor cars, airplanes and iceboxes. They also know of our high standards of living and think of us as a nation to be envied rather than loved or admired. Now for the first time efforts are being made to convey to people abroad that peculiar American process by which our great productivity has become a tool for freedom and social progress.<sup>43</sup>

The show’s main concern, to replace envy of American culture with understanding, would be performed through the use of easily read images that would strike the chord of sentiment in any viewer’s eyes, regardless of nationality. The proposal for *Image of America* declares, “In order to communicate the essence of the American way of life to people all over the world we must show them our men, women and children in their

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<sup>42</sup> Louis Kaplan, *American Exposures: Photography and Community in the Twentieth Century* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005), 58.

<sup>43</sup> RdH, VII.85. MoMA Archives, NY.



specific American situations and pursuits, but in warm terms of a universal language of human dignity, joy and sorrow.” The exhibition outline suggests the show would do this work by picturing “Americans at work and at play against the background of family, community, and nation. It will...show the darker sides of American life together with the bright ones. (The existence of race prejudice and political corruption, for example, will not be denied but will be presented as a challenge in the continuing fight for the fullest realization of American ideals).” The exhibition, to be “designed by Captain Edward Steichen as a dramatic narrative held together by historical quotations from great Americans,” would follow the tradition of “‘Road to Victory’ and ‘Power in the Pacific’... [where] [i]mage followed image in a dynamic sequence.” Like the previous political persuasion shows, *Image of America* would be composed of pictures placed on large panels in order to “draw the visitor into the narrative itself.” Smaller photos would be used as punctuation, highlighting “incursive moments.” The exhibition proposal concludes: “The combination of a brilliant use of modern display technic [sic] and of the sense of directness and human reality that only photography can impart made these exhibitions ideal carriers of ideas.”<sup>44</sup> Like Steichen’s wartime exhibitions, *Image of America* was to express a particular story about America’s greatness through carefully placed photographs and modern exhibition design.

The language used in the outline for the exhibition *Image of America* is almost identical to the language of *The Family of Man* press release. In the first line of the release, the show is described as “an exhibition of creative photography dedicated to the

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<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*

dignity of man.” Just as *Image of America* was to be held together with “historical quotations from great Americans,” *The Family of Man* release asserted, “Throughout the exhibition are quotations from world literature.” The show stressed “the art of photography as a universal language in recording the world we live in,” and just as *Image of America* categorized the work of humanity, the *Family of Man* press release did the same: “The first sequences in the exhibition are devoted to the lovers, marriage, childbirth, and children.... Photographs in the exhibition show men working on the land.” Like *Image of America*, *The Family of Man* would display “the darker sides” of life, showing death as the “great leveler” and ending the exhibition with “a series of photographs which dramatically raise ominous fear of another war.”<sup>45</sup> The similarities in language describing the two shows makes it clear that in *The Family of Man* the earlier, abandoned exhibition *Image of America* was realized in a global context. Every major aspect of *Image of America* is present in *The Family of Man*. The comparison between the *Image of America* proposal and the press release for *The Family of Man* shows that *Image of America*, Steichen’s exhibition on the American dream, actually did reach the public but in the form of *The Family of Man*. The narrative that united people across the world originated from western values and spread a version of humanism that was based on American values.

Steichen himself took considerable time to talk about American values through the image of the American family as presented in *The Family of Man* (figure 8). He spoke to audiences at the Minneapolis Institute of Arts on June 21, 1955 about Nina Leen’s

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<sup>45</sup> Department of Circulating Exhibition Records (CE), II.1.57.1.1. MoMA Archives, NY.

photograph from *Life* magazine:

The American family is one of the finest bits of Americana I have ever seen. A good family. Grandparents, children, and grandchildren, and on the wall the great grandparents in crayon portraits with their plush and gilt frames, all sitting around the stove. The goodness and strength of America is in that picture. The dignity of man is in that picture. The grandmother sits with her silver halo in her rocking chair in the middle and the children and the grandchildren are grouped around her like a halo. That's our strength...and it is with the help of the State Department we are going to show these pictures all over the world. They are going to see something of what Americans look like and that we are just like everybody else....<sup>46</sup>

*The Family of Man* was not only a show that spread the message of universality, but more importantly it acted as a vehicle to illustrate to the world both the accessibility and exemplarity of the American family. Steichen may have told the Minnesotans as the exhibition traveled the world via the State Department that international audiences would see "we are just like everybody else," but if we understand this statement through the lens of a westernized human rights discourse it seems what Steichen really meant was that through their acceptance of the universal humanism that sprang from American values, international audiences would understand that they would want to "become like us."

The story of *The Family of Man* as told by Edward Steichen and the Museum of Modern Art relied on Steichen's careful manipulation of the images used in the

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<sup>46</sup> RdH, IV.217. MoMA Archives, NY.

exhibition. The prints used in the show came from negatives sent to Steichen by each of the artists. If a negative was not available, Steichen would take pictures of the print photograph he had and then use the new negative as the basis for the print shown in the exhibition. Steichen also made sure he had permission to alter the original images by having all photographers that submitted photographs for the show sign a release form that gave him the rights over the included works.<sup>47</sup> Whatever it was, the original intention of the photographer no longer mattered. Steichen cut borders, cropped images, and changed aspect ratios to elicit emotional responses from his audience, not to showcase the photographers' work.

The process began when Wayne Miller looked through 3.5 million prints from the *Life* archives and pulled the ones he thought might be suitable for the exhibition.<sup>48</sup> Then Steichen sent out an international call to photographers asking for images that "keep in mind the universal elements and aspects of human relations and the experiences common to all mankind rather than situations that represented conditions exclusively related or peculiar to a race, an event, a time, or place."<sup>49</sup> The language of Steichen's call erases the particularities of nationality. In his effort to tell a singular story of the world, cultural history and pride are erased in service of a universal version of global humanity.

Steichen combed through the pictures sent to him by the photographers and the images culled by Miller from *Life* and other photo-banks, and then he cropped and/or

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<sup>47</sup> Berlier, 213.

<sup>48</sup> Sandeen, *Picturing*, 41.

<sup>49</sup> Eric Sandeen, "The Family of Man," 373; News release quoted in Sandeen, "Museum of Modern Art Plans International Photography Exhibition," January 31, 1954.

manipulated each image until it suited the meaning he wished for it to portray. For example, all of the prints in *The Family of Man* were black and white, except for the image of the mushroom cloud from an American hydrogen bomb explosion in the Pacific Ocean. Steichen intended to shock his audience by portraying in color the terror associated with the power of nuclear weapons. He hoped the vivid transparency would radiate in his viewers' minds long after they left the exhibition. Even when the show was up and open to the public, Steichen continued to edit the presentation of the exhibition's photographs in order to ensure maximum emotional effectiveness. When the exhibition first opened, a section Steichen and Miller referred to as the "faces exhibit" garnered a lot of attention from viewers. Nine individual portraits were mounted around a mirror that was hung at eye-level. As viewers came to the "faces exhibit" they would see themselves, explicitly, as members of the "family of man."<sup>50</sup> During the first two weeks of the show, Steichen and Miller saw mixed reactions from viewers and critics; the arrangement, in the words of exhibition designer Paul Rudolph, was "corny and wrong."<sup>51</sup> As a result, Steichen removed the mirror from the "faces" portion of the exhibit.

Exhibition designer Paul Rudolph followed the thirty-seven thematic sections of the show to guide his installation by using the subjects of the photographs to help him

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<sup>50</sup> Staniszewski, 244.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 244.

make design decisions for the show's layout.<sup>52</sup> The design space, created in accordance with Bayer's principles, was manipulated to heighten the implied meanings of the photographs, the enigmatic wall-texts, and the links between the two. The combination created "new media," argues Michael North in *Camera Works: Photography and the Twentieth-Century Word*, that "seemed to bridge the gap between language and visible phenomena by making a language of visible phenomena, a language impossibly more flexible and more various than any of the written languages."<sup>53</sup> The Museum of Modern Art publicized the show as featuring the "democratic language of photography," and, explains Erina Duganne in *The Self in Black and White: Race and Subjectivity in Postwar American Photography*, MoMA "promoted photography as a universal language and as a tool of mass communication."<sup>54</sup> Audiences were to be persuaded by the presumed truth of photography into believing that all of mankind really was the same.<sup>55</sup>

American audiences had been looking at mass-produced photographs of families in *Life* magazine since the late 1930s; *Life*'s readership was estimated to be about twenty million readers, making it the era's most popular magazine. The photographs in *Life* were presented to readers as truthfully depicting the real world. In her book, *Life's*

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<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 240. Eric Sandeen notes in *Picturing an Exhibition* that Paul Rudolph was also the designer for the floor plan of the 1952 *Good Design* exhibition at the Chicago Merchandise Mart (134).

<sup>53</sup> Michael North, *Camera Works: Photography and the Twentieth-Century Word* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 8.

<sup>54</sup> Erina Duganne, *The Self in Black and White: Race and Subjectivity in Postwar American Photography* (Hanover, N.H.: Dartmouth College Press, 2010), 57.

<sup>55</sup> Sandeen, "The Family of Man," 369. The viewer was at the same time presented with "an elaborately conceived argument for the validity of the photograph as a persuasive document, as well as for the liberal sentiment that 'mankind is one.'"

*America: Family and Nation in Postwar Photojournalism*, Wendy Kozol explains that *Life*'s use of metonymy, "the use of the 'ordinary' individual to represent broader social conditions," made larger-than-life news stories seem intimate to its readers. The same technique used by *Life* – "explain[ing] abstract or complex problems, issues, or events through visual portraits of 'real' people" – was used in *The Family of Man*.<sup>56</sup> The pictures in *The Family of Man* were meant to represent broad themes in life like love, birth, and death, but because the themes were represented by individuals audience members were encouraged to react personally.

Steichen believed viewers needed to feel autonomous while they were unknowingly directed in a specific path through the exhibition. The tension between the power of the individual viewer and the design of *The Family of Man* as it was presented at MoMA is taken up by Fred Turner in his article, "*The Family of Man* and the Politics of Attention in Cold War America." When visitors entered the exhibition they walked "under an arch covered with images of a huge crowd seen from the air. Directly in front of them, they saw a river. To walk under the arch and into the exhibition space was to step into the river of humanity, flowing through time." Turner argues that as visitors left the foyer they "largely left images of crowds behind," seeing instead as they came into the exhibition proper "a Lucite wall hung with images of individuals and couples — sitting under a tree, chatting on a street corner, kissing, working — as well as a wedding procession. By implication, the entryway reminded visitors that much as America had defeated the fascists of World War II, the Americans of 1955 could defeat the new

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<sup>56</sup> Wendy Kozol, *Life's America: Family and Nation in Postwar Photojournalism*. (Philadelphia, Penn.: Temple University Press, 1994), 9.

authoritarian forces of massification at home and abroad and enter a peaceful, global society of individuals.”<sup>57</sup> The dual nature of the exhibition—reinforcing the individuality of the viewer while simultaneously leading the viewer on a prescribed path created by Steichen—followed the same type of design used by Bayer and Steichen in their propagandistic wartime photograph exhibitions. Viewers were not physically led by the hand through the exhibitions, but the path to get from the beginning to the end of one of Steichen’s political persuasion exhibitions was clear.<sup>58</sup>

Viewers of *The Family of Man* exhibition were theoretically able to move about the show as they pleased, but their choices were limited by the options presented to them by the exhibition designers. Audiences may have felt autonomous, but they were really being managed.<sup>59</sup> The process of moving through the exhibition echoed the power structure at play in the exhibition’s narrative: no matter how unique each visitor’s experience felt, he or she could not escape the one story told by the museum. The process of reifying the individual in the realm of the mass is deconstructed by Carol Duncan and Alan Wallach in their article, “The Museum of Modern Art as Late Capitalist Ritual: An Iconographic Analysis.” Mistaking one’s choices as self-made in a world where one’s decisions are made for them is the same process as mistaking one’s spiritual beliefs to be reflected in a commercial world, a process that Duncan and Wallach argue happens daily within MoMA’s walls. Duncan and Wallach explain that “[a]s an

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<sup>57</sup> Turner, 76.

<sup>58</sup> See “Installations for Political Persuasion,” in Staniszewski’s *The Power of Display*.

<sup>59</sup> Turner, 58.



institution, MoMA appears to be a refuge from a materialistic society: a cultural haven, an ideal world apart. Yet, it exalts precisely the values and experiences it apparently rejects by elevating them to the universal and timeless realm of spirit.”<sup>60</sup> The museum, known as the “place for seeing art in the original,” is a “modern ceremonial monument” that claims to present truths about both art, and more generally, society. The museum space tricks patrons into believing they are experiencing their own spiritual and artistic connection; while “[i]ndividuals respond in different ways according to their education, culture, [and] class...the architecture is a given and imposes the same underlying structure on everyone. By following the architectural script, the visitor engages in an activity most accurately described as a ritual.”<sup>61</sup>

When visitors entered *The Family of Man* they could see through a Lucite panel to the center of the exhibition, but they had first to make a prescribed turn in the “birth pavilion” where thin curtains were hung “to suggest hospital wards...[and] pictures of a woman in labor, a child being born and mothers nursing” greeted the viewer.<sup>62</sup> Only after leaving the birth pavilion did the exhibition space open up. The viewer was presented with different choices of what to look at, but each path ended with images of the family: “To their right, they faced a display of images of children and, visible beyond it, a walkway with images of families playing and celebrating together. If they walked straight ahead or turned left, they found themselves in the open center of the exhibition.

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<sup>60</sup> Carol Duncan and Alan Wallach, “The Museum of Modern Art As Late Capitalist Ritual: An Iconographic Analysis,” *Marxist Perspectives* 4 (Winter 1978): 47.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 28.

<sup>62</sup> Turner, 78.

There they encountered enormous, wall-sized images of family groups hung from the ceiling at different heights and facing different directions.”<sup>63</sup> No matter what path one walked down, the nuclear family waited; all paths resulted in essentially the same ritual of viewing for *The Family of Man* attendee. Turner explains that “Steichen did indeed structure the show to take visitors from birth to death and even rebirth at the end.”<sup>64</sup> The individual’s ability to choose his path in a show that ultimately led from point A to point B, regardless of his/her route, puts into practice the manipulation of subjectivity MoMA relied on in order give its attendants a satisfying aesthetic and spiritual experience.

In addition to using “Mother’s love” to guide his viewer, Steichen stitched together the hundreds of photographs in the exhibition with famous quotations and song lyrics for further assurance of the show’s message of universality. When the viewer entered the exhibition she first saw a panel written in the hand of contemporary author and Steichen’s brother-in-law Carl Sandburg that read:

There is only one man in the world  
and his name is All Men  
  
There is only one woman in the world  
and her name is All Women.  
  
There is only one child in the world  
and the child's name is All Children  
  
a camera testament, a drama

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<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 78.

of the grand canyon of humanity,  
an epic of fun, mystery, holiness -  
here is The Family of Man!<sup>65</sup>

Sandburg's poem shows the enormity of the exhibition's reach while also welcoming each individual into *The Family of Man*—both the exhibition, and Steichen's imagined community. The poem promises truth, "a camera testament," that will show the highs and the lows of "the grand canyon of humanity." The dedication to presenting age-old truths about life was reinforced to the viewer as she encountered "brief Bible quotations, folk-sayings, and text from world literature, including thoughts from Virgil, Homer, Lao-tse, Lui-Chi, Thomas Paine, Thomas Jefferson, James Joyce, Shakespeare, William Blake, Montaigne and Anne Frank, as well as from the Bhagavad-Gita and from Native Americans."<sup>66</sup> Lines from Native Americans were meant to reinforce the idea that America has always been an inclusive nation, even before it was settled by the colonists: "We shall be one person" (Pueblo Indian); "With all beings and all things we shall be as relatives" (Sioux Indian). Quotations from the Bible evoked the naturalness of the family within the most widely-known text in the United States: "She is a tree of life to them..." (Proverbs 3:18); "And the people sat down to eat and to drink, and rose up to play" (Exodus 32:6). Phrases from great writers showed viewers that believing in the family of man would take them through tragedy to resolution and reconciliation: "Everyman beareth the whole stamp of the human condition" (Montaigne); "...Nothing is real to us

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<sup>65</sup> CE, II.1.57.1.1. MoMA Archives, NY.

<sup>66</sup> Berlier, 213.

but hunger" (Kakuzo Okakura); "...I still believe that people are really good at heart" (Anne Frank, "Diary" - 14 years old); "I know no safe depository of the ultimate powers of society but the people themselves..." (Thomas Jefferson).<sup>67</sup> All of the quotations were easy to comprehend and viewers themselves could participate in the reading and processing of the exhibition without feeling intimidated. The readability of the captions coupled with the easily understood photographs helped viewers feel at ease in Steichen's exhibition and ultimately part of All Men/All Women/All Children.

The assumption that photography could act as universal language was utilized by Steichen to create an all-inclusive global family. Steichen, in the words of the show's press release, "saw in the varied photographs the kinship of people everywhere, communicated through pictures. He drew from them a hope that all men can find a common framework of objectives – objectives broad as the aspirations of mankind."<sup>68</sup> Steichen was able to tie diverse family images together by picking photographs, as Phoebe Lou Adams points out, where each "posed family photograph looks exactly the same whether it's African, Asian, or European. The dog may be fat or thin, but the people have identical expressions of slightly apprehensive satisfaction."<sup>69</sup> Steichen promoted what Louis Kaplan calls the "photo-global rhetoric," whereby the overwhelming portrayal of nuclear families as the basic unit of humanity served to

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<sup>67</sup> CE, II.1.57.1.1. MoMA Archives, NY.

<sup>68</sup> *Family of Man* Press Release, August 18, 1955, folder 620, box 81, series O, Record Group (RG) 4, Rockefeller Family Archives, RAC.

<sup>69</sup> Phoebe Lou Adams, "Through a Lens Darkly," *The Atlantic Monthly*, April 1955, accessed November 1, 2008, <http://www.theatlantic.com/issues/55apr/adams.htm>

champion “stereotypical gender roles and the heteronormativity of the 1950s domestic life.”<sup>70</sup> He used the nuclear family to show his audience that “‘we are all alike’ . . . [a claim supported] with evidence that makes the family unit serve as the basis of ‘our likeness.’”<sup>71</sup> The naturalness of the nuclear family was asserted, in particular, by the special insertion of the wife and children of Steichen’s assistant Wayne Miller in the exhibition.<sup>72</sup> The Millers were featured prominently at the opening of the exhibition with a picture of Joan Miller delivering her first son. The picture was taken by Wayne Miller, and the doctor in the picture was Wayne Miller’s father.<sup>73</sup> The subtext of the photograph highlights Steichen’s insistence on the power of the nuclear family.

Miller’s family is immortalized in *The Family of Man* exhibition catalogue in a photograph that pits the nuclear family against nuclear attack. As mentioned earlier, the only color photograph in the show was of the mushroom cloud emerging from a hydrogen bomb test. It was a transparency lit from behind that hung by itself in a dark gallery. The image was labeled “Explosion of a Hydrogen Bomb. Fall. 1952. U.S. Pacific Proving Grounds. Marshall Islands. This photograph was taken 50 miles from the detonation point.” The caption to the left of the photograph—a quotation by Bertrand Russell—read, “Authorities are unanimous in saying a war with hydrogen bombs is quite likely to put an end to the human race. . . . There will be universal death—Suddenly only

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<sup>70</sup> Kaplan, 63.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>72</sup> It was not made know to the public that it was Miller’s family that was used throughout the exhibition.

<sup>73</sup> Sandeen, “*The Family of Man*,” 379-80.

for a fortunate minority, But for the majority a slow torture of disease and disintegration.”<sup>74</sup> The color transparency did not travel with the exhibition and was only represented in some editions of the deluxe hardcover versions of the exhibition catalogue. When the image did appear in the book, it was in black and white, with Wayne Miller’s wife and three children standing in front of it, seemingly in deep conversation (figure 9).<sup>75</sup> Miller’s three children gaze at their mother thoughtfully, the oldest boy looking as if he is in disbelief. We only see the back of Miller’s wife as she faces the transparency full on. As the mother, she must face the horror completely, while educating her children about, and protecting them from, the terrible reality of nuclear warfare. Audiences saw the possibility of global devastation due to the misuse of nuclear weapons in the representation of the hydrogen bomb. The picture of Miller’s family contemplating the explosion emphasizes family rather than the threat of nuclear destruction. The narrative of the exhibition told viewers that concentrating on the representative nuclear family or *The Family of Man* instead of nuclear armament was the only way to move forward in the Cold War world. Not only was the original version of the hydrogen bomb image not in the exhibition book, but it was also removed from some versions of the traveling exhibitions because Steichen “found it in conflict with the central mood of the show.”<sup>76</sup> When the show traveled it was used as a piece of cultural diplomacy for the United States Information Agency, as was the exhibition book. The USIA’s decision to leave the

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<sup>74</sup> CE, II.1.57.1.1. MoMA Archives, NY.

<sup>75</sup> Staniszewski, 247.

<sup>76</sup> Szarkowski, 13.

photograph out of most copies of the traveling exhibition and Steichen's choice to use the picture of the Miller family in front of the hydrogen bomb in *The Family of Man* book confirms both the volatile politics of the Cold War era, as well as the power of the image of family to smooth over those same tensions.

One goal of *The Family of Man* when it circulated under the management of the USIA was to forget America as aggressor and to picture America as savior. This was also the motivation for Nelson Rockefeller's funding of the exhibition; he was invested in the work *The Family of Man* could do for America's image at home and abroad.

Rockefeller praised Steichen for creating an exhibition that gave "us hope that in all human relationships we can find a common framework of objectives broad enough to encompass the hopes and aspirations of all mankind."<sup>77</sup> This message was made clear in the exhibition in the placement of pictures of children, the general symbol of the hope for the future, after the hydrogen bomb transparency. Then, after a series of pictures featuring couples labeled with the caption "We two form a multitude," a large picture of the United Nations comforted audiences.<sup>78</sup> Audiences found salvation from the bomb in the innocence of youth and in an organization heavily influenced by the Rockefellers.

For years, John D. Rockefeller Jr. had supported the League of Nations, the precursor to what we now know as the United Nations.<sup>79</sup> In the early fall of 1944, when

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<sup>77</sup> SR, 55.1 D. MoMA Archives, NY.

<sup>78</sup> Sandeen, "*The Family of Man*," 371.

<sup>79</sup> John Ensor Harr and Peter J. Johnson, *The Rockefeller Century* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1988). Rockefeller's League library "functioned throughout World War II and remains today a resource for documentation and research for the United Nations" (173).

the United States, Great Britain, the Soviet Union, and China started to plan for an international organization to secure world peace—the initial plans for the U.N.—Nelson Rockefeller was integral to the approval of its charter.<sup>80</sup> Rockefeller was made assistant secretary for Latin American affairs by Secretary of State Edward R. Stettinius Jr. Because he worked closely with Latin American cultural leaders as the Coordinator of Commercial and Cultural Affairs for the American Republics, Nelson Rockefeller was able to secure enough Latin American votes to balance out issues that had arisen with the Soviet Union in the creation of the U.N.'s charter.

The involvement of the Rockefellers in the establishment of the U.N. did not end with John D. Rockefeller Jr.'s patronage of the League of Nations or Nelson Rockefeller's wrangling of the Latin American vote. When it came time to establish a permanent residence for the newly organized United Nations, the Rockefeller family badly wanted to secure its residence in New York. Locations in Flushing Meadow, Rockefeller Center Theater, and Pocantico were all rejected. The day before the U.N. deadline to establish its location, Nelson Rockefeller was able to convince realtor William Zeckendorf to sell him a chunk of land in Turtle Bay, Manhattan, between 42<sup>nd</sup> and 48<sup>th</sup> streets, at the price of 8.5 million dollars. John D. Rockefeller Jr. paid for the land and the United Nations stands on that location to this day.<sup>81</sup> The Rockefeller backing of the U.N., both in its creation and physical establishment in the United States, reinforces the power and influence of the Rockefellers in the postwar era. (Just to show

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<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, 420.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, 431-33.



how far this reach extended, John D. Rockefeller Jr. was able to get a special bill passed in Congress in order to write off his \$8.5 million donation to the U.N. as a charitable deduction.<sup>82)</sup>

When viewers saw the picture of the U.N. and presumably read its message of security, they were also, albeit unknowingly, looking at the far reach of the Rockefeller family's power. *The Family of Man* existed because of funds made available by Nelson Rockefeller. Viewers saw *The Family of Man* either at the Museum of Modern Art, a Rockefeller institution, or in a traveling exhibition that was, in part, funded by the museum. When they came upon the picture of the United Nations, the global family of leaders, they were investing themselves in the security of a gathering of nations that was originally funded by, and had a home because of, the Rockefeller family.

The Rockefellers had a deliberate vision of American dominance in the modern world, and they made sure their vision was consistent across all of their institutions and endeavors. Like the Rockefellers' decision to ignore racial tensions in Colonial Williamsburg, the most overt reference to racial violence in *The Family of Man* was removed during the first two weeks of the show's run at MoMA. When the exhibition was first put up, the "inhumanities" section included a 1937 photograph of a lynched black man called *Death Slump at Mississippi Lynching* (figure 10). The photograph shows a victim chained to a tree, his body sagging against the shaft of the tree, and his arms pulled tightly behind his back. The photograph received a lot of attention from viewers and from the press. Steichen decided to remove the photograph because he was

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<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, 596.

afraid the picture would become a focal point and take away from the exhibition's overall theme of peace.<sup>83</sup> Though Steichen aimed to show the good and the bad side of humanity, the image of the lynched black man too clearly referenced American racial atrocities and compromised the idea of America as benevolent nuclear family.

The lynching photograph, in short, focused too much on actual events rather than universal experience. In order for audiences across the globe to receive the show's message of one family of man, the portrayal of race had to be managed; as Michael North argues, "the designation of the visual as a language at all depends on excluding from it the extraneous, the irrelevant, the foreign, which in a European context," or Euro-American context, "ultimately means the racial."<sup>84</sup> Audiences at home and abroad could not preoccupy themselves with cultural particularities if they were going to understand Steichen's photographic story of universality. In her book *The Self in Black and White*, Erina Duganne notes that lynching photographs were "used by left-wing and liberal black political organizations in national anti-lynching campaigns. By the 1940s and 1950s, these publicized lynching photographs... 'met with national protests and condemnation in the international press' and were a general embarrassment for the United States, especially 'as it sought to present itself as a more democratic alternative to communism during the cold war.'"<sup>85</sup> More to the point, Steichen wrote that the aim of the 503

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<sup>83</sup> John O'Brian, "The Nuclear Family of Man" (lecture, Hiroshima Peace Institute, Hiroshima City University, Hiroshima, December 6, 2007), repr. in *Asia-Pacific Journal: Japan Focus*, accessed September 10, 2009, [www.japanfocus.org/-John-O-Brian/2816](http://www.japanfocus.org/-John-O-Brian/2816)

<sup>84</sup> North, 99.

<sup>85</sup> Duganne, 145-146.

photographs in the exhibition was to display “the universal elements and aspects of human relations and experiences common to all mankind *rather than situations that represented conditions exclusively related or peculiar to a race, an event, a time or place*” (emphasis added).<sup>86</sup> *Death Slump at Mississippi Lynching* emphasized the horrors of lynching as well as continuing racial violence and discrimination in America. The photograph called attention not just to a particular race and event but to a particularly American treatment of a group of people theoretically included in *The Family of Man*.

The lack of racial subject matter in the exhibition was the target of *The Family of Man*'s most famous criticism. In his essay, “The Great Family of Man,” which was included in his 1957 book *Mythologies*, Roland Barthes condemns the exhibition for excluding historical context from its images and for relying instead on sentimentality and humanism to reveal “the relativity of their institutions or the superficial diversity of their skins” all lying upon “the solid rock of a universal human nature.”<sup>87</sup> In the middle of his assessment, Barthes asks, “Why not ask the parents of Emmett Till, the young Negro assassinated by the Whites what *they* think of *The Great Family of Man*?” Where Barthes’s theoretical writing focuses on the tension between nature and history and the manipulation of both by the exhibition, the most straightforward part of his review boldly called into question America’s racial politics and the continuation of racial brutality in Cold War America. Allan Sekula echoes Barthes’s outrage in his famous critique of *The Family of Man* and its use: “This is an aestheticized job of global accounting, a careful

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<sup>86</sup> O’Brian, “The Nuclear Family of Man.”

<sup>87</sup> Roland Barthes, *Mythologies* (1957; reprint, New York: Hill and Wang, 1994), 101.

Cold War effort to bring about the ideological argument of the neocolonial peripheries with the imperial center. American culture of both elite and mass varieties was being promoted as more universal than that of the Soviet Union."<sup>88</sup> For Sekula selling audiences on the story of universal humanity told through photographs was the same as selling audiences on the greatness of American culture. MoMA and the United States Information Agency claimed that *The Family of Man* was an exhibition that spoke to all audiences because of the readability of photographs and relatability of the content of the pictures, but the show was conceived and produced by an American man who believed that given the chance, any citizen of the world would want to be "like us." Of course it was easier to sell audiences on this idea if the racial violence that existed in the United States was ignored.

What infuriated Barthes and Sekula was the very same issue that made the exhibition so suitable for international exhibition under the auspices of the United States Information Agency. With the picture of the lynching removed and the evidence of nuclear warfare present only in some versions of the traveling exhibition, the show, as Eric Sandeen points out, "made few references to specific historic events [which] only heightened its utility to an agency that preferred to make its American imprint invisible and its message indirectly delivered."<sup>89</sup> In fact, the modifications made to *The Family of Man* only increased its overall popularity.

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<sup>88</sup> Allan Sekula, "The Traffic in Photographs," *Art Journal* 41 (Spring 1981): 20.

<sup>89</sup> Sandeen, "International Reception," 354; CE, II.1.57.1.2, MoMA Archives, NY. "Section 40: BOMB" was crossed out on a master exhibition checklist revised in July 1957 for the USIA.

Positive reviews of the exhibition from the American press were published in a wide spectrum of outlets. As *Vogue* told its readers, “The camera sweeps over the whole range of human life. Its message...is the universality of human life everywhere.”<sup>90</sup> *Modern Photography* offered, “It does not hang limply on a wall inviting technical criticisms.... [I]t attempts much more important things. It wants to show people of one land that people of others are really not as different as they may seem.”<sup>91</sup> For *Congress Weekly* the exhibition validated the status of photography as a true art form: “The Museum of Modern Art has repeatedly proved that photography can be an art, but never as convincingly as in the huge show, *The Family of Man*.”<sup>92</sup> In general, the show’s easily identifiable themes and its promotion of peace in the postwar world made it popular both at home and abroad. The familiar drama of nuclear fear, the reassuring promise of a united global community, and “photojournalistic realism and vision of a humanity whose character matched a mythic 1950s American ideal,” Mary Anne Staniszewski writes, “made [*The Family of Man*] a perfect vehicle to promote the State Department’s interests” abroad.<sup>93</sup> At a time when modern art was seen as subversive to contained American Cold War culture, *The Family of Man* offered a vehicle through which the USIA could spread the dual message of American cultural superiority and global postwar peace. Jean Back declares in a 2005 collection on the show:

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<sup>90</sup> Department of Public Information Records (PI), II.B.116. MoMA Archives, NY.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>93</sup> Staniszewski, 257.

A Congressman might not be able to understand Abstract Impressionism, the favored artistic style for export, or might feel uncomfortable having an African-American such as Louis Armstrong, the designated American musician in the international circuit, represent the United States abroad through indigenous art form of jazz. But even if he had not seen *The Family of Man* inside the United States he would certainly have constituents at home who had the exhibit catalog on their coffee tables.<sup>94</sup>

The popularity of the exhibition, and the proliferation of its accompanying text, turned *The Family of Man* itself into a symbol of universal humanity in the Cold War world.

*The Family of Man* book went into production a few months after the opening of the original exhibition. On June 19, 1955, Harvey Breit reported in the *New York Times* column "In and Out of Books" that while critics were skeptical of *The Family of Man's* artistic worth, the general public could not get their fill fast enough. Before the book was even published, it jumped publication dates and made the best-seller list, with 130,000 copies sold pre-publication and 100,000 more on the presses. Breit added: "Doubleday's upper Fifth Avenue shop, Bloomingdale's, Macy's, Grand Central, all report it their number-one best seller. R.R. Donnelly & Sons, printers extraordinary (they print *Time*), destroyed 85,000 of a first run of 130,000 because they didn't think the reproductions had been good enough. After they got it right, they bought 650 copies for themselves."<sup>95</sup>

More copies were on order after the first run for the USIA to be sent along with the

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<sup>94</sup> Jean Back and Viktoria Schmidt-Linsenhoff, eds. *The Family of Man 1955 – 2001, Humanism and Postmodernism: A Reappraisal of the Photo Exhibition by Edward Steichen* (Marburg: Jonas Verlag, 2005), 111.

<sup>95</sup> Harvey Breit, "In and Out of Books," *New York Times*, June 19, 1955.

traveling exhibitions. *Commentary*'s Hilton Kramer went so far as to equate *The Family of Man* book with the Bible and noted another columnist's suggestion that the book would eventually become essential to every family's library.<sup>96</sup> The book was accessible not only because it was mostly made up of photographs but also because the controversial images from the exhibition were omitted from the book. *Death Slump at Mississippi Lynching* had been removed, as had an image of several individuals being shot by a firing squad, and the picture of the hydrogen bomb, as it was represented in the show, was not found in the book.<sup>97</sup>

In August of 1957, *The Family of Man* was officially sold to the United States Information Agency, where multiple copies of the exhibition were made for several international tours. Five copies of the show traveled to thirty-eight countries and were shown in ninety-one separate venues, with more than ten million people attending the exhibition in total, worldwide. The most famous version of the traveling exhibition was mounted in Moscow's Sokol'niki Park in 1959 at the American National Exhibition. The success of the endeavor to increase America's global popularity was reported in *The New York Times* in early September 1959. The report begins, "Moscow, Sept. 4 – The United States Government has given itself a B+ in popularity and an A+ in communicating ideas

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<sup>96</sup> In the October 1955 issue of *Commentary*, Hilton Kramer cites a comment made by columnist Bob Considine in June: "One columnist foresaw the hard- and softcover books published in conjunction with the show becoming 'as much a part of the family library as the Bible.'"

<sup>97</sup> As explained earlier, some editions of the book included the installation photograph of Wayne Miller's family standing in front of the image of the hydrogen bomb explosion. Mary Anne Staniszewski notes, "Important to the history and influence of *The Family of Man* is the fact that the standard version of the catalogue did not include the photograph" (Staniszewski, 254).

at the American National Exhibition in Moscow.” The American Exhibition was an overall success, but it was *The Family of Man* that was given “top rating in ‘total impact.’” While there was no mention of Communism, capitalism or democracy in *The Official Training Book for Guides* at Sokol’niki Park, the training guide did state that “the United States hopes to demonstrate ‘how America lives, works, learns, produces, consumes, and plays.’”<sup>98</sup> The propagandistic element of the exhibition may have been hidden, but this was “not ordinary propaganda,” *The New York Times* notes. Indeed, it was clear that “the United States was...the source of the exhibit’s human appeal.”<sup>99</sup> John Morris, former Picture Editor for the London Bureau of *Life* magazine and executive editor of Magnum Photos, describes the foreign policy of *The Family of Man* in straightforward terms: “[It] was very simple: there are no foreigners. We all belong to one human race. People are People.”<sup>100</sup> In *The Family of Man*’s foreign policy there were no foreigners and everyone was part of the same family – a family imagined by the United States.

The Museum of Modern Art kept a detailed record of the exhibition’s wildly

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<sup>98</sup> O’Brian.

<sup>99</sup> International Council/International Program Exhibition Record. Steichen Archives: SP-ICE-24-59.12. MoMA Archives, NY.

<sup>100</sup> John G. Morris, “*The Family of Man* as American Foreign Policy” *History of Photography* 29, no. 4 (Winter 2005): 360. In *Picturing an Exhibition*, Eric Sandeen credits John Morris’s “People are People the World Over,” a series of twelve two-page photographic spreads that ran in *Ladies Home Journal* in 1948 and 1949, as influencing in part Steichen’s ideas for *The Family of Man*. Though Morris’s series showed readers the living habits of people in other lands, his viewpoint, like Steichen’s, reinforced Western values: “The influence of the editor in maintaining a Western world view of world cohesion was identifiable, albeit unrecognized” (25).



successful reception abroad. In Belgrade, more than half of the city's 500,000 resident saw the show; in Japan one million people saw the show across 19 cities; in India viewers reached one and a half million. Germans got the message: as the USIA reported later, "an opinion survey revealed that more than 90% of the visitors recognized the objective of the exhibit to be beyond that of the usual photo show, i.e. that it was intended to stress the common and uniting characteristics of all men." In Southern Rhodesia, an editorial in the *African Daily News* read: "Never before have the universal themes and the common experiences of a lifetime so graphically been shown.... I believe 'The Family of Man' helps one to realize how man is basically the same all over the world, and in our multiracial society, the exhibition helps one to have a realization and human approach to all problems that estrange one man from another." And in France, where the fact sheet notes "all photography was invented," "the press comments are extraordinarily unanimous in high praise. ... 'wonderful,' 'beautiful,' 'extraordinary quality,' '[a] revelation for all Parisians,' 'a symphony in black and white,' 'heart-rending.'"<sup>101</sup>

The USIA's aim in using *The Family of Man* as propaganda was to promote American values and the American way of life. The most literal case of the exchange among the show, democratic capitalism, and consumer culture was seen in Johannesburg, South Africa. As described in the Coca-Cola brochure, "Overseas," the show's co-sponsor, Coca-Cola Bottling Co. of Johannesburg, "was permitted to install a refreshment center in the middle of the exhibition. It was attractively and discreetly laid out and consisted of a selling kiosk equipped with a Coca-Cola and a Fanta dispenser, each

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<sup>101</sup> PI, II.B.116. MoMA Archives, NY.

connected to pre-mixed tanks of carbonated water.”<sup>102</sup> The display was discreet in description only. Coca-Cola had installed a “large globe of the world encircled by bottles of ‘Coca-Cola’ [which] created a most attractive eye-catching display and immediately identified [Coca-Cola] with *The Family of Man* sponsorship.”<sup>103</sup> As Mary Anne Staniszewski puts it, Steichen’s ‘one world’ dream “had transmogrified into the universal markets of Coke.”<sup>104</sup> The photograph on the cover of the 1958 brochure depicting a young man and woman sitting happily near a river drinking coke could easily have been included *The Family of Man*.

Nowhere was it more clear than in Johannesburg that *The Family of Man* was telling the story of how great it was to be an American. Coca-Cola’s logo was easily read as a symbol of the long reach of American markets. The showing of *The Family of Man* in Johannesburg revealed the true intention of the USIA, the Rockefellers, and even Steichen’s greatest hope: the people in South Africa were enjoying life just as Americans did. In the South African exhibition of photographs and advertising, cultural values and material goods came together in a perfect storm to lionize the leisurely lifestyle available to Americans, a lifestyle available only because of America’s economic and military supremacy in the second half of the twentieth century.

*The Family of Man*’s impact is lasting: there is a museum dedicated to the exhibition in Clervaux, Luxembourg, the book “continues to sell by the millions,” and the

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<sup>102</sup> Coca-Cola Brochure, “Overseas,” 1958. International Council/International Program Exhibition Record. Steichen Archives: SP-ICE-10-55.9. MoMA Archives, NY.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>104</sup> Staniszewski, 257.

show is now included in the United Nations Educational, Scientific, Cultural Organization (UNESCO) “Memory of the World” register.<sup>105</sup> Transforming *Image of America* into *The Family of Man* was a success. Global audiences felt they were part of the universal family pictured for them by Edward Steichen and funded by the Rockefellers. The United States Information Agency was able to “sell the rest of the world on the benefits of life and art under capitalism” through what the masses already considered a universal, yet personalized language of photography.<sup>106</sup> *The Family of Man* used decontextualized photographs, familiar photo-journalistic display and mythic wall texts to show that American families were like all families, and so all families could be like American families. When viewers felt themselves to be included in *The Family of Man*, an exhibition that started as the *Image of America*, they were investing themselves in an American-led postwar world. Ultimately, the insistence on the international/global community in *The Family of Man* came at the price of denying non-Americans their distinct cultures for the exhibition’s fabricated universal heritage.

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<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, 259.

<sup>106</sup> Eva Cockcroft, “Abstract Expressionism, Weapon of the Cold War.” *Pollock and After: The Critical Debate*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, ed. Francis Francina (New York: Harper and Row, 2000), 150.

## Chapter Four

### “I Give You Your Problem Back”: *Nothing Personal* and the Cold War Politics of Photo-text

In 1964 James Baldwin and Richard Avedon published a collection of essays and photographs called *Nothing Personal*. The book was a direct challenge to the photo-text genre, a genre embodied by *The Family of Man* exhibition and book of the same name. In his 1981 essay “The Traffic in Photographs” art critic and photographer Allan Sekula wrote that the *Family of Man* was an “apotheosis of *Life* magazine.”<sup>1</sup> Indeed, Eric Sandeen writes in *Picturing an Exhibition: The Family of Man and 1950s America*, “The *Family of Man*...spoke directly to a general population with a visual language already familiar through the popular media. These were the same people who read *Life* magazine: viewers who recognized that a picture was worth a thousand words and who assumed that whatever reading they formulated would be replicated in other people’s minds.”<sup>2</sup> *Nothing Personal* disrupts the formulaic reading of photo-text, and the assumption that everyone participated in the same narratives they created, in order to give voice to those who have been pushed aside or silenced by those very narratives.

Baldwin, a black author and cultural critic, was on the forefront of the racial crisis occurring in America at the same time as the early years of the Cold War. Baldwin, however, did not see himself as an activist or agitator, but rather as “witness.” Just three years before his death, Baldwin told author Julius Lester in an interview for the *New York Times* that he had always understood himself as a “Witness to whence I came, where I

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<sup>1</sup> Allan Sekula, “The Traffic in Photographs,” *Art Journal* 41 (Spring 1981): 20.

<sup>2</sup> Eric Sandeen, *Picturing an Exhibition: The Family of Man and 1950s America* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1995), 60.

am. Witness to what I've seen and the possibilities that I think I see. . . . I am a witness."<sup>3</sup> In 1963 Baldwin came together with his old high school friend, Richard Avedon who at the time was famous for his fashion photography, to create *Nothing Personal*. Baldwin and Avedon envisioned a photo-text that attempted to make readers witnesses to the truth of racial inequality in American society.<sup>4</sup> When juxtaposed against the hegemonic work of the Rockefellers' cultural organizations, *Nothing Personal* acts as a rebuttal to the narratives of exclusion promoted by the family.

Baldwin and Avedon's avant-garde text endeavored to give voice to the subaltern, those ignored by the Rockefellers' narrative of American history and culture.

"Subaltern" here refers to the key term made popular by cultural philosopher Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak in her essay "Can the Subaltern Speak?"<sup>5</sup> While Spivak's writing is concerned with the possibility, or the impossibility, of true self-representation for those oppressed because of their marginalized third-world (and/or female) subjectivity, the larger theoretical intention of her question helps us to understand Baldwin and Avedon's project in *Nothing Personal*. In his 1968 essay "The Black Arts Movement" Larry Neal presents the conflict between black and white power as "symbolic of larger confrontations between the Third World and Western society." It is worth quoting Neal

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<sup>3</sup> James Baldwin, interview by Julius Lester, "Books," *The New York Times*, May 27, 1984, accessed January 10, 2015, <http://www.nytimes.com/books/98/03/29/specials/baldwin-reflections.html>

<sup>4</sup> Rachel Cohen, *A Chance Meeting: Intertwined Lives of American Writers and Artists: 1854-1967* (New York: Random House, 2004), 282. Baldwin and Avedon had worked together on *The Magpie* at DeWitt Clinton High School in the Bronx, New York.

<sup>5</sup> See Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, ed. Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (Urbana: U of Illinois P, 1988), 271-313.

at length here because of his clear summary of the impossibility of the white world hearing black speech:

Even though Western society has been traditionally violent in its relation with the Third World, it sanctimoniously deplores violence of self assertion on the part of the enslaved. And the Western mind, with clever rationalizations, equates the violence of the oppressed with the violence of the oppressor. So that when the native preaches self-determination, the Western white man cleverly misconstrues it to mean hate of *all* white men. When the Black political radical warns his people not to trust white politicians of the left and the right, but instead to organize separately on the basis of power, the white man cries: 'racism in reverse.' Or he will say, as many of them do today: 'We deplore both white and black racism.' As if the two could be equated.<sup>6</sup>

The discounting of black voices, continues Neal, is part of the overall disenfranchisement of black culture. Quoting Maulana Karenga, Neal states, "Without a culture Negroes are only a set of reactions to white people."<sup>7</sup> Along those same lines, literary critic Marion Berghahn describes the struggle for black culture as an inability to escape from underneath the narrative of the oppressor: "[white history is] nothing but an intolerable

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<sup>6</sup> Larry Neal, "The Black Arts Movement" in *Within the Circle: An Anthology of African American Literary Criticism from the Harlem Renaissance to the Present*, ed. Angelyn Mitchell (Durham N.C.: Duke University Press, 1994), 192. It is important to note that Larry Neal was a part of the Black Arts Movement, which he describes as the "aesthetic and spiritual sister of the Black Power concept" (184). Neal also makes clear that "the Black Arts movement eschews 'protest' literature. It speaks directly to Black people" (185). Though Baldwin falls in the camp opposite of Neal's, the goals of the two groups are the same: to make clear a sovereign black identity in modern America.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 189.

yoke.... And whatever that history may have given to the subjugated is of absolutely no value, since [blacks] have never been free to reject it.”<sup>8</sup> If a rejection of a master narrative is impossible, as described by Neal and Karenga, then black artists must find other ways to dismantle the histories placed upon them. One possible method, the strategy employed by Baldwin and Avedon in *Nothing Personal*, is to challenge the structure of the master narrative by signifying on its means. Through their play on the photo-text format, Baldwin and Avedon directly challenge the narrative of American life presented by the planter elite at Colonial Williamsburg, the photo-essays in *Life* magazine, *The Family of Man* exhibition and the Rockefeller family themselves.

African American literary theorist and critic Henry Louis Gates Jr. describes “signifyin(g)” as “a bit like stumbling unaware into a hall of mirrors: the sign itself appears to be doubled, at the very least, and (re) doubled upon even closer examination” resulting in the “vertiginous movement between these two ‘identical’ signifiers, these two homonyms have everything to do with each other and, then again, absolutely nothing.”<sup>9</sup> Signification can give voice to the subjugated by presenting a narrative that looks to be in line with the master but underneath is a play on meaning that empowers the oppressed. Baldwin and Avedon complete the kind of play described by Gates by using the format of popular publications like *Life* and *Look* magazine in their own publication *Nothing Personal*. They then turn the familiarity of the photo-text on its head by featuring photos of marginalized peoples like activists and those committed to insane asylums and pair

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<sup>8</sup> Marion Berghahn, “Images of Africa in the Writings of James Baldwin,” in *James Baldwin*, ed. Harold Bloom (New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 1986), 107.

<sup>9</sup> Henry Louis Gates Jr., *The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of Afro-American Literary Criticism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 44-45.

those pictures with seemingly unconnected essays about discrimination and the fragile state of the American consciousness. Baldwin's essays and Avedon's photographs work together, in Baldwin's words, to "alert the country to the fact that, in spite of all that has been done to us, we, who have been described so often, are now describing the country."<sup>10</sup> Reading *Nothing Personal* against the myth of an equal, universal American identity it signifies on presents us with a clear alternative to the narrative told by the Rockefellers and their various institutions at mid-century. *Nothing Personal* allows us to witness the fissures in Cold War America first-hand, to see the truth of racial discrimination, and to unmask the damage done by the grand narrative of cultural modernity sponsored by the Rockefellers.

*Notes of a Native Son*, arguably Baldwin's most famous non-fiction work, was published in 1955, just months after *The Family of Man* opened at the Museum of Modern Art. The book contained the essay "Everybody's Protest Novel," where Baldwin slammed Harriet Beecher Stowe and Richard Wright for creating literary symbols that perpetuated the stereotype of the helpless, suffering, and in-need-of-salvation black male. Baldwin's critique of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* focused on Stowe's use of sentimentality – the same emotion Edward Steichen capitalized on in *The Family of Man* – to engage audiences. For Baldwin, sentimentality was just another tool of the oppressor. He writes, "Sentimentality, the ostentatious parading of excessive and spurious emotion, is the mark of dishonesty, the inability to feel; the wet eyes of the sentimentalist betray his aversion to experience, his fear of life, his arid heart; and it is always, therefore, the signal of

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<sup>10</sup> Baldwin quoted in J. H. O'Dell, "Foundations of Racism in American Life," *Freedomways* 4, no. 4 (Fall 1964): 535.



secret and violent inhumanity, the mask of cruelty.”<sup>11</sup> Harriet Beecher Stowe’s authorial intention was to “prove slavery was wrong,” but her understanding of why it was wrong was related to her own “terror of damnation.”<sup>12</sup> The novel fails, argues Baldwin, because Stowe’s overly simplistic presentation of liberation was really a re-inscription of the shackles of race she was supposedly unlocking: “if, being mindful of the necessity of good works, she could not cast out the blacks...she could not embrace them either without purifying them of sin. She must cover their intimidating nakedness, robe them in white.”<sup>13</sup> The sentimental response to Stowe’s novel, according to Baldwin, is a feeling manufactured to make the reader feel better about him/herself; it is not a true emotional response that would cause the reader to call into question his/her own beliefs.

In his non-fiction essays, Brian Norman writes, Baldwin “introduced the American reading public to philosophical debates about Black Nationalism and Civil Rights, and the vocabulary with which to talk about America’s ‘racial nightmare.’”<sup>14</sup> Baldwin’s public engagements and widely read writing placed him at the forefront of cultural criticism and American identity politics. In 1962, Baldwin defined what he called the ‘negro problem’ for modern audiences in the *New Yorker* essay “Letter from a Region in My Mind.” According to Baldwin the ‘negro problem’ exists because white Americans cannot “divest themselves of the notion that they are in possession of some

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<sup>11</sup> James Baldwin, *Notes of a Native Son* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1983), 14.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 14, 18.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 17-8.

<sup>14</sup> Brian Norman, *The American Protest Essay and National Belonging: Addressing Division* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2007), 110.

intrinsic value that black people need, or want. And this assumption...makes the solution to the Negro problem depend on the speed with which Negroes accept and adopt white standards.”<sup>15</sup> Because the ‘negro’ refused to assimilate, “a hundred years after his technical emancipation, he remains -- with the possible exception of the American Indian -- the most despised creature in his country.”<sup>16</sup> The extremely popular essay would be published as the book *The Fire Next Time* in January of 1963, just months before Baldwin was featured on the cover of *Time* magazine.

In June of 1963, Baldwin and Avedon came together in San Juan, Puerto Rico, to discuss their collaborative project. Fresh on Baldwin’s mind was the meeting of black leaders he organized in May that then went to the White House to talk with the Kennedy administration about taking a stand against segregation. The outcome of their effort was a speech made by John F. Kennedy on June 11. The sense of elation following the group’s success was short-lived as a result of the murder of Medgar Evers, the chief officer of Mississippi’s National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), on the day following Kennedy’s speech.<sup>17</sup> As Baldwin and Avedon brainstormed ideas for the layout of the book, it was racial turmoil in America that kept the project moving forward. It was decided that the book would be divided into three parts, “the America that refuses to see; insanity; and redemption.”<sup>18</sup> The two would work

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<sup>15</sup> James Baldwin, *The Fire Next Time* (New York: Modern Library, 1995), 91.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 84.

<sup>17</sup> Cohen, 281.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 282.

separately and meet later in the year to put the text together.

The final product consisted of four essays on, respectively, “the national condition of despair, racial profiling and identity logic, the American failure of self-invention, and the redemptive possibility of love.” The essays separated four groupings of photographs based on weddings at City Hall; “avowed racists and ‘those fighting against the problem’; patients in a Louisiana mental institution; and a small group of images of racial and human solidarity, including a couple of mixed race with their child.”<sup>19</sup> Visual culture scholar Sara Blair points out that both the essays and the photographs were composed as “a form of witnessing.”<sup>20</sup> Avedon’s photographs and Baldwin’s essays offered readers a way to look at American culture from a deeply personal and necessarily engaged standpoint: this was not a text to be read, but a text that required its readers to witness its message. Reader engagement was made compulsory by Baldwin and Avedon through the purposeful avoidance of any text linking the photographs to the essays.

Readers of photo-texts, as Joshua L. Miller states in his essay “‘A Striking Addiction to Irreality’: *Nothing Personal* and the Legacy of the Photo-Text Genre,” expected “external instructions for interpretation,” captions that would make sure readers could not “miss the ‘meaning’ of the image.” The provision of direction for how to understand an image meant that “the viewer [was] less likely to interrogate the picture’s creativity and artfulness, and more likely to treat it as simply another code, another

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<sup>19</sup> Sara Blair, *Harlem Crossroads: Black Writers and the Photograph in the Twentieth Century* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2007), 183.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*

language.”<sup>21</sup> In order to make the reader an interrogator and a witness, Baldwin and Avedon had to obscure the connections between the photographs and the essays. For example, in the second essay of the collection, Baldwin recounts his arrest with a friend on Broadway in New York City caused by no other reason than his being a black man walking with a white man. The section of photographs that follows this essay, a series featuring activists and racists, opens with an oversized image of professional boxer Joe Louis’s fist, followed by double-page spread close-up of Jerome Smith and Isaac Reynolds, two student activists, and then a double-page spread of George Wallace, the segregationist governor of Alabama who famously denounced any and all attempts for equal rights (figures 11, 12, 13 & 14). Louis’s fist acts as a symbol of the fight for equality and also the vicious treatment of minorities in the United States, much as what Baldwin describes in the preceding essay: “The America of my experience has worshipped and nourished violence for as long as I have been on earth.”<sup>22</sup> To follow the fist picture with a photograph of two young black male activists was to imply the power of the civil rights movement. The dual-images of Wallace, stern and then smug, suggested to the reader what those young students and the movement they stood for were up against. Without linking text, however, the reader had to come up with this narrative on his/her own.

Mid-century photo-essays in popular publications such as *Life* did not show real

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<sup>21</sup> Joshua L. Miller, “‘A Striking Addiction to Irreality’: *Nothing Personal* and the Legacy of the Photo-text Genre,” in *Reviewing James Baldwin: Things Not Seen*, ed. D. Quentin Miller (Philadelphia, Penn.: Temple University Press, 2000), 181-82.

<sup>22</sup> James Baldwin and Richard Avedon, *Nothing Personal* (New York: Atheneum Publisher, 1964). Note: *Nothing Personal* is not paginated.

American life but rather, as explained by Wendy Kozol in *Life's America: Family and Nation in Postwar Photojournalism*, “standardized” the white, middle-class family as the ideal of stability in a time of social change and political upheaval.<sup>23</sup> The images in *Life* were unrealistic and unattainable. Kozol argues:

Despite the magazine’s inclusive claim, depictions of ‘America’ and ‘Americans’ were limited. The credibility of *Life*’s photographs carried great weight in conveying a specific ideal as a transparent or unmediated visual truth about society. Factual or realistic news portraits of ‘actual’ families presented a particular image, based on dominant social norms of gender, race, class, and sexuality, as representative of national identity.<sup>24</sup>

It is exactly the image of national identity promoted by *Life*, of the heteronormative white nuclear family, that Baldwin and Avedon hoped to disrupt in *Nothing Personal*.

What we see in *Nothing Personal*, in the words Sara Blair, is a “fuller understanding of the possibilities of photo-text as an experimental form, a last, late repository of modernist ambition for the styles of radical will.”<sup>25</sup> Blair writes that “documentary image making under the sign of modernity not only penetrated to but defined the coalescing realms of mass media...and postwar consumerism.”<sup>26</sup> In *Nothing Personal*, Baldwin and Avedon seek to shine a light on the emotional and intellectual

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<sup>23</sup> Wendy Kozol, *Life's America: Family and Nation in Postwar Photojournalism* (Philadelphia, Penn.: Temple University Press, 1994), ix.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, viii.

<sup>25</sup> Blair, 164.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

hollowness of the photograph-turned-sign. By refusing to connect picture to text, they show their readers how an image could be emptied of its standardized meaning and how it could take on a new meaning based on a reader's individual response.

Unfortunately, that agenda of making the reader engage with the text, or witness, hurt *Nothing Personal's* popular reception. The book was not well received. Baldwin was accused of providing readers with a "narcissistic rant" and Avedon was said to have taken an "opportunistic embrace of a zeitgeist."<sup>27</sup> *The New York Review of Books's* Robert Brustein wrote that "*Nothing Personal* pretends to be a ruthless indictment of contemporary America, but the people likely to buy the volume are the subscribers to fashion magazines, while the moralistic authors of the work are themselves pretty fashionable, affluent, and chic." Brustein's review proceeds to tear Baldwin and Avedon's volume apart by making note of the "few unifying links" in the text.<sup>28</sup> Brustein's dig about a unified narrative suggests Baldwin and Avedon actually succeeded in their plan. Their book made people "angry," and that type of emotive response could only come from readers that paid attention to what they were looking at.<sup>29</sup>

Baldwin used his writing to provoke his audiences into examining their values. He hoped to educate audiences and his work in *Nothing Personal* was no different. In the second of the book's essays he writes, "we are unbelievably ignorant concerning what goes on in our country—to say nothing of what goes on in the rest of the world—and

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<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 183.

<sup>28</sup> Robert Brustein, "Everybody Knows My Name," *The New York Review of Books* (December 17, 1964), 10.

<sup>29</sup> Cohen, 285.

appear to have become too timid to question what we are told.”<sup>30</sup> Understanding “what we are told” about racial inequality helps us to better understand just what *Nothing Personal* signifies on. White Americans of European descent, states Reginald Horsman in his book *Race and Manifest Destiny*, believed they built a nation that would lead the old world to a better future, with white men “destined to lead” while others were destined “to serve,” “one race to flourish, many to die.” This was the “rhetoric of redemption” used to justify the brutalities caused by “the power of [the] superior,” or white, race.<sup>31</sup>

Historian Carroll Smith-Rosenberg further explores the oppression of minorities by white Americans in her book *This Violent Empire: The Birth of an American National Identity*. Smith-Rosenberg argues that the founding generation of Americans felt it necessary to create a sense of national collectivity for the “motley array of European settlers who had gathered at the nether side of the North Atlantic.” In order to forge a singular identity, the leaders of the new world “had to imagine themselves arrayed against an expanding series of threatening Others whose differences from the settlers overshadowed the divisions that distinguished the settlers from one another.... Difference perceived as dangerous, disdained as polluting, demanding expulsion, formed a critical component of American’s new national identity.”<sup>32</sup> The theoretical division between a superior race and inferior minorities still exists in America, explains Smith-Rosenberg,

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<sup>30</sup> Baldwin and Avedon, *Nothing Personal*.

<sup>31</sup> Reginald Horsman, *Race and Manifest Destiny: The Origins of Racial Anglo-Saxonism* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1981), 303.

<sup>32</sup> Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, *This Violent Empire: The Birth of an American National Identity* (Chapel Hill: Published for the Omohundro Institute of Early American History and Culture by the University of North Carolina Press, 2010), x.

because “we continue to be a motley array of immigrants and the descendants of immigrants.... To mold this composite into a cohesive whole, those who embrace our normative national culture must not only imagine a romanticized national past; they must continue to call forth a host of Others.”<sup>33</sup> And yet, while Americans still rely on othering in order to complete their own identity, mid-century cultural emblems such as *The Family of Man* presented the nation as stable and whole, peoples united behind the world’s newest and most prominent global superpower.

The international perception of America’s race relations was critical during the Cold War. Racial strife was seen as a threat to the economic machine white elites were building as America helped repair Europe with the Marshall Plan and attempted to woo newly decolonized nations in Asia and Africa to become democratic nations with markets open to the west. Mary L. Dudziak gives a detailed account of how international pressure pushed forward the civil rights agenda in her book *Cold War Civil Rights: Race and the Image of American Democracy*. She frames her argument around Swedish sociologist Gunnar Myrdal’s identification of what he, like Baldwin, called the “Negro problem” in America. Myrdal, she explains, saw that America had a problem with “racial superiority dogma...[that] came to power by means of racial persecution and oppression. In fighting fascism and racism, America had to stand before the whole world in favor of racial tolerance and cooperation and of racial equality.” Dudziak further emphasizes that “the contradictions between racism and the ideology of democracy were...a quintessentially

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<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, xi.



American dilemma.”<sup>34</sup> She claims that the Cold War did push certain civil rights legislation forward, such as the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965, but only in so far as that reform satiated the global audience whose eyes were on the United States. Dudziak concludes that “when the international gaze later shifted to Vietnam and to civil unrest, the international leverage for civil rights receded.”<sup>35</sup> Turning into law provisions for racial equality may have been part of America’s Cold War policy of containment, but once attention turned elsewhere it was clear that the “Negro problem” persisted.<sup>36</sup>

In mid-century America, racial discrimination moved away from blatant white domination to a hegemonic form of unwitting consent to rule.<sup>37</sup> The consequence of this type of hegemonic action was the illusion of progress through moderate action, when in reality larger more radical race issues were marginalized. For instance, while the Supreme Court ruled in favor of desegregation in *Brown vs. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas* in 1954, schools in the American South remained segregated: ten years

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<sup>34</sup> Gunnar Myrdal quoted in Mary L. Dudziak, *Cold War Civil Rights: Race and the Image of American Democracy* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2000), 8.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 251.

<sup>36</sup> For more on the influence of United States foreign policy on race relations at home, see Thomas Borstelmann, *The Cold War and the Color Line: American Race Relations in the Global Arena* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2001); Penny M. Von Eschen, *Race Against Empire: Black Americans and Anticolonialism, 1937-1957* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1997); and Brenda Gayle Plummer, *Rising Wind: Black Americans and Foreign Affairs, 1935-1960* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996).

<sup>37</sup> Michael Omi and Howard Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (New York: Routledge, 2015), 132.

after the decision was made, only one in eighty-five Southern black children was educated at an integrated school.<sup>38</sup> As the Cold War progressed, America exhibited “unabashed structural racism [made] all the more brazen because on the ideological or signification level, it adheres to a principle of ‘treating everyone alike.’”<sup>39</sup> For example, *The Family of Man* suggests that we should all be comforted by the universality of human nature, or, that we should all be similarly fearful of the threat of atomic destruction, while issues of racial difference were deemed less pressing.

Elaine Tyler May identifies similar cultural work being done with the practice of “domestic containment.” In *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War*, May defines the transference of George F. Kennan’s foreign policy of containment to the home: “The power of the Soviet Union would not endanger national security if it could be contained within a clearly defined sphere of influence.... In the domestic version of containment, the ‘sphere of influence’ was the home... [where] public policy, personal behavior, and even political values were focused on the home.”<sup>40</sup> In the postwar years, all groups, regardless of race or class, contributed to America’s thriving economy and baby boom; however, “it was the values of the white middle class that shaped the dominant political and economic institutions that affected all Americans. Those who did

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<sup>38</sup> Ian Millhiser, “‘Brown v. Board of Education Didn’t End Segregation, Big Government Did,’” *The Nation*, May 14, 2014, accessed January 15, 2015, <http://www.thenation.com/article/179875/brown-v-board-education-didnt-end-segregation-big-government-did#>

<sup>39</sup> Michael Omi and Howard Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States: From the 1960s to the 1990s*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (New York: Routledge, 1994), 75.

<sup>40</sup> Elaine Tyler May, *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War* (New York: Basic Books, 1988), 16.

not conform to them were likely to be marginalized, stigmatized, and disadvantaged as a result.”<sup>41</sup> America may have seemed to be moving away from institutionalized racism, but the social pressures to conform to a standard of living based on the white middle class were stronger than ever. Not only did “anything that hinted of a redistribution of wealth evoke fears of socialism and a threat to American capitalism,” but non-white Americans were increasingly clamoring in the postwar period for the same access to economic prosperity as the white middle class.<sup>42</sup>

More to the point, domestic containment was pictured in popular photo-texts like *Life*, where “specific visions” of gender, race and class status were promoted: “Photo-essays praising the middle-class family’s consumer habits naturalized a class-based affluence and its accompanying ideology of consumption as a defining characteristic of American society. *Life* often equated democracy with consumption, arguing that the right to choose which goods to buy signified American freedom.”<sup>43</sup> Picturing the ideal family made it even easier for American culture makers to equate national security with the nuclear family. Ultimately, May argues, “the ‘American way of life’ embodied in the suburban nuclear family, as a cultural ideal if not a universal reality, motivated countless postwar Americans to strive for it, to live by its codes, and – for black Americans – to demand it.”<sup>44</sup> Domestic containment, with its emphasis on the ability to create a safe

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<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, xxiv.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, xix.

<sup>43</sup> Kozol, 183.

<sup>44</sup> May, 11.

home by buying the right products, treated everyone alike. The spotlight on the home as the place where Communism was truly defeated gave even more power to the values associated with the white, hetero-normative nuclear family—and further silenced marginalized voices—by treating them as subversive and dangerous.

Civil rights activist J. H. O’Dell considers the myth of racial progress and domestic containment in his essay “The Foundations of Racism in Everyday Life” in the 1964 issue of *Freedomways* magazine. O’Dell argues, “Beyond a doubt, the ideology of racism has been considerably modified in recent years and that unquestionably is progress. However, for the good of the country, what must be exploded is the national myth that the dominant ideology in America has always been freedom and equality while racism is just some unfortunate departure from the norm.”<sup>45</sup> While America may have been known as the land of the free, within its borders racial discrimination prevailed. The cultural ideal that both created and perpetuated the midcentury narrative of white elitism, the narrative propagated by the Rockefellers through their various institutions, worked because it both structured societal action and gave meaning to those actions. Thus, the story behind domestic containment, and further, the dominance of white cultural values, was powerful because of its enduring mythic qualities.

In his book *Mythologies* Roland Barthes defines myth “as a type of speech.”<sup>46</sup> He continues,

[W]hat must firmly be established at the start is that myth is a system of

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<sup>45</sup> O’Dell, 533.

<sup>46</sup> Roland Barthes, *Mythologies* (1957; reprint, New York: Hill and Wang, 1994), 109.

communication, that it is a message... Mythical speech is made of a material which has *already* been worked on so as to make it suitable for communication: it is because all the materials of myth (whether pictorial or written) presupposed a signifying consciousness, that one can reason about them while discounting their substance.<sup>47</sup>

For Barthes, the sign systems within myth perform the same function as the system of signification in language. The linguistic sign, explains philosopher and linguist Ferdinand de Saussure, is made up of the signified – the concept of the word being spoken – and the signifier – the sound-image related to the concept. Most importantly, the linguistic sign has two “primordial characteristics” that affect all sign systems: first, the bond between signifier and signified is arbitrary and second, the relationship between the signifier and the signified is linear.<sup>48</sup> There is a natural contradiction within the sign system: there is no separation between the signifier and signified that creates the sign since they are directly—linearly—related; however, the liner bond is arbitrary, or random. The chance relation between signifier and signified means that the meaning of a sign can be manipulated.

For Barthes, the malleability of the sign translates to the pliability of myth. Myth is a form, like a sign, that is given meaning by a culture, but because that meaning is arbitrary it is also plastic, its substance able to be “discounted” and shaped to suit the creator, a construction infused with a deliberate message or moral. Barthes writes, “I

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<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 109-10.

<sup>48</sup> Ferdinand de Saussure, “From *Nature of the Linguistic Sign*” in *The Critical Tradition: Classic Texts and Contemporary Trends*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., ed. David H. Richter (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin’s, 2007), 843-44.

shall say that the signification of the myth is constituted by a sort of constantly moving turnstile which presents alternately the meaning of the signifier and its form, a language object and a metalanguage, a purely signifying and a purely imagining consciousness.”<sup>49</sup>

Following Barthes’s paradigm of myth, Michael Omi and Howard Winant, in their book *Racial Formation in the United States*, suggest thinking of racial formation as such

processes...occurring through a linkage between structure and representation.

Racial *projects* do the ideological ‘work’ of making these links. *A racial project is simultaneously an interpretation, representation, or explanation of racial dynamics, and an effort to reorganize and redistribute resources along particular racial lines.* Racial projects connect what race *means* in a particular discursive practice and the ways in which both social structures and everyday experiences are racially *organized*, based upon that meaning.<sup>50</sup>

Situating race in such a way disrupts what Omi and Winant describe as the “continuous temptation to think of race as an *essence*, as something fixed” as well as the “opposite temptation to imagine race as a mere *illusion*, a purely ideological construct which some ideal non-racist social order would eliminate.”<sup>51</sup> Race is not a myth, but the way race is used in society to control power operates under the same rules as societal myth as described by Barthes.

The distortion of meaning that occurs in the constant flux of a myth’s

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<sup>49</sup> Barthes, 123.

<sup>50</sup> Omi and Winant, *Racial Formation* 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., 125.

<sup>51</sup> Omi and Winant, *Racial Formation* 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., 54.

modifications, explains Barthes, is made acceptable through the process of naturalization. By his lights, myth “transforms history into nature.”<sup>52</sup> The violence done to our understanding of humanity through myths of exclusion, myths that have been turned into something unquestionable, or elemental, is what O’Dell lays bare in *Freedomways*. Racism and exclusion were not exceptions to a mythic democratic America; they were the ideals on which this nation was founded. O’Dell summarizes this dark reality with striking precision:

Afro-American slavery, the decimation of the indigenous Indian population, their deprivation and confinement in concentration camp-reservations; the military conquest of a large part of the national territory of the Mexican people and their dispossession from ownership of the land, the overthrow of Reconstruction’s noble effort at representative governments, the establishment of the state system of racial segregation (enforced by the police power and lynch-mob), the systematic cultivation of white racial-supremacy theories of government by the leading educational institutions of the nation and the application of these theories in the wholesale disenfranchisement of the black population in the southern states, as well as in the conquest of the Philippines, Puerto Rico and Guam; this was the main path by which the American power structure ascended to the position of a world power, by the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>53</sup>

O’Dell’s long history of oppression in the United States, and in the Global South in

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<sup>52</sup> Barthes, 129.

<sup>53</sup> O’Dell, 532.

particular, emphasizes the pervasiveness of the myth of equality he is calling his readers to “explode.” While coalitions such as the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, led by Martin Luther King Jr., and the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee were making headway via demonstrations such as the Montgomery Bus Boycott (1955-56), the Greensboro Sit-Ins (1960) and the Selma to Montgomery March (1964), the competing fear of Communism and the ideology of domestic containment continued to thwart real social change.

In the early years of the Cold War, civil unrest was made to seem more dangerous because of the Red Scare. As argued by Landon R. Y. Storrs in *The Second Red Scare and the Unmaking of the New Deal Left*, the Red Scare was not just about anti-Communism but about anything “foreign,” including the welfare state, feminism, and civil rights.<sup>54</sup> We can understand the universalist narrative in *The Family of Man* as responding to the fear of the foreign. By presenting a photo-narrative of an inclusive global family, the exhibition promoted a type of colorblindness that inflicted damage on the psyche of minorities by eliding difference and robbing distinct groups of peoples of their own particular cultures. Narratives that played on togetherness while wiping the cultural slate clean, like those presented in *Life* magazine and *The Family of Man*, are exactly the types of narratives *Nothing Personal* hoped to challenge.

Omi and Winant write: “[The United States] cannot suddenly declare itself ‘color-blind’ without in fact perpetuating the same type of differential, racist treatment. Thus,

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<sup>54</sup> James R. Barrett, Review of *The Second Red Scare and the Unmaking of the New Deal Left*, by Landon R. Y. Storrs, *Labor* 11.1 (2014): 146.



race continues to signify difference and structure inequality.”<sup>55</sup> Though a policy that ignores skin color seems to be fair, it actually, as Omi and Winant assert, continues the distinct epistemology of a racial hierarchy of white supremacy. Richard Dyer gives a detailed explanation of systematic privileged whiteness in his 1997 book *White*. White people, Dyer writes, “don’t see their white privilege.” He continues, “For those in power in the West, as long as whiteness is felt to be the human condition, then it alone both defines normality and fully inhabits it.... White people have power and believe that they think, feel and act like and for all people.... [W]hite people create the dominant images of the world and don’t quite see that they thus construct the world in their own image.”<sup>56</sup> Whiteness then becomes a type of “truth,” a standard against which to judge the behaviors and feelings of all others. “Truth” here is defined by Michel Foucault as “a circular relation with systems of power which produce and sustain it, and to effects of power which it induces and which extends it. A ‘regime’ of truth.... This regime is not merely ideological or superstructural; it [is] a condition of the formation and development of capitalism.”<sup>57</sup> O’Dell builds on Foucault’s assertion and applies it directly to the American condition: “The young American nation, born in a pioneering revolution of freedom was, nevertheless, born with the ‘congenital deformity’ of slavery. And, because the institution of slavery was so important to the economic development of the United States, it had a profound impact in shaping the political-legal system of

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<sup>55</sup> Omi and Winant, *Racial Formation* 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., 57.

<sup>56</sup> Richard Dyer, *White* (London: Routledge, 1997), 9.

<sup>57</sup> Michel Foucault, “Truth and Power,” in *The Foucault Reader*, ed. Paul Rabinow (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984), 74.

institutions in America.”<sup>58</sup> The standard of whiteness at the heart of America’s democratic government relied on a capitalist system funded by chattel slavery.

Baldwin, too, locates the start of America’s identity problems and racial violence at the founding of the nation. He writes in the first essay of *Nothing Personal*, “We have all heard the bit about what a pity it was that Plymouth Rock didn’t land on the Pilgrims instead of the other way around. I have never found this remark very funny.... The inertness of that rock meant death for the Indians, enslavement for the blacks and spiritual disaster for those homeless Europeans who now call themselves Americans.” Here Baldwin laments the mistreatment of minorities as well as the unstable foundation of American identity as a whole. He continues to pull apart America’s romanticized past, writing that “the myth tells us that heroes came, looking for freedom; just as the myth tells us that America is full of smiling people.... The relevant truth is that the country was settled by a desperate, divided, and rapacious horde of people who were determined to forget their pasts and determined to make money.” Power, violence and wealth pervade Baldwin’s account of the formation of American identity. Like Barthes and O’Dell, Baldwin recognizes the deception in America’s myth of egalitarianism.

In the essay “Many Thousands Gone,” from *Notes of a Native Son*, Baldwin describes the relationship between white master and black slave, oppressor and subjugated, as a “blood” relationship, motivated by both hatred and love. It is a complicated relationship because the two opposing forces are so closely related, one inextricable from the other. In her book *Outsider Citizens: The Remaking of Postwar Identity in Wright, Beauvoir, and Baldwin*, Sarah Relyea muses on Baldwin’s conception

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<sup>58</sup> O’Dell, 515.

of the black/white relationship in America and implies that because Baldwin understood the plantation to be where American identity was born, “its descendants remain paradoxically bound together by blood—and [are bound to] the founding realities of rape, of hatred, and even of love.” She suggests further that Baldwin’s constant consideration of family in his writing is purposeful: “Baldwin imagines America through the figure of the family.”<sup>59</sup> Baldwin’s conception of the American family—a family unbreakably bound together through the master/slave relationship—challenged societal norms, like those presented in *The Family of Man*. While exhibition viewers may have seen different colored families, patriarchal nuclear families were pictured over and over again. Mary Anne Staniszewski explains, “There was, of course, no room in [Steichen’s] narrative for matriarchies or different kinship structures or nonheterosexual couples and relationships. There were no pictures of the divorced or the dysfunctional.”<sup>60</sup> In *Nothing Personal*, the image of family and life promoted by *The Family of Man* is confronted by Avedon’s photographs and deconstructed by Baldwin’s writing.

At the beginning of *Nothing Personal* the reader sees a section of photographs featuring couples married at City Hall in New York City. While only heterosexual marriage was allowed at the time of *Nothing Personal*’s publication, Avedon found ways to subvert the traditional images of weddings. The section opens with two brides giving each other a kiss on the lips. A large foldout follows showing three groups of people: two white couples with friends and family flanking a young black bride who is smiling,

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<sup>59</sup> Sarah Relyea, *Outsider Citizens: The Remaking of Postwar Identity in Wright, Beauvoir, and Baldwin* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 9.

<sup>60</sup> Mary Anne Staniszewski, *The Power of Display: A History of Exhibition Installations at the Museum of Modern Art* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1998), 241.

kissed on both cheeks by two black men and from the front by a middle-aged white woman. Additional photographs in the section include an older couple looking at each other with happiness as their young son witnesses their union and an embarrassed bride receiving what looks like an unwanted kiss from her bridegroom.

In *Nothing Personal*, Avedon's photographs do not look like the photographs of families seen in midcentury mass media. Though the picture looks innocent enough, showing two women kissing was taboo. To feature a black couple getting married was radical, especially when one considers Avedon's photograph also featured the celebration of the marriage by a white woman who joined in the display of affection. In the year following *Nothing Personal's* publication, Avedon photographed black model Donyale Luna for *Harper's Bazaar*. Advertisers in southern states pulled their ads from the magazine after Luna's feature and many readers chose to end their subscriptions.<sup>61</sup> Avedon lamented that "for reasons of racial prejudice and the economics of the fashion business...I was never permitted to photograph [Donyale Luna] for publication again."<sup>62</sup> Institutionalized racism in the United States, says Richard Powell in *Cutting a Figure: Fashioning Black Portraiture*, was "pervasive enough to thwart the materialization of black people and, when they were seen, insidious enough to regulate the image's

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<sup>61</sup> Ben Arogundade, "The Tragic Tale of Donyale Luna," *The Telegraph*, November 11, 2012, accessed February 20, 2015, <http://fashion.telegraph.co.uk/news-features/TMG9658276/The-tragic-tale-of-Donyale-Luna.html>

<sup>62</sup> Richard J. Powell, *Cutting a Figure: Fashioning Black Portraiture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 103.

perpetual tenor.”<sup>63</sup> The suggestion here is that the only representation of black culture that was acceptable was either white-washed or depicted as “as abject, deformed and dangerous.”<sup>64</sup> Avedon and Baldwin signify on the mainstream media’s portrayal of those considered to be un-photographable, those who should not be seen, by making those very people the subject of their text.

The third section of photographs in *Nothing Personal* features patients from an insane asylum and is the clearest example of a challenge to the type of subject that would typically be featured in a mid-century photo-text. The section opens with a photograph of a young black man with a sympathetic smile in what looks like a straitjacket. Behind him is another black man in too-short pants, waving at the camera. On the next page we see a young girl crying, with hair disheveled, and hands that are gnarled. Opposite the girl is an older black woman, hair cropped close, bent over in sorrow, in prayer, in fear – it is up to the reader to decide. On subsequent pages we see black and white men together, in ill-fitting pajamas, private parts exposed, with terrified looks on their faces (figures 15, 16, 17, 18 & 19). We see two men holding hands, a grown woman with a baby doll, and a woman seemingly awakened from a nap on the floor. Much later, in the 1985 essay “Freaks and the American Ideal of Manhood,” Baldwin would write “freaks are called freaks and are treated as they are treated...because they are human beings who

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<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>64</sup> Smith-Rosenberg, xi.

cause to echo, deep within us, our most profound terrors and desires.”<sup>65</sup> The photographs inside of the insane asylum not only ask readers to question what it is that they are looking at in a photo-text but they also call attention to the fragility of an American identity based on othering. The implication is that we will all go insane if we continue to form our American identities based on what we are not rather than what we are.

Furthermore, Baldwin’s blackness and homosexuality and Avedon’s Jewishness put both artists on the edges of society, afflicted by what some believed to be threatening social disorders. In the 1950s and early 1960s, the ideological threats of the Cold War “conflated homosexuality with communism, positioning it as a threat of national security and as being on the constitutive ‘outside’ of national belonging.”<sup>66</sup> William J. Spurlin explains further that homophobia was at its peak in this period, when it was categorized as a psychiatric and psychoanalytic disorder. Homosexuality was listed as a sociopathic personality disturbance in the first publication of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* in 1952 and was further condemned when a ten-year study conducted by Irving Bieber concluded in 1962. Bieber found clinical “‘evidence’ of homosexuality as indicative of sociopathic disturbance.” As Spurlin puts it, the listing of homosexuality as a psychiatric condition “helped further fuel American anxieties about a range of social issues, including those pertaining not only to sexuality but also to race, gender, the

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<sup>65</sup> James Baldwin, “Freaks and the American Ideal of Manhood” in *James Baldwin: Collected Essays* (New York: The Library of America, 1998), 828.

<sup>66</sup> William J. Spurlin, “Rethinking the Politics of Race, Gender, and Sexuality: The Critical Reception of Baldwin’s *Go Tell It on the Mountain* in the Cold War Imaginary and in US Black Nationalism,” *MWA* 19, no. 1 (2004): 63.

family, and national security.”<sup>67</sup> Part of the fear of homosexuality was that, like religious belief, it could be hidden. Sarah Relyea explains “the phenomenon of passing would come to be regarded as a problem of national security, as homosexuals, Communists, and Jews came to be seen as subversive and potentially treasonous.”<sup>68</sup> Perhaps even more dangerous than passing, as suggested by Avedon’s later censorship because of his relationship with Donyale Luna, was to make white Americans confront their demons.

In the second and third sections of photographs in *Nothing Personal*, Baldwin and Avedon challenge what is considered subversive via a sequence of portraits of mainstream and radical figures. In a steady stream the viewer sees—Commander of the American Nazi Party George Lincoln Rockwell; poet Allen Ginsberg; former President Dwight D. Eisenhower; Black Nationalist leader Malcolm X; son of Reverend Martin Luther King Jr. Martin Luther King Jr. III; William Casby, who was born in slavery; playwright Arthur Miller; writer Dorothy Parker; actress Marilyn Monroe; and Major Claude Eatherly, a pilot at Hiroshima. The photographs do not attempt to create a universal American identity. Baldwin, however, does recognize the need for some kind of reconciliation within the American identity if we are to move forward as a nation. He writes in *Nothing Personal*, we “cannot use the past, [we] cannot function in the present, and so [we] can never be free... [This is ] the very key to our crisis.” Baldwin purposefully uses “us” and “we” across his nonfiction writing to challenge white

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<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>68</sup> Relyea, 9.

audiences to include a black perspective in their sense understanding of the world.<sup>69</sup> In *The American Protest Essay and National Belonging*, Brian Norman explains that Baldwin attempts to create an “inclusive national project by generating a collective ‘we’ that is accessed through personal, almost private experiences. He further connects the personal to the political in the image of lovers, which dramatizes Baldwin’s position that in our individual experiences lie keys to comprehending the national fantasies that define us.”<sup>70</sup> Indeed, relationships feature heavily in Baldwin’s essays and in Avedon’s photographs. The final section of *Nothing Personal*, in which couples are featured and ends with a portrait of members of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, focuses on the possibility for a reconciled national consciousness.

In order for progress to happen in America, to find a “viable national life,” Baldwin argued throughout his work that white Americans had to give up their self-conception of purity and innocence.<sup>71</sup> Baldwin’s insistence on a reconciled inclusive national identity is found in the last essay and section of photographs in *Nothing Personal*. Baldwin’s final piece of writing in the book centers on two lovers, one from Chicago and one from Hong Kong. He writes, once you fall in love “Hong Kong will immediately cease to be a name and become the center of your life. And you may never know how many people live in Hong Kong. But you will know that one man or one woman lives there without whom you cannot live. And this is how our lives are changed, and this is how we are redeemed.” Baldwin uses the two lovers to show the power of

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<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, 129.

<sup>70</sup> Norman, 92.

<sup>71</sup> Relyea, 148.



love to change the perception one has of one's own life and the lives of others. In the concluding sentences of the essay, Baldwin insists on mobility, on change:

For nothing is fixed, forever and forever and forever, it is not fixed; the earth is always shifting, the light is always changing, the sea does not cease to grind down rock. Generations do not cease to be born, and we are responsible to them because we are the only witnesses they have. The sea rises, the light fails, lovers cling to each other, and children cling to us. The moment we cease to hold each other, the moment we break faith with one another, the sea engulfs us and the light goes out.

At the closing of *Nothing Personal*, Baldwin points to the continually shifting narratives that shape our understanding of the American experience. Carol Smith Rosenberg described how the shape of a hegemonic master American identity constantly adapts to threatening Others, but there is also the possibility of subaltern narratives to form and rise up in challenge to the picture of a unified and placid America. A changing narrative, or sense of identity, cannot be institutionalized or commodified. Relating this constant shifting to the perpetuation of generations, lovers clinging to each other, and children clinging to the lovers, Baldwin cements the importance of love rather than terror in fostering resistance to the master's narrative in future generations.

The last four pictures in the book are of a white man with a pregnant woman at the beach, both smiling excitedly; a white woman and her black child playing in the surf; a man holding up his young baby at twilight; and finally a group of black and white students of mixed ages, "Members of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee Atlanta Georgia" (figures 20, 21, 22, & 23). Unlike the other sections of photography in

*Nothing Personal*, Baldwin's essay is interspersed between the photographs. No one is alone in the final set of pictures, nor are the photographs separate from the text. The implication is that the only way to make significant change is to stand together. The final photograph of members of SNCC, with the young black students leading, confronts readers with that imminent change. The subjects in the photograph look directly at the camera, unafraid and standing strong for their cause. The way of life that has been pushed upon these students will no longer suffice; they are ready to break free and create their own American narrative.

In the spring of 1963, Baldwin took to the streets of San Francisco with KQED's mobile film unit in order to show America how blacks were really treated in the "white-washed" City-by-the-Bay.<sup>72</sup> The result was a powerful documentary that aired in 1964, the same year as the publication of *Nothing Personal*, called *Take this Hammer*. While touring the city, meeting with city officials, and interviewing many young black men and women, Baldwin finds that race relations in San Francisco are as strained as in the rest of the United States; the finding was shocking because San Francisco was believed to be a city of progress and change. At the conclusion of the documentary, Baldwin meditates on categorization and how cataloguing and identity politics are a large part of continued discrimination in America. While he sits in an arm chair smoking a cigarette, Baldwin looks directly at the camera and muses,

What you say about somebody else, anybody else, reveals you....Now here in this country we have something called a "nigger," who doesn't in such terms, I beg

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<sup>72</sup> James Baldwin, "Take this Hammer," Television Documentary (1963; San Francisco: KQED), accessed January 27, 2015, <http://vimeo.com/13175192>

you to remark, exist in any other country in the world. We have invented the “nigger.” I didn’t invent him. White people invented him....I’ve always known, and really always, that’s part of the agony, I’ve always known that I’m not a “nigger.” But if I am not the “nigger,” and if it’s true that your invention reveals you, then who is the “nigger”?.... I am not the victim here.... But you still think, I gather, that the “nigger” is necessary. But he’s unnecessary to me, so he must be necessary to you. I give you your problem back. You’re the “nigger,” baby, it isn’t me.

It is impossible to describe the power of Baldwin’s confrontation in words. Baldwin takes the narrative of black inferiority and gives it back to the audience. He forces white viewers of the documentary to recognize the arbitrary nature of the label ‘nigger’ and implicitly encourages black viewers to eschew the label. ‘Nigger’ was a marker of what was outside the norms and desires of a particular myth of American identity, a way of purging society of difference.<sup>73</sup> Now Baldwin pushes his audience to consider that what was outside the norm was intolerance, that creating opposition in order to feel exclusive and whole is no longer an acceptable way to conceive of a national consciousness.

Later, in a 1965 article for the *New York Times*, “The American Dream and the American Negro,” Baldwin would write, “until the moment comes when we, the Americans, are able to accept the fact that my ancestors are both black and white, that on that continent we are trying to forge a new identity, that we need each other, that I am not a ward of America, I am not an object of missionary charity, I am one of the people who

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<sup>73</sup> Relyea, 149.

built the country--until this moment comes there is scarcely any hope for the American dream.”<sup>74</sup> Baldwin is pushing his audience to find a way, in the words of postmodern art critic Craig Owens to “conceive difference without opposition.”<sup>75</sup> In the essay “The Discourse of Others: Feminists and Postmodernism,” Owens writes that “the representational systems of the West admit only one vision – that of the constitutive male subject –or, rather, they posit the subject of representation as absolutely centered, unitary, masculine,” yet the truth is that “no one narrative can possibly account for all aspects of human experience.”<sup>76</sup> Owens, in short, deconstructs the myth of a unitary American identity based on othering: yes, there are differences among Americans, but those differences do not have to be divisive.

*Nothing Personal* materializes difference without opposition. In their challenge to the photographic narrative of universalisms presented in *The Family of Man*, James Baldwin and Richard Avedon demand that their readers participate in the deconstruction of any homogenized sense of American identity. *Nothing Personal* insists on an active audience and thereby leaves a passive viewer subject to the text’s scathing criticism. Forced to make their own connections between the text of Baldwin’s essays and the people pictured in Avedon’s photographs, readers, too, unsettle the master narrative *Nothing Personal* seeks to pull apart. The ultimate act of signifying on the photo-text,

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<sup>74</sup> James Baldwin, “The American Dream and the American Negro,” *New York Times*, March 7, 1965, accessed January 23, 2015, <http://www.nytimes.com/books/98/03/29/specials/baldwin-dream.html>

<sup>75</sup> Craig Owens, “The Discourse of Others: Feminists and Postmodernism,” in *The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Postmodern Culture*, ed. Hal Foster (Seattle, Wash.: Bay Press, 1983), 62.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, 58, 64.

the vehicle of choice for transmitting the singular narrative of mid-century modernity, a narrative that glorified domestic containment via the white, heterosexual, nuclear family, is the title of the book itself. Everything about James Baldwin and Richard Avedon's book is personal: the author and the photographer turn their book into a mirror and gives readers their problem back.

## Epilogue

In late 2014 the movie *Selma*, directed by Ava DuVernay, was released in American theaters. *Selma* tells the story of the marches held between Selma and Montgomery, Alabama, in 1965 in protest of voter intimidation laws. The movie spends considerable time examining the discreet moments of Martin Luther King Jr.'s life at the time of the marches, the troubles he had with his wife Coretta Scott King, and the dynamics of the relationships among King, the members of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, and leaders of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee. *Selma* opens softly with a depiction of Martin Luther King Jr. and his wife accepting his 1964 Nobel Peace Prize. The next scene is of four young black girls walking down the steps of a church gossiping about hair styles. The girls are dressed in their Sunday best—they are young and innocent and happy. DuVernay built no anticipation for what happened next, the tearing apart of the church walls and those little girls' bodies by a violent bomb explosion. Though anachronistic—King accepted his Nobel prize in December of 1964 and the 16<sup>th</sup> Street Baptist Church Bombing happened in September of 1963—the narrative of *Selma* is clear. As Scott Mendelson writes in *Forbes* magazine, “it is the rare black-centric historical drama told explicitly from the point of view of its black protagonists.”<sup>1</sup> The movie, written and directed by a black woman, tells the story of the struggle for the Voting Rights Act—and the larger battle for racial equality—as understood and internalized by black Americans.

At first the media buzzed with anticipation of *Selma*'s Academy Award potential,

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<sup>1</sup> Scott Mendelson, “Why Ava DuVernay’s ‘Selma’ Oscar Snub Matters,” *Forbes*, January 15, 2015, accessed January 20, 2015, <http://www.forbes.com/sites/scottmendelson/2015/01/15/why-ava-duvernays-selma-oscar-snub-matters/>

the movie business's highest honor. But soon Oscar talk turned to criticism. *Selma* continued to make headlines, but not for its powerful depiction of the protesters in Alabama. Critics had taken up the issue of DuVernay's portrayal of Lyndon B. Johnson. In the film, DuVernay depicts President Johnson as obstinate regarding the Voting Rights Act; *Selma* shows Johnson as saying voting rights were important but legislation to change the laws could wait. *Salon's* Elias Isquith claimed Johnson's depiction in the film was just "not true."<sup>2</sup> Mark K. Updegrave, director of the L.B.J. Presidential Library and Museum, wrote in *Politico* magazine that DuVernay "bends truth" for the sake of her story's arc.<sup>3</sup> Joseph A. Califano Jr., President Johnson's top assistant for domestic affairs from 1965-1969, asked in a *Washington Post* editorial, "What's wrong with Hollywood"? Califano charged that the film falsely pits King versus Johnson for the sake of dramatic tension.<sup>4</sup>

While the Lyndon B. Johnson audiences saw in Ava DuVernay's *Selma* may not have been completely accurate, the attention paid to President Johnson's storyline and not the terrible violence of the era points to a larger problem in the way American society continues to receive narratives of subversion. Focusing on the faults in *Selma's* portrayal

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<sup>2</sup> Elias Isquith, "'That's Just Not True': What *Selma* and the Establishment Get Wrong about LBJ," *Salon.com*, January 13, 2015, accessed February 21, 2015, [http://www.salon.com/2015/01/13/thats\\_just\\_not\\_true\\_what\\_selma\\_and\\_the\\_establishment\\_get\\_wrong\\_about\\_lbj/](http://www.salon.com/2015/01/13/thats_just_not_true_what_selma_and_the_establishment_get_wrong_about_lbj/)

<sup>3</sup> Mark K. Updegrave, "What 'Selma' Gets Wrong," *Politico Magazine*, December 22, 2014, accessed February 21, 2015, <http://www.politico.com/magazine/story/2014/12/what-selma-gets-wrong-113743.html#.V0kELUI2Gap>

<sup>4</sup> Joseph A. Califano Jr., "The Movie 'Selma' Has a Glaring Flaw," *Washington Post*, December 26, 2014, accessed February 21, 2015, [http://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/the-movie-selma-has-a-glaring-historical-inaccuracy/2014/12/26/70ad3ea2-8aa4-11e4-a085-34e9b9f09a58\\_story.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/the-movie-selma-has-a-glaring-historical-inaccuracy/2014/12/26/70ad3ea2-8aa4-11e4-a085-34e9b9f09a58_story.html)

of President Johnson discounts the horrors of racial violence and discrimination of the time. Further, the bashing of *Selma* because of its depiction of President Johnson's role represents a continued favoring in American society of narratives of white power and dominance.

Narratives of exclusion in the name of uplifting American culture, of which the Rockefellers' depiction of American history is a good example, continue to this day. As explained by Michael Omi and Howard Winant "structural forms of racial inequality persist and in many cases have deepened.... Many people in the United States believe that the goals of the civil rights movement have been substantially achieved, that racial discrimination is a thing of the past, and that we are rapidly evolving into a truly colorblind society."<sup>5</sup> However, argue Omi and Winant, "Contradictions abound today, as they have in the past. Most overt forms of racial discrimination have been outlawed, but racial inequalities pervade every institutional setting."<sup>6</sup> For example, in February of 2015 the state of Oklahoma voted to pass a bill defunding the teaching of Advanced Placement U.S. History. Legislators believe the course focuses too much on what is "bad" about America and not enough on "American exceptionalism." Margaret Hartmann of *New York Magazine* explains that the tide in Oklahoma turned against AP U.S. History in 2013 when retired teacher Larry S. Krieger complained to conservative legislators. He argued that the course made Americans out to be bigots and suggested that concepts like Manifest Destiny would be taught as being "built on a belief in white racial superiority

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<sup>5</sup> Michael Omi and Howard Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (New York: Routledge, 2015), 1-2.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.



and a sense of American cultural superiority,' rather than 'the belief that America had a mission to spread democracy and new technology across the continent.'"<sup>7</sup> Krieger's, and now the Oklahoma legislature's, unwillingness to accept broader narratives of America's history, ones that include criticism of America's past, echo the selective narratives spread by the Rockefellers during the Cold War.

The success of Colonial Williamsburg's Cold War symposia "Prelude to Independence" and "International Assembly," the mid-century rededication of the Abby Aldrich Rockefeller Folk Art Collection, the meteoric popularity of *The Family of Man*—each of these events depended on the general assumption that the democratic spirit which fueled American identity was both singular and accessible to all. It is not possible, however, to be both exceptional and universal without demanding the giving up of unique cultural identities and histories for the sake of conformity.<sup>8</sup>

This project attempts to show how the Rockefellers shaped the past in order to secure and spread their economic, political and cultural power in the middle of the twentieth century. By creating narratives of American exceptionalism based on white affluence, the Rockefellers institutionalized an American modernism that thrived on exclusion. Situating the Rockefellers' cultural work in a Cold War context allows for a

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<sup>7</sup> Margaret Hartmann, "Why Oklahoma Lawmakers Voted to Ban AP U.S. History," *New York Magazine*, February 18, 2015, accessed February 21, 2015, <http://nymag.com/daily/intelligencer/2015/02/why-oklahoma-lawmakers-want-to-ban-ap-us-history.html>

<sup>8</sup> Laura A. Belmonte, *Selling the American Way: U.S. Propaganda and the Cold War* (Philadelphia, Penn.: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), 2. Belmonte uses the conundrum of claiming America is exceptional and universal in her explanation of the Bush administration's framing of the War on Terror.

deeper understanding of how these projects of exclusion could take hold at a time when the nation was supposedly the global beacon of freedom. Reading *Nothing Personal* against the hegemonic work of the Rockefellers' cultural organizations offers a consideration of how narratives of exclusion necessitate and give life to narratives of resistance. The struggle between dominant and marginalized voices chronicled in this dissertation continues in contemporary American society. While there is no definitive way to deracinate the deeply rooted prejudices inherent in American society, alternate histories and narratives of resistance and subversion continue to be important tools with which to dismantle the house of the master.

## APPENDIX

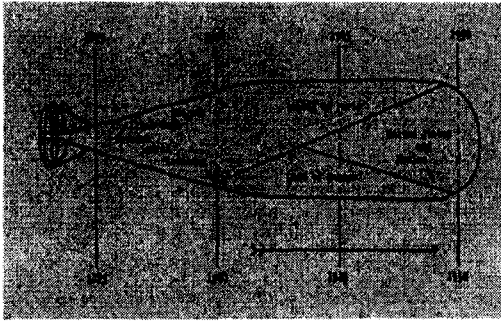


Figure 1.

### Alfred Barr's Torpedo

Alfred H. Barr Jr., Torpedo Diagram 1941, Museum of Modern Art, accessed February 21, 2015, [http://www.moma.org/explore/inside\\_out/2009/12/21/at-play-seriously-in-the-museum/](http://www.moma.org/explore/inside_out/2009/12/21/at-play-seriously-in-the-museum/)

As the “torpedo” moves forward, more and more art in MoMA’s collection will come from the United States and Mexico.

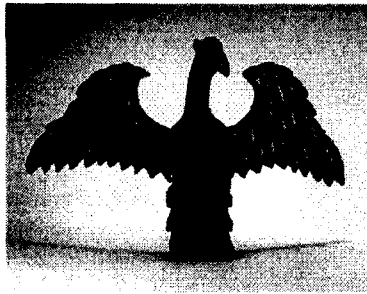


Figure 2 & 3

### William Zorach's sculpture *Spirit of the Dance* (1932)

William Zorach, *Spirit of the Dance* (1932), Cummer Museum, accessed February 21, 2015, <http://blog.cummermuseum.org/2011/07/22-william-zorach-spirit-of-the-dance/>

### William Schimmel's early American wooden eagle

William Schimmel, *Eagle* (after the late 1860s), Detroit Institute of the Arts, accessed February 21, 2015, <http://www.dia.org/object-info/e1f4c475-a043-478c-899a-2ea8d578f3d0.aspx?position=243>

Halpert paired Schimmel's piece with Zorach's “*Spirit of the Dance*” (1932) in order to show the similarity in line between early American and modern American art. The draping of the cloth behind Zorach's figure echoes the arches of the eagle's wings. The eagle's long neck and turned beak can also be seen in the neck and head of Zorach's figure.

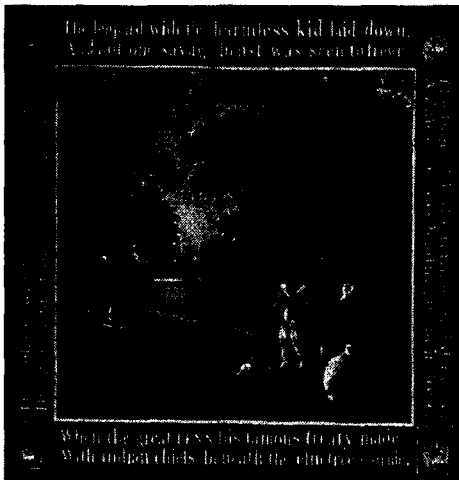


Figure 4.

Edward Hicks's *The Peaceable Kingdom* (1826)

Edward Hicks, *The Peaceable Kingdom* (circa 1826-28). Art & Artists, accessed February 21, 2015, <http://poulwebb.blogspot.com/2013/08/edward-hicks-part-1.html>



Figure 5.

Edward Hicks's *The Peaceable Kingdom* (1846)

Edward Hicks, *The Peaceable Kingdom* (1846). Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, accessed February 21, 2015, <http://www.history.org/Foundation/newsroom/images/meditKit08/PeaceableKingdom.jpg>

These two examples of *The Peaceable Kingdom* are representative of the over sixty versions of the painting in existence.

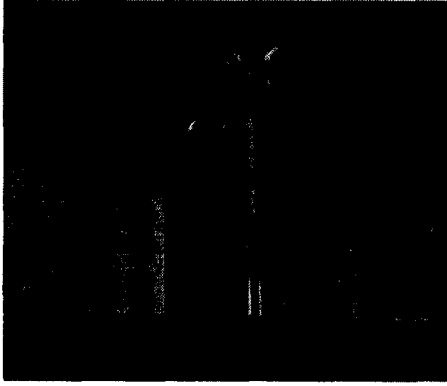


Figure 6.

Edward Hopper's *House by the Railroad* (1925)

Edward Hopper, *House by the Railroad* (1925), Museum of Modern Art, accessed February 21, 2015, [http://www.moma.org/collection/object.php?object\\_id=78330](http://www.moma.org/collection/object.php?object_id=78330)

Edward Hopper's *House by the Railroad* was the first work of art acquired by the Museum of Modern Art in 1930. The painting was given to the Museum by Stephen C. Clark, heir to the Singer Sewing Machine Company fortune and famous supporter of American folk art.



Figure 7.

*Baby in Red Chair*

*Baby in Red Chair* (circa 1810-1830), Antiques and Fine Art Magazine, accessed February 21, 2015, <http://www.antiquesandfineart.com/articles/article.cfm?request=774>

*Baby in Red Chair* was highlighted as an example of great American art at the Brussels World Fair in 1958.

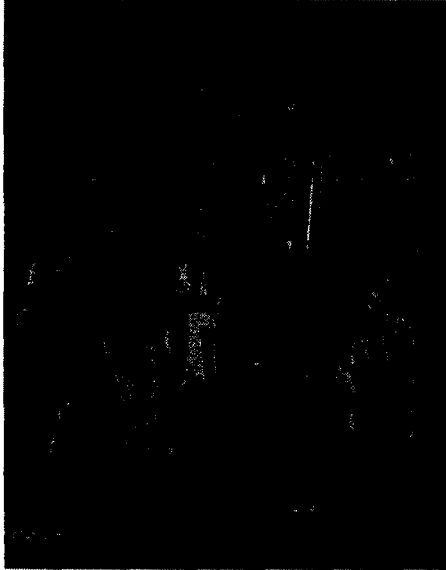


Figure 8.

Nina Leen's *Life* photograph of the American family as it appeared in *The Family of Man*.

Nina Leen, Photography-Now, Accessed March 11, 2015, <http://www.photography-now.com/exhibition/92024>

Edward Steichen described Nina Leen's photograph at a talk on *The Family of Man* at Minneapolis Institute of Arts in June of 1955 as a photograph that would help the rest of the world see "something of what Americans look like and that we are just like everybody else."



Figure 9.

Wayne Miller's Family in front of the hydrogen bomb as reproduced in *The Family of Man* book.

"Visitors to *The Family of Man* standing in front of a color transparency of test *Mike*, New York, 1955," reproduced in John O'Brian, "The Nuclear Family of Man" (lecture, Hiroshima Peace Institute, Hiroshima City University, Hiroshima, December 6, 2007), repr. in *Asia-Pacific Journal: Japan Focus*, accessed September 10, 2009, [www.japanfocus.org/-John-O\\_Brian/2816](http://www.japanfocus.org/-John-O_Brian/2816)

The hydrogen bomb color transparency was not reprinted in *The Family of Man* book that accompanied the exhibition. Only some versions of the book included a photograph of Wayne Miller's wife and two children contemplating the explosion. The photograph emphasizes the power of the nuclear family rather than the threat of nuclear destruction.



Figure 10.

1937 *Death Slump at Mississippi Lynching* by unknown photographer

*Death Slump at Mississippi Lynching* (1937) reproduced in John O'Brian, "The Nuclear Family of Man," (lecture, Hiroshima Peace Institute, Hiroshima City University, Hiroshima, December 6, 2007). Reprinted in *Asia-Pacific Journal: Japan Focus*. Accessed September 10, 2009, [www.japanfocus.org/-John-O\\_Brian/2816](http://www.japanfocus.org/-John-O_Brian/2816)

*Death Slump at Mississippi Lynching* was removed from *The Family of Man* within the first two weeks of the show's opening. Steichen said the photograph took away from the exhibition's overall theme of peace.



Figure 11.

Photograph by Richard Avedon, captioned *Joe Louis, fighter* in *Nothing Personal*  
Richard Avedon, *Joe Louis, fighter* (1963), Artnet, Accessed March 11, 2015,  
<http://www.artnet.com/artists/richard-avedon/joe-louis-prize-fighter-new-york-city-EgSA1HHTZIYsJelLmCXz7Q2>

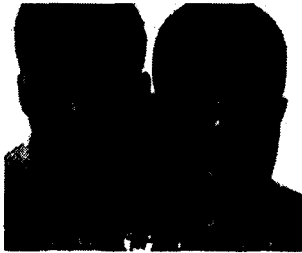


Figure 12.

Photograph by Richard Avedon, captioned *Jerome Smith, Isaac Reynolds, students*, in *Nothing Personal*  
Richard Avedon, *Jerome Smith and Isaac Reynolds, civil rights workers, New York, December 10, 1963*, (1963) Avedon Foundation, Accessed March 11, 2015, <http://www.avedonfoundation.org>



Figures 13 & 14.

Photographs by Richard Avedon, captioned *George Wallace, Governor of Alabama*, in *Nothing Personal*

Richard Avedon, *George Wallace, Governor of Alabama* (1963), "Tutorial Avedon," Accessed March 11, 2015, <http://www.slideshare.net/guest3bd2a12/tutorial-avedon-presentation>

Richard Avedon, *George Wallace, Governor of Alabama* (1963) Avedon Foundation, Accessed March 11, 2015, <http://www.avedonfoundation.org>

Joe Louis's fist acts as a symbol of the fight for equality and also the vicious treatment of minorities in the United States. The photograph that follows of Jerome Smith and Isaac Reynolds, two young black male student activists, implies the strength of the civil rights movement. The images that comes next of George Wallace, the segregationist governor of Alabama who famously denounced any and all attempts for equal rights, suggest to the reader what those young students and the movement they stood for were up against.





Figure 15.

Photographs by Richard Avedon, captioned *Patients in a Mental Institution*, in *Nothing Personal*

Richard Avedon, *East Louisiana State Mental Hospital #10, Jackson, Louisiana, February 15, 1963* (1963)  
Avedon Foundation, Accessed March 11, 2015, <http://www.avedonfoundation.org/avedonreportage>



Figures 16 & 17.

Photographs by Richard Avedon, captioned *Patients in a Mental Institution*, in *Nothing Personal*

Richard Avedon, *East Louisiana State Mental Hospital #7, Jackson, Louisiana, February 15, 1963* (1963)  
Avedon Foundation, Accessed March 11, 2015, <http://www.avedonfoundation.org/avedonreportage>

Richard Avedon, *East Louisiana State Mental Hospital #6, Jackson, Louisiana, February 15, 1963* (1963)  
Avedon Foundation, Accessed March 11, 2015, <http://www.theavedonfoundation.net/index.php#mi=2&pt=1&pi=10000&s=3&p=5&a=2&at=0>



Figure 18.

Photograph by Richard Avedon, captioned *Patients in a Mental Institution*, in *Nothing Personal*

Richard Avedon, *East Louisiana State Mental Hospital #12, Jackson, Louisiana, February 15, 1963* (1963)  
Avedon Foundation, Accessed March 11, 2015, <http://www.avedonfoundation.org/avedonreportage>

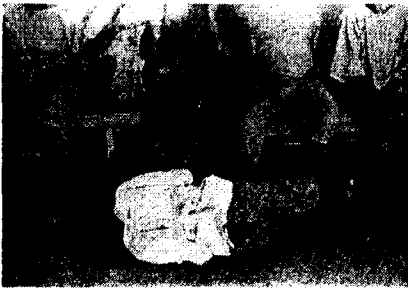


Figure 19.

Photograph by Richard Avedon, captioned *Patients in a Mental Institution*, in *Nothing Personal*

Richard Avedon, *East Louisiana State Mental Hospital #11, Jackson, Louisiana, February 15, 1963* (1963)  
Avedon Foundation, Accessed March 11, 2015, <http://www.avedonfoundation.org/avedonreportage>

The third section of photographs in *Nothing Personal* features patients from an insane asylum and is the clearest example of a challenge to the type of subjects that would typically be featured in a mid-century photo-text. The photographs, paired with Baldwin's writing on identity politics, imply that we will all go insane if we continue to form our American identities based on what we are not rather than what we are.



Figure 20.

Photograph by Richard Avedon, no caption, *Nothing Personal*

Richard Avedon, *Santa Monica Beach #3, September 30, 1963* (1963) Avedon Foundation, Accessed March 11, 2015, <http://www.avedonfoundation.org/avedonreportage>



Figure 21.

Photograph by Richard Avedon, no caption, *Nothing Personal*

Richard Avedon, *Santa Monica Beach #2, September 30, 1963* (1963) Avedon Foundation, Accessed March 11, 2015, <http://www.avedonfoundation.org/avedonreportage>



Figure 22.

Photograph by Richard Avedon, no caption, *Nothing Personal*

Richard Avedon, *Santa Monica Beach #4, September 30, 1963* (1963) Avedon Foundation, Accessed March 11, 2015, <http://www.avedonfoundation.org/avedonreportage>



Figure 23.

Photographs by Richard Avedon, captioned *Members of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee Atlanta, Georgia*, in *Nothing Personal*

Richard Avedon, *Julian Bond and members of the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee, Atlanta, Georgia, March 23, 1963* (1963), Avedon Foundation, Accessed March 11, 2015, <http://www.avedonfoundation.org>

The final section of photographs in *Nothing Personal* suggests standing together is the only way to change American societal values. The last photograph in the text, of members of SNCC, confronts readers with imminent social change.

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