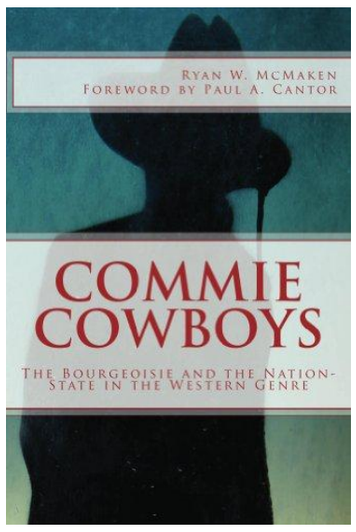

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> like its counterpart in increasingly liberal Britain during the nineteenth century, the American middle class was focused on wealth accumulation, private property, industrialization, domestic life, religious devotion, and anti-authoritarian politics. It is during this period that we see the rise of Victorian America, which in many ways mirrors British Victorian society and its values. Due to the lack of an anti-liberal aristocracy in the United States, however, American Victorianism was even more closely associated with middle-class liberalism than was the case in Britain.[11] Victorian society is historically marked by significant growth in the middle classes, industrialization, formal education, scientific inquiry, and by the growing influence of women in cultural and literary trends. The political ideology of this period in America was heavily influenced by the classical liberalism of the late eighteenth-century American revolutionaries, and was sustained through art and literature that reiterated the assumed virtues of the “Founding Fathers.” These founders were in many cases very wealthy patricians, but were nevertheless revered by the American middle classes.[

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> few watch them today, I will also briefly examine how early silent and B-Westerns differed markedly from what we now consider to be traditional Westerns. Certainly, the films made from the late 1890s through the 1930s were important in the development of the genre, but they exert much less direct influence in modern popular culture and political discourse than the classical Westerns. When politicians and American film audiences think of archetypal Westerns today, they are almost always referring to the Westerns of John Ford and other Westerns of the 1940s, 1950s and 1960s. It is the values of the classical Western that are still closely associated with the genre as a whole. This value system is generally supposed to reflect bourgeois liberal, and thus solid middle-class ideologies, but an examination of films like High Noon (1952), Rio Bravo (1959), and She Wore a Yellow Ribbon (1949), suggest that an altogether different set of values is being put forward by the classical Western. Ironically, the post-classical revisionist Westerns, such as the works of Sergio Leone and Clint Eastwood, often derided as being opposed to these bourgeois values, are more sympathetic to such values than are the classical Westerns, and they resemble older pre-classical Westerns in some of their pro-Indian and anti-authoritarian themes.

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> scholars of the Western like John Cawelti and Richard Etulain have long sought to specifically define the Western and what sets it apart from other genres.[15] It is not enough that a storyline take place on a frontier location to make it a Western. Willa Cather's novel O Pioneers!, for example, is rarely considered to be a Western although it takes place on the frontier. A similar, although rarely-asserted, argument might be made about Howard Hawks' The Furies (1950), which could be described as a family drama that happens to take place in a frontier setting. Whether a Western or not, the immensely popular Little House series, by offering a contrasting vision, helps illustrate how the classical Western embraces a much different value system than what many of its proponents think it does.

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> As Gottfried describes it in After Liberalism, the old classical liberalism of the nineteenth century was centered on the values of the rising middle class that glorified the business-oriented private property owner.[17] These middle class liberals valued self-responsibility, a commitment to family, and an acceptance of long-term obligations to both home and the workplace. The "good" man of the nineteenth-century middle class planned for the future with sound savings and investment. He was a part of the complex economic and social systems of families, markets, and political institutions, all of which he used to forward bourgeois goals. He was also, for the most part, a religious man. Liberalism dominated politics throughout America and Western Europe at various times during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries as members of the rising bourgeois classes, chafing under the yoke of ancient systems of government privilege and control, set out to gain access to power. In place of the old regimes, the bourgeoisie wanted nation-states friendly toward free trade, low taxes, large-scale business enterprises, and political liberty. And they wanted peace. When one is the owner of a major economic enterprise dependent on international trade, unless one is politically well connected, war can be extremely bad for business. The American wars that were fought in this period, such as the wars with Native Americans and with the Mexicans, were justified on the grounds that they would eliminate the need for wars in the future.

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> Britain, the corresponding anti-war position of Richard Cobden and his Manchester liberals further reinforced the relationship between the Victorian-era bourgeois liberalism and a preference for commerce over violence. The bourgeoisie were naturally criticized for this aversion to war. In the nascent days of liberal dominance in Britain, Napoleon Bonaparte is said to have scoffed at the British as a nation of shopkeepers, concerned with matters of commerce when they should have been tending to more glorious pursuits such as war.[20] Some critical Brits theorized that their countrymen, the Manchester liberals, would gladly have accepted military conquest by the French, as long as it produced new business opportunities. In America, Victorian-era exemplars of liberalism, men like Edward Atkinson, founder of the Anti-Imperialist League, and William Graham Sumner, were seen as excessively attached to peace and free trade and were denounced as seditious.[21] Writing on Sumner's 1899 condemnation of the Spanish-American War, Raico notes that the time-honored game of international intrigue and victory on the battlefield was indeed the way of the great powers. But, according to Sumner it was not the American way. That way had been more modest, more prosaic, parochial, and, yes, middle class. It was based on the idea that we were here to live out our lives, minding our own business, enjoying our liberty, and pursuing our happiness in our work, families, churches, and communities. It had been the "small policy."[22] This apparent liberal pre-occupation with the economic sphere has been linked historically with liberalism since its early years in the writings of John Locke. Locke, considered to be one of the earliest liberal theorists, was key in fashioning the importance of private property and its protection as a central component of liberal ideology. For Locke, the acquisition of private property exists in the state of nature, and the cultivation and protection of wealth is one of the foundational elements behind the formation and perpetuation of human society. Key to Locke's philosophy, and of particular importance to an evaluation of the Western genre in relation to liberalism, is the fact that Locke accepted that order in society was obtainable without the interference of a state apparatus. While Locke can accept the presence of a limited state apparatus in securing pre-existing property rights, societal order itself precedes the state and as such is not based on coercive power. As

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> we shall see, the chief narrative behind the classical Western is that the spread of civilization and economic prosperity is not possible without the presence of a nation-state apparatus or at least a state-like apparatus in the form of the gunfighter. The gunfighter, like states themselves, employs coercive and war-like force to mete out punishment and to gain compliance, and this is portrayed as the foundational act of civilization. Eventually, this narrative met with enthusiastic acceptance from millions of Americans for whom the Second World War and the Cold War were defining events in their lives. The necessity of violence in making civilization possible is especially evident in the cavalry sub-genre of the Western. In She Wore a Yellow Ribbon (1949), the narrator in the film's prologue informs the viewer that "one more such defeat as Custer's and it would be a hundred years before another wagon train dared to cross the plains." Historically speaking, this statement almost comically exaggerates the threat that the Native Americans posed to the Westward expansion of whites. Even without this hyperbole, however, She Wore a Yellow Ribbon and John Ford's other cavalry films, Fort Apache and Rio Grande (1950), all assume that the role of the cavalry is to pave the way for civilization on the frontier. The option of co-existence between the whites and the Indians in these films is assumed to be unworthy of even the most terse discussion. The classical Westerns assume that any solution involving the Indians and the whites living near each other would result in a state of total warfare. The only option then, is total removal or eradication of the Indians, made possible by a strong United States cavalry.

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> role of the cavalry in ushering in civilization is also presented symbolically in John Ford's Stagecoach (1939) in which the passengers of the stagecoach are only able to obtain safe passage through the frontier via the intervention of the United States cavalry. The stagecoach, America in microcosm, attempts to cross the hazardous wilds, and is finally escorted safely to its destination. The heroes of the film, who would have been massacred had it not been for the cavalry, are then able to get on with the business of building civilization

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> choice between a war of all against all, and a government strong enough to eradicate the Indians and confiscate firearms, is a frequent theme in Westerns and places the gunfighter (in these cases a cavalryman or sheriff) at the center of civilized life. Although John Locke may have been able to imagine a functioning society that existed before government, the Western film clearly cannot. In contrast to the coercive power of the gunman in film are the concerns of the typical middle-class American of the real-life frontier period. With liberalism as the primary political ideology in America, private commercial and domestic concerns were of chief importance. The middle-class bourgeois cultural mores that accompanied this ideology were equally important on the historical frontier. Dignity, restraint, prudence, thrift, and practical commercial skills were viewed as important values that provided a solid foundation for the preservation and advancement of Christian civilization. The role of self-defense by force was certainly not ignored, but it was not given primacy above all other skills. Indeed, one of the most notable characteristics of classical liberalism was its departure from medieval societal norms that placed soldiering and war-making at the summit of human societal values. In some of the wealthiest and most liberal societies, such as in the Dutch Republic, the image of the patrician or aristocrat as soldier and military hero had been replaced by the image of patricians who were businessmen or bureaucrats dressed in sensible black clothes as in Rembrandt's iconic painting "The Syndics of the Drapers' Guild." In the real-life settlements of the American West, the settlers carried this liberal civilization to a new frontier. Back in the East, the older agricultural way of life was giving way to the new urban way of life, and many Americans found themselves working in factories instead of on farms and living in cities instead of small towns. Wealthier Americans began moving to the first suburbs, and railroads made travel available to most middle-class Americans. Early factory life and urban living enjoys a negative reputation among many today, but for the Victorians, these

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> developments were a sign of progress and the spread of civilization.

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> gunfighter in film, however, whether wandering loner, sheriff, or military man, is not part of this Victorian liberal world, and is very rarely a member of the bourgeoisie or part of a bourgeois family structure. Very few of the protagonists from Westerns of the classical period are businessmen or family men. Most are cavalry officers, sheriffs or marshals, although Anthony Mann's protagonists are often small-time proprietors in the form of bounty hunters and guns for hire. Even the few Western protagonists with children, such as Tom Dunson (John Wayne) in Red River (1948), are unmarried or estranged from their wives; and among television Westerns, which tended to be more family-themed, patriarch Ben Cartwright of Bonanza (1959-1973) and Lucas McCain of The Rifleman (1958-1963), for example, are both widowers.

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> the gunfighter does not own property of any consequence, and he does not have savings or make investments. He rarely has a family, and he rarely has any use for religion at all. In the Western, this figure so contrary to bourgeois sensibilities remains always at the center of the action. There might be a businessman or family patriarch somewhere in the background, but such figures remain more or less as props viewing the action with little more input than the audience sitting in the theatre. More often than not, businessmen are villains.[24] The

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> classical Western centers not on bourgeois values of commerce and hearth and home, but on martial values of physical courage, skill with weaponry, and power through violence. Perhaps there is nothing to dislike about things such as courage and skill in battle. Yet what we find in the classical Western is that these values, as personified in the gunfighter, are not complementary values to the bourgeois world, but generally are in conflict with it. Through its literary conventions, the Western turns the value system of the historical frontier on its head. In the classical Western, bourgeois liberal values are viewed not just as irrelevant to the final resolution of the plot, but are portrayed as a hindrance to the neutralization and punishment of the villains. What is essential to the proper resolution of conflicts in the Western is the frequent application of deadly force upon both the white and Indian residents of the frontier.

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> establish ideal conditions for the extension of the fable, the classical Western makes two assertions that are central to the life of the genre. First, it creates the image of an American West that is extremely violent. Second, the genre requires that the residents of the frontier be incapable of defending themselves so that they may only be saved after they abandon their naïve bourgeois ways and embrace militarism and gunfights as their only hope in avoiding destruction. This

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> Richard Shenkman noted “Many more people have died [i.e., been murdered] in Hollywood Westerns than ever died on the real frontier.”[26] As summarized by Jodi McEndarfer,[27] the work of historians like Robert Dykstra and Richard Brown tends to leave one underwhelmed as to the magnitude of frontier violence. For example, while the Kansas code gave mayors the power to call a vigilante group from all the men in the town who ranged in ages from 18–50, it seems, at least in Kansas, that it was rare.[28] Over 38 years, Kansas had only 19 vigilante movements that accounted for 18 deaths.[29] In addition, between 1876 and 1886, no one was lynched or hanged illegally in Dodge City.[30] Deadwood, South Dakota and Tombstone, Arizona (home of the O.K. Corral), during their worst years of violence saw four and five murders respectively. Vigilante violence appears not to have been much worse.

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> wagon trains created a large mobile economic system that moved across the plains. Entire industries grew up around getting people to their destinations and serving them once they got there. Scouts, guides, equipment, guidebooks and teamsters were all readily supplied by enthusiastic entrepreneurs. Wagons and families moved from one train to another as conditions and preferences dictated. This image, of course, is in contrast to the movie version of the wagon train experience in which one wagon train moves alone and isolated across the plains and is subject to Indian raids and outlaws with nowhere to look for help but the steady hand of the gunfighter.

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> film historian Thomas Doherty notes, the “slanderous central conceit” of High Noon was that “the Old West was packed with no-account yellow-bellies.”[34] Notably, the cowardly townspeople are concerned about real-estate values and boring old business matters rather than with settling scores with the bad guys. The government marshal is heroic. The local merchants are cowards.

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> Western repeatedly sets up a tale of gunfighters (themselves almost supernatural in their wisdom and invincibility) who are beyond the comprehension of ordinary polite society. The gunfighter serves a near-messianic role on the frontier as he saves the bewildered townspeople from their enemies, pulls them away from their petty bourgeois concerns, and unifies them in a struggle against evil. Unfortunately for any Hollywood scriptwriter aiming for historical accuracy, the American West was far less exciting than the Westerns would lead people to believe. The frontiersmen knew this themselves. In his old age, Buffalo Bill Cody, one of the most flamboyant architects of our perceptions of the West, openly admitted to lying about his violent exploits to sell more dime novels. He was, after all, wounded in battle with Indians exactly once, not the 137 times he claimed.[35] Such tales were also immensely popular with Americans of the mid-twentieth century who seemed open to believing almost anything about the West as long as it was simultaneously exciting and violent. Kit

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> story lines all follow a basic pattern in which the townsfolk are threatened by an aggressive and evil business that seeks to exploit all for its own interests. The only thing standing between these businessmen and their sinister aims is the gunfighter, who is often a government agent, perhaps a sheriff, cavalryman, or a federal marshal. Sometimes, the people beg for deliverance from their capitalist oppressors, as in Shane, and sometimes they are oblivious to the true extent and severity of the threat posed, as the settlers are in The Man from Laramie. Private property is certainly a theme in Westerns, but “property rights” is understood as the crushing of large business enterprises for the good of “the people.” The view of business in the Western is the view one would expect from a genre that reached its greatest popularity among a population that overwhelmingly supported the New Deal. Everywhere large business interests are out to crush small business interests and must be neutralized. An aversion to the complexities of industrialized bourgeois life is again apparent as simple one-man operations are looked upon with great fondness in the Western, but large enterprises and sophisticated business practices are not to be tolerated. The Western takes a dim view of the free market in other ways. Stagecoach (1939) features a banker stealing the payroll owed to the workers, a particularly insidious act of theft. The banker then proceeds to extol the virtues of the American business class. His hypocrisy is obvious. Not even small businessmen are safe from the Western’s anti-commerce views. Winchester ‘73, Fort Apache, and She Wore a Yellow Ribbon all feature small-scale merchants who engage in the apparently unforgivable act of attempting to trade guns and other goods with the Indians. Indeed, in Fort Apache and Yellow Ribbon, a central purpose of the cavalry is to enforce trade embargoes against the Indians. In Yellow Ribbon, The Man from Laramie, and Winchester ‘73, the merchants are murdered by the very Indians with whom they are trying to do business. Why the Indians would kill those who supply them with essential goods is not explained, but the message to the audience is clear. Such are the wages of trading with the enemy. In The Man from Laramie, it is revealed that the villain plans to sell rifles to the local Indians in an effort to keep the Army away so he can rule the entire countryside with an iron fist. One member of the town, upon hearing of the plot, declares “some people will sell anything to make a profit.”

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> Contrary to the nineteenth-century bourgeois liberals who saw free trade and markets as a source of enduring prosperity, peace, and cooperation, the Western sees business and trade as a zero-sum game where exploitation is much more likely than cooperation. Free-market defenders of the Western have argued that although the Western seems to portray businessmen in a bad light, the genre is really showing a conflict between truly private business interests and politically influential corporatists in league with government officials.[40] North, for example, bases this claim on the fact that, on the historical frontier, homesteaders came into conflict with open-range ranchers who grazed cattle on federally-owned lands; thus, the conflict is between private homesteaders and federally-subsidized ranchers.[41] While this was true in real life, the facts of the matter are virtually never articulated in classical Western films themselves. The role of the American federal government as subsidizer of open range is not addressed in Shane, nor is it addressed in The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance in which the big land owners employ the homicidal Liberty Valance to enforce their will. Nor is a theme of government collusion with business used in Jesse James (1939) in which the railroads are the chief villains, in spite of the fact that the railroads were notorious supporters of corporate welfare on the real-life frontier. If these films really wanted to point to the state as the source of conflict, why do they virtually never make a government agent a villain? The villains are, almost without exception, businessmen or Indians or the people who collaborate with them. Government agents are usually heroes. When large business interests do appear as friendly protagonists in film, they are notable for their rarity. Andrew McLaglen's Westerns McLintock! (1963) and Chisum (1970) present two exceptions to the usual rule, and they assumed that there is "no conflict between the frontier aristocrat and the public welfare."[42] Both McLintock! and Chisum were later Westerns, however, with Chisum being made well into the period of revisionist Westerns when the structure of the classical Western had almost completely broken down. According to Lenihan, during the 1950s and the high tide of the classical Westerns, only two major Westerns, The Broken Lance and Ten Wanted Men, employed the same themes as McLintock! and Chisum. In most classical Westerns, when capitalists appear as villains the conflict is generally framed as a simple matter of big business versus small business or small-time farmers.

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> To claim that there is a subtext of free-markets versus government subsidy in classical Westerns is to invent a theme and subplot where none exists. On the contrary, the economics of the Western fit quite well with a primitivist view of modern economies in which advanced economies exploit workers, coerce the public, and rob men and women of their right to live off the land.

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> all of these cases, the film presents the gunfighter—who in Ford's films is usually a government agent—as the only truly competent defender against threats to the establishment of law and order. Whenever the "simplicity" of the West is victorious over the complexity and corruption of the East, it is due to the Eastern interloper attempting to use law and reason to limited avail while the gunfighter functions much more successfully on blind instinct. Stoddard keeps attempting to reason his way to a solution with Valance, but in the end, this proves useless, as the only thing the men of the West understand is brute force.

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> of the Western as exemplar of America's traditional values might claim the Western denigrates industrialized society in order to emphasize the importance of self-reliance and independence. While this may be arguable regarding the myth of the frontier, it nevertheless runs up against the reality of the historical frontier in which self-sufficiency was an unobtainable ideal. As noted by Douglas J. Den Uyl, one can argue "no one in a pre-civilized state can be self-sufficient because the goods needed are simply not available."[48] The gunfighter, ironically, depends on mass-produced firearms for his vocation; and on the real-life frontier, few settlers attempted "self-sufficiency" in a way attributed to the gunfighter. Most everyone depended on trade, contracts, family connections, and church organizations to make a go of it on the frontier. "Self-sufficiency" of the gunfighter type would have had few adherents among the bourgeois classes of nineteenth-century America. The impetus behind this fondness for savagery and primitivism, as Studlar notes, is a distinct reaction against the urban bourgeois life that characterized the industrialization of the nineteenth century. Richard Etulain attributes some of the popularity of the Western to "the conflict between industrial and agricultural America and the resultant nostalgia for the past." [49] Nostalgic primitivism isn't simply fondness for simpler ways, but an active aversion to the economic system of the contemporary world during the early twentieth century. Referring to the early Westerns of Fairbanks, Studlar writes

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> which seemed to many, to be increasingly difficult to acquire and retain among the complacency, compromise, and consumerist comfort of modern bourgeois life.[50] Criticizing modern bourgeois life and the capitalist system it created then becomes a raison d'être of the Western early on, and the theme of the competent and honest frontiersman against the incompetent and duplicitous Easterner becomes an enduring symbol.

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> The revolt against the effeminate Easterner in Western film is closely related to the revolt against bourgeois society in general. The Easterner represents a refined, cultured, and literate society at peace. In the worldview of the Western, this sort of society does not produce people suited for self-reliance or sound decision-making on the frontier. While the gunfighter ascends to levels of great virtue and importance in the Western, the institutions of peaceful and private society are regularly mocked and portrayed as corrupting at best, and ridiculous at worst. While we know that the landscape of the historical West is primarily a landscape of farms, ranches, shops, churches, and homes, the landscape of the cinematic West is a landscape of war inhabited primarily by gunmen and their victims. This focus on the frontier society's dependence on the gunfighter pushes all institutions of civilization to the margins and produces a genre that portrays constant violent conflict as a romantic and redemptive activity. Meanwhile, religious devotion, economic pursuits, and domestic concerns are shown to be secondary activities and superfluous luxuries that owe their very existence to the quick draw of the gunfighter. In the traditional Western, the gunfighter is Nietzschean Übermensch and Hobbesian Leviathan rolled into one. He exists to enlighten others and to impose order on a dangerous world simply by being more proficient at the use of force than his enemies. He is a man apart. He is above the contemptible pursuits of ordinary daily life, and only after he imposes order is peaceful civilization possible. The classical Western thus comes to an important conclusion: without the gunfighter, civilization is impossible. Reviewing the themes of the classical Western, it becomes apparent that the Western is well situated to buttress claims in favor of an authoritarian garrison state of the nature justified by rhetoric of the Cold War or the War on Terrorism during the mid-twentieth and early twenty-first centuries.[51] In the Western, those who remain preoccupied by economic and domestic interests live rather trite and naïve lives until they embrace the way of the gun. The real conflict is between the non-gunfighters of the frontier, who represent the outdated and dangerous notions of an ill-conceived bourgeois society, and the heroic gunfighter, a symbol of a twentieth-century society much better suited to deal with the harsh realities of the world. Anthony Mann's gunfighters in

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> Ford's films, the hero is less feral, although just as aloof to being attached to the responsibilities of ordinary society. In all four of his cavalry films, Cheyenne Autumn (1964), She Wore a Yellow Ribbon, Fort Apache, and Rio Grande, the hero, always a cavalry officer, has virtually no obligations to any family or property, and his affections are reserved strictly for the Army. Only in Rio Grande does the hero, Kirby Yorke, have living family members at all, and even then he is estranged from them and unfamiliar with the responsibilities of family life. The hero attains his value as an extremely efficient killing machine that is uncomfortable filling roles normally associated with an ordinary middle-class lifestyle. In these films, the hero is more comfortable in the saddle than in a chair and more accustomed to sleeping outside than in a bed. He might be tamed for an evening to engage in the niceties of civilization, such as a bath and a shave, but he must always return to the wilderness where the important action—the heroic action—takes place.

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> the Western has little patience for the economic complexities of the market and the industrialized world, it is even more contemptuous of the social and religious life of the Victorian bourgeois world that dominated American culture throughout much of the nineteenth century. The nineteenth-century American middle class, much like the middle class throughout Western Europe, was dominated by bourgeois assumptions about the role of the domestic world in the larger society. Proper domestic conduct was no small affair. The domestic sphere in the bourgeois world was seen as the fundamental building block of Western civilization. Contemporary defenders of the bourgeoisie from Vienna to San Francisco often contended that it was the family home that made civilization function.[54] Indeed, beyond the factories and merchants, the bourgeois home was the symbol of modern liberal society during much of the nineteenth century. The liberal movements during the nineteenth century that attempted (often unsuccessfully) to restrain the nation-state through constitutions and representative governments were, to a large extent, executed with the goal of making the state more accommodating to the property-related pursuits of bourgeois families and individuals.[55]

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> As the nineteenth century progressed, family and domestic relationships began to change. As the wealth and size of the middle classes throughout America and Europe continued to grow, a considerable number of ordinary families, for the first time in history, could subsist on the income of a single person working outside the home. This was virtually always the husband, so household governance became the central focus of the wives. “Home economics,” as we now know it, became very nearly a science during the nineteenth century as middle-class women spent many hours a day in household management and in budgeting the wages earned by their husbands.[56] In many cases, the wife was largely responsible for household management including the physical maintenance of the home, planning for future household needs such as furniture and utilities, and countless other chores considered essential to the economic stability of the family. In Europe especially, even weddings became in many ways a business transaction in which the long-term economic and cultural concerns of families were addressed through economically savvy matchmaking. Thanks to the surpluses made possible through industrialization, education for women became widespread and homes, educational institutions, and churches became worlds often dominated by women. Women attained more power in the domestic sphere and in churches, where the middle-class women who were fortunate to have discretionary time would devote their resources to a variety of pursuits. Eventually, women would become very active in political movements, whether they were in favor of relieving poverty or abolishing slavery. As the century came to an end, women would be at the forefront of the peace movements against the Spanish-American War and against American entry into the First World War. Women’s groups marched against imperialism, slavery, drunkenness, and anything else they saw as a threat to bourgeois domestic life.[57] Not all of these movements were necessarily compatible with the laissez-faire and capitalist sensibilities of many classical liberals of the period, but the centrality of the bourgeoisie to these movement and ideological currents was undeniable.

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> In order to complete this change from the sentimental narratives to the more hard-nosed “honest” narratives of the modern world, the moderns needed to overcome “the powerful white middle-class matriarch of the recent Victorian past.”[65] The Western, so opposed to the value system of the late Victorians, fits well within this new shift in popular culture.

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> the era of the classical Western, Indians had been relegated almost entirely to roles as villains. The somewhat pro-Indian classical Western, Broken Arrow (1950), is notable precisely because a Western film sympathetic to the Indians had become such a novelty during the post-war period. During 1910, however, there would have been little novelty to the plot of Broken Arrow, which casts the Apache leader Cochise in a positive light. As late as the 1930s, Indians were portrayed much more sympathetically than in the post-war films. In the movie serials The Miracle Rider (1935), starring Tom Mix, the protagonist becomes an advocate for the Indian tribes, and early in the series, being told that one group of Indians are traveling cross-country with a large amount of cash, the hero rushes off to protect the Indians from possible highway robbers. He’s too late, however, and the Indians fall victim to marauding white men. In a major departure from the classical Westerns, some early Westerns cast the Indians not only as sympathetic characters, but as examples of virtuous middle-class behavior. In The Miracle Rider, the ambushed and robbed Indians had been carrying savings they had accumulated in order to begin farming operations as part of an effort to settle down and become like the white middle-class settlers. In the earlier full-length silent film Hiawatha: The Indian Passion Play (1913), the Indians welcome Catholic missionaries into their settlement displaying an openness to Christianity exhibited by few gunfighters of the classical Western. Indians repeatedly exhibit values of hearth and home in contrast to the shiftless white settlers who disrupt established ways of life. In early Westerns based on the works of James Fenimore Cooper, the iconography of the frontier hero is challenged with story lines featuring “talkative Indians and long-winded Natty [Bumppo, the protagonist] himself [who] seem far from Hollywood’s taciturn cowboys.”[68] Director D.W. Griffith, certainly a defender of (Anglo-Saxon) bourgeois values in Birth of a Nation (1915), brings his own Victorian sensibilities to some early Westerns. Simmon describes Griffith as “the most consistent, and most Victorian, in assigning the highest ethics to women”[69] in his Western films while exhibiting a “lingering Victorian obsession” [70] with story lines related to the protection of the innocence of children. This

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> hero of the silent Westerns remains a man of the wilds, at least initially, and his intervention is key in paving the way for civilization. He has little use for civilized society in his role as a gunfighter, although he will usually settle down with a woman once the villains have been killed. Indeed, the centrality of women to the gunfighter is much more prominent in many early Westerns than is the case during the classical period. While revenge, male camaraderie, and noble ideals usually motivate the gunfighter of the classical period, winning over a woman is a major motivator for the gunfighter of the early Westerns. In The Return of Draw Egan (1916), the protagonist (William S. Hart), an outlaw who has tricked the residents of a town into making him marshal, decides to go straight permanently and settle down after falling in love with the mayor's daughter, who is "the kind of girl he had heard of but never believed to exist." In Tumbleweeds (1925), the hero Don Carver (Tom Mix) is a drifter but his love for a woman motivates the principal action of the film involving an Oklahoma land rush.

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> early Westerns are often much less authoritarian than the Westerns of the classical period as well. The heroes of silent-era Westerns are often outlaws or Indians, and the outlaws are frequently on the run from ineffectual agents of law enforcement. In John Ford's Stagecoach (1939), the last of his pre-war Westerns, the Ringo Kid is reminiscent of the charming and mostly harmless outlaws played by Tom Mix and William S. Hart during an earlier period. After World War II, Ford departs from this model completely and never again features an outlaw as his protagonist. None of Hawks' heroes from the classical period are outlaws, although Anthony Mann, notable for his more "edgy" Westerns, employs former outlaws as his heroes in Bend of the River and Man of the West. Although her critique applies partially to Western films of all periods, Tompkins' critique is most applicable and trenchant when applied to the post-war classical Westerns. With all their sparse landscapes, militarism, masculine focus, and absence of religious faith, the classical Western presents the themes of the Western in their most stark and serious terms. Following the Second World War, the vestiges of Victorianism in the Western are excised almost completely. Women recede even more into the background, while religion, commerce, and domestic concerns become even sparser and of less relevance. Indians become almost uniformly a force for evil, while sheriffs, cavalry and other symbols of government power become even more revered and unchallenged.

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> As Stagecoach opens, Dallas, the whore with a heart of gold, is being run out of town by the more conventional and shrewish women who have created a frontier version of the National League of Decency. Dallas' woes are increased by the prejudices of the bourgeois passengers on the stagecoach, with the exception of the charming outlaw, The Ringo Kid. In Mann's The Far Country, the women (most of them saloon girls) enthusiastically talk about building churches at some time in the distant future, implying that when churches arrive, the process of settling the frontier will have been complete. Westerns in general are dotted with occasional references to God, usually made by women, at which point the gunfighter is reliably shown to be made uncomfortable or to shrug off the importance and relevance of religious faith to the conflict at hand. Christianity in the nineteenth century was not such a marginal and infrequent topic of conversation. As Tompkins and Douglas note above, the popular literature of Victorian America was steeped in Christianity. The popular status of books like Ben Hur and Quo Vadis illustrates that the Victorian world was a Christian world, and the bourgeois families that lived in it identified themselves as Christian and subscribed to a Christian worldview. Christianity was prominent in their literature, education, and politics. We know that the people who settled the West carried their Christianity with them.[71] Catholic and Protestant missionaries crisscrossed the frontier, and churches sprang up wherever new towns were founded. In spite of all of this however, the classical Western either ridicules or ignores religion as an important part of the story of the West.

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> Engaged in the primitive world of the kill-or-be-killed frontier, the gunfighter has no time for such immaterial pursuits. He knows only one thing—physical survival—and no amount of praying is ever going to do him much good. In fact, in some cases, the gunfighter himself serves as a sort of divinity, doling out death and vengeance without the slightest thought that his judgments might be flawed or that he might be gunning down the wrong man. The gunfighter is always right, he always wins the final showdown. He is simultaneously omniscient and omnipotent, and he doesn't need God, for he is a god of sorts—impervious to the dangers and trials that would destroy a lesser man. This aspect of Westerns is closely related to the anti-intellectualism of the genre, which is not suited to complex philosophical questions. Instead, the Western relies on a moral structure of simplistic dichotomies between good and evil. Later Westerns are notable for their moral ambiguity, but the classical Westerns create a world where the gunfighter destroys the villain with the help of the gunfighter's infallible instincts. When it comes to one's status as a member of the elect or the damned, the characters in Westerns often lack free will since free will would imply an ability to repent of one's evil ways or, conversely, to fall from a state of grace. That fact that characters in Westerns virtually never do either illustrates the Western's need to dispense with anything that might complicate the moral landscape.

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> The Christian God has no value because he is of no use in the classical Western's utilitarian world. The only things that can be trusted in the Western are a ready gun, a steady horse, and a fast draw. The gunfighter may ride for the greater glory of his countrymen and the United States of America, but he most certainly isn't riding for God.

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> Meanwhile, there appears to be no civilian government of any consequence in Rio Bravo. Chance has total authority to make unilateral choices at will. The enemy, predictably, is a rancher using his wealth to unleash murderous cowhands upon the town. Chance's unimpeachable conduct and the behavior of several townspeople who are not only helpful, but also know their place in relation to Chance, turn High Noon on its head without challenging the position of the lawman at the top of the town's hierarchy.

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> depictions of a benevolent order secured by the quick draw of the gunfighter would grow increasingly rare as the 1960s progressed. As with Morg Hickman in The Tin Star, the gunfighter of the traditional Western eventually provides his services with benevolence and compassion. They might show reluctance at first, but in the end they always chose to defend the community in need, sometimes even at potentially great cost to self. The Westerns of Peckinpah, Leone, and Eastwood, on the other hand, feature gunfighters who held no such feelings of good will. Leone's stock character, The Man with No Name, played by Eastwood in three of Leone's films, is a thoroughly self-interested loner who only for very brief moments expresses much interest in anything other than private profit. Peckinpah's protagonists can be actively menacing. Peckinpah's Major Dundee (1965), for example, is a cavalry film where the cavalry is led by a nearly-mad Union commander. The commander, Amos Dundee (Charlton Heston), commonly abuses his own men, invades Mexico against orders, picks a fight with the occupying French forces, and partakes in not one, but two bloodbaths as the film draws to a close. In Pat Garrett and Billy the Kid

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> (1973), Pat (James Coburn), newly appointed sheriff, betrays his old friend Billy (Kris Kristofferson) and guns him down as a service to the New Mexico territorial government, which is controlled by a corporate-crony regime. In both cases, the cavalryman and the sheriff, traditionally heroic characters in Westerns, are suddenly murderous villains sowing discord wherever they go. Sergio Leone's Westerns seldom feature any government agents as prominent characters. In general, such agents in Leone's Westerns are either irrelevant or corrupt as in Once Upon a Time in the West (1968) and The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly (1966). Union soldiers in The Good, The Bad, and the Ugly are particularly monstrous, and the federal soldiers prove to be the most snarling, violent, and corrupt people on the frontier. The one Union soldier with a conscience can only manage to face the absurdity of it all by maintaining a perpetual state of drunkenness. This is all part of the film's profoundly critical view of the nation-state in wartime. Taking place against the backdrop of the New Mexico theatre of the American Civil War, the film portrays the war as a pointless sideshow to the much more interesting and reasonable business of finding buried gold on the frontier. The greed of the protagonists appears quite sane, and even charming, against the senseless carnage of the war that surrounds them. "Blondie" (Clint Eastwood) even offers a puff on his cigar to a dying Confederate soldier in a poignant scene displaying the mercy of the outlaw contrasted against the brutality of war. A decade later, Clint Eastwood's own The Outlaw Josey Wales (1976), drawing upon the many films about Jesse James, featured the exploits of an unreconstructed Confederate guerrilla that heads West to escape the disgraceful United States cavalry. In the end, he guns down a detachment of the United States Army with the help of a little old lady and her settler family from Kansas. The repudiation of John Ford's position on former Confederates is clear. In Unforgiven, Eastwood further expands on the brutal nature of official law enforcement. When English Bob (Richard Harris) attempts to bring a gun in the town of Big Whiskey, the sheriff, Little Bill (Gene Hackman), beats Bob within an inch of his life and confiscates the gun. The gun control measure, predictably, also fails to prevent the bloodbath at the end of the film. This is a reversal of the gun-control storyline found in the classical Western Winchester '73 in which Wyatt Earp, sheriff of Dodge City, confiscates the protagonist's gun while he is in town. In this case, gun owners willfully submit and the gun control measures are even shown to be effective in preventing violence within the town. Wyatt Earp does not deliver any vicious beatings in the film. The contrast between law and order in Winchester '73 and in Unforgiven typifies the change that takes place as the Western genre moves from its classical form to its revisionist form. In the earlier era, willful submission to government authority is assumed for all but violent outlaws. In a later era, however, the brutality of government agents is an ever-present threat. Abuse of power also appears to be endemic among lawmen within the revisionist Westerns. While some classical Westerns featured crooked lawmen, such portrayals were rarely a commentary on power itself. In a classical Western, the problem of a bad lawman was usually solved by the intervention of a good lawman, while in the revisionist Westerns, power itself is what makes a bad man bad.

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> cannot assume that negative portrayals of authoritarian government in revisionist Westerns necessarily mean a rehabilitation of the image of bourgeois society in these later films. The Outlaw Josey Wales is quite an exception in its magnanimous view of middle-class Kansas settlers who form a close bond with Josey as they build a homestead in the wilderness. An anti-capitalist and anti-bourgeois bias is obvious in Peckinpah's The Wild Bunch (1969) for example, when the opening scenes establish that the outlaws' primary foes are the local railroad conglomerate. The tyrannical and dishonorable railroad men ("We represent the law," they tell us) are contrasted with the honorable killers of the Wild Bunch itself who hold to a code of outlaw honor. The railroad company makes its monstrous nature all the more clear when its hired gunmen open fire on the Wild Bunch, even though a Temperance League parade has wandered into the crosshairs. The resulting bloodbath and the images of bodies of men, women, and children strewn about Main Street serve to further elevate the outlaws above the wicked railroad. Nameless, faceless business interests are in collusion with the territorial government of New Mexico in Pat Garrett and Billy the Kid (1973). The shadowy businesses are motivated to have Garrett rid them of The Kid because he has become a thorn in the side of the large ranchers who are attempting to consolidate their power in the region. Garrett thinks he's his own man, but in the end, it's revealed that he has not escaped the corrupting influence of corporate America. A man with no name appears in Eastwood's High Plains Drifter (1973) to avenge the murder of the late sheriff who discovered that the corporation ruling the town with an iron fist is engaged in illegal mining activities. Naturally, the company will murder to protect its profits. Pale Rider (1985), a loose remake of Shane, pits small-time miners against large-scale miners with the large mining interests eventually resorting to hiring corrupt marshals to force the small miners off their property. Sergio Leone appears often to be silent on this issue. While there are groups of men who band together for the express purpose of making money (as in A Fistful of Dollars (1964) and For a Few Dollars More (1965)), such gangs are portrayed as traditional criminals and not as representatives of business. One exception is Leone's vehemently anti-corporate Once Upon a Time in the West (1968) featuring Morton, the railroad baron who will stop at nothing to crush an entrepreneur who has gotten in the railroad's way. As the film progresses, Morton serves as a symbol of Manifest Destiny in addition to being a personification of corporate greed. He repeatedly looks at a painting of the Pacific Ocean and talks at length about how nothing can prevent him from reaching all the way to the Pacific. In a particularly melodramatic touch by Leone, Morton suffers from a rare bone disease so that this symbol of Westward expansion is literally disintegrating from the inside out. The

> role of religion is more varied in the revisionist Western than in the classical Western. Some hold to the traditionally hostile view toward religion. Peckinpah in particular is quite down on Christianity. Most of his Westerns feature crazed, Bible-thumping preachers and fundamentalists with words of vengeance on their lips. The Temperance Union featured in The Wild Bunch, obviously a symbol of bourgeois Christianity, is portrayed as innocent but is nevertheless a rather ridiculous group. Ride the High Country (1962) and Pat Garrett and Billy the Kid both feature actor R.G. Armstrong as a venom-spitting Bible-thumper. In Pat Garrett and Billy the Kid, he can barely restrain himself from shooting an unarmed and shackled Billy in the face. In The Ballad of Cable Hogue (1970), Hogue's friend, the Reverend Joshua Sloan, is a womanizer and con man who spends his evenings seducing married women. Clint Eastwood, on the other hand, places supernatural elements into two of his Westerns. High Plains Drifter (1973) suggests that the hero is some kind of ghost or avenging angel. He forces the townspeople to literally paint the town red and renames the town "Hell" before burning it to the ground. The "Preacher" (Eastwood), as he is called in Pale Rider, appears in the film as a girl reads Scripture: "And behold a pale horse: and his name that sat on him was Death, and Hell followed with him."[80] It is suggested that the Preacher, perhaps murdered by the same men who do the mining company's dirty work, has returned from the dead to even the score. The Preacher wears a collar, hence his name, but trades in his collar for a gun before the showdown. He also seduces another man's fiancée. The Preacher's presence provides some oblique references to Christianity, although the Preacher's origins and his intentions remain quite vague. Indeed, only in Leone's work do we find any unambiguously positive portrayals of Christianity, couched as a commentary against war. In The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly, Blondie and Tuco (Eli Wallach) stumble upon a Franciscan friary where the friars care for the casualties of the war. The head friar makes his contempt for the war known and notes that they care for the dying regardless of the color of the uniform they wear. Later, Tuco's lapsed Catholicism and his encounter with his brother, who has become a friar and who is portrayed very sympathetically, are shown to be a source of considerable unease and possible regret for Tuco. While occasional references to God and the supernatural manage to make their way into some of the later Westerns, it would be a mistake to conclude the standard contempt for religion that dominated the Westerns at mid-century had evaporated in later representatives of the genre. Nor can we say that the fundamental building blocks of the Western as described by Jane Tompkins have disappeared. The central action of the Western still revolves around the gunfighter, and the gunfighter attains his dominant position through a superior command of the primitive landscape where intellectual and economic considerations are of extremely limited importance. Essentially, the gunfighter's behavior remains unchanged, although the context has shifted considerably. In this respect, Sam Peckinpah's Westerns are very traditional, although his dark vision of the West and his inventive portrayals of violence on film were novel for his time. Peckinpah's Westerns (indeed his films overall) rarely feature women, and the action is generally driven by very violent men who, while vicious, can be quite sympathetic. The gunfighters as shown in The Wild Bunch, for example, are men of action and self-sufficient rogues who have no need of religion or women or even civilization. In Peckinpah's films, the gunfighter is destroyed only when civilization catches up with him, and the West is conquered by the modern world.

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> Perhaps one of the most popular, critically-acclaimed, and groundbreaking Westerns of this period was the HBO series Deadwood (2004-2006), featuring the mining town of the same name that once flourished in the Dakota Territory. In a detailed examination of the series, Paul Cantor identifies the series' highly sympathetic view of spontaneous order. Deadwood, according to Cantor, takes the position that ordered human societies can arise independent of the intervention of any established law-enforcement entity, and that those societies are held together by economic self-interest.[82] As we have seen, this is an extremely unusual position for a Western to take. Classical Westerns overwhelmingly take the opposite view and maintain that true order is finally only established with the intervention of a cavalryman, sheriff, or gunman who can pave the way for civilization. In Deadwood, on the other hand, order arises immediately out of the self-interest of miners and merchants who seek riches and appreciate that peace and a functioning economic system are essential for prosperity. In

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> Deadwood, as with many revisionist Westerns, takes a different approach, but Deadwood takes the critique of centralized government and its commentary on progress to a more sophisticated level than is normally seen in Westerns. Both The Wild Bunch and Once Upon a Time in the West look upon the end of frontier life as the end of something good. In The Wild Bunch, and Pat Garrett and Billy the Kid, an older world of gunfighter honor is being lost to a corrupt modernism. In Once Upon a Time in the West, the gunfighter is almost literally buried by the railroad as industrialization replaces the way of the gun. Here we find all the elements of nostalgic primitivism in which the masculine gunmen are replaced by a more effeminate and complex society, which in some ways resembles the industrialized society of bourgeois liberal America. Deadwood departs even from these lingering elements of the Western and posits that something far more important than masculinity or gunfighter honor is lost in the march of progress. According to Cantor: Elements of the Western myth of progress are present in Deadwood, especially in season 3, when outside forces truly begin to transform the town. But [series creator David] Milch evaluates the transformation quite differently, and refuses to view it simply as progress. More than any other Western I know, Deadwood dwells upon what is lost when a town makes the transition to civilization and becomes part of the nation-state. What is lost is freedom.[88] In Deadwood, territorial and national officials are viewed as thieves and bureaucrats whose primary interest is stealing from the Indians, and, when they can get away with it, from the white civilians also. "They're too busy stealing to study human nature" one character remarks, while a local saloon owner during the second season declares: Who of us here didn't know what government was before we came?

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> The warmongers of the central government in The Good, The Bad, and the Ugly spread murder and discord while the marshals in Eastwood's Pale Rider come to drive small businessmen off their land and enforce the rule of might over right. Meanwhile, the outlaw Josey Wales flees a triumphant and murderous nation-state formed out of the ruins of the bloody Civil War.

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> Jill, the symbol of the settled bourgeois life, can never maintain a relationship with the gunfighter, because the two lifestyles cannot be reconciled. The gunfighter is not a complement to the bourgeois life, nor is he its protector. He is instead either irrelevant or damaging to the settlement of the West, wild and prone to self-destruction. As the film draws to a close, Harmonica and Cheyenne ride away from Jill's estate to die, forgotten and useless in the dust. Dedicated to Sergio Leone, Clint Eastwood's Unforgiven takes Leone's critique of the gunfighter and presents a far darker and much more devastating deconstruction of the gunfighter and everything he stands for. Unforgiven opens in a brothel. But this is not one of the well-lit, ribald brothels of the classical Western. Inside, a cowboy is cutting up a whore who has laughed at his miniscule genitals. His assault ends with the sheriff Little Bill arriving with his deputies and demanding that the cowboy and his partner compensate not the woman who's been cut up, but the brothel owner for destruction of his "property." The sheriff's obvious disregard for the concept of self-ownership and his alarmingly light punishment leads the whores to pool their money to hire a bounty hunter. Enter William Munny (Eastwood), a vicious outlaw who we are repeatedly told has killed women and children, and is a former Civil War guerrilla. Munny had turned away from gunfighting while under the influence of his wife Claudia, a "respectable" woman who married Munny against her mother's wishes. Yet by the time the news of the whores' bounty reaches Munny, Claudia has died and Munny has fallen on hard times. Munny is recruited by The Schofield Kid, a youth who talks too much and obviously wants to make a name for himself with a few killings. Munny accepts the job largely out of his desperate need for money (he has two children), and he brings on his old partner Ned (Morgan Freeman) for one last job. As the film unfolds, Munny repeatedly refers to what Claudia would have wanted from him. "She cured me of drinkin' and wickedness," he tells Ned. He's only doing this for the money, and to set things right for what the cowboy did to the whore. Claudia haunts the film every step of the way, and even in death she is an enduring symbol of domesticity and peace. It was she who turned Munny away from the life of the gun. It was she who built a house with him, had children with him, and worked a farm with him. Now, by accepting this job, he is risking repudiating everything she ever taught him. Through most of the film, Munny holds fast to what Claudia would have wanted. He invokes her name like a mantra, and, unlike his partners, he doesn' t patronize the brothel or drink any whiskey. He's in town to make some money and return to his children. Unfortunately, Munny runs into Little Bill, the sheriff who has scarcely any less experience in gunning men down than Munny does. Indeed, it may be that the only difference between Little Bill and Munny is that Little Bill wears a badge. Little Bill's viciousness was well established earlier in the film when he administered a savage beating to English Bob (Richard Harris), a gunfighter who had attempted to bring a pistol into town against Little Bill's regulations.[91] After the beating, Bill shares with Bob's biographer the secrets of being a gunfighter. In this conversation, Bill essentially deconstructs the myth of the gunfighter, pointing out that a fast draw and the other legends of the dime novels of the time had very little to do with reality. In real life, Bill tells us, winning a gunfight is about getting the drop on your opponent, taking careful aim, and shooting him down. The showdowns of myth are ridiculous, Bill tells us. At this point, Bill is just confirming what Munny has been telling us throughout the entire film. The Schofield Kid continually grills Munny, seeking to learn his secrets to winning gunfights; yet Munny himself isn't even sure how he came out of so many gunfights on top. He attributes most of it to luck: "I've always been lucky when it came to killin' folks," he says, and he owns that he doesn't remember much of it because he was drunk most of the time. According to Munny himself, there isn't much that's courageous or interesting about being a gunfighter. Thus Claudia is confirmed as Munny's salvation and as his rescuer from a world of drunkenness and murder.

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> Little Bill's shoddy house sets up a second symbol of bourgeois domesticity set against the life of the gunfighter. Just as Munny cannot simultaneously honor Claudia's memory and gun down the cowboys for the bounty, neither can Little Bill build a neat little bourgeois life for himself at the same time he is raining blows upon every man who dares question his authority.[92] After Munny, Ned, and the Kid kill the offending cowboy and his innocent friend for the bounty, Ned is captured and tortured to death by Little Bill. The final epiphany for Munny comes when he learns of Ned's death at the hands of Little Bill, and Munny takes his first drink of whiskey since his marriage to Claudia. Munny returns to town to shoot down Little Bill and every member of his posse, even shooting some of them in the back. Little Bill, dying on the floor, declares to Munny, "I don't deserve this, to die like this. I was building a house." Little Bill's appeal to justice is not that he was a good man or a good sheriff, but that he was building a house, the symbol of everything that the gunfighter is not. Critical analyses of Unforgiven are common, and a common conclusion among them is that the film is a commentary on the futility of violence. This is certainly true, and we know this from Eastwood himself. The film begins with a non-lethal assault on a woman and ends with a bloodbath. By the end of the film, the bounty itself, which had precipitated so much killing, appears excessive, for in fact, the whore's scars from the original assault have healed and are already faded by the time the final showdown commences. Some have claimed that the film's coda, which tells us that after he returns home, Munny becomes a businessman in San Francisco, proves that Munny's return to gunfighting bore much fruit. Yet we know that earlier in the film, Munny had confronted his own mortality. He had seen "the angel of death," was terrified, and had seen the face of his wife, "all covered in worms." Why does the film include this? It certainly doesn't do much to convince us that Munny, after getting drunk and shooting a few men in the back, will be living happily ever after. And while the role of violence is a central theme, the presence of Claudia's memory and Little Bill's house serve to illustrate the alternative for the gunfighter. It is the peaceful bourgeois life of the settlers. But neither Little Bill nor Munny is capable of living this life. They are condemned to the shiftless life of the gun with no wife, no home, and nothing but a life of endless combat and death. The connection to Once Upon a Time in the West is clear, for Cheyenne and Harmonica were likewise incapable of settling down. They were committed to the life of the gunfighter, and like the lives of Little Bill and Munny, the life of the gunfighter is sterile. They create nothing and destroy everything. They cannot sustain themselves and ultimately ride to the horizon as ruined men to die.

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> I have contended that the classical Western discounts and undermines nineteenth-century bourgeois liberal values of free commerce, small government, liberalism, family, and religious faith. The contrast between the Little House series and the classical Westerns illustrates just how great is the difference between the typical Western and frontier fiction which features family life and commerce apart from violence. The Little House series reminds us that the Western formula is not the only way of addressing the American frontier through fiction. The Little House stories offer an alternate model, as do the frontier stories of Willa Cather, for example. In spite of a thoroughly different focus from that provided by the Western, the Little House series does not question the value of the Westward expansion of American civilization. It simply contends that the expansion was far less violent and chaotic than what is shown in the classical Western. Wilder's books, and the Little House television series as well, exhibit a substantial amount of optimism about Westward expansion and sympathy for the settlers themselves. Little House is not a revisionist Western in the model of The Wild Bunch or High Plains Drifter. Coupled with an examination of the importance of commerce and local self-reliance, the focus on the virtues of nineteenth-century American frontier society found in the Little House series bears the marks of the influence of Rose Wilder Lane.

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> Lane was injecting her own Lockean brand of liberalism into the Little House stories.[98] Lane's bourgeois liberal philosophy is also reflected in the social structure of the American frontier, as featured in the Little House stories and series. Unlike the classical Western, which creates a myth of a totally self-sufficient gunfighter or military man who is largely untouchable and lives apart from civilized society, the Little House series emphasizes the need for community action, education, cooperation, and family, which arise, incidentally, out of an order established by the settlers independent of any powerful government institution. As perhaps a final repudiation of the Western genre and its roots in nostalgic primitivism, The Little House series of books re-defines masculinity along much different lines. According to Jim Powell, writing in The Triumph of Liberty:

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> the Westerns still being made today, the original formula often remains largely intact, however, and although the Little House series proved that a dramatic history of the frontier need not be about showdowns and law and order imposed at the point of a gun, that image continues to shape American ideas about the nation's history and from where order and prosperity have their origins. Today, the Western has been largely replaced by zombie films, superhero epics, and gritty police dramas. Zombie films provide similar story lines to the Indian extermination narratives of cavalry Westerns, while superheroes act as modern gunfighters on a global stage. Police dramas continue to offer righteous indignation for the viewer in the face of repugnant outlaws. The Western is more powerful than these other genres, however, because it purports to be a type of American history. Although it does not reflect the reality of the historical American frontier, the Western continues to form the imaginations of viewers regarding the role of the American state and American society in the modern world.