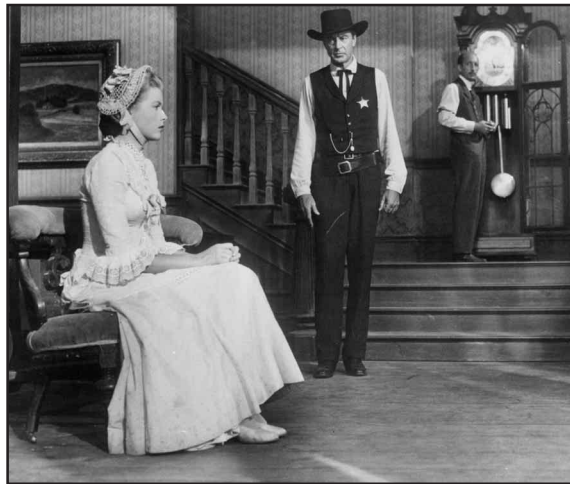


# Rewriting *High Noon*: Transformations in American Popular Political Culture During the Cold War

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*High Noon* (1952) was a landmark artifact of American popular political culture of the high Cold War.<sup>1</sup> Screenwriter Carl Foreman intended it as a commentary on Hollywood capitulation to HUAC. Director Fred Zinneman and star Gary Cooper saw it as a film about the nobility of the individual in the face of a failure of public morality. John Wayne, the film star and conservative archetype of the period declared the film Un-American.<sup>2</sup> One scholar has characterized the film as catering to ideological extremists and challenging the “vital center.”<sup>3</sup> The varied readings of the film, coupled with its critical and commercial success, spawned a sub-genre of politically self-conscious westerns, treating the nature of the American community, the role of the individual within it, and the responsibilities of citizenship and of power, all within a tale of the lone lawman defending a town from a gang of cut-throats. *High Noon*, in short, became a cinematic and ideological touchstone against which other directors sought to define their own position and visions of the proper role of the individual in American society. This paper explores three of these films: Anthony Mann’s *The Tin Star* (1957); Edward Dmytryk’s *Warlock* (1959), and Vincent McAvety’s *Firecreek* (1968).<sup>4</sup> Setting these films in the changing historical and cultural contexts of the 16 years after the original (1952-1968) reveals transformations in American popular political culture of the Cold War.

While often characterized as an age of conformity, recent historical studies have revealed the 1950s as a period of political, economic, and cultural ferment. The high cold war (1947-1963) was an era of social change, with the emergence of a post-industrial economy, the creation of planned communities, and the rise of a national security state of unprecedented power and scope of activity. Within this context of social change a new politics of group interests began to emerge including the civil rights



Sheriff Will Kane (Gary Cooper) and his new wife (Grace Kelly.)

Courtesy of National Screen Service

movement, a politics of gender, and early signs of a youth movement suggested by the fear of juvenile delinquents and the literary rebellion of the beats.

In this context of social and political change, citizens, government, business, and cultural agents attempted almost desperately to cling to a notion of consensus around a “vital center.” Cast in a variety of contexts—ideological, economic and cultural—the key element was a notion of consensus across the political spectrum, fueled by unparalleled consumer power, uniting disparate former ideological combatants into a

centrist coalition against the extremist forces of communism and fascism. The vital center described a community of white, middle class, two-parent families with faith in the virtue of their leaders and in the moral superiority of a free market. They were united by a mission of moral progress, defined primarily as the export of their free-market, individualist ideology around the globe. Their mission was threatened by the forces of totalitarianism of both communist and fascist varieties.<sup>5</sup> While this “vital center” was articulated, defended and sought by many if not most social actors, there is ample and increasing evidence that the center was growing increasingly fragmented.

Tom Engelhardt sees this fragmentation as intimately related to the breakdown of an American consensus he identifies with the American war story, a tale of ambush against Americans leading to a justifiable moral crusade to defeat unconditionally the attacker. He argues that the decline of the war story in the context of nuclear containment (the big fear) led elites to seek to contain the parts of society that were breaking away from the vital center, including the “little fears” of juvenile delinquency and communist sympathizers.<sup>6</sup> We can add to this, based on the work of Elaine Tyler May, Jane Sherron de Hart, KA Courdileone and others, women and men.<sup>7</sup> The enemy within, either as

communist, delinquent, or gender-defier becomes as significant a Cold War enemy as the Soviet Union, and thus a subject of containment.

Similarly, Alan Nadel treats containment as a hegemonic narrative, claiming that “Although technically referring to US foreign policy from 1948 until at least the mid-1960s, [containment] also describes American life in numerous venues and under sundry rubrics during that period.”<sup>8</sup> The function of this “rhetorical strategy” was “. . . to foreclose dissent, preempt dialogue, and preclude contradiction.”<sup>9</sup> In doing so, “. . . containment equated containment of communism with containment of atomic secrets, sexual license, of gender roles, of nuclear energy, and of artistic expression.”<sup>10</sup> Where Engelhardt sees the atomic bombing of Japan and the Vietnam War as the seminal moments in the decline of the war story, Nadel points to the Bay of Pigs as the undoing of the containment narrative because “. . . the fiasco manifested a national narrative whose singular authority depended on uncontrollable doubling, a gendered narrative whose coupling depended on unstable distinctions, a historical narrative that functioned independently of events, a form of writing that undermined the authority of its referents.”<sup>11</sup>

By the 1960s the vital center had fragmented under the weight of these contradictions and the new politically active groups that emerged out of them. With the growing realization that containing communism had made the United States appear increasingly like its enemy, with domestic surveillance, purges, and disinformation generating a growing credibility gap, the moral certitude of the center (and the certain threat posed by these groups) faded into increasing ambiguity and ultimately dissolved. This ambiguity, emergent in the 1950s and apparent to very close reading in *High Noon* and *The Tin Star*, becomes clearer by 1959 (*Warlock*) and loses all semblance of subtlety by 1968 (*Firecreek*). The articulation of these various elements—vital center, government, youth, and gender—reveal in these films a growing discomfort with American cultural norms, ambiguity about moral action, and increasing doubt that moral action is possible within the American community.

## High Noon and its Legacy

The law and order film, of which *High Noon* is the progenitor, consists of several key elements. In all of these films, a central character is the town; in fact, two of these films take their title from the name of the town. Hadleyville’s abandonment of Marshall Will Kane (Gary Cooper) in *High Noon* provides the central moral conflict of the film. While several different perspectives are given for the town’s failure to support the marshal, including the disability of his mentor, the moral beliefs of his Quaker wife, and the fear of the judge who sentenced Frank Miller to death, the central point is made by the mayor (Thomas Mitchell) during the ad hoc town meeting at the church. Investors from up state are considering locating new business in Hadleyville, he

argues, and a gunfight in the streets on a Sunday will drive that potential investment away. He urges Kane to leave and convinces the town not to support him. The progressive commercial interests of the town, seeking to protect their prosperity, reject the moral certitude of the noble marshal.

The middle class progressive interests who fear the impending conflict are not the only faction within the town. In the saloon and the hotel we find less progressive but equally commercial interests who see in the return of Frank Miller the potential for increased profit. These more rapacious and morally questionable economic interests have been subdued by Kane’s taming of Miller. We are led to believe throughout the film that the commercial and moral progress of the town was made possible only by Will Kane’s defeat of Frank Miller five years previously. Now, the same interests that have benefited from Kane’s provision of law and order turn their backs on him in his hour of need, leaving open the possibility that without the noble marshal to protect their interests, they will lose their progressive prosperity.<sup>12</sup>

The marshal (or sheriff or deputy in some cases) is the other central character in these films. In *High Noon*, this is Will Kane. Kane has quit as marshal, gotten married and is ready to leave town when he hears that Frank Miller will be arriving on the noon train, and that his gang is waiting for him at the station. While Kane never states his reasons for staying to face Miller, frequently telling people that if he had to explain then they would not understand, it is clear that the moral integrity of the individual is the source of his action. There is a strong suggestion that the conflict between Kane and Miller has a personal side to it; Kane and Miller apparently vied for the attentions of saloonkeeper Helen Ramirez (Katy Jurado), and Miller holds Kane personally responsible for his conviction and imprisonment. But within the context of the story, these personal conflicts are subordinated to the public threat posed by Miller and the moral duty this places on Will Kane. Even when everyone has abandoned him—the town, his wife, his friends – and he is facing near certain death, he must still face Miller and his gang. The marshal thus represents the virtuous individual, facing the threat to the community even with the potential for death that it entails. The failure of the community to support him leads him to reject that community, throwing his badge to the ground in disgust, but only after he has successfully met the moral duty that is incumbent upon him.

Other significant elements include youth, women and the villain. *High Noon* suggested that the relationship of adults to adolescence was paternalistic, but also that youth was unreliable. Kane’s relation with his deputy, Harve (Lloyd Bridges), demonstrates the latter aspect of this. Harve clearly wants to be Kane. He is angry with Kane and quits because Kane did not recommend him as his replacement because he was too young. He becomes angry in the saloon when the manager suggests he is not as brave as Kane. He is sleeping with Kane’s former lover. Since Harve represents the next generation, the film seems to suggest that the

impatience and ignorance of youth undermines their ability to offer an adequate moral replacement for the generation that is passing away. Both Kane and Helen Ramirez tell Harve that he is too young, and that he does not understand the moral necessity that roots Kane to Hadleyville, even at the cost of true love, happiness and life. Clearly the next generation has proven inadequate. The moral failings of the town have corrupted the next generation, leaving Harve inadequate to face threats to the town's security.

There are two types of women in these films: the civilizing woman who seeks to end violence and endorse the community; and the dark woman who understands the marshal and the need for violence. In *High Noon* these are Amy (Grace Kelly), Kane's newly wedded Quaker wife, and the saloonkeeper, Helen Ramirez (Katy Jurado), respectively. Helen is the former lover of Kane, Frank Miller and currently is with Harve. Douglas McReynolds notes that neither Amy nor Helen perform a significant ideological function other than the temptations of female stereotypes they set for Kane. Helen represents the temptation of sexual license, a corollary to the potential authoritarian power of Kane. Amy represents the temptations of middle class domesticity that have undermined the moral fiber of the town.<sup>13</sup>

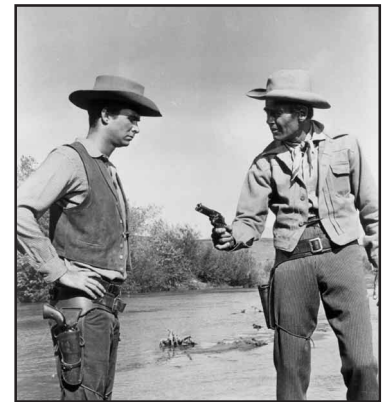
The ostensible villain, Frank Miller, is an ominous absence through most of *High Noon*. It is through reference and innuendo that we discover his vicious nature and his threat to Kane.<sup>14</sup> At one time a citizen of Hadleyville, Miller was the main target of Kane's activity to impose law and order on the town. The town still retains a Miller faction in the saloon and the hotel who think that Miller provides a potential for increased income. As noted above, the other business interests in town see Miller's return as a threat, although that threat will be alleviated if Kane is not there to meet Miller. Within the context of the tale, Miller is an outsider, an external threat who has been repulsed once and now must be killed.<sup>15</sup>

The interweaving of these elements in *High Noon* offered a vision of American society in which the progressive middle class interests had lost the willingness and the nerve to defend themselves against a threat to their very existence. This left the one individual who retained a clear moral vision to face this threat alone. Ultimately, the threat defeated, the individual leaves the shamed community in disgust, condemned for their cowardice and weakness. Youth and women offer little hope for redemption; the civilizing female (Amy) can only endorse fleeing from responsibility, and is herself converted to the need for violence by her husband's predicament. Harve is ignorant of the moral duty of the individual and too impatient to acquire the trappings of authority. *High Noon* is thus a strong voice criticizing the vital center for its lack of public virtue and its failure to support the noble, virtuous individual who risks all to defend a community unworthy of that defense.

## The Tin Star (1957)

In *The Tin Star* the disillusioned sheriff, now a bounty hunter, comes to a town very similar to Hadleyville. Feared by the town, the bounty hunter, Morg Hickman (Henry Fonda) becomes the tutor of the young sheriff, Ben Owens (Anthony Perkins). Hickman had lost his faith in his community when his town failed to help him and his sick wife. Now he travels as a bounty hunter, alienated and bitter.<sup>16</sup> Through tutoring the young sheriff to confront Bart Bogardus (Neville Brand), and through the growing affection between himself and the woman and child who take him in, Hickman comes to learn that the values he defended as a sheriff are still worth defending and leaves this town to find a place where he can again become a sheriff.

Toward the end of *The Tin Star* there is a scene in which the town fails to support the young sheriff in the face of a lynch mob led by Bogardus. Unlike *High Noon*, there are few excuses offered by the town elders; the judge claims that as a man of the law he cannot participate, and the banker who is also the mayor tries to get the sheriff to leave town. There is little need for



Bounty hunter Morg Hickman (Henry Fonda) tutors sheriff Ben Owens (Anthony Perkins) in *The Tin Star*.

Courtesy of Film Archive

excuses, since the film can only be seen as a sequel to *High Noon*, and thus the excuses were already offered in that film. At a time when he was noted for panoramic, open, colorful backgrounds for his western films, Anthony Mann shot *The Tin Star* in black and white, almost completely in a town set that is a virtual replica of Hadleyville. The town is never named in the film; one almost thinks of it as Hadleyville prime. With the shadow of *High Noon* hanging over the film, there is little need to restate the moral conflict within the town. Yet failing to do so alters the nature of that conflict. The moral tension within the film becomes less the failure of the town to support its sheriff in the face of a threat than the personal conflict of the ex-sheriff turned bounty hunter. Hickman quit being sheriff in some other nameless town when its leaders who purported to be his friends refused to loan him the money to take his dying wife to a healthier climate. He turned bounty hunter to gain the needed thousand dollars, but while he was gone, his wife and son died. Now he rejects the duty that comes with the badge to dwell on the moral outskirts of society as a bounty hunter.

*High Noon* hints that Will Kane is a man of questionable moral standing. He is portrayed as authoritarian; he has had an affair with Helen Ramirez, and is given to fits of temper. Morg

Hickman in *The Tin Star* is cast in a morally ambiguous light from the beginning. He appears as a bounty hunter, leading a packhorse with a dead body draped across its back. He rejects formal authority and wishes nothing to do with law and order. He is perceived as a threat to the town, someone with whom the sheriff should not associate and for whom there is no room at the hotel.<sup>17</sup> The noble individual is thus further alienated from the community than was Will Kane, but is still essential to it. Throughout the film the town elders try to force him to leave and threaten to remove the sheriff from office if he continues to associate with Hickman.

The town has the same representative elements as Hadleyville, which seem to advocate the same ideological positions. As in Hadleyville, the forces of progressive capitalism fail to support the noble individual in his time of need. At the same time, *The Tin Star* does not condemn the town in the way *High Noon* damned Hadleyville. The return of Frank Miller posed a threat of violence and the breakdown of social order; the community should have rallied to its own defense in the face of such an overt threat. In *The Tin Star*, the lynch mob led by Bogardus seeks to hang the McGaffey brothers (Peter Baldwin and Lee van Cleaf) because they have killed Doc McCord (John McIntyre). Doc is represented throughout the film as the moral center of the town. He delivers the babies that comprise the families that give the town identity and purpose. His diaries, in which he records all of the town's births, serve as the only necessary history to the town. His murder is thus an overt stab at the very heart of the town and offers some justification for the desire to seek revenge against his killers.<sup>18</sup> Where Hadleyville failed to meet the challenge of a potential threat, this town becomes violently enraged over an actual attack; the town elders, who will fail to support the young sheriff against Bogardus' lynch mob, are eager to join the posse to catch the McGaffeyes. While the lynch mob is thus not condoned in *The Tin Star*, it is rendered more understandable than is the fear of Frank Miller.

Bogardus represents the Frank Miller suggested to us: a threat from within. He is an integral citizen of the town who runs the livery. He aspired to be sheriff, but seeing his desire was based on having a "shooting license" the town council gave the job to young Ben. While the actual crime in the film is committed by the McGaffey brothers, this is less significant than Bogardus' attempt to lynch them. It is here that the true threat is posed. The forces of order captured the criminals who would stand trial; that is how a progressive community operates. Beyond their crime and punishment the criminals pose no specific threat. The threat to the community is instead posed by Bogardus, who flouts law and order and seeks a vigilante justice to express his own barbarism. As in *High Noon*, there is a real threat to the community. In confronting this threat, Ben Owens will find his manhood, the maturity and skill to match his idealism, and Hickman will again find his ideals.

The main conflict that had driven *High Noon* is, however, minimized in *The Tin Star*. It becomes background to the re-conversion of Morg Hickman to the law and order position. Hickman's disillusion with that position arose over the failure of his town to help him and his sick wife. He rejected the town in which he was sheriff over a largely personal issue, not over the same failure of public morality that confronted Will Kane, nor which confronts young Ben Owens. Mann takes the issue of civic virtue presented in *High Noon* and makes it secondary to the private virtues of family in *Tin Star*. In fact, the brief failure of the town's virtue, and the bravado of the young sheriff in its absence, is the epiphany Hickman needs to regain his own public virtue. The moral corruption of Hadleyville that leads Will Kane to throw his badge to the ground in disgust generates a renewal of faith in Morg Hickman; the young sheriff's idealism about the noble duty of the lawman even in the face of total abandonment rekindles the fire in Morg, but only after he has recreated the family he has lost.

*The Tin Star* offers an intermediate level of community that is lacking in *High Noon*. Where Amy represented marriage and middle class prosperity as a temptation that would keep Will Kane from doing his noble duty,<sup>19</sup> Nona Mayfield (Betsy Palmer) and her son Kip (Michel Ray) represent family as a necessary integrating device for the maintenance of social order. Nona, the widow of an Indian with a mixed blood son who dwells on the outskirts of town and takes in sewing to make a living, takes Hickman in when the hotel refuses to let him a room.<sup>20</sup> The growing affection between Morg and Nona is the key to his re-acceptance of duty and his willingness to return to the role of sheriff. This is shown in the scenes surrounding the search for the McGaffey brothers. Bogardus leads a posse of angry citizens in search of them, abandoning the sheriff to his own devices, while Hickman refuses to accept a deputy's badge and rides back to the Mayfield home. Finding that young Kip has ridden after the posse, Hickman chases after it to protect the boy. He meets with the sheriff who thinks he is tracking the McGaffeyes, to which Hickman replies, "I'm not looking for McGaffeyes. I'm looking for a boy." Only after finding that Kip, who is safe, has found the brothers does Hickman help the sheriff capture them and bring them in alive. The public duty of finding the brothers takes second place to the private goal of protecting his surrogate son for Hickman; only after he has achieved this private goal can he turn to the public duty.

As Hickman recreates the family he has lost, he regains his sense of moral duty to defend civilization from all threats. Reincorporated into a family, he also dons the badge Ben has been trying to get him to accept throughout the film. Nona Mayfield offers to Hickman a pre-fabricated family that will return to him an identity and purpose that he lost with the death of his own family. His re-incorporation into the community at the end of the film is made possible by his incorporation into the family of Kip and Nona, recreating the family necessary to domesticate his

anomic spirit. Similarly, through tutoring Ben Owens, Hickman takes on the role of father to the young sheriff. Ben wants to provide law and order and a moral center to the town, but his youth and inexperience render him incapable of doing so. When he sees the competence of Hickman with a gun and with men and finds that Hickman was once a sheriff himself, he asks him to be his tutor. Through the process of teaching the young sheriff, Hickman regains a belief in the moral value of defending a town and providing it with law, order, and a moral compass. At the end of the film he has been accepted into the town; the final scene, when Hickman, with Nona and Kip, rides through town on a buckboard while the townspeople wave and call him by name, unwrites the ominous and icy greeting he received from these same people in the first scene. When young Ben asks him to stay on as sheriff, he says no; he and his new family will settle somewhere else that needs a sheriff because this town already has one.

The importance of the private family to the public community is also seen in the relationship between Ben Owens and Millie (Mary Webster). Millie, the fiancé of Ben and daughter of the dead sheriff he replaced, wants nothing to do with being married to a sheriff. She eschews violence, but learns through the intervention of Doc McCord that the sheriff's role is necessary. Like Amy, who takes up a gun and shoots one of Frank Miller's men in the back, Millie comes to understand that the noble duty of the sheriff must be performed. By the end of the film, as Ben and Millie walk hand in hand, we see that the domestication of the sheriff incorporates him into the civilized town, binding his idealism to the defense of the community. Where the domestic promise of Amy had tempted Will Kane from fulfilling his duty, the domestication promised by Millie assures that the duty will be performed and passed on to the next generation, as Hickman has passed his skills on to young Ben.

*The Tin Star* un-writes *High Noon*, making the failure of the community less significant than the personal loss suffered by Hickman and de-legitimizing Kane's rejection of the community that seemed justified. Transforming the public failure of *High Noon* into the private failings of *The Tin Star* may represent the changed context of the film; by 1957 McCarthy and HUAC no longer dominated the political scene and peaceful coexistence was the order of the day. The political issue was no longer whether to conform to the witch-hunt hysteria or to stand on the personal integrity of the liberal individual, but to maintain the course in the face of a less impending threat. While *The Tin Star* seems to reverse the moral message of *High Noon* by having Hickman leave in search of a town in need of a sheriff, it ultimately begs the question by altering the terms of the moral dilemma. Relocated within a family, the alienated Hickman is reincorporated into the community in a way Kane could never be; his personal life in order, he can now return to his public role of defending the community, and the community, its future secure, can concern itself with purely private matters. The community need not defend

itself, merely support and defer to the sheriff. Like the town of *The Tin Star*, the vital center is no longer expected to defend itself, merely to offer a supportive environment in which noble individuals will defend it from itself. The personal begins to outweigh the public, and the retreat into privacy, condemned in *High Noon*, becomes virtuous in *The Tin Star*.

## Warlock (1959)

The town of *Warlock* is removed even further from Hadleyville. Less well kept than Hadleyville, Warlock is not even a real town, but an offshoot of the legal town of Bright Star. It is not the progressive commercial center represented by Hadleyville, but a mining town surrounded by the San Pueblo ranch, representing a more rapacious and destructive form of capitalism. The citizens of the town are threatened by the vicious illegalities of the San Pueblo rancher, Abe McQuown (Tom Drake), and his gang, who rustle cattle, have terrorized five previous deputies, massacred Mexicans, and killed the town barber in cold blood. The town seeks to protect itself by hiring a vigilante, Clay Blaisdale (Henry Fonda), as marshal on acceptance. Once the McQuown gang is subdued, the town comes to fear Blaisdale, and he is forced to confront the new deputy, Johnny Gannon (Richard Widmark), a former member of McQuown's gang.

Michael Coyne offers a strong reading of *Warlock* as presenting the centrist position between the far left (the anarchy of McQuown) and the far right (the authoritarianism of Blaisdale). He supplements this by treating the film as an allegory to Edward Dmytryk's experiences as the only member of the Hollywood Ten to cooperate with HUAC. In this version, Johnny Gannon becomes the avatar of Dmytryk. Originally a member of the McQuown gang, Gannon becomes disillusioned over the bloodshed and joins with the town as its deputy, protecting them from the ravages of both HUAC (Blaisdale) and the Hollywood Ten (McQuown).<sup>21</sup> While Coyne offers a convincing interpretation of the film, there is a much more complex treatment of the law and order theme than suggested by this allegory. The potential of the young Warlock to turn into a progressive capitalist haven a la Hadleyville is secured by the conversion of Gannon to the law and order position; the willingness of the town to support him in the face of the threats from McQuown and Blaisdale suggests that potential will be realized. *Warlock* thus offers a more satisfying conclusion concerning the future of the town than *High Noon*, one more akin to the promise of noble



Clay Blaisdale (Henry Fonda) explains the importance of rules to Warlock's new deputy Johnny Gannon (Richard Widmark).

Courtesy of Film Archive

heroes protecting law and order that is given by *The Tin Star*. But it promises more from the town than either of these previous films, hence offering less faith in the noble individual and more in the supportive community.<sup>22</sup> But what exactly is that community supporting?

As an unincorporated town, Warlock has no public officers of its own. Its order is provided by a deputy to the sheriff of the nearby Bright City. Similarly, its law is provided by the judge – on acceptance. He is not really a judge, but functions as one as long as the town accepts him as such. The judge is a cripple who is given to bellicose outbursts in defense of the law and against the vigilantism represented by Blaisdale, who the judge sees as the representative of “anarchy, murder and violence,” although Blaisdale’s authority is based on the same acceptance as that of the judge. “There’s something bigger than all men; that’s the law,” the judge tells Blaisdale. Yet this law that he represents is only valid “on acceptance.” It provides no help to Gannon as he confronts McQuown or Blaisdale. It is as crippled as the judge who bears it. Likewise, there is no moral center to Blaisdale, who tells Gannon:

I remember when I first killed a man. It was clear it had to be done, though I went home afterwards and puked my insides out. I remember how clear it was; afterwards nothing was ever clear again, except for one thing. That’s to hold strictly to the rules. It’s only the rules that matter. Hold onto them like you were walking on eggs, so you know yourself you’ve played it as fair and as best you could.

The “rules” for Blaisdale serve the same function as “the law” for the judge: to provide a means of existing in human communities absent a moral center. The center does hold in *Warlock*, as Coyne suggests, but what holds it together has no intrinsic meaning. Rules may keep us orderly, but they do not provide moral clarity. Thus *Warlock* may suggest greater faith in the American community’s ability to come together to defend itself, but what exactly is being defended has become increasingly ambiguous.

The absence of an inherent meaning to the vital center that *Warlock* seems to validate renders the film incapable of offering a coherent meaning or stable roles for any of the characters. Where *High Noon* suggests a certain moral ambiguity to Will Kane, and Morg Hickman is seen initially as morally corrupt by the town of *The Tin Star*, the moral ambiguity of the marshal in *Warlock* is even more pronounced, largely because there are two, Clay Blaisdale and Johnny Gannon. Blaisdale is hired as marshal-on-acceptance, a community sponsored vigilante, to face the gang that has been terrorizing the town. Blaisdale, like Hickman, dwells on the fringes of morality. A hired gunfighter, he supplements his income by dealing faro at the casino of his partner, Tom Morgan

(Anthony Quinn). Blaisdale recognizes that his situation is temporary; once he has defended the town, they will come to fear him and reject him. This is, in fact, what happens. Rather than turn on the town, however, he, like Hickman, finds a sense of identity through the affection of a young woman, although this is fleeting and illusory. This sense is lost when he is forced to kill Morgan and then must face deputy Gannon. With Morgan’s death, Blaisdale is forced to confront that he is unable to assimilate into the community and must either destroy it or be driven out. When he faces the sheriff, though, he refuses to shoot, throws his gold handled colts into the dust, mounts his horse and rides away alone. The town of Warlock does come together for its own defense, again unwriting *High Noon*, but the provider of law and order has lost the moral certitude that was exemplified by Kane and regained by Hickman.

Gannon, a member of McQuown’s gang who is disillusioned by a massacre of Mexicans, plays the role most akin to Will Kane. A legal representative of law and order, he stands between the villainy of McQuown and the morally ambiguous vigilantism of Blaisdale. Unlike Kane, he is not adept at gun-fighting; the skill is all on Blaisdale’s side. Gannon, however, represents a legal order and thus has the consensus of the community as a support. This is represented by the willingness of the town to come to his aid against McQuown, and the offer of help against Blaisdale. He turns down the latter support, noting that this is his job. The authoritarian elements of Will Kane are thus expelled from the legal order of Warlock, while the legal consensus of the center is offered as the hope of the future. While Blaisdale leaves town and takes the authoritarianism with him, he is not in search of another Warlock, where the center will defend itself. He is instead in search of another town in need of a vigilante; the authoritarian is not reformed as was Morg Hickman, nor is he completely expelled. He is still traveling from town to town, stopping wherever he is permitted “on acceptance.” This suggests that while the center has held, it has not led to meaningful change. There are still other towns, other opportunities for Blaisdale to be a vigilante. The center has held, but it is a vacuous center, without meaning and thus no redemptive power.

One of the consequences of the meaninglessness of the community is the mutability of social roles. McQuown, who flouts law and order, is the initial threat. When Blaisdale kills Gannon’s brother in a shootout, McQuown and his followers begin posting signs through town to find his killer. They organize themselves as a vigilante band of “Regulators.” While the film places them in the bad guy camp, this act highlights the ambiguities of Blaisdale’s position. The townspeople of Warlock may recognize Blaisdale as an authority, but the ranchers of San Pueblo do not, recognizing their own Regulators as the authority.

Over the course of the film, as McQuown and his gang are subdued, the threat to the town begins to be posed by Blaisdale. An interesting role reversal occurs as Gannon, the former

member of the gang becomes deputy, forcing an ultimate face off with the original provider of order, Blaisdale. Nor is Gannon the only member of the gang who changes sides; Curly (DeForest Kelly) helps Gannon in the fight with McQuown, although he had been one of the staunchest of McQuown's men. Similarly, Lily Dollar (Dolores Michaels) moves from wanting Blaisdale and Morgan dead to asking Blaisdale to help Gannon, declaring that she doesn't care about their feud any more. Hence by the end of the film the bad guy has become the hero and the hero has been expelled as a potential (if not actual) bad guy. The increasing ambiguity of these roles, as well as gender roles, is a product of the emptiness of the consensus the film seems to advocate and thus further undermines the apparently centrist message of the film.

In *Warlock*, the role of women is rendered ambiguous, particularly since one of the women is a man. Jessie Marlowe (Dorothy Malone) represents the civilizing woman who tempts Blaisdale with domesticity and makes him want to live in town. Tom Morgan, Blaisdale's partner in the casino, is the darker woman, whose love for Blaisdale leads him to commit murder. Lily Dollar, a former bar girl and ex-lover of Morgan also represents the dark side of woman. She has come to town to seek revenge on Morgan and Blaisdale for killing the man for whom she left Morgan, Ben Nicholson. However, these images are less clear than in the other two films. Lily is very domestic, keeps a genteel house and cooks dinner, indicating a domestic side to her that is unusual in the dark woman. She is domesticated by the town, falling in love with Gannon, and settling down in Warlock, putting aside her hatred of Morgan and Blaisdale. Jessie, likewise, suggests that she is not the good girl one expects; while that is the role she plays, she protests, "I hate being an angel." Morgan, likewise, plays confused roles. A partner to Blaisdale both in the casino and in gunfights, we are led to believe that he is a better gunfighter than Blaisdale. "How do you think you've stayed alive all these years," he asks Blaisdale. As they get ready for their showdown Morgan tells Blaisdale, "I'm better than you." In the three instances where they draw weapons on each other, Morgan is always quicker. Yet Morgan is also the domestic one. When they first see their spartan rooms over the saloon, Morgan tells Blaisdale, "I'll bring in all new stuff and fix it up real fancy." He protests to Gannon that marriage is woman's way of chaining men. Lily notes that Morgan cares more for Blaisdale than for himself, a sentiment Morgan reinforces. "It's all been for you," he pleads when Blaisdale finds that he has murdered Ben Nicholson to protect Clay from a gunfight. When Blaisdale informs him that he is going to settle down in Warlock with Jessie, Morgan goes on a drunken rampage, shooting up the town, and forcing Blaisdale to kill him. Blaisdale carries his body to the saloon where he confronts the town in his grief. Kicking the crutch out from under the crippled judge he tells him, "Crawl for it, crawl past a real man." He then sets fire to the saloon and keeps anyone

from dousing it, creating a funeral pyre for his friend. Blaisdale's grief over the death of Morgan, his threats to the town for driving him to this point, all point to the deep homo-erotic relationship that had been apparent throughout the film. Having killed the uncivilized woman in his life, Blaisdale cannot settle down with a civilized woman in Warlock; instead he must ride out of town, alone, in search of other avenues through which to express his wildness. "Maybe I need to find another Morgan," he tells Jessie when she pleads with him to stay and marry her.

Failing to identify a moral purpose or identity to the town apart from strict adherence to law and unable to contain gender within its traditional roles, *Warlock* ultimately undermines the centrist position it seems to be advocating. While reinforcing that center ideologically through the confrontations of Blaisdale, McQuown and Gannon, the center breaks apart as social roles become increasingly ambiguous. Women in *The Tin Star* and *High Noon* were firmly lodged in their respective realms. Amy and Millie were the conventional forces of civilization who eschew violence in favor of negotiation, who tame men to live in the domestic realm of the indoors. Helen Ramirez and Nona Mayfield may have some of that domestication within them, but by dwelling on the moral and geographic fringes of the community they provide a female counterpart to the noble male, one who can provide the necessary support in the face of life-threatening duties. In *Warlock*, those roles are violated. The female dark woman, Lily, can be domesticated by the town, but the light woman cannot domestic the authoritarian individual; instead, he must be surrounded by even darker companions of questionable gender (Morgan), suggesting the crisis of masculinity that was a prevalent theme of social discourse in the late 1950s.<sup>23</sup> The apparent nobility of the individual, Blaisdale, can only survive when linked to a perverse, crippled version of himself, who lacks any semblance of nobility. This equates Blaisdale, who needs the crippled Morgan, with the town, which needs its crippled judge, indicating that both the law and the violence that support the noble individual are lacking in some way. While we can reaffirm ideologically the vital center in the larger vision of containing the enemy, we lose the battles in the little containments of gender, and any real moral content to the crippled rules that define the centrist position. As the 1950s come to a close, *Warlock* suggests the vital center is fragmenting. In the wake of red scares, threats of missile gaps, growing disaffection with an increasingly powerful and interventionist state, and the increasing voice of potential dissidents, the consensus lauded earlier in the decade is harder to find. Where it is found, it seems to lack any inherent meaning other than preventing its own dissolution. The moral vacuity and role confusion of *Warlock* mirror this changing cultural environment, revealing growing cultural anxiety and a loss of faith in the consensus of the vital center.

## Firecreek (1968)

By 1968 faith in the American community seems to have been shattered. Released in the same year as the Tet offensive, Lyndon Johnson's decision not to run for the presidency, and the assassinations of Robert Kennedy and Martin Luther King, *Firecreek* suggests that the vital center is dead, but just does not realize it yet. The town of Firecreek is a decrepit, poorly built and worse maintained "cemetery of a town." "It's barely even here," bad guy Bob Larkin (Henry Fonda) says as he rides into the town. Firecreek was settled by a group of pioneers on their way to Oregon who saw in this hardscrabble valley land that was not as arable as what they sought, but for which no one would challenge them. They are, in the words of the storekeeper Mr. Wittier (Dean Jagger) "a town of losers." "There are a lot of old people here," part-time sheriff Johnny Cobb (James Stewart) tells Bob Larkin and his men. When Larkin's gang disrupts the night to wake a dead member of their gang, the terrified townspeople go along with the wake. "Look at them," Mr. Wittier tells Cobb, "they're terrified because today isn't exactly like yesterday." This is the antithesis of Hadleyville. Where Will Kane was rejected because of the fear of a disruption of commercial progress, no one in Firecreek, including sheriff Cobb, will oppose the Larkin gang for fear of facing any kind of conflict. Conforming to the sameness of each day in the run down Firecreek has left them incapable of progress, of defending themselves, of doing anything other than hoping the threat will go away of its own accord. The only member of the town who sees a need to confront the Larkin gang is the half-witted teenager, Arthur Firecreek (J. Robert Porter). When the gang kills Arthur, they are, in effect, murdering the town; this is done while Cobb is back at his farm, and all the citizens of the town stay indoors and do nothing. When Cobb discovers the body in the morning, he walks through the main street of town calling out, "how could you let this happen?" while all the citizens of the town sit at their windows, saying and doing nothing. The community has become moribund through its own fear and timidity, seeking merely to maintain sameness. This is no progressive community, but a set of ramshackle hovels that serve as the coffins of the walking dead. There is nothing here to defend, and no one to defend it. As the young killer Earl (Gary Lockwood) says to Larkin, "This ain't no town we got to hurry through."

*Firecreek* strays far from the visions of marshals provided in these earlier films. While his role is not morally ambiguous (he is a family man who attends church) sheriff Cobb does not act on the moral certitude of the

gunfighter as do the marshals in the previous films. There are no noble individuals in the town of Firecreek, save for the young Arthur. The sheriff is a farmer who is only a part-time lawman, paid two dollars a month and sporting a homemade badge on which sheriff is misspelled. He is unwilling to confront Larkin's gang, instead asking them to keep it down and not to disturb the peace, even though it is obvious that they are bad men. It is only after Arthur has been killed and the town terrorized that the sheriff is willing to face the gang. The moral certitude of Kane is suggested only at this point, with both the sheriff and the town indicted for their moral weakness.

In each of the first three films the marshal is an outsider who brings the skill of the gunfighter and the moral certitude of the competent individual to the role. In *Firecreek*, the lawman emerges out of the town and is representative of its failures. Whereas *High Noon* and the *Tin Star* offered the hope that noble individuals would protect the community from its own inherent weakness, and *Warlock* suggested that the community would pull together around some vital center, *Firecreek* suggests that the community has already died, and that only its rage will lead it to act, but that act will come too late to save it.

*Firecreek* sees youth as lost and adrift, lacking any sense of morality or focus to their lives. We are confronted by two different trajectories for youth. The first is suggested by the younger members of Larkin's gang, particularly Earl, and by the young girl, Leah (Brooke Bundy). In one of the opening scenes Earl attempts to rape Leah and is stopped only by the timely arrival of Larkin, who wants to avoid open conflict with the town they are nearing. Earl gives her five dollars to pay for her torn dress. This satisfies her, and the attempted rape is forgotten. Later, when the men begin to terrorize the town in the middle of the night, Leah will dress up to attract the attentions of her would be rapist, seeing in Earl a potential beau. This trajectory for lost youth – delinquency, perverse promiscuity and moral turpitude – seems to be one of the consequences of a lack of moral center.

The other trajectory, represented by Arthur Firecreek, the simple-minded assistant to the storekeeper, is as bad if not worse. Found wandering alone by members of the town as a pre-teen, Arthur did not even know his own name. He thus took the name of the town as his own. He is the only member of the town who wants to face the gang and drive them out. Even the erstwhile sheriff is unwilling to face them, and restrains Arthur from acting on several occasions. When Arthur hears screams in the night from the house of Meli (Barbara Luna), he investigates. Finding her being raped by



Sheriff Cobb (Jimmy Stewart) discovers the body of Arthur Firecreek (J. Robert Porter).

Courtesy of National Screen Service

one of the gang, Arthur tries to stop him and accidentally kills him. The gang sees this as murder and demands that Arthur be jailed, which the sheriff does. Later, when the sheriff is out of town attending to his wife, the gang hangs Arthur in the livery stable. It is only at that point that the sheriff becomes willing to face the gang in a showdown.

The anomie of youth in *Firecreek* is a major change from the 1950s. Where *High Noon* saw youth as corrupted by the immorality of the town and *The Tin Star* saw the idealism of youth as redemptive of the cynicism of a disillusioned adult world, *Firecreek* suggests that the loss of identity for youth spells disaster all around. Adolescents in this film are either vicious killers and rapists, whores, or starry-eyed half-wits, whose noble idealism is quashed by the fear of the community. Left alone, Arthur acts on noble impulses. This results in his death, as no one in the town will support his action, not even sheriff Cobb. In the end, it is not the idealism of Arthur that brings Cobb to the defense of the town, but his murder. That an innocent half-wit could be lynched generates anger in Cobb; while he argues that he has regained a sense of virtue, that is questionable. His shootout with the Larkin gang seems motivated more by a desire for revenge than a moral crusade.

The women of Firecreek may still perform a civilizing function, but it is one that has only perverse and debilitating consequences. Johnny Cobb's wife (Jacqueline Scott), pregnant and going through a painful false labor asks him why they settled in this valley rather than going on to the more fertile Oregon as they had intended. Here, the civilizing role of woman has led to a domesticity that created a town of losers who settled for "so much less than they wanted." Beside this passively corrupt domesticity sits Dulcie (Louise Latham), Leah's mother, a man-hating, brutal woman. When we first meet her, she is holding a belt in her hand, ready to beat Leah who she thinks has been having sex with some boy in town. Dulcie is frequently said to want no men around. The domestic women of Firecreek offer no hope of building civilization; instead they either domesticate society to the point where it cannot and will not defend itself (Mrs. Cobb) or are rendered bitter and mean because of their failure to do so (Dulcie).

The dark woman in the film is Meli (Barbara Luna), an Indian woman who married and bore a child by Johnny's brother, and who now runs the restaurant in Firecreek. The town is unaware of her relationship to Cobb, and there are rumors of a possible sexual liaison between them. Meli does not represent the empathy between noble men and women, as had Helen Ramirez and Nona Mayfield; instead she is one more dark secret buried under the false veneer of civilization in Firecreek. Evelyn (Ingrid Stevens), very blonde and never seen out of doors, is a closer parallel to Helen Ramirez, yet she never speaks to Cobb during the film, conversing only with Larkin. Evelyn settled in Firecreek with her father after Indians killed her husband, and she is identified as out of place by Larkin. Clearly lodged within the

domestic realm but not domesticated, she sees in Larkin the kind of man to whom she is attracted, but also notes the lack of moral validity to his claims that he works within the law. Larkin is also attracted to Evelyn, telling her that he might be willing to come back and settle down with her. She will, like Amy, take up the gun at the end of the film. Unlike Amy, she will shoot her potential lover, Larkin, before he kills Cobb, not in the back, but still sniping from a window. Since the violence of man cannot be domesticated without man losing all dignity, the only recourse is to kill the savage.

Where Cobb continually lies to himself throughout *Firecreek* (and apparently throughout his life), Larkin is completely self-aware. He recognizes his own desire to lead, even if it is only a band of savage marauders. He identifies the similarity between his own position and that of Cobb, both trying to hold things together for their respective communities in the face of threats: "we're both holding on to a greased pig." He identifies Evelyn as different from the others in this "cemetery of a town." Where Will Kane, Morg Hickman, and Clay Blaisdale understood the situation within the communities they sought to defend, vicious killer Larkin, rather than sheriff Cobb, is the one who truly understands Firecreek. We have moved from a situation where the nobility of purpose could only be found within the heroic individual to a point where the nobility of purpose is known only to the enemy, who will not act on it. Like Blaisdale, he plays by the rules, although on the fringes. He and his men are hired guns riding south from the northern range wars where they had been employed. He works within the law, just as Morg Hickman claimed. But while Larkin can see some nobility in himself, his gang has none. His followers engage in two attempted rapes, disrupt a church service, terrorize the town and hang Arthur, all in less than twenty-four hours. When Evelyn shoots Larkin to save Cobb, it is at once an act in defense of the town and at the same time a mercy killing; she has given the noble villain his only possible exit from a world where domestication means emasculation, where he would become like sheriff Cobb.

## Conclusion

Tom Engelhardt offers the theories of conspiracy surrounding the death of John Kennedy as an example of how much the public had come to distrust the government and itself by the early 1960s. He notes that this event, the most significant cultural touchstone since Pearl Harbor, seemed ". . . open to any interpretation except the most obvious anti-Communist one."<sup>24</sup> The consensus of the vital center could not hold in the face of a government that seemed to be doing many of the things for which it castigated the enemy. The weakening of that consensus created a space in which new voices could be heard. As those new voices of the civil rights, women's, and youth movements became increasingly audible, the consensus continued to erode. By the end of the 1960s, the Cold War consensus of the vital center was gone.

The trajectory of these films, all critical reactions to American society and the role of the individual within it, suggest a growing ambiguity about the moral center of American society and reveal the erosion of the consensus of the vital center. While the progressive community is indicted in *High Noon* for its failure to do its duty in defense of the individual, there is still a clear vision of what that moral duty is. This is not so clear in *The Tin Star*, where the personal tragedy of Morg Hickman's family is the source of his disillusionment. There is still a moral vision, but it is less clear than it was for Will Kane. *Warlock* has lost a vision of moral certitude; where Will Kane and Morg Hickman knew what was right, Clay Blaisdale has only his rules, and Johnny Gannon has only the crippled law. While the center may hold in *Warlock*, it is a vacuous center, devoid of content and purpose. It is even difficult to identify the villain in *Warlock*; the identity of the villain and the hero are conditional, depending on who poses the most immediate threat to the community. Finally, the multiple transformations of roles in the film suggest an inability to contain social actors: Morgan moves from friend to foe, from man to woman. Gannon moves from villain to defender of law. Curly goes from enemy to friend, as does Lily Dollar. Without the moral content that was known to Kane and Hickman, the residents of Warlock have no fixed identities, but move in and out of roles with no seeming direction; this fluidity suggests the breakdown of domestic containment, and renders the vital center the film seems to advocate incompetent to provide meaningful social direction.

By 1968, *Firecreek* can no longer offer any semblance of moral certainty nor any accepted rules, and must instead dwell firmly in the ambiguity. The identification of the sheriff with the leader of the villainous gang, the overt indictment of both the town and the sheriff, the emasculating role assigned to women, and the unredemptive power of youth leave *Firecreek* a morass of moral mush, with nothing but survival and maintenance as a goal. The lack of a moral vision, and the failure to see any defenders (or potential defenders) of morality implies a loss of faith in an American mission that many suggest was a consequence of the moral ambiguity of the US Cold War policy. This moral ambiguity ultimately contributes to the erosion of the vital center, rendering any claim to a moral consensus problematic. Unsurprisingly, *Firecreek* seems the last film that takes *High Noon* as its thematic and ideological predecessor. Its willingness to paint as morally questionable both American society and the individual within it suggests the exhaustion of the law and order Western as social commentary, and serves as overture to the symphony of carnage and disillusion that will be *Once Upon a Time in the West*, and *The Wild Bunch*.

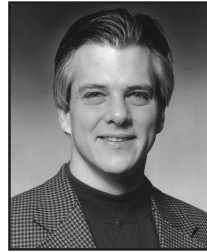
## NOTES

1 I would like to thank Nelson Hathcock, Michael Dimassa, William Graebner, Philip Drummond, Brian Rommel-Ruiz, and the editors of *Film and History* for helpful comments on this paper. Any faults, however, are my own. I

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- 2 Stephen Whitfield, *The Culture of the Cold War*, 2nd edition (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996) 148. Garry Wills, *John Wayne's America: The Politics of Celebrity* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1997) 273.
- 3 Peter Biskind, *Seeing is Believing: How Hollywood Taught US to Stop Worrying and Love the Fifties* (New York: Owl Books, 1983) 47.
- 4 Slotkin identifies eight films of the 1950s and early 1960s as revisions of *High Noon* or retellings of the OK Corral story, which he sees as essentially the same. These are: *Law and Order* (1953); *A Man Alone* (1955); *Top Gun* (1955); *Wichita* (1955); *Gunfight at the OK Corral* (1957); *The Tin Star* (1958); *Rio Bravo* (1959); and *Warlock* (1959). Adding *Firecreek* (1968) to the list takes the law and order western into the late 1960s when this sub-genre seems to have been exhausted. See *Gunfighter Nation: The Myth of the Frontier in Twentieth-Century America* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1992) 402-403. The omission of *Rio Bravo* from my study may seem unjustified. While Howard Hawkes referred to the film as his *High Noon*, this may have been an afterthought (Wills 273). While *Rio Bravo* retains the basic structure of the law and order western, it does not treat the thematic elements in a strongly ideological fashion. The town is almost absent from the film, thus there can be little moral conflict over the responsibility of its defense. Both the female (Angie Dickinson) and youth (Ricky Nelson) play negligible roles as the plot unfolds. The main dramatic tension is the recovering alcoholic deputy (Dean Martin). Rather than articulate an ideological position within the law and order framework as the three films discussed here do, *Rio Bravo* assumes a position and never challenges it. From the standpoint of ideological analysis, this renders the film much less interesting than the other three.
- 5 See Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr. *The Vital Center: Our Purposes and Perils on the Tightrope of American Liberalism* (Boston: Houghton-Mifflin, 1949). Also see Biskind (1983), particularly chapter 1 and *passim*; KA Courdileone, "'Politics in an Age of Anxiety': Cold War Political Culture and the Crisis in American Masculinity, 1949-1960." *Journal of American History* 87.2 (2000): 515-534.
- 6 Tom Engelhardt, *The End of Victory Culture: Cold War America and the Disillusioning of a Generation* (New York: Basic Books, 1995).
- 7 Elaine Tyler May, "Explosive Issues: Sex, Women and the Bomb," in Larry May (ed) *Recasting America: Culture and Politics in the Age of Cold War* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988) 154-170; Jane Sherron de Hart, "Containment at Home: Gender, Sexuality, and National Identity in Cold War America," in Peter Kuznick and James Gilbert (eds) *Rethinking Cold War Culture*, (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Books, 2001) 124-155; KA Courdileone, "'Politics in an Age of Anxiety.'"
- 8 Alan Nadel, *Containment Culture: American Narratives, Postmodernism, and the Atomic Age*. (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995) 2-3.
- 9 Nadel 14.
- 10 Nadel 5.
- 11 Nadel 6.
- 12 Douglas McReynolds reads the film as an allegory of the returned serviceman lamenting that the values for which he has fought have already been lost. He suggests that Hadleyville has already sunk to this state, and that the values defended by Will Kane have "...squelched the idealistic vision of [Hadleyville's] founders." This may be too strong an argument. Because Kane will defeat Miller, the Mayor and his ilk will remain dominant in

- Hadleyville, even though they are revealed as morally bankrupt. They do not, as McReynolds suggests, "...embrac[e] the very evil the system was designed to protect its citizens against." Instead of embracing it, by their failure to oppose that evil, they permit its return. Hence the potential for social declension follows the evidence of moral declension, rather than vice versa as McReynolds implies. See "Taking Care of Things: Evolution in the Treatment of a Western Theme, 1947-1957," *Literature/Film Quarterly* 18.3 (1990): 203.
- 13 McReynolds 206.
- 14 It is perhaps this absence that permits Slotkin to interpret so much background to the story in his discussion of the film. See *Gunfighter Nation*, 391-395.
- 15 McReynolds notes the outsider quality to the Miller gang in *High Noon*, see "Taking Care of Things" 205.
- 16 While emphasizing his resignation, Jim Kitses also notes the bitterness of Hickman. See *Horizons West: Anthony Mann, Budd Boetticher and Sam Peckinpah: Studies of Authorship within the Western*. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1969) 39.
- 17 McReynolds refers to Hickman as a pariah. "Taking Care of Things" 204.
- 18 Jim Kitses, setting this film in the context of Mann's other work, sees the death of Doc McCord as evidence of "how the community brings about the death of its very soul ... by denying the existence of evil which its own attitudes create." Had Bogardus killed Doc, this position would seem more justified. Instead, the McGaffey brothers kill Doc; they are not members of the community, but live well outside of town. If there is an element to the community that is responsible for Doc's death, it is the racism that is also represented by Bogardus, for the McGaffey brothers, like Kip Mayfield, are identified as part Indian, thus are objects of scorn. See *Horizons West* 60.
- 19 On this see McReynolds, "Taking Care of Things" 206-207. However, his argument that Nona and Morg remain "unclean" seems belied by the ending of the *Tin Star*. See below.
- 20 *The Tin Star* is one of the few law and order films that also contain a strong pro-civil rights message. Bogardus' attacks are always against "half-breeds," such as the McGaffey brothers or the man he shoots in the saloon. Nona Mayfield is ostracized from the community for marrying an Indian and bearing a half-breed son.
- 21 Michael Coyne, *The Crowded Prairie: American National Identity in the Hollywood Western*. (London: Taurus Publishers, 1997) 84-104.
- 22 Coyne offers this vision as a product of the lessening of Cold War hostilities in the late Eisenhower era. To the extent that Biskind's reading of *High Noon* as catering to ideological extremes is correct, *Warlock's* endorsement of the vital center unwrites *High Noon* as much as *The Tin Star*. The film goes further than just endorsing the center, but implies that when the community defends the center it can defeat the forces of villainy and convert the forces of anarchy.
- 23 KA Courdileone, "Politics in an Age of Anxiety" 515-534.
- 24 Engelhardt, *End of Victory Culture* 184.



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## ***Hollywood's White House: The American Presidency in Film and History***

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"As badly as Hollywood often presents the presidents, it has had an enduring impact on how we see them, on how they behave, and even, in a few cases, on who won. It is about time, therefore, for a book like this that takes seriously the American presidency in film and history" (from the foreword by Richard Shenkman, author of *Presidential Ambition: Gaining Power at Any Cost*).

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