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Renegade Costume; How elements of blue-collar and military uniforms from the early 20th century became signifiers of oppositional masculinity in American cinema from 1951 to 1955.

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STATEMENT OF ACADEMIC INTEGRITY/ DECLARATION OF ORIGINALITY

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ABSTRACT

The images of "rebel cool" popularized by American stars Marlon Brando and James Dean in cinema in the fifties utilized items of clothing that had until then been primarily worn by blue-collar workers from the 1870s to the end of the Second World War. This clothing now commonly associated with the figure of the American rebel played an important role in major political and economic events of the thirties and forties – maintaining the image of American masculinity and indicating the favorable and necessary traits that embodied manhood. From Levi's patented "waist overalls" and lumberjack dress seen on working-class men during the Great Depression, to the white t-shirts, various aviation jackets and combat boots worn by U.S. soldiers in WWII, American masculinity became visually tied to the clothes worn by blue-collar professionals as well as the muscular male form that was needed and valued in these jobs. In this way, representations of manhood in America were strongly influenced by the most commonly held jobs, and political attitudes of the time. In the conservative climate of Cold War America, these images of strong working bodies in rough textiles were no longer desirable and the grey flannel suit became the accepted signifier of masculinity, embracing conformity in the growing white-collar workforce. The social rejection of blue-collar and military clothing as expressions of masculinity and the embracement of a more metropolitan image created a sense of disillusionment to the mass of WWII veterans, triggering the creation of multiple films centered on male delinquency in the struggle to adjust to post-war American society. These films utilized blue-collar workwear to symbolize the social marooning of men who existed as outdated masculine figures; costuming could be used to mark male characters as dissenters in this fashion.

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INTRODUCTION

The "bad boy" archetype appears frequently enough in Western media from the mid-twentieth century to date that it has solidified itself within the cultural lexicon. John Bender in *The Breakfast Club* (1985), Ren McCormack in *Footloose* (1984), almost any early Marlon Brando performance, and most notably, James Dean as Jim Stark in *Rebel Without a Cause*: these are the rebels, the bad boys, the men fathers don't want their daughters to date, immortalized on the silver screen (and in some of our teenage hearts) by their torn Levi's, tight white t-shirts, black leather jackets and smoldering. In fact, these elements have been so common to maverick characters that they have become a key part of the visual lexicon which is used to describe rebellious men, and connote hyper-masculinity to today's audiences. A language has formed around male deviance within the United States, which (as many American cultural phenomena have) is now well understood and recognized throughout the Western world.

Elements of blue-collar workwear in American cinema serve as a cultural shorthand for a character who displays rebellious tendencies and strong masculine traits - as displayed in films such as 1951's *A Streetcar Named Desire* and 1955's *Rebel Without a Cause*. The formation of this shorthand for oppositional masculinity is a consequence of blue-collar and military issue working garments being the principal signifiers for masculinity in America during the Great Depression and WWII; and their subsequent erasure from the language of masculinity post-war, due to the rise of white-collar employment and these depictions' likeness to Socialist Realism artwork during the Cold War.

It is also worth noting that American masculinity (and by virtue of influence – Western masculinity) has always existed in a volatile state. The concept of masculinity – and thus, the expression of it – has almost consistently based itself off the idea that men are the breadwinners of a household in the United States. Throughout the 19th and 20th Centuries the economy of this still young nation was in a constant state of change, and if masculine identity rests on man's ability to provide for his family or himself, the expression of masculinity precariously rests on the main source(s) of employment, or unemployment, at a given time.

The temperamentality of the masculine identity in America is a vital concept to this thesis; the importance of the economic and political climate in the United States to changing masculine symbols through the early 20th century forms the foundation of my discussion on the evolution of the essential American rebel wardrobe.

Because masculine ideals in America at any point in the first half of the 20th century were consistently defined by the employment sector that needed male workers the most (or vice versa), whatever the most recognizable garment in that profession's uniform is becomes a cultural shorthand for what America expects of its men at that given time.

In Chapter One: *The New Deal; Re-Masculinizing America*, I will introduce the concept of working-class masculinity and strength as a masculine ideal in America during the 1930s. The decade was defined by the Great Depression, which acted as a catalyst for re-defining American masculinity. To combat the massive unemployment crisis that prevented millions of American men from providing for their families and themselves, the recently appointed administration under President Franklin D. Roosevelt made a conscious effort to rebrand the American definition of manhood. The Works Progress Administration (WPA) and a series of other New Deal programs and initiatives sought to re-employ the men affected in the

Depression in areas of manual labor including farms, factories and building new public infrastructure. The imagery created to advertise and appraise this "rebuilding" of America is what I will examine in this chapter, using them to demonstrate the extent to which blue-collar work became uplifted as the benchmark for American masculinity in this decade, also defining physical strength (which was so vital to manual labor) and the working garments primarily worn in these jobs became desirable traits and visual signifiers of the masculine ideal during the Depression.

In Chapter Two: *The Changing Uniforms of Masculinity in War*, I will discuss how masculine ideals in America were greatly affected by political (as well as economic) events in the 1940s and 50s. Beginning with Americas early reluctance to enter into conflict during the Second World War and providing weapons to the Allied forces through the "Lend-Lease" initiative, the working-class masculinity present in factories and on farms during the Depression was still greatly needed, but the rebuilding of the country slowly began to grind to a halt as some civilian production made way for military production for the Allied forces, changing the pretense under which blue-collar men were important in America. Declaring war on Japan and beginning the mobilization of troops created a new image to attach the masculine ideals of the time that were deemed more necessary in a state of war. Using artistic and photographic representation in both government propaganda and corporately commissioned imagery of servicemen from this period, I will discuss how contemporary portrayals of the soldier imparted new values upon masculinity, soliciting a more aggressive demeanor from American men as they were required to use their strength to defend against the Axis powers. These images also inducted elements of military uniform into the visual glossary of idealized masculinity in the United States. I will then go on to discuss how the soldier became an

increasingly irrelevant figure during demobilization, losing its status as the masculine ideal, and what went on to take its place. The post-war boom increased employment in white-collar sectors, making white-collar workers more visible than ever before, and the increasingly conservative views held by Americans during the Cold War elevated the corporate worker in his grey flannel suit as the quintessential image of the American man. The Cold War also oversaw the erasure of pro-blue-collar imagery because of its likeness to Socialist Realism (the Soviet Union's official art style), which revered the worker. The United States wished to separate itself from imagery of this kind, disregarding its status as the dominant expression of masculinity during the Depression. The excommunication of blue-collar and military masculine identities from American cultural values created a horde of disaffected veterans unable to assert their masculinity through culturally acceptable means.

The denial of blue-collar masculine expression in the 1950s is what fuels my discussion on the creation of the American renegade in films of the early fifties in Chapter Three: *Costuming oppositional masculinity in American cinema*. The appearance of the modern rebel on screen is often affiliated with the image of James Dean in a white crewneck t-shirt, Levi's 501s and a red bomber jacket in the 1955 teen drama, *Rebel Without A Cause*; but the look can be accredited to some of Marlon Brando's earliest on-screen roles, originating with Stanley Kowalski in the 1951 film adaption of Tennessee Williams' *A Streetcar Named Desire*. I will discuss how the intentional use of blue-collar clothing as a former signifier of masculinity in both the Broadway play and the film help to underpin Stanley as an uncivilized, unsavory character to conservative audiences in the 1950s. From there, I will discuss two other stand-out rebel performances by Brando: Johnny Strabler in 1953's *The Wild One*, and Terry Malloy in 1954's *On the Waterfront*. These films helped solidify the use of blue-collar garments in costumes for

rebels, as well as expending the visual language to include new garments not worn in *Streetcar*, such as leather jackets and buffalo plaid coats. Each of the characters Brando portrays come from backgrounds where their costumes make very practical sense; the characters either being veterans, blue-collar workers, or both. The opposite is true for Jim Stark, the middle-class teen protagonist of *Rebel Without a Cause*, who is the final case-study in this dissertation. Stark seemingly has no affiliation to the elements of blue-collar clothing in his costume (the jeans, t-shirt and bomber jacket) in the film's final act; and yet, this costume is used to signify a change in character as Stark becomes more independent, opposing his parents' will. The film appropriates the masculine expression of a bygone era to symbolize Jim's arrival into manhood and abolished the need to use these elements of costume in the context of a working-class background, creating a cultural shorthand applicable to any narrative when looking to alert an audience to the presence of a rebellious male character.

CHAPTER ONE

Reimagining masculinity in New Deal art, 1929 – 1940

At the beginning of the twentieth century, men in the United States understood their centuries-old societal roles of father, husband, breadwinner - and most had the means to fulfill those roles too. And particularly around the period of the Industrial Revolution, the self-made man was the benchmark for American masculinity. That is until the Wall Street Crash of 1929. What followed was a decade of uncertainty – millions of job losses would prove the self-made man an unachievable dream for a quarter of American men. Without a figure to model their masculinity off - with no jobs or means with which to self-make - masculinity was threatened with a great identity (or lack of identity) crisis.

However, with the enactment of the New Deal, the Roosevelt administration created millions of new jobs building public infrastructure and carrying out manual labor in factories and farms to combat this mass unemployment and bring the country out of recession. And through multiple Federally-backed art schemes, the United States government began to purposely promote images of strong, willing, working-class men in an effort to motivate this new workforce who were helping to rebuild the country, and in effect give these men a new, achievable, positive marker for their masculine identities. Images of working-class men, brawny bodies and blue-collar professions were rampant in this attempt to re-masculinize working-class American men. The man helping to rebuild America became the defining model of masculinity for this decade - ushering in a positive attitude towards physical

strength in the male physique, hard work, co-operation, and public service, as masculinity was no longer definable by individual economic gain.

1.1 The Great Depression and the emasculation of the American man

Sociologist, Michael Kimmel argues that American men have always defined their masculinity through self-making.[1] The rise of capitalism in America in the 19th century caused American men to link their worth as men to their economic success and their ability to conform to the "breadwinner" role.[2]

The American economy flourished wildly throughout the Roaring Twenties. Unfortunately, Americans thoughtless spending of all this income now available to them had a snowball effect which eventually resulted in the sudden stock market Crash of October 1929, prompting the beginning of the Great Depression - a period that directly undermined men's relation to their masculinity through economic success via largescale economic failure. Around one third of the labour force (16 million Americans, a vast majority of them men) lost their jobs and unemployment had tripled between 1930 and 1934. Millions of American men felt emasculated and disheartened, now deprived of the means through which to assure their masculine identities as workers, household heads, and breadwinners.[3] In Kimmel's words:

> "Never before had American men experienced such a massive and system-wide shock to their ability to prove manhood by providing for their families…With nearly one in four

[1] Kimmel, Michael. *Manhood in America: A Cultural History*. pp. 175-176.

[2] Kimmel elaborates on the concept of the self-made man/breadwinner role in "Consuming Manhood; The Feminization of American Culture and the Recreation of the Male Body, 1832-1920" *The History of Men: Essays in the history of American and British masculinities.* pp. 37-60.

[3] For a more in-depth discussion of the demise of the self-made man, see Joseph M. Armengol's essay, "Embodying the Depression: Male Bodies in 1930s American Culture and Literature" in *Embodying Masculinities: Towards a history of the male body in US culture and literature*. pp. 31-48.

> American men out of work, the workplace could no longer be considered a reliable arena for the demonstration and proof of one's manhood."[4]

1.2 The WPA: rebuilding America (and it's men)

From 1933 to 1939, President Roosevelt enacted the New Deal; comprised of a series of relief programmes, public work projects, initiatives, and agencies to help re-inflate the American economy. The Work Progress Administration (WPA) was set up in 1935 as one of these New Deal agencies to commission public works projects which aimed to improve and construct new public infrastructure, and in doing so, create millions of new jobs. These jobs were mostly unskilled labour work (largely in construction), which resulted in the creation of a new blue-blue collar workforce, eager to re-instate their masculinity. These American men were once again given the opportunity to align their masculine ideals with the ability to fulfill the role of breadwinner (through stable employment). Due to the nature of the work being carried out, physical strength and the male physique also became important parts of the expression of masculinity at this time; the strong worker-body becomes a normative representation of the successful American man. Not only was the Roosevelt administration lifting millions of American families out of poverty, it triggered the "re-masculinization" of America, uplifting the working-class man who was helping to rebuild America - through the construction of new public infrastructure - and its economy.

Under Federal Project Number One (Federal One) - a group of projects were allocated funding for the employment of artists, musicians, actors and writers to create a new body of American public artworks. The Federal Art Project was created to fund the visual arts sector. It was the

[4] Kimmel, Michael. *Manhood in America: A cultural history*. pp. 140-141.

largest of the New Deal arts projects, employing over 10,000 artists and establishing more than 100 community art centres nationwide. [5] [6] The Federal Art Project contributed substantially to the national body of Public Art in the 1930s (with no governmental restriction to subject matter) making it instrumental to the national visual culture at this time – including any and all artistic depictions of masculinity. These depictions of working-class men advocated for the belief that the value of a man was tied to his physical strength.

Figure 1: Muchley, Robert. "Protect your hands! You work with them." 1936. Posters: WPA Posters, *Library of Congress. Web. 29 Dec. 2020.*

Many of the early posters published by the Federal Art Project, such as this poster by Robert Muchley in Figure 1, promoted safety in the workplace. Since much of the work done for the WPA was construction and involved manual labour, this meant men had to protect

[5] Kalfatovic, Martin R. *The New Deal Fine Arts Projects: A Bibliography, 1933–1992*.

[6] Naylor, Brian. "New Deal Treasure: Government Searches for Long-Lost Art". *All Things Considered*, NPR. Web.

themselves (their bodies, their hands) from physical strain or injury. This placed a spotlight on the male form. Both the heavy emphasis on "HANDS!" in the pictures caption, and the stylized depiction of strong working hands below it are almost the sole focus for the viewer, accentuating the importance of this appendage as much as any other tool that might be used in manual labour. The worker-body was a vital/valuable tool in the rebuilding of America, and in attempting to safeguard it through posters like Figure 1, asserting that the male form was just as vital to the smooth operation of the workplace, it cherished the strong male form as a vital tool in rebuilding the United States, and symbol of American masculinity.

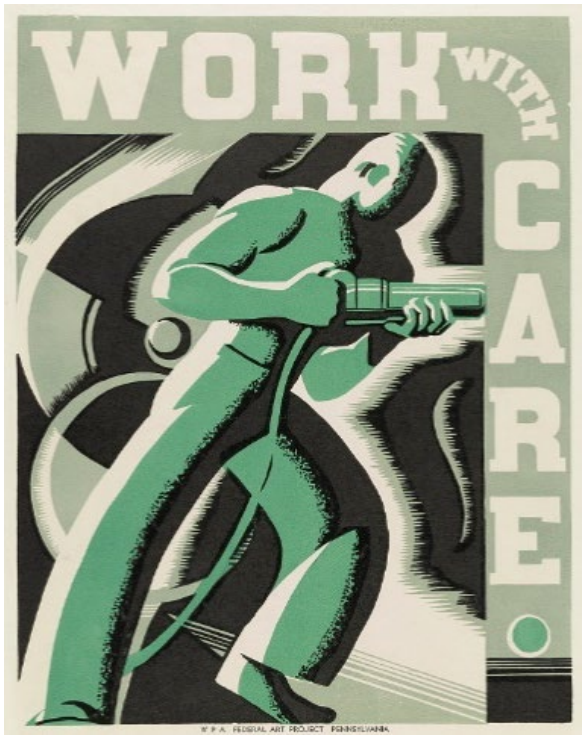

Figure 2: Muchley, Robert. "Work with Care." [1936 or 1937]. Posters: WPA Posters, *Library of Congress. Web. 29 Dec. 2020.*

Here in another print by artist Robert Muchley, Figure 2 once again aimed to promote safety in the workplace. The defined muscles on the front arm of male figure pictured, as he works with an indistinct tool, accentuates his physical strength and prowess while working. Images

like these accepted and stressed the necessity for physical strength in blue collar work, and in framing the physical form as a valuable tool to be protected, it made a virtue of the strong male form, regarding strength as a key masculine trait.

Through traditionally blue-collar jobs, men were once again able to perform their role as a breadwinner. The importance of strong working bodies in this line of work made muscular male figures one of the primary tokens of masculinity in America at this time, under the influence of widespread government commissioned media aimed at inspiring the workforce once more.

Another example of importance being placed on the male body is in the promotion of sport and leisure activities. Although the country had an increased interest in sports and activity since the late 19th century, the Depression posed an even greater need for productive, engaging past-times. [7] Sport and exercise became positive distractions from the economic turmoil the country was still climbing out of. In an interview with the New York Times, Ray Robinson, a civilian who lived through the Depression, reminisced on the importance of sport to people's emotional well-being; "Like many other recreational activities, people did go to the ballpark to get away from the economic horrors of empty wallets and ice boxes." [8] The WPA played a large part in this during the New Deal, with around $40 million spent building and improving athletic facilities, and the establishment of more than 40,000 sports and recreation projects.[9]

[7] Kimmel, Michael. *The History of Men: Essays on the History of American and British Masculinities.* pp. 66-77. This is from Kimmel's essay "Baseball and the Reconstitution of American Masculinity", which is also an insightful exploration of the relationship between masculinity and sports in America in the early 20th century.
[8] Belson, Ken. "Apples for a Nickel, and Plenty of Empty Seats." *The New York Times*. Web.
[9] Adelson, Andres. "Sports were affected during the Great Depression." *Orlando Sentinel*. Web.

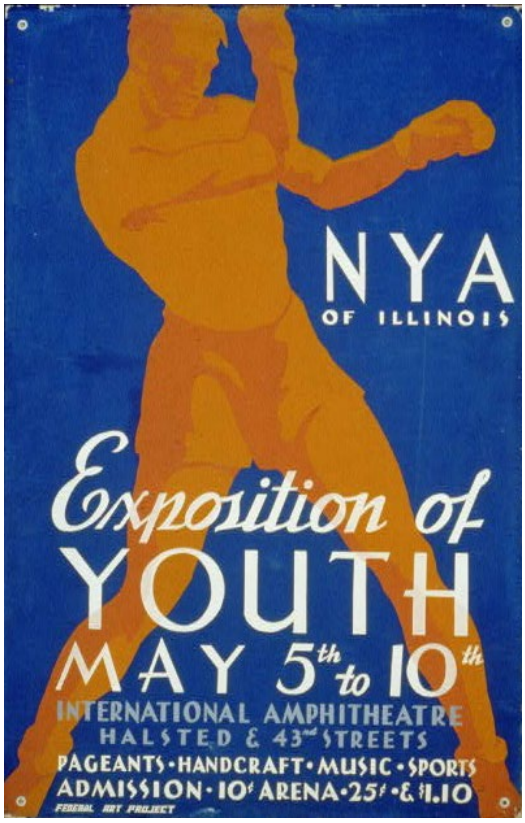

Figure 3: "N.Y.A. of Illinois--Exposition of Youth ... pageants, handcraft, music, sports." 1936. Posters: WPA Posters, *Library of Congress. Web. 29 Dec. 2020.*

Figure 3 exemplifies the popularity of Athenian displays of strong male bodies through sport - which continued to glorify the idea of masculinity-as-activity to the American man during the Depression. While advertising what was sure to be an entertaining event, it places the male figure once again at the centre of the image, as a boxer. Although the poster also advertises "pageants, handcrafts, [and] music", the decision was made to show sports as the main draw of the event. The male figure was being used to embody the enjoyment of American pastimes, positively reinforcing its role in society as a vital public motivator.

This promotion of sport as part of the New Deal continued to put the physically strong male physique at the forefront of Roosevelt's "re-masculinized" America. Self-making was no longer the only signifier of masculinity, as it was in the decades before the Crash. The blue-

collar workforce responsible for the rebuilding of America was glorified – largely through works commissioned by the WPA – as America's home-grown heroes.

1.3 America's finest overalls

The WPA venerated its blue-collar workforce via the numerous posters published through the Federal Art Project and fashioned the worker-body into a meaningful personification of masculinity; and this triggers the conception of other, traditionally working-class, signifiers of manliness. Besides their tools, what made these workers so recognisable, even through abstract artistic depictions, were their uniforms and protective dress. Blue-collar workwear was so universal across America at this point in time that anyone wearing it could be easily identified as working-class. Denim, Mackinaw, and other heavy-duty fabrics used to fashion protective clothing were crucial identifiers of men in strenuous working conditions, and just as a knight's suit of armour is to heroism in fairy-tales, blue-collar workwear was to manhood in the 1930s.

Consider blue jeans - as can commonly be seen on cinematic rebels, outlaws and cowboys. Going all the way back to the goldrushes that overtook America for the latter half of the 19th century, blue jeans were a common sight in mines and on farms. In 1873, Levi Strauss and his associate Jacob Davis received the patent to own the right for making copper-riveted "waist overalls".[10] Levi Strauss & Co targeted their denim products at laborers who would need the

[10] Levi Strauss & Co. IMPROVEMENT IN FASTENING POCKET-OPENINGS. US139121A. United States Patent and Trademark Office, 20 May 1873. *Google patents*. Web. 10 Dec 2020.
The patent was received for the use of copper rivets to reinforce the points of strain on denim trousers and overalls, and became a key selling point for Levi's denim garments.

tough material to withstand the strain of their working conditions. With slogans like "The Best in Use for Farmers, Mechanics and Miners,"[11] denim jeans and overalls remained recognisable as standard blue-collar workwear, even half a century later.

As blue-collar professionals were uplifted as the primary breadwinners of the 1930s, it followed then that recognisable blue-collar workwear such as Levi's denim overalls also became representative of American masculinity in that decade.

Figure 4: [Mathews, John?] ""Just a scratch" But! Infection is avoided by immediate first aid on-the-job!" [circa 1936 - 1941]. Posters: WPA Posters*, Library of Congress. Web. 29 Dec. 2020.*

Figure 4 illustrates this clothing being as being a key part of the visual language surrounding working-class men: the colour and distinct cut of his clothes convey that the man pictured on

[11] Joseph Hancock noted this branding "clearly marked [these garments] for a particular lifestyle of this era," in *Brand Story; Cases and explorations in fashion branding.* p. 119.

the left certainly works in some kind of manual labour; the form of his blue denim overalls is unmistakable and they (along with the implication of potential physical injury on the job) clearly show that this was a depiction of and aimed at men who worked in blue-collar professions. What the worker was wearing was just as much a signifier of the work he did as his strong physique. Therefore, the clothes themselves become as much of a symbol of masculinity as the bodies wearing them; from here, images of an American "uniform" of masculinity based upon the working-class start to appear.

1.4 Paul Bunyan and the American lumberman

Another good example of workwear becoming a huge part of the American visual lexicon is the mythical figure of Paul Bunyan. Historian Michael Edmonds claims that Bunyan is "one of the most widespread icons [of American] culture, a ubiquitous symbol of American power and ingenuity."[12] Although Bunyan first began to appear in oral folktales around the turn of the century among Northwoods communities, he did not become a household name in the Unites States until the 1920s. After WWI the United States suddenly had the eyes of the world on them. Americans had a need to find their own visual identity in an international context; "[they] were eager to embrace an indigenous folk hero who could stand beside Hercules and Thor."[13]

This Bunyan fanfare became a Bunyan mania during the Depression. He was "the ideal self-reliant worker […] who provided the muscle and know how to make America strong again,"[14]

[12] Edmonds, Michael. *Out of the North Woods: The Many Lives of Paul Bunyan*. p. 1.
[13] Edmonds, Michael. *Out of the North Woods: The Many Lives of Paul Bunyan*. p. 3.
[14] Edmonds, Michael. *Out of the North Woods: The Many Lives of Paul Bunyan*. p. 3.

and achieved the same heroic status for lumbering as many other blue-collar professions at this time (like mining, construction, and farming). Paul Bunyan became a popular allegory of the masculine virtues of blue-collar work. He was a working-class man reimagined as a folktale hero.

Figure 5: Correll, Richard V. "Clearing Tacoma Flats." 1938. Digital collections; Society and Culture Collection, *University of Washington Libraries. Web. 02 Jan. 2021.*

Looking at Figure 5, this imagining of Bunyan by Richard V. Correll served much the same function of Bunyan as WPA posters did for the real working-class men of America: uplifting the worker-body - and the clothes it wears - as heroic. Identifiable by his gargantuan size, buffalo-plaid Mackinaw coat and axe, the natural elements seem no match for this lumberman's superior physical strength or his thick, protective clothing. This truly is the personification of masculinity as it was idealised during the Depression – taming the landscape and using natural resources to help build and fortify a better, stronger America.

Conclusion

These images of the heroic working-class aimed to instil a sense of hope, pride, and importance in the millions of previously unemployed men - men who had lost all understanding of their masculine identities after losing their jobs in the Depression. The Roosevelt administration, in attempting to re-motivate the work force, also redefined ideas about manhood in America. While masculinity was still somewhat tied to a man's employment status, personal economic gain was no longer its sole focus. Hard work, particularly manual labour, was advertised as something that instilled good values in a man; the honour of employment was in a hard day's work improving the community and enriching the lives of fellow Americans, not in a decent week's pay-check. Many of these artistic depictions of men clearly showed them working blue-collar jobs, on government pay-checks, doing manual labour; and these men were portrayed as happy and confident – the pride of their community.

There is a marked visual presence of the strong worker body and traditional items of workwear in these images. As the most striking visual elements in many works commissioned by the Federal Art Project, they became clear signifiers for the ideal American man, changing what pervasive masculinity looked like and stood for during the Great Depression.

At the end of the 1930s however, the figure which defined masculinity in the United States - the blue-collar worker - faced the end of its reign; the beginning of military production to support the Allied forces in WWII began in September of 1940, halting most civilian production and construction, and concluding this period of rebuilding America.[15]

[15] "Lend-Lease and Military Aid to the Allies in the Early Years of World War II" *The Office of the Historian*. n.d. Web. 08 Jan 2021.

While the working-class were still temporarily employed in manual labour during mobilization, when the United States declared war on Japan in December of 1941 many of these men were enlisted in the military and a new personification for American masculinity emerged – the soldier.

In the next chapter I will explore how these great political and economic changes imposed upon America during WWII - and later the Cold War - metamorphosed Americans' expression of masculinity. The emergence of the soldier, followed by the white-collar worker, as the primary embodiment of manhood in the United States greatly affected the nations masculine values and character traits, becoming notably different to the ideals of the 1930s.

CHAPTER TWO

The Changing Uniforms of Masculinity in War, 1941 – 1959

The values and strengths of the worker appraised during the Depression become somewhat unfit to represent masculinity with the onset of the Second World War. Halting civilian production to make way for military production changed the purpose of most manual labor, which altered the moral responsibilities of the working-class man. While there was still a definite patriotic element to masculinity in the 1930s, it was very different to the patriotism seen in representations of masculinity during the 1940s and 50s.

Upon entering WWII, the United States once again rose to global prominence; and so, as in WWI when the use of characters like Bunyan was employed to embody American fortitude, the soldier emerged during the Second World War as the new champion of American masculinity. Military propaganda often superimposed a good vs. evil narrative onto the war, and resisting the Axis powers characterized servicemen as heroes.[16] This embodiment brought with it new masculine ideals. The physical strength of the worker body remained a common trait with the soldier, but in an alternative context; the overt presence of physical aggression in images of the soldier created a threatening presence meant to dissuade any potential enemy nations during the war, additionally affecting the domestic perception of masculinity.

[16] Clavin, Patricia. "The Genesis of World War." *Why the Allies Won*. Ed. Robert Overy. p. 22-23.

After the war, there was less of a need for images of the soldier and the values he imposed upon masculinity; in peacetime, there was no urgent call for the intimidation of other nations through an outwardly aggressive national appearance, and the country's flourishing post-war economy eliminated the need for the "re-masculinizing" imagery present during the Depression. Employment within the white-collar sector began increasing, eventually leading to a majority of Americans holding white-collar jobs as opposed to blue-collar jobs. [17] The landscape of American employment changed from farms, factories and construction sites to offices, classrooms and board rooms. The grey flannel suit grew in popularity until it became a uniform for the white-collar employee, encouraging male conformity in the workplace and the wider world. Manhood became a reflection the rampant consumerism and conservative attitudes across the nation. It was also used as a means to discontinue the use of any previous representations of masculinity that might appear to be Soviet-sympathetic in Cold War America; Socialist Realism (the official art style of the Soviet Union) commonly depicted the proletariat as the models of society, much like the American exaltation of the blue-collar worker during the 1930s, and any government or commercial promotion of similar imagery would have created a conflict of interest during this politically tense period. Recognizing the forced erasure of the worker from expressions of masculinity is key to understanding 1950s masculine principals and visuality.

[17] Moffatt, Mike. "What Caused the Post-War Economic Housing Boom After WWII?" *ThoughtCo*.

2.1 The changing responsibilities of the worker during military production

The United States had garnered an isolationist attitude towards European Conflicts after the lives lost during WWI and a still weakened economic state at the turn of the 1940s. Still wishing to aid in the resistance of Nazism, the Roosevelt Administration enacted the "Lend-Lease" programme to supply military provisions to the Allied forces but avoid engagement in direct conflict.[18] This triggered a mass conversion of industrial civilian production to military production; the production of regular goods and services slowed as resources were poured into arms production. The working class re-employed by the many New Deal programmes in manual and factory labour were now being repurposed to contribute to the mobilization effort. Their physical strength in unskilled labour was of as much use to the corporate leaders responsible for arms production as it was to the rebuilding of America. As we see the labour force that represented American masculinity during that decade repurposed, we also begin to see slight changes in how working men are depicted and the way in which the male form is used symbolically as America joins the war effort.

[18] Welch, David. "The Culture of War: Art, ideas and propaganda." *The Oxford Illustrated History of World War Two*. p. 393.

Figure 6: Merlin, Maurice. "Mobilizing Michigan for farm and factory U.S. Employment Service survey conducted house to house by veteran's organizations." [between 1941 and 1943]. Posters: WPA Posters, *Library of Congress. Web. 29 Dec. 2020.*

In Figure 6, as in New Deal art, the male figure is still heavily relied upon in representations of blue-collar work - in this case, promoting the mobilization effort. But interestingly, the yellow figure doesn't seem to be the sole focus of the image here; equally prominent are the spanner and the tractor. All three components occupy roughly equal space in the page and the composition has them overlapping, encased within text, suggesting there is no strong distinction of hierarchy between the three.

This is very reminiscent of German militarist, Ernst Jünger's notion of the "Figure of the Worker" in his 1932 piece *The Worker*. In it, Jünger writes: "Technology is the art and the manner by which the Figure of the Worker mobilizes the world."[19]

[19] Jünger, Ernst. *Der Arbeiter: Herrschaft und Gestalt [The Worker: Dominion and Figure]*. p. 150.

Applying this to the imagery in Figure 6, visually merging man and machine signifies more power to the worker. It is a different kind of power to the mythical strength of Paul Bunyan; it seems more cold, steely, impenetrable. The physical strength of the human body being likened to the physical strength of machinery gives the male figure a further symbolic layer of protection from vulnerability (emasculation), and the American values placed on masculinity begin to change again.

2.2 The emergence of the soldier

As America entered World War II in December 1941, immediately after the attack on Pearl Harbour, this invulnerable image played to their favour as they are once again thrust under the international spotlight. The working-class men that were working in factories making provisions during the mobilization effort were also being enlisted into the military to actively fight in the war. Images of soldiers and armies dominated how men were depicted in American propaganda, and these images continued to uplift the physical strong male form. Keeping troops motivated was vital to the war effort and servicemen of any rank were overwhelmingly depicted as national heroes. The changing depictions of men as strong, war-ready soldiers was also useful in globally projecting America as a force to be reckoned with.

Figure 7: "Keep 'em Fighting; Production Wins Wars. Stop Accidents." [circa 1944]. Powers of Persuasion, *National Archives and Records Administration. Web. 10 Nov. 2020.*

Although it was intended as a domestic safety advertisement for those working in factories, the subject of Figure 7 is a brawny naval officer, and his state of semi-undress does not pussyfoot in placing emphasis on his muscularity and brute strength. And as in Figure 6, it continues to tie the male figure to technology. However, this depiction hints at far more aggressive action than in Figure 6, due to the technological element in the poster existing in the form of weaponry – the large missile in the hands of the navy officer seemingly takes centre stage. It's arresting presence connotes far more violent ideas of masculinity-as-action, especially when paired with the strong symbolism of the officer's bare muscular torso. It suggests that masculinity possesses a very naturalistic relationship with violence, while also re-enforcing the necessity of physical strength in American men.

In *Male Fantasies; Vol. 2*, sociologist Klaus Theweleit analyses the violence in Jünger's man-machine analogy, writing:

> "For Jünger, then, the fascination of the machine lies in its capacity to show how the man might 'live' (move, kill, give expression) without emotion." [20]

Especially in the case of how man might "kill without emotion", Theweleit is surely correct about how this male depiction's steel bodied exterior and likening to the weapons he wields in war can serve to protect him from any vulnerabilities. This suggests that the association of masculinity and strength during the Second World War is no longer to fulfil the breadwinner role - in American men, physical strength was needed and used to enact violence. Masculinity was portrayed as aggressive and generally emotionless; and while it may be possible this was done in an effort to motivate U.S. troops, back on the home-front it sold an entirely false image of the trauma and death American soldiers were experiencing. Presenting soldiers as men within an army, cogs within a machine, allowed for a sense of anonymity (akin to Jünger generalizing the Figure of the Worker). The dominant masculine imagery of WWII appeared to disregard the individual outside his military ran. A man's work in the military was only of worth when contributing to the larger force of an army. Since masculinity never really stopped being defined by employment in America, the expression of manhood in the military through war propaganda influenced overall attitudes of what masculinity should look and act like.

However, propaganda posters and advertisements weren't the only form of media that utilized imagery of soldiers to embody American male heroism during the war. *Life* magazine was one corporately owned publication that became greatly involved in the creation of wartime art. In 1941 the magazine commissioned artists (including Tom Lea, Paul Sample and

[20] Theweleit, Klaus. *Male Fantasies. Volume 2. Male Bodies: Psychoanalyzing the White Terror*. p. 159.

Bryon Thomas) to create pieces for a nation preparing for war; and in 1943 it began working closely with the army and took over the Navy Combat Art Programme - previously run by the War Department Art Advisory Committee, until their government funding was cut.[21] As the first all-photographic news magazine in America, *Life* lead the charge on photographically representing the military in civilian media. Photographs of soldiers were not only less likely to be staged (and so, true to life), they also had an obvious element of human connection. There was a great contrast between purposely aggrandizing images of soldiers in artistic depictions so as to make them seem more heroic and manly, and photographing real men in military training or on the front lines, risking their lives for liberation's sake - lending the latter emotional authenticity as well as visual authenticity.

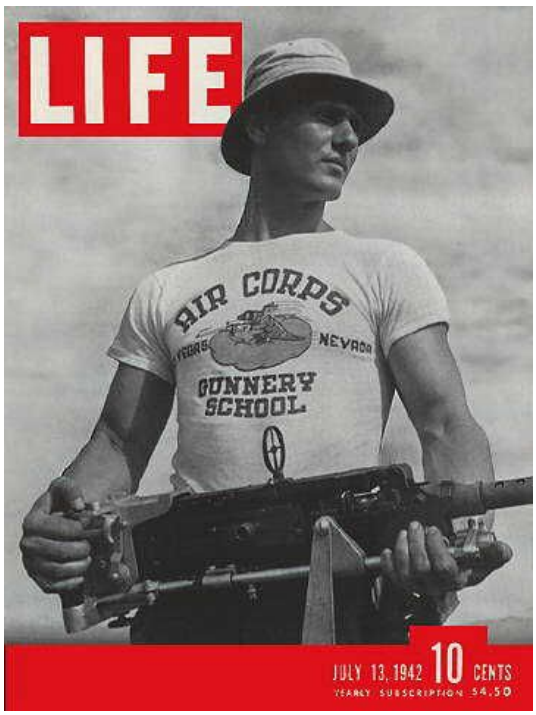

Figure 8: "Alexander Le Gerda, 853rd Ordnance Company, Gunnery School, Las Vegas, Nevada; on the cover of Life *magazine." (issue released on) 13 Jul. 1942.* Life Magazine, July 13, 1942 - Gunnery training, *Old Life Magazines. Web. 03 Oct. 2020.*

[21] Welch, David. "The Culture of War: Art, ideas and propaganda." *The Oxford Illustrated History of WWII.* p. 395.

Figure 8 features an officer in training, Alexander Le Garda. The low angle shot establishes his dominance - a simple way of reinforcing ideas of male power and its association with the military. It lends Le Garda an air of stoicism and prowess; and the machine gun he holds reminds the viewer of the strength and aggression also strongly associated with the figure of the soldier. Like the missile in Figure 7, the presence of the machine gun in this photograph is reminiscent of Theweleit's thoughts on the man-machine analogy. Even if it is not as centred in the composition as the missile is in Figure 7, the express presence of weaponry in Figure 8 still strengthened the association between American masculinity and violence during WWII.

The form-fittedness of La Garda's t-shirt, emblazoned with the words "Air Corps Gunnery School", does nothing to dissuade an association between his physical strength and capability in combat. Indeed, the white t-shirt almost perfectly embodied masculine values during the war; it made servicemen easily distinguishable (as denim overalls did for workers in the Depression), while clinging to the body, showing off the muscular male form without the need for nudity.

While the t-shirt evolved as a men's undergarment from the union suit, by the 1940's it was synonymous with the United States military and was a clear identifier of servicemen. Originally, the t-shirt was adopted as an official undergarment of the U.S. Navy in 1913 to be worn under uniform jackets unless in hot working conditions below deck or in tropical climates, and the U.S. Army followed suit in 1944.[22] The so-called "skivvies" gained the same symbolic value as garments like waist overalls and Mackinaw jackets, making them the signifier for the masculine ideal during WWII when it was seen on these heroically framed

[22] Sewell, Dennita. "T-Shirt." *The Berg Companion to Fashion.* pp. 690-692.

images of servicemen. Like its blue-collar predecessors, the t-shirt became the defining garment of wartime masculinity for American men.

2.3 Conformity and the Cold War through the grey flannel suit

After the Second World War, a great many cultural changes took place – some of them posing a great threat to the stability of American masculinity as it was understood for a decade and a half. The post-war economic boom had been triggered by the successful mobilization from military production back to civilian production, and a consumer base that had been rationing for three years and was ready to spend their money again.[23] The G.I. Bill passed in 1944 allowed millions of returning veterans to pursue higher education, which created a larger skilled workforce than America had seen before.[24] White-collar jobs were on the rise and became the most common source of employment by 1956. Salaried jobs were a source of higher income, and so, gave Americans more spending power.

The growth of the white-collar work force indicated the existence of a shrinking blue-collar work force, and post-war demobilization allowed veterans to return to civilian life, reducing the U.S. Military to a tenth of its size at the height of the war.[25] Without a predominantly blue-collar workforce, there was no longer a need for masculinity to be expressed through the

[23] Jobling, Paul. "The post-war market for men's clothing." *Advertising Menswear*. pp. 23-32.

[24] Exampled are some of the benefits listed in the Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944. Source: "G.I. Bill of Rights." *National Archives Foundation*. Web.
[This document was on display in the "Featured Documents" exhibit in at National Archives in Washington, DC, June 6 through July 14, 2014.]

[25] "Peace Becomes Cold War, 1945-1950." *American Military History*. Ed. Richard W. Stewart. p. 530.

working-class; "The demands of a thriving economy gave rise to a body politic which no longer had any use for the muscle-bound hero." [26]

Economic boom wasn't the only reason blue-collar and military workers and uniforms were superseded by a new masculine identity. As the dust settled from WWII, the United States found itself in the midst of another conflict: The Cold War. As tensions between the United States and its allies, and the Soviet Union and its allies rose, America wanted to distance itself from any and all Soviet values and imagery. Unfortunately for the American working-class man, Socialist Realism (the Soviet Union's official art style from 1932 to the 1988) was distinguishable by its appraisal of the proletariat, especially through images of strong male bodies.

Fig 9: [Peffer, Franz A.] "[Translation:] Comrade, your factory is your pride!" 1919. Franz A. Peffer, *Artnet. Web. 06 Feb. 2021.*

[26] Cuence, Mercé. "Invisibilizing the Male Body: Exploring the Incorporeality of Masculinity in 1950s American Culture" *Embodying Masculinities: Towards a history of the male body in US culture and literature*. p. 50.

Figure 9 is a prime example of this. It shows the strong and admirable physique of the working-class man, and very obviously parallels how working-class men were often depicted in WPA and Federal Art Project posters throughout the 1930s.[27] The caption on the poster, "Comrade, your factory is your pride", also strongly parallels the popular attitudes of workplace pride and sense of community among the working-class during the New Deal that formed into the pervasive masculine ideals of the 1930s. The United States media appeared to actively supress and shun images upholding working-class men in this fashion during the Cold War, so as never to appear socialist, and this meant a gross rejection of any American Masculine identities that appeared similar in image to this soviet glorification of the proletariat. The physically strong male form, and blue-collar and military items of workwear began to disappear as signifiers of masculinity. And in their place, the white-collar corporate worker rose to power embodied by the man in the grey flannel suit.

Figure 10: "Tom (Gregory Peck) is challenged by his late-grandmother's caretaker, Edward (Joseph Sweeney) about the contents of her will" The Man in the Grey Flannel Suit *(Johnson, 1956), 01:22:54. Film still.*

[27] (which itself was standing in the way of capitalism by the late 1930s and was greatly disliked by America's corporate leaders).

Figure 11: "George Bailey (James Stewart) upon seeing the 'honeymoon' his wife, Mary (Donna Reed) has prepared." It's a Wonderful Life *(Capra, 1946), 1:02:00. Still.*

While the mention of it might strike up images of Gregory Peck as WWII veteran, Tom Rath, trying to assimilate into corporate post-war America in 1956's *The Man in The Grey Flannel Suit* (Figure 10), the grey flannel suit itself actually began to appear on screen in the late 1940s, famously on actors such as Peck and James Stewart. As with George Bailey (James Stewart) from *It's a Wonderful Life* (Capra, 1946) in Figure 11, the suit can be seen on characters that clearly embodied domesticated, family-oriented working fathers and husbands. It could also be seen on characters that behaved as truth seekers in the corporate environment, often in the role of journalists or editors, like Philip Schuyler Green (Peck) in Gentlemen's Agreement (Kazan, 1947), P.J. McNeal (Stewart) in *Call Northside 777* (Hathaway, 1948), or Joe Bradley (Peck) in *Roman Holiday* (Wyler, 1953). They were characters that often behaved as upstanding citizens, and so were afforded a moral high ground. Clothing morally righteous characters in grey flannel suits became a common enough image in post-war film that it began to imbue

the suit with cultural meaning. To see a man wearing it indicated that he was employed in a white-collar profession - but from its frequent appearance on virtuous film characters it announced that he was likely an honest American as well, and portrayed white-collar work and conformity as virtuous on throughout the 1950s.

Nik Cohn, in his book *Today There Are No Gentlemen*, describes the clothing that marked this transition, the infamous grey flannel suit, as "anti-clothing, a denial of attraction"[28]. And a general erasure of the male form in popular media can definitely be seen as America becomes more conservative and family-oriented throughout the 1950s. A growing awareness – and a growing fear – of homosexuality in this decade, largely due to the rise of McCarthyism prompts the male body to become taboo viewing material. Philosopher Susan Bordo also contributes this disappearance of the male figure to the pervasive opinion that "sex (especially sex for sex's sake, not aimed at marriage and family) was portrayed as nasty, dirty, evil"[29]. Modest images of respectable working men working to achieve the American dream overtook depictions of the brawny, muscle-bound men, who rebuilt the country during the Depression. And as the worker-body ceased to symbolise pervasive American ideas about masculinity, it gave way to a superiority complex over the corporate image.

This white-collar male appeared to be more groomed, more civilized than his working-class predecessor. In 1954, *Life* magazine called him the "new American domesticated male," observing that this iteration of fulfilling the breadwinner role was much more involved in tending to household duties which had previously been reserved exclusively for their wives; "He has become baby tender, dishwasher, cook, repairman."[30] Not the brawny, muscle-bound

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[28] Cohn, Nik. *Today There are No Gentlemen: The Changes in Englishmen's Clothes Since the War*. p. 39.

[29] Bordo, Susan. *The male body: A new look at men in public and in private*. p. 126.

[30] "The New American Domesticated Male," *Life*, 04 Jan. 1954. pp. 42–5.

man exalted in images of the worker and the soldier in the 30s and 40s, this expression of masculinity seemed much less aggressive, less action-based and less outwardly dominant.

In his study, *Homosexuality in Cold War America: Resistance and the Crisis of Masculinity*, Robert Corber proposed that this highly tailored and over-groomed image and career-success literature which "urged men to develop qualities that would attract, please, and impress their superiors in the corporate hierarchy" completely subverted the expectation for even the everyday man to display social dominance to assert their masculinity, and so "feminized" them[31]. But when the hegemonic masculine ideal is considered to be more on the conservative and feminine end of the spectrum, compared to past iterations, this confuses, and ultimately destabilizes the concept of masculinity – prompting what has commonly been referred to as a crisis of masculinity.[32]

Conclusion

Against the white-collar man, hypermasculine presentations of the physically strong working-class man or the brave and physically aggressive soldier seem outrageous, brutish, and - due to the more fitted nature of garments like the t-shirt - vulgar (nigh inappropriate in certain contexts). Any usage of these images during the reign of conservative white-collar masculinity in the 1950s felt unwelcome due to its uncivilized nature and similarity to Soviet masculinity; presenting masculinity as such was consciously or unconsciously an act of social

[31] Corber, Robert J. *Homosexuality in cold war America: Resistance and the crisis of masculinity*. p. 35

[32] 'crisis of masculinity' or 'masculinity-in-crisis' refers to the destabilization of the concept of masculinity due to its expression failing to embody male power (e.g. the Great Crash of 1929 and sudden mass unemployment, referenced in Chapter One). The work of Corber, Cuence and Dyer all explore the American crisis of masculinity that occurred in the 1950s.

and political insurgency, rejecting dominant cultural ideals. In Chapter Three I commonly refer to this as an expression of oppositional masculinity: the blue-collar worker did once exist as the expression of pervasive masculinity, but was not welcome in conservative Cold War America. Unfortunately, the nation was populous with the millions of returning war veterans, who had previously defined their masculinity by these now-unwelcome terms.

These displaced-veteran storylines began to emerge in American literature, theatre and cinema, portraying men clearly unsettled by their lack of belonging, and in many cases, lashing out because of it. In the earliest stages of his career, Marlon Brando performed the role of the disaffected war veteran more than once, primarily and most notably in Tennessee Williams' *A Streetcar Named Desire* on Broadway in 1947 and on screen in 1951. Brando's performance as Stanley Kowalski perfectly communicated the powerlessness and social isolation of American veterans after WWII through his predisposition towards violence, and at times hostile dominance over the women in his household. Both the infamous costume Brando wore – his tight white t-shirt – and the sexual aggression he displayed as Kowalski encapsulated how images of the strong worker body and blue-collar/military masculinity were viewed as vulgar and antagonistic.

From exploring the oppositional masculinity of Stanley Kowalski and some of Brando's other early performances of renegades, I will discuss how the strong associations these characters created between rebellion and blue-collar masculinity allowed elements of blue-collar clothing to be used outside the context of working-class storylines to still represent male delinquency and a rejection of social norms in 1955's *Rebel Without a Cause*, starring James Dean as the disillusioned middle-class teenager, Jim Stark.

CHAPTER THREE

Costuming oppositional masculinity in American cinema, 1951 – 1955

While veterans had been presented with government-endorsed educational opportunities, job opportunities, benefits payments, accessible suburban housing schemes[33] and a thriving economy upon returning home from the war, they were not culturally welcomed as they were; all of these provisions seemingly served to assimilate veterans and fully adjust them to life in post-war conservative America. With its new white-collar masculine values, it seemed as if America did not want a competing image of masculinity returning home and fighting with the corporate male for dominance over the public perception of masculinity. It followed then that veterans would experience their own crisis of masculinity, apart from the feminized white-collar male. Veterans themselves had been the dominant personification of American masculinity during the Second World War, but in the 1950s were completely erased from the American visual narrative of hegemonic masculinity.

But these images - the strong male physique, the Levi's jeans, the buffalo plaid, the white t-shirt, the military uniforms, the aggressive demeanor - do not disappear entirely from American media. They merely ceased to define contemporary masculine ideals, and instead began appearing on figures who appeared to reject cultural conformity. The clothes

[33] "G.I. Bill of Rights." *National Archives Foundation*. Web.

themselves became a cultural shorthand for a different, purposely oppositional form masculinity.

With the establishment of this visual language of rebellion through films including *A Streetcar Named Desire* (Kazan, 1951) *The Wild One* (Benedick, 1953), and *On the Waterfront* (Kazan, 1954) (although both *Streetcar* and *The Wild One* do this through veteran protagonists, while *Waterfront*'s protagonist, Terry Malloy (Brando), is a working-class man), blue-collar and military garments would later be appropriated by characters who had no relation to a working-class background, and no forced rejection of their masculine expression (and so, nothing societal to rebel against), such as Jim Stark (Dean) in *Rebel Without a Cause* (Ray, 1955).

3.1 The marooned masculinity of Stanley Kowalski

In 1947, Marlon Brando walked on stage at the Ethel Barrymore theatre playing Stanley Kowalski, a cruel yet magnetic veteran in Tennessee Williams' *A Streetcar Named Desire.* Clad only in a white t-shirt and Levi's 501s that clung to his muscular figure, Stanley Kowalski (and Brando himself), left a lasting impression on the American public, triggering a change in the way the public anticipated the intentions of a man clothed in garments traditionally associated with blue-collar work.

Figure 12: Van Vechten, Carl. "Portrait of Marlon Brando for the original Broadway production of A Streetcar Named Desire." 27 Dec. 1948. Photograph. Van Vechten Collection, *Library of Congress. Web. 08 Jan. 2021.*

Designed for both the stage (1947) and film (1951) adaptations by Lucinda Ballard, Stanley's costume (Figure 12) purposely drew attention to his muscular body, alluding to the raw carnality of his character – there is something very animalistic about Stanley.[34] He doesn't seem like a man who is either able or willing to resist his natural urges and tendency toward dominance and aggression. The white t-shirt previously known to be military-issue underwear alludes to a boldness in Stanley; he is not afraid to still assert his masculinity through showing off his physical strength. Crassness is echoed in the lower half of his costume as well - Ballard washed Brando's jeans until they clung to him like a second skin. She also cut out their inner pockets, which Brando felt fit in well with Stanley's brazen nature, stating: "I think that Stanley would have liked to push his hands in his pockets and feel himself" [35]

[34] Pappas, Nickolas. "Anti-Fashion: If not fashion, then what?" *Philosophical Perspectives on Fashion*. p.90.
[35] Manso, Peter. *Brando: The Biography*. p. 228

Stanley is costumed in such a way that Brando semi-assumes the form of a pin-up; the clothing perpetrated his objectification, and in a way, it welcomed it too – everything about Stanley Kowalski exuded lust and a rawness. The image of Brando in that straining t-shirt has followed him throughout his career and labeled him as a hypermasculine and sexual icon, when really, it shouldn't have.

In *Only Entertainment*, Richard Dyer explains the instability of early male pin-ups as representations of masculinity[36]. Traditionally, women assume the cultural role of performer, and men assume the role of observer, but a male pin-up inverts this dynamic. [37] The power dynamic between men and women enters uncertain territory and the male image holds the potential to lose all associations with male power, and by extension, it's masculinity. The active/passive nexus of looking and being looked has been demonstrated through numerous studies showing that while women make more eye-contact, men stare more – and staring is considered a dominant aspect of looking[38]. Laura Mulvey, in her essay *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema*, echoes this sentiment asserting: "The male figure cannot bear the burden of objectification. Man is reluctant to gaze at his exhibitionist like."[39]

In considering dominance and assertiveness as traditionally masculine traits (particularly emphasized by images of the soldier during WWII), the exhibitionistic male form (which Stanley undoubtedly assumes) contradicts these ever-present masculine values. And in a play that contains such strong sexual themes, the image of Stanley Kowalski could have very easily

[36] Dyer, Richard. *Only Entertainment*. pp. 121-37.
[37] Henley, Nancy M. *Body Politics: Power, Sex, and Nonverbal Communication*. p. 161.
[38] Henley, Nancy M. *Body Politics: Power, Sex, and Nonverbal Communication*. p. 166.
[39] Mulvey, Laura. "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" *Film Theory and Criticism: Introductory Readings*. p. 810.

appeared a hollow recreation of a defunct masculine identity. Stanley's character managed to counteract this by blatantly establishing himself as a dominant and aggressive character.

Figure 13: Elisofon, Eliot. "Kim Hunter (left), Marlon Brando, Karl Malden and others in rehearsal for the original production of A Streetcar Named Desire*." 1947.* Brando Takes Broadway: LIFE on the Set of 'A Streetcar Named Desire' in 1947, *The LIFE Picture Collection. Web. 08 Jan. 2021.*

Almost every scene in *Streetcar* that unabashedly flaunts Brando's strong physical figure, either naked or in undershirts, features violence and/or an aggressive display of physical strength. As can be seen in Figure 13, Stanley (Brando) struggles against three other men to attack his wife, Stella (Hunter). The fact that it takes so much force to subdue Stanley proves that his muscles are not just for show (as they might be in most other pin-ups) and these displays of aggression justified showing his herculean figure as not just for sexual spectacle. In this way, Stanley evokes the physically aggressive images of hyper-masculine soldiers seen in WWII, such as the photo of Alexander Le Garda, who was also clad in a fitted white t-shirt, on the cover of *Life* (Figure 8). He also counteracts the passivity the (his) male form would be

vulnerable to through objectification by behaving in alignment with Depression-era ideas of masculinity-as-activity. And so, Stanley remained a hyper-masculine character, even though his own expression of masculinity didn't fit in with the masculine ideals of the 1950s.

Figure 14: "Stanley (Marlon Brando) examines the contents of Blanche's luggage, citing his right to know her assets under 'Napoleonic code' in Louisiana while Stella (Kim Hunter) protests." A Streetcar Named Desire *(Kazan, 1951), 18:25. Film still.*

The film adaption of *A Streetcar Named Desire* in 1951 - again featuring Brando as Stanley Kowalski - was a critical hit. Its popularity forged Brando into a household name and granted him his first Oscar nomination.[40] The roughness of Stanley is even further emphasized in the film when he is seen next to Blanche (Vivien Leigh) in her delicate chiffon dresses and fine-looking costume jewelry. She is far more composed and the picture of civility (although it's later revealed that this is an identity Blanche delusionally assumes) than Stanley, and his

[40] It was also nominated for 12 more Academy Awards, and won 4, including Best Costume Design – Black-and-white for Lucinda Ballard, and was inducted into the National Film Registry in 1999. Source: "The 24th Academy Awards / 1952" *Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences*. Web.

animalistic nature seems almost caricaturish as he roughly tears Blanches clothes and belongings from her luggage to scrutinize them (possibly foreshadowing his assault on her later in the film), holding them next to his own disheveled-looking outfit, seen in Figure 14.[41]

A Streetcar Named Desire created an unholy union between images of strong, working class men in blue-collar workwear and unsavory, dangerous characters prone to social dissent. The image of the blue-collar body and clothing was already a form of oppositional masculinity in postwar America; but Stanley Kowalski started it along a journey towards becoming a visual signifier of *rebellious* masculinity.

3.2 Johnny Strabler and Terry Malloy

Throughout his early career, the young Brando became a native to performing veteran and working-class masculinity ostracized from society; he frequently played rebellious characters, but seemingly only when in opposition to an embodiment of "civilized" society or white-collar masculinity. This is what makes the re-emergence of a blue-collar masculine language *oppositional,* as opposed to a resurgence of working-class male imagery in the form of a trend.

[41] *A Streetcar Named Desire*, 16:20-19:41.

Figure 15: "Johnny (Marlon Brando) stands alone from the gang at Frank's Café, the local hangout of the BRMC" The Wild One *(Benedek, 1953), 23:57. Film still.*

In *The Wild One* (Benedek, 1953), Brando played Johnny Strabler (Figure 15), the leader outlaw biker gang, the Black Rebel Motorcycle Club (BRMC). Inspired by Frank Rooney's short story "Cyclists' Raid" which was based on the events of the Hollister Riot, *The Wild One* is haled as the first outlaw biker film in American cinema.[42] The film captured the attitudes towards bikers and other social deviants as troublemakers without reason in Johnny Strabler when local girl Mildred (Peggy Maley) asks, "What are you rebelling against, Johnny?", and he answers "Whaddaya got?".[43] Biker culture was founded in America upon the shoulders of disillusioned WWII Air Force veterans – explaining the presence of t-shirts and leather bomber Jackets in biker clothing. There is no credited costume designer for *The Wild One,* and the costumes of the gang (who were played by genuine bikers instead of trained actors) are allegedly the actors' own wardrobe, lending an authenticity to the film and its costumes.[44] The

[42] Dixon, Foster. *A Short History of Film*. p. 244
[43] *The Wild One*, 24:46-24:51.
[44] IMDb

film and Johnny (Brando) contributed to the conversion of blue-collar workwear from representing outdated hegemonic masculinity to symbolising a new population of disillusioned males prone to social rebellion. As put by sociologist William Thompson: "Whether portrayed accurately or not, their macho image and demeanor helped redefine masculinity and shaped public perception of bikers for decades." [45]

Brando dons the uniform of a working man in *On the Waterfront* (Kazan, 1954) as dockworker, Terry Malloy, a fish-out-of-water in the mob-run New Jersey docklands - once again embodying the blue-collar masculinity forgotten by the corporate workers of the 1950s.[46] The most notable piece of costuming in the film – Terry's buffalo plaid jacket – is both reminiscent of blue-collar figure Paul Bunyan, and symbolic of the theme of rebellion against authority (mob boss Johnny Friendly (Cobb) in this case) present in *On the Waterfront*. [47]

Figure 16: "Terry (Marlon Brando) in the buffalo plaid jacket passed down to him from Dugan, after he breaks into Edie's (Eva Marie Saint) apartment seeking refuge from the mob." On the Waterfront *(Kazan, 1954), 01:16:48. Film still.*

[45] Thompson, William E. *Hogs, blogs, leathers and lattes: The sociology of modern American motorcycling*. p. 12.
[46] Some consider *On the Waterfront* to be Kazan's response to criticisms of testifying against eight former Communists in the film industry before the HUAC in 1952. Source: Dixon, Foster. *A Short History of Film*. p. 235.
[47] Costume in *On the Waterfront* was designed by Anna Hill Johnstone, who had previously worked under *Streetcar*'s costume designer, Lucinda Ballard, on *Portrait of Jennie* in 1948. Source: IMDb

The jacket, seen in Figure 16, changes hands several times during the film between the three men who decide to take a stand against Friendly; as one whistleblower is silenced, the jacket finds it's way into the hands of the next man attempting to report Friendly to the authorities, until it ends up with Terry, the character that eventually succeeds in testifying against Friendly. Terry's character is also centrally linked to physical strength and aggressive action through his background as a former prize-boxer, and defines his masculinity (or self-perceived loss of it) against this in the speech to his brother Charley (Rod Steiger) about the part he played in ending Terry's boxing career, lamenting: "I coulda had class. I coulda been a contender. I coulda been somebody, instead of a bum, which is what I am, let's face it."[48]

These examples given of three of Brando's performances that utilize elements of blue-collar and military clothing to symbolize rebellion, are each instances of the very evident expression of the crisis of masculinity being experienced by veterans and the working-class – who were no longer accepted in the American visual lexicon as valid presentations of masculinity by the early 1950s. Each of them is marooned or disillusioned for reasons relating to the circumstance of their working background and their unstable masculine identities can explain their need for rebellion and feel authentic to the costumes they wear. They give a context and appropriate background for wearing those costumes; something that doesn't exist within *Rebel Without a Cause* (Ray, 1955), and yet it's iconic use of oppositional masculine symbols in James Dean's final costume of the film make it the most memorable rebellious narrative (and character) of them all.

[48] *On the Waterfront*, 01:14:48-01:15:00.

3.3 Inversion of manhood in *Rebel Without a Cause*

Rebel Without a Cause was a drama about troubled middle-class teenagers navigating the emotional challenges of adolescence and misunderstandings of their parents. It approached the themes of rebellion and manhood from a vastly different viewpoint to any of Brando's working-class characters I refer to earlier in the chapter. The film's protagonist Jim Stark (James Dean) was a middle-class teenager from a suburban household who lacked any form of a male role model; this contrasts the veterans and workers who already had established masculine ideals but were no longer recognized as such in post-war America. Within *Rebel,* Jim (Dean) has no benchmark for what masculinity should look and act like; he, as a character, has no visual language through which to express his experiences of coming-of-age and arrival into manhood. His father's submissive demeanor towards his domineering mother torments Jim, denying him the family dynamic and gender roles his peers are all supposedly exposed to; he even attempts to confront his father several times about his failings as a role model, even imploring him to take back control; "What can you do when you have to be a man?...Now you give me a direct answer!"[49]

The image of Dean in Levi's, a white t-shirt and a red bomber jacket (as in Figure 17, below) is easily one of the most recognizable cinematic portrayals of rebellion. The film's costume designer Moss Mabry obviously appropriates items of blue-collar workwear to establish the same rebellious maverick qualities in Jim Stark that were previously possessed by characters such as Stanley Kowalski (*Streetcar*), Johnny Strabler (*The Wild One*) or Terry Malloy (*On the*

[49] *Rebel Without A Cause,* 42:24-42:26.

Waterfront). He used the language established by Brando's characters as if they had imprinted themselves upon the young Jim Stark - as if they were the only male role-models he was able to rely on. And there is a definite ounce of that in Dean's performance in *Rebel*; he purportedly idolized Brando, and tried to model much of his acting style off of Brando's early performances, as well as adopting elements of his lifestyle.

Figure 17: "Jim (James Dean) prepares himself to participate in a 'chickie run'." Rebel Without a Cause *(Ray, 1955), 47:45. Film still.*

Jim's final costume in *Rebel* (Figure 17) was also intended to pay tribute to Brando's host of blue-collar rebel performances since the film's conception - long before Mabry began work on it. One of the film's screenwriters, Stewart Stern had always included the appearance of a traditionally working-class jacket at the major turning-point in the film, as Jim becomes more independent and rebellious, stating in an interview:

"My whole use of the jacket in Rebel was an echo of the use of [Terry Malloy's] jacket in On the Waterfront, which was given to one worker and then another worker, and finally

Terry got it, and that's the armor he wore when he went to make his final confrontation. When you see Jimmy in his red jacket […] it's a warning. It's a sign." [50]

The colour of the nylon bomber jacket was also an important element of it; it's bright crimson colour aroused, "plenty of passionate associations: the anger of adolescence, the audacity of rebellion, the threat of blood and violence, as well as a definite sexual bravado. And during a time of hysteria about the Red Menace [Soviet Russia], it was a color tinged with subversiveness."[51] [52]

This use of blue-collar garments appropriated symbols of male rebellion/masculinity-in-crisis that had been established by characters of working-class or military backgrounds themselves in many of Brando's early films. Jim is not working class, he is not an example of oppositional masculinity as it existed in the 1950s; and yet, even without the appropriate background, his costume change midway through the film still comprehensively portrays an oncoming change in behavior. The role these working garments play in the film is strictly to act as a visual shorthand that signals the presence of rebellion to an American audience.

The film also very cleverly contrasts this character change in Jim with the image of his father, Frank Stark (Jim Backus) – whom himself is a perfect example of Robert Corber's description of the "feminized" white-collar male figure.[53]

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[50] Frascella, Weisel. *Live Fast, Die Young: The Wild Ride of Making Rebel Without A Cause*. p. 120.

[51] Frascella, Weisel. *Live Fast, Die Young: The Wild Ride of Making Rebel Without a Cause.* p. 128.

[52] The iconic jacket wasn't always red as *Rebel* began filming in black and white first. It was only when studio executives decided to have it shot in colour after Dean's massive success in *East of Eden* (Kazan, 1954) that Mabry decided to clothe Dean in a red bomber. Source: Frascella, Weisel. *Live Fast, Die Young: The Wild Ride of Making Rebel Without a Cause.* pp. 116-121.

[53] Corber. *Homosexuality in cold war America: Resistance and the crisis of masculinity*. p. 35.

Figure 18: "Jim's father, Frank Stark (Jim Backus), typifying his submissive behavior by wearing a flowery apron over his grey flannel suit, feminizing him." Rebel Without a Cause *(Ray, 1955), 42:36. Film still.*

In a scene where Jim walks in on his father clad in a flowery apron over his grey flannel suit (Figure 18), the masculinity of the white-collar man is directly challenged. As well as emphasizing Jim's lack of a male role model, this image of Frank Stark in his grey flannel suit, partially obscured by a highly feminine apron undermines the existence of so-called white-collar masculinity as the popular ideal of the time. Jim by contrast, wearing the clothes native to a defunct form of masculinity, rejected as outdated and brutish during the Cold War, appears to be the obvious model of manhood in this scene. I consider this to be a cultural turning point; wherein the strong male physique and blue-collar clothes were slowly once more accepted in American society as signifiers of a kind of masculinity manifested through individualism and rebellion.

Conclusion

The use of blue-collar dress in *Rebel* is particular in its blatant appropriation of the costumes worn by Brando in *Streetcar*, *The Wild One*, and *On the Waterfront*. It uses these performances not only as inspiration (much like Dean is cited to have done), but also as a male role-model for the character Jim. It is highly likely that Mabry witnessed the pattern forming within the costumes of these three aforementioned films, but Jim's aspirations of manhood being expressed through appropriated working-class symbols seem written into the very fabric of his character. In lacking a capable father figure, or any kind of male role-model (from which to learn things like the accepted dynamics of romantic relationships), Jim's character relies on the only masculine figure present that does not resemble his weak-willed, submissive father.

Even the parallels between Jim pleading his father to display some resoluteness in the face of his own wife: "Dad, let me hear you answer her. Dad, Dad, stand up for me;" and Stanley warning his own wife Stella against speaking to him in a certain tone: "Since when do you give me orders?" suggest the yearning for a certain masculine authority in Jim. The change in costume into blue-collar dress appears at a moment when Jim is being required to prove his masculinity to his male peers via the "chickie-run". *Rebel Without a Cause* knowingly uses the costume semiotics established in earlier Marlon Brando performances to meaningfully convey Jim's transition into manhood, which is aggravated by his parents' disconnect. The costume and the film tactfully encapsulate the rebellion of a young man confined to the ill-fitting life and ideals of his household and his urgent need to grow up.

CONCLUSION

The extent to which American notions of masculinity and insurgency can be conveyed through clothing is far broader in the 21st century than what is discussed in this dissertation. Just a decade after *A Streetcar Named Desire* was adapted into film, counter-culture and anti-fashion began to flourish under the guise of mods, teddy boys, hippies, and other Western subcultures. But when audiences first witnessed the indecently dressed Stanley Kowalski on the Ethel-Barrymore stage in 1947, in his too-tight Levi's and t-shirt that left little to the imagination, it was radical. This dissertation explored the semiotics of blue-collar dress: the creation of meaning and the reconstruction of that meaning when the cultural standards in relation to masculinity and the acceptable expression of it changed. In repurposing these masculine signifiers, the directors, costume designers, actors and writers involved created a new language through which to explore, understand and experience masculinity, and even male sexuality in America, away from the pressures and constraints of conformity.

The aim of discussing the formation of working-class masculinity through New Deal art amidst the Great Depression in Chapter One is firstly to impart upon the reader the importance of the breadwinner role in American masculinity –the social impacts of employment status are a keystone to understanding the motivations behind every subsequent transformation of the masculine image discussed thereafter. The first chapter secondly establishes the historical context behind blue-collar masculinity and the re-masculinization of America in order to meaningfully discuss three things: the prominence of strong worker bodies in many depictions of American masculinity, the use of characters, archetypes or figures to indicate the contemporary masculine standard (in this chapter: the Laborer and Paul

Bunyan), and the initial attachment of workwear to expressions of manhood (beginning with jeans and lumberjack dress). The effect international issues had on masculinity discussed in Chapter Two introduced the soldier and the white-collar worker. It examines the impact these two figures had in modifying or replacing the values imposed upon manhood, and their respective work dress signifiers – the white t-shirt among other military garments, and the grey flannel suit. The second chapter acts as an intermediary between how blue-collar clothing is presented in Chapter One as hegemonic masculinity, and how it is presented in Chapter Three as oppositional masculinity by establishing the social climate of the 1950s that led to the creation of male rebel characters and storylines and contextualizing the violence and force so often used by these renegade men. These discussions on masculine work-dress signifiers and the ever-changing masculine ideal culminate in the appearance of disillusioned and antisocial male characters on screen in the early 1950s - performed most famously by Marlon Brando and James Dean – explored in Chapter Three. The adoption of blue-collar and military garments as shorthand for rebellion helped to articulate the struggles that men of marooned masculine identities faced, as with Stanley Kowalski in *A Streetcar Named Desire*; it also proposed that blue-collar and military dress still retained implicit value as a masculine signifier, as describing unconventional masculine identities - especially when placed beside the conservative man in the grey flannel suit, as in *Rebel Without a Cause*.

On a penultimate note, I would like to assert that the understanding of masculinity and rebellion through costume and workwear discussed in this dissertation is principally from the cultural perspective and experience of the white American male; it is, by no means, exhaustive, but instead acts as an examination of the first strong assertion of a rebel archetype in American cinema.

My intention when I began this research enquiry in September of 2019 was to examine the costume worn by James Dean in *Rebel Without a Cause* and its popularization as a cultural shorthand for the young male rebel archetype. Through various lines of investigation – the working history of the garments, the cultural landscape in which these characters could be considered rebels, the importance of men and masculinity when embodying this trope - my comprehension of the structure and behavior of American masculinity in the twentieth century grew and I realized that the depth of this subject matter couldn't be comprehensively covered in this dissertation alone. One consideration for further study is the perception of male sexuality from this era and the impact that models of oppositional masculinity had on expressions of homosexuality in America in the decades following McCarthyism - particularly through the work of the Finnish artist, Tom of Finland. Another would be how *Rebel Without a Cause* revolutionized the public perception of teenpics as a serious American genre.

As a final remark, the insight I have gained throughout this dissertation has been incredibly consequential to me as a designer and scenographer. Through the completion of this work (and its many complete rewrites) I have become a more thorough and contemplative researcher, editor and in many aspects, designer. Not only has the wide breadth of research carried out made me a far more critical reader when looking at any form of text (including manuscripts), it has also provided me with a sturdy understanding of white manhood in America and the United States formation of attitudes on gender. The latter has proved particularly invaluable while working on the final submission for my bachelors – designing a remake of Ken Kesey's emotionally charged drama, *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* for film. Whether or not I was initially attracted to the text because of its rebellious protagonist, themes of nonconformity/free thinking or the marooned masculinities of the male patients on the

ward, the research conducted for this dissertation has provided an invaluable lens through which to interpret and understand the piece. Set in the early 1960s, it could be considered a thematic evolution of the last work discussed in this text, *Rebel Without a Cause*. Kesey embodies the conservative American attitudes of the 1950s through ex-army nurse, Mildred Ratched, and her immaculately run ward, and contrasts this with the increase in liberal views and public awareness of social issues in the 1960s through the use of an intentionally gruff and working-class male renegade character – Randle McMurphy. McMurphy's arrival on the ward and active insurgency against Nurse Ratched are extremely evocative of the social uprisings and cultural revolutions that characterized the 1960s.

The existence of a meaningful application of this work to reflect upon affirms the value of the discussions carried out within this dissertation. It has increased relevancy when specifically dealing with characters that assert their masculinity through the oppositional language perpetuated by figures like Brando and Dean, but may also prove insightful when looking at *any* alternative presentations of masculinity in American media.

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