

## BLACK AND WHITE AND BANNED ALL OVER: RACE, CENSORSHIP AND OBSCENITY IN POSTWAR MEMPHIS

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"I cry, because I love old niggers," Lloyd Binford told a *Collier's* reporter in 1950, his eyes welling with tears as he recalled his youthful friendships with the black servants on his family's plantation. Before the aghast reporter could respond, Binford expounded on the extent of his love: at his funeral, "two rows of seats in the rear" would be "set aside for my Negro friends."<sup>1</sup>

While the octogenarian chairman of the Memphis Board of Censors clearly reflected his proudly unreconstructed southernness in his word choices, more pertinent to his duties were those two rows of seats. For in his role as censor, Binford policed the cinematic color line with a rigorous passion, consistently exercising his power to suppress any vision of improper interracial contact or themes from appearing on mid-twentieth-century Memphis screens. More than an anomalous figure, Binford represented several decades of post-World War II Memphis history in which local censorship and obscenity policies were structured by race. This article examines the period from the 1940s through the early 1970s, during which three distinct phases of race-based censorship and racialized conceptions of obscenity shaped Memphis policy.

As World War II empowered African Americans, black Memphians assumed a newly assertive public role. Censorship decisions of the 1940s consequently reflected a conscious attempt by the local white power structure to suppress any cinematic content that might serve as fuel for that assertiveness. Vague sexual undercurrents regarding prevalent white southern miscegenation fears ran beneath Binford's censorial opposition to "social equality," but their flow became a gush as the 1950s civil rights movement took formal shape and began pushing for integration. As the Supreme Court made "obscenity" the criterion for suppression, Memphis censors adopted an overtly sexual notion of racialized obscenity predicated on depictions of interracial sexual contact. Finally, as this local obscenity regime gave way to subsequent court rulings, the intermingling of race and obscenity was acted out in different terms in the late 1960s by New Right Mayor Henry Loeb, who used outcries over obscenity as a discursive displacement of the racial issues facing Memphis, harnessing moralistic outrage to efface the more complex dilemmas confronting the city. Again, obscenity policy was shaped by the racial politics of Memphis, in an unsubtle but bluntly effective way that contributed to an effective silencing of public discussion on the urban crisis.

If the Supreme Court supplied the lexicon of obscenity, then, the semantics were generated locally. As censor Mrs. Judson McKellar explained to a reporter in 1960, obscenity "means entirely different things to you and to us" from what it meant to the Supreme Court.<sup>2</sup> That race shaped censorship and local definitions of obscenity in Memphis should, in some sense, be no shock; from the city's early years in the mid-nineteenth century as the hub of slave-trading for the mid-

South to the much-belated election of its first black mayor in 1991, the history of Memphis remains incomprehensible unless seen through the lens of race.

But the histories of censorship and obscenity have generally been written as legalistic narratives, from national perspectives that give little sense of their precise mechanics in specific locations. Only recently have scholars begun to recognize the significance of place in understanding the suppression of texts and media, and despite some valuable work in this direction, much remains to be done.<sup>3</sup> By grounding the developing perception of the obscene in the context of postwar Memphis, this article shows how unspoken tensions in a city that prided itself on its peaceful calm could be more forthrightly articulated and acted upon in the indirect forum of suppressing obscenity.

This strategic deployment of censorship and obscenity has wide-ranging implications that far transcend the Memphis city limits. First, though the idea of racialized obscenity has never been systematically studied, evidence suggests it was a pervasive practice, particularly in the South. A Texas town banned the interracial romance *Pinky* in 1949, while records of the Atlanta city censor office parallel Memphis in their attention to racial matters. A member of the Georgia State Literature Commission singled out James Baldwin's interracial charged novel *Another Country* as obscene in 1964. J. Douglas Smith has shown the prevalence of racial considerations in Virginia censorship policies of the 1920s, while Wayne Dowdy has made a similar case for Memphis itself in the pre-civil rights era; for that matter, Lee Grieveson has recently uncovered the racist impulses that structured the very foundations of American film censorship, tracing them back to the interracial boxing films of 1910–1912.<sup>4</sup> In an even broader sense, obscenity as a means of social control has a lengthy and also understudied past; queer media from the 1928 lesbian novel *The Well of Loneliness* to Kenneth Anger's underground films of the 1960s certainly fell prey to ideologically-motivated obscenity charges, as did several radical New Left papers of the 1960s such as *Rat* and *Open City*.<sup>5</sup> This article, then, maintains a singular focus on Memphis as a tableau for the functioning of one particular racialized obscenity regime, but it suggests how further research may uncover analogous scenarios elsewhere.

### Censoring Social Equality

Memphis had developed such a freewheeling reputation in the nineteenth century as a rambunctious river market town that Union forces implemented a rare regulation of prostitution in 1864 rather than trying to eliminate it. But after a devastating 1878 yellow fever epidemic the city forfeited its name and charter, reverting to governance by the state.<sup>6</sup> Only with the emergence of E.H. Crump's machine rule in 1909 would the city fully stabilize. Crump would dominate Memphis for a half-century, transforming it from a backward-looking, undeveloped city based on overt racism to a modern metropolis based on covert racism. Under his tenure lynchings and violence would cease, replaced by an unspoken but unbroken system of racial deference and second-class citizenship for black Memphians.<sup>7</sup> Black disfranchisement, so common to the South, did not occur in Crump's Memphis; instead, black suffrage became crucial to the maintenance of the Crump machine. By paying the poll-tax for local African Amer-

icans, Crump was able not only to win their loyalty, but also to insure his own electoral success. By the 1930s, as historian Roger Biles writes, "participatory democracy effectively ceased to exist in Memphis," but the genius of Crump—who generally maintained power from behind the scenes by this time—was that even a staged charade of democracy offered black Memphians more than they could expect elsewhere in the South, while still satisfying the requirements of the white supremacist status quo.<sup>8</sup>

The entire edifice of the Crump machine, then, was built on a delicate balancing of black ambition against white dominance that required frequent compromise, continuous negotiation and occasional ruthlessness. For instance, local black Republican leader Robert Church, Jr., who had amassed sufficient power to receive repeated White House invitations during the Harding and Coolidge administrations, reached an uneasy truce with the Democratic Crump during the 1920s: Crump would not challenge Church's local power, while Church refrained from using his influence over federal patronage against the machine. But when the Roosevelt administration left Church without federal Republican support in the 1930s, the black leader failed to recognize his debilitated power. When he protested police treatment of black citizens Crump moved to crush him, ultimately seizing Church's property for failure to pay back taxes. This sent the former leader into de facto exile in Chicago, and his right-hand man George Washington Lee quickly capitulated to the designs of the Crump machine. At other times, Crump showed a kinder, gentler paternal hand, such as when he acted behind the scenes in 1942 to remove a degrading "mammy" billboard from a local laundromat, thus satisfying the demands of the local Negro Chamber of Commerce without drawing publicity that would alert white Memphians to this black influence.<sup>9</sup>

During these years of Crump hegemony, little attention was paid to censorship. A Board of Censors, with power to regulate all motion pictures, plays, and other public exhibitions, was established in 1911 but was not formally codified until a decade later. The Board acted relatively infrequently, though it censored a 1914 film of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* on the grounds that it might cause a racial disturbance. That same year, Memphis banned a play based on Klan-adoring novelist Thomas Dixon's *The Leopard Spots* in response to black protestors who appealed directly to Crump. But in stark contrast to nearby Virginia, whose state censors spent much of the silent era policing the racial politics of cinematic content, the Memphis Board of Censors had little more to say on the matter for several decades, until the Crump machine felt its fragility exposed.<sup>10</sup>

In 1927 Mayor Watkins Overton rewarded wealthy insurance man Lloyd Binford with the chairmanship of the Board of Censors when Binford reversed his anti-Crump position and voiced support for the machine. Binford, born in 1886 to a Mississippi state senator who allegedly wrote the state's first Jim Crow law, had relocated to Memphis from Atlanta when his insurance firm underwent a merger, and he brought with him a defiantly Old-South perspective on race relations, as seen in his comments to the *Collier's* reporter.<sup>11</sup>

This racial attitude—retrograde even for mid-century Memphis—did not manifest itself immediately. The first film Binford banned, on religious grounds, was Cecil B. DeMille's biblical epic *King of Kings*, in 1928. When a local theater owner contested the ban, the local circuit court supported the challenger, but a

state appellate court reversed the decision, ruling that Board of Censor decisions were "final so far as to preclude review on the merits," thus setting Binford safely beyond judicial interference.<sup>12</sup>

Having secured a powerful precedent, however, the novice censor did little to exercise his new, unchecked power. In 1937 he wrote to the mayor, explaining that the censors took a lax stance "in the matter of dress . . . because it seems to be accepted that women can dress as scantily as they desire not only on the stage but in public places." Later that year local columnist Harry Martin insisted, "someone should call a halt on the rash of sex pictures with which Main Street is being infested," and Binford barely half-rose to the occasion, cutting some scenes from the white-slave film *Smashing the Vice Racket* but allowing the more explicit sex-hygiene film *Sinful* to play for gender-segregated audiences. Binford even passed the controversial 1932 sex-themed Hedy Lamar film *Ecstasy* without cuts in 1939, though he subsequently claimed to have been "double-crossed" when a more explicit version screened at the Strand, a local theater. Throughout this period, his censorial profile remained so low that a newspaper account of a wedding he attended in the late 1930s simply described Binford as a "prominent Memphis insurance man."<sup>13</sup>

Textual permissiveness, then, paralleled relative racial permissiveness in Memphis into the 1940s. But the strains of the Crump system, always present though generally concealed, began to show during the war years as the artificial harmony generated by the muting of racial discord grew more difficult to sustain. The Congress of Industrial Organizations, unsuccessful in Memphis throughout the 1930s, remained persistent in the face of Crump-sponsored violence, and its presence revealed the racial fault lines of the workplace as it steadily amassed black support, in contrast to the white-oriented American Federation of Labor.<sup>14</sup> Wartime exigencies resulted in an influx of African American workers from surrounding areas as jobs increased, and also in a perceived local shortage of white men as the military called them to service. Long-held white myths of black men as both sexually voracious and sexually infected contributed to this, as the armed services rejected a disproportionate number of black men on the basis of venereal disease. A local example of this thinking came from a doctor in the county VD program, who in 1941 explained, "There is a high rate of syphilis among negroes. Nearly all become infected at some point in their lives." When the desperate military began inducting men with syphilis in 1942, several white women voiced their concerns. One letter to the local draft board implored it to accept men with VD, by which the author clearly meant black men; as she explained, "they are fast alarming us by their leering passes at the white women and girls." Another letter, to the mayor, claimed black men not only "RUB & STOMP all over you with that dease [sic] that nearly every negro has," but that they also "take up all the seats on the [street] car and you stand up."<sup>15</sup>

Misplaced sexual fears aside, the last letter reflected an inarticulate awareness of growing black assertiveness that did have some basis in fact. World War II served as an empowering experience for thousands of black soldiers, and several historians trace the origins of the civil rights movement to this transformation.<sup>16</sup> Traces of this can be seen in the 1942 response of P.L. Harden, District Commander for Colored Posts of the American Legion, to Mayor Walter Chandler's suggestion that civil-rights activists were "subversives" attempting to stir up racial

conflict. "In many of our communities," Harden wrote, "the police department causes more disturbance and bring[s] about more bitter feeling, than any element subversive or what not." He went on to catalogue various police abuses before demanding enhanced legal authority for black leaders. Though Chandler responded with an extremely noncommittal form letter, it was clear such delay tactics held limited effectiveness in the face of burgeoning civil rights activism.<sup>17</sup>

White paranoia pervaded wartime Memphis, as citizens reported, "there is certainly a most distinct feeling of animosity growing daily between the whites and the negroes." Even the county director of social services confided to the mayor in 1942 that a "supposedly authentic source" had informed him that "there is going to be an uprising among the negroes on Tuesday night of the next week." The revolt never arrived, though as late as the summer of 1945 Chandler was called on to inform an inquiring Virginia businessman that the arrest of three hundred conspiring black men had never occurred.<sup>18</sup>

What did arrive, 600 miles away in Detroit, was an actual race riot in 1943.<sup>19</sup> And with it came a belief to Crump-machine city officials that denial and avoidance were insufficient tools to maintain social order, and that more proactive steps were needed. When *Cabin in the Sky*, a frivolous musical film with an all-black cast, opened in Memphis that year, city leaders suddenly identified cinema as a potentially destabilizing force that needed to be controlled. A resolution, attributed to "serious public disorders and race riots," was passed banning the exhibition of films with all-black casts or with "negro actors performing in roles not depicting the ordinary roles played by negro citizens" from being screened for white or mixed audiences. As Wayne Dowdy has argued, hopes of containing explosive white anger motivated this resolution as much as did the overtly racist goal of suppressing black visibility.<sup>20</sup> Indeed, the assumption of the unimportance of regulating film content for black audiences reflected a lack of concern for black consciousness in general. But whatever the intent of the resolution, its effect was to awaken from a two-decade slumber the censorial shears of Lloyd Binford, who cared little for the intent or even the mandates of laws and ordinances. The cutting-room floors of Memphis would see no peace for years.

After *Cabin in the Sky*, Binford indulged in a flurry of racial censorship, frequently cutting black performers entirely from films, regardless of the narrative significance of their roles. Lena Horne particularly drew his wrath, vanishing from the musicals *Ziegfeld Follies of 1946* and *Till the Clouds Roll By*. Pearl Bailey disappeared from *Variety Girl*, and even blind pianist Art Tatum was removed from *The Dorsey Brothers*. Duke Ellington, Cab Calloway, and the King Cole Trio suffered similar erasures at the hand of Binford in roles as musicians. *Sailor Takes a Wife* Binford banned because a black servant character showed resentment toward a white character, though he pointedly neglected to modify a reissued *Gone With the Wind*, a paean to the mythical Old South of happy slaves and paternalistic masters.<sup>21</sup>

In 1945 Binford explained the logic of these deletions. Banning the screwball comedy *Brewster's Millions*, in which a wealthy white man on a quest to spend a fortune is accompanied by his mildly sassy male black servant, Binford condemned the film as "inimical to the friendly relations between the races now existing here." The film, he claimed, "presents too much familiarity between the races . . . too much social equality and racial mixture." Adding a non sequitur

seemingly intended to rationalize the gesture, the censor noted his lack of objection to films with all-black casts screening for all-black audiences. "We don't have any trouble with racial problems here and we don't intend to encourage any by permitting movies like this to be shown," he concluded.<sup>22</sup>

Unsurprisingly, these "friendly relations between the races" existed mostly in the imaginations of Crumpite officials. Black serviceman Dunbar McLaurin wrote Mayor Chandler from his station in San Francisco to complain of the *Brewster's Millions* ban, calling Binford the "Memphis Goebels [sic]" and sarcastically attributing the ban to the film's "mistake of lending dignity to the Negro." The sophisticated McLaurin tied the ban to white supremacy, pointing out that the "bourbon ruling class" clearly feared that closer race relations would alert "the poor whites and the poor colored" to the fact they were both being "played off against each other" by the white elite "in the best fascistic 'divide and conquer' manner." No record exists of a reply by the mayor.<sup>23</sup>

Shortly after Binford banned *Brewster's Millions*, and just before V-J Day in August 1945, two white Memphis police officers sexually assaulted two young black women. The resulting outcry from the black community forced a reluctant Crump machine to prosecute the two officers. When the predictable "not guilty" verdict came back in less than an hour, civil rights activists nonetheless considered it a milestone that the officers had even been prosecuted, despite the perfunctory trial. Memphis NAACP membership began to climb rapidly, growing from 1500 in 1943 to 4000 by 1947. Police Commissioner Joe Boyle, a vituperative racist who had publicly declared Memphis "white man's country" in 1940, stood behind not only his police but also Binford's racial censorship. When Boyle proposed a book censorship board in 1946 to keep Memphis safe from obscene literature, his idea of the type of book to be censored was *Strange Fruit*. The book dealt with an interracial relationship. In 1948 Boyle publicly smashed blues records from jukeboxes because of what historian Laurie Beth Green interprets as "anxieties that their sexually suggestive lyrics provoked miscegenation."<sup>24</sup>

Clearly, Binford was not alone in his stance toward racial representations. Indeed, as he turned his focus toward race in 1945 the city rewarded him with an 800% pay raise, upping his \$25 monthly salary to \$200 per month. Even as Binford expanded his horizons to include the banning of violent westerns such as *The Return of Jesse James*, race remained his dominant concern—so much so, in fact, that he often ignored the expanding sexual frankness of contemporary cinema. The *New York Times* expressed surprise at his approval of "the super-sexy French film" *Carmen*, but even more baffling to a local reporter was Binford's logic for banning Howard Hughes' *The Outlaw*. Unlike nearly every other watchdog group in the nation, Binford "did not object to over-display of Jane Russell's anatomy," as Harry Martin phrased it, but rather to the film's "excess gunplay."<sup>25</sup>

But if modern sexuality sometimes escaped Binford's gaze, challenges to the color line less often did. When *Annie Get Your Gun*, a touring musical play based on the life of Annie Oakley, scheduled a Memphis production in 1947, Binford quickly banned it, offering various explanations. To one reporter, he explained, "the negroes' parts looked too big." In another newspaper account, he emphasized black actors playing a conductor, a waiter and a porter; "We don't

have any negro conductors in the South," he acidly clarified. Black performers singing and dancing "with the white performers in the chorus and with Miss Martin," the play's white star, particularly galled Binford, but his most forthright explanation was simply, "It's social equality in action."<sup>26</sup>

"Social equality" appeared as the governing force behind another 1947 Binfordization, the banning of Hal Roach's *Curley*. The comedy, from the long-running *Our Gang* cycle of children's films, featured scenes of racially integrated schools that roused Binford's ire. In an unusual display of directness, he explained the ban to distributor United Artists by writing, "The South does not permit negroes in white schools nor recognize social equality between the races, even in children."<sup>27</sup>

Both the *Annie* and the *Curley* bans inspired widespread protest. A representative of the Methodist Student Movement of North Carolina wrote to mayor James Pleasants of the *Annie* ban to "condemn this action as being far from an ethical and Christian act." From Buffalo, New York, a college student asked, "Have you people in Memphis forgotten that this is 1947 not 1847?????????????" Local black newspaper *Memphis World*, generally hesitant to criticize Crump's representatives—perhaps remembering all too vividly the fate of Robert Church, Jr.—managed to issue a strong rebuke without any direct editorial commentary of its own, simply by offering an article full of outraged quotes from figures such as Attorney General Tom Clark and Hal Roach, who said Binford was "still fighting the Civil War."<sup>28</sup>

The most important response came from *Curley* studio United Artists, which filed suit against the Board of Censors. With help from the ACLU, which eagerly sought a test case to reach the Supreme Court and reverse the decades-old precedent that denied First Amendment protection to cinema, UA delivered a powerfully-worded petition charging Binford with "purposefully and intentionally pursuing a policy" of banning potentially subversive racial depictions "under the mistaken belief" that such images would disrupt the racial status quo. The petition also pointed out that the *Our Gang* movies had always featured white and black children playing together, and that over twenty of them had played in Memphis between 1939 and 1944, clearly indicating that Binford's racial policies were a direct response to the shortcomings in the Crump machine's social controls revealed during the war years.<sup>29</sup>

Undaunted, Binford continued to ban as he pleased. A confidential letter to Mayor Pleasants in early 1948 promised, "I will continue to keep the Memphis white theatres free of mixed races in pictures," as long as Binford had the support of Pleasants and "our esteemed friend," or E.H. Crump. Though no documented reply exists, affirmation was presumably communicated, since later that year Binford banned the Danny Kaye musical *A Song Is Born*. The film, about the birth of jazz in New Orleans, contained what Binford called "a rough, rowdy bunch of musicians of both colors," but, he added gravely, "There is no segregation."<sup>30</sup>

When the county Circuit Court dismissed the *Curley* suit, United Artists quickly appealed to the Tennessee Supreme Court. Meanwhile the ACLU began looking for another opportunity to create a test case. But when an ACLU representative wrote to *Press-Scimitar* editor and anti-Crump activist Edward Meeman to ask for suggestions of Memphians possibly willing to screen another

interracial film, Meeman gave a chilly reply, claiming "a good many people in Memphis" did not approve of Binford's racialized censorship, but that "I do not know of any one who would want to force a test of the issue. Those with whom I am acquainted do not believe such a test would improve race relations." With even the opposition uninterested in challenging his methods, it seems clear Binford's positions fell within the white Memphian consensus.<sup>31</sup>

While the *Curley* case awaited resolution, Hollywood delivered what film historian Thomas Cripps calls "a pot of message." Inspired by the unexpected profits reaped from "message" films such as *Crossfire* and *Gentleman's Agreement*, both of which dealt with the sensitive topic of anti-Semitism, studios turned to racial themes in 1949. *Home of the Brave*, dealing with a black soldier cracking under the pressure of racism, unexpectedly passed Binford's muster; "I don't see any special social equality in it," he said, adding, "It's just a picture about a negro and three white men." Next came *Intruder in the Dust*, based on a William Faulkner novel about a black man accused of shooting a white man. This, too, Binford permitted, exclaiming with delight, "There's no social equality in it at all." When *Pinky*, about a southern black woman returning home after passing as white and falling in love with a white man while schooling in Boston, arrived in Memphis, Binford called it "a peculiar kind of picture" and demanded unspecified "minor" deletions but let the film play.<sup>32</sup>

One possible reason for Binford's anomalous lenience may have been the films' relative lack of challenge to the status quo; as film scholar John Nickel notes, the black characters in these films were often paired with—and implicitly equated with—crippled white characters, hardly a radical affirmation of black power.<sup>33</sup> Unlike the rollicking good times of children playing in *Curley* or musicians bonding over jazz in *A Song is Born*, the racial message films did little to encourage interracial contact or organized activism; though liberal in theme, the extent of their analysis was that racists were, as *Home of the Brave* put it, "cruds." While *Pinky*'s title character had romanced a white doctor, their affair is already in the past when the film begins; though he shows up for a few pro forma kisses, the film never suggests their interracial romance could actually work. "I'm a Negro," *Pinky* explains, "I can't pretend to be anything else. I don't want to be anything else." Perhaps most importantly, the studios had indicated their willingness to challenge censors in court, a concern Binford subsequently admitted was on his mind at the time; his passing of the films, he said, was influenced by "an inkling of what the court's attitude probably would be."<sup>34</sup>

But Binford had hardly joined the march of progress. In the midst of his brief period of relative laxity, he wielded his censorial powers against another message picture, *Lost Boundaries*, the true story of a black doctor passing as white in a small New Hampshire town. While the largely offscreen interracial romance between a white man and a black woman in *Pinky* had failed to anger Binford, *Lost Boundaries* reconfigured the categories, with the black doctor marrying a white woman. A familiar rallying cry emerged: the film "deals with social equality between whites and negroes in a way that is not practiced in the South," explained the censor in banning the film. In a display of how far he had wandered from the original 1943 resolution on cinematic race matters, Binford refused to allow even a group of local ministers—a group quite unlikely to initiate a race riot—to view the film privately.<sup>35</sup>

The passing of the message films in 1949 generated some excitement among black Memphians, and the weekly *Memphis World* ran a nearly endless series of articles on *Home of the Brave*, celebrating star James Edwards and noting an award bestowed on the film by the Jewish War Veterans. But in an uncommonly bitter tone, the paper also reflected the relative unimportance of the films. The announcement of *Pinky's* arrival "means little to the Negro section of the city since there are no seats available at the Palace for them, and they will have to wait for a future booking" to see the film. And when Binford banned *Lost Boundaries*, a reporter for the *Memphis World* crossed the Mississippi to view it in West Memphis, Arkansas. Though she found the film "a step forward in better race relations," it paled in comparison to her surprise at being invited to sit with the white press representatives at the screening and introduced as "Miss," which constituted "more than a step forward."<sup>36</sup>

One reason the black press found less than momentous importance in local film censorship was that Binford had clearly failed to suppress the rising tide of civil rights. Black Memphians attained new heights of representation in 1948, with groundbreaking hires by the post office and police force. Radio station WDIA introduced the first black disc jockey that year, creating a popular forum for community formation and dialogue. African Americans also flexed their electoral muscles in the 1948 election, delivering a devastating setback to the Crump machine by helping to elect Senator Estes Kefauver and Governor Gordon Browning over the machine candidates. Challenging the status quo off-screen clearly superseded access to depictions of such challenges onscreen.<sup>37</sup>

In late 1949 the Tennessee Supreme Court finally delivered a decision in the *Curley* case. Upholding the earlier dismissal of UA's suit on the grounds that the studio's distribution system failed to conform to Tennessee commercial code, the Court found UA to lack legal standing. This allowed the Court to avoid addressing the substantive issues raised regarding censorship. In a significant obiter dictum, however, the Court acknowledged that "to use race or color as the sole legal basis for censorship" was legally impermissible.<sup>38</sup>

Local headlines the next day found the aside about race far more significant than the details of the dismissal; "Can't Ban Films Because of Negro Actors, Rules State Supreme Court," read the headline of the *Press-Scimitar*, adding in much smaller type, "However, 'Curley' Suit is Thrown Out." Binford blamed the race comment on President Truman's liberal policies but said he would discontinue race-based censorship; "We'll just have to pass these pictures," he grimly declared.<sup>39</sup>

It took Binford a mere month to revert to form. When *Imitation of Life*, a reissued 1934 film about female childhood friends on opposite sides of the color line, was scheduled for Memphis in January 1950, Binford called it "the worst case of racial equality" he had ever seen and promptly banned it. An office manager for the New York film company releasing the movie called Binford to discuss it with him, mentioning to him that she came from Georgia. In what she described as a "most uncouth" manner, Binford told her that not only would he not reconsider the ban, but also that the Ku Klux Klan might "bother" her if she ever returned to her home state. Elaborating his stance to the local press, Binford explained that *Imitation of Life* "illustrates some pretty strong things to negroes, that they are better than white people." When a reporter asked him about the

recent Court ruling, custom trumped law as the censor answered, "That doesn't bother me a bit. I will continue to ban pictures which I think are not to the public good, for both the white and negro races." Despite the obvious strong case it had, *Imitation's* distributor declined to challenge Binford's ban, citing high legal costs. And so Binford's power remained unchallenged as the 1950s began.<sup>40</sup>

### Decoding Lloyd Binford

No Oedipus is needed to unlock the riddle of "social equality," for Binford was no Sphinx. His mantra-like phrase, used in nearly every racial ban he imposed, had already been examined by sociologist Gunnar Myrdal, who noticed the widespread use of the phrase in the South. In his landmark 1944 look at American race relations, *An American Dilemma*, Myrdal decoded antipathy to "social equality" as "to be understood as a precaution to hinder miscegenation"—the great southern taboo, too obscene to even name.<sup>41</sup> And indeed, Binford's bald prose style left little need for such exegesis; his talk of "familiarity" and "racial mixture" in regard to a film as innocuous as, for instance, the comedy *Brewster's Millions*, clearly bespoke a barely-latent anxiety concerning something other than white-led race riots, while his curious avoidance of direct verbal confrontation with the miscegenational aspects of *Lost Horizons* showed the subsumption of the concept into "social equality."

Binford articulated this more directly in an unpublished 1947 mini-manifesto titled "Economic Equality vs. Social Equality." Quoting Abraham Lincoln on the necessity of maintaining separation of the races, Binford claimed to support black economic self-advancement of the Booker T. Washington variety and equal pay for equal work. But he blamed "Negro opportunists"—the one, presumably inadvertent time he ever graced the term with a capital letter—for "a lot of illogical theories and activities" which, with the support of Hollywood, sought to "artificially create social equality." Binford displayed reasonable specificity in defining economic equality: it meant the right to elevate oneself through work and entrepreneurship, the right to purchase and use property as one chooses, and the right to equal, albeit separate, goods and services for a given cost. On social equality, however, he conveyed only extreme distaste, not a definition. It would lead to the "degradation of the White race," and it "may be paid for in blood and tears of the Southern people," but it stood *sui generis*, a verbal tautology lacking outside referent.<sup>42</sup>

That Binford resolutely refused to define his terms did not, however, render their meaning any less clear. Concluding his argument, Binford wrote, "The highest attainments of any Race have been reached when that Race was free from contamination by other bloods. Conversely, the downfall of every ancient civilization is traceable to racial contamination." The unspoken premise—that everything from the NAACP to CORE to hokey Lena Horne movies covertly strove toward this goal of mixing the races in a very literal and sexual sense—was to Binford either too axiomatic or too obscene to articulate. He did, however, link his analysis to his function as censor: "Equal and exact justice as to the two Races, under the Law, with racial separation as a right to be enforced, is the principle and the practice that the BOARD OF CENSORS stands for." In other words, economic equality was to be defended, social equality suppressed.<sup>43</sup>

If Binford's essay brought forth the undercurrents of the Memphian's anxieties about social equality, never did those anxieties burst forth with such clarity, or such vitriol, as in the censor's response to *No Way Out*, last of the message-film cycle. The 1950 film starred Sidney Poitier as a black doctor compelled to treat a racist white criminal's gunshot wounds against a backdrop of a near-race riot. If ever opportunity presented itself for Binford to show concern over the possibility of the film-inspired race riots that had ostensibly mandated his entire racial policy, *No Way Out* was it. But instead, in a document of astonishing fury, Binford directly linked the film to miscegenation. Labeling the film "communist propaganda" and lamenting the presence of white performers Richard Widmark and Linda Darnell in the film, Binford asked, "Do our white people and especially the actors have to be so dumb that they cannot comprehend the subtlety of this communistic plot of mongrelization to destroy them!"<sup>44</sup>

To this point, several paragraphs into his rant, Binford expressed very familiar racist sentiments. But then the essay took a sharp turn into the unexpected, decrying the fact that "We are having a rash of so-called socialites marrying negroes or hybrids." With venom dripping, Binford proclaimed, "The most extreme penalty of the law should be applied" to those who "violate the racial integrity and purity of both races, in these messegenation [sic] matings." Taking the example of a wealthy Detroit woman who married her black servant, Binford unsurprisingly chalked the pairing up to "a coarse, physical infatuation due to forbidden lust" before insinuating that Eleanor Roosevelt, with whom the Detroit socialite shared a first name, "has always preferred to pal around with negroes rather than the whites." With such behavior, he continued, the Eleanors had betrayed their race and "broken the laws of man, God and nation," and "they should be officially banished to a 'colored' country."<sup>45</sup>

Amazingly, Binford managed to return the essay to the topic at hand by explaining, "No doubt the servicing of white's [sic] by negro doctors as portrayed in *No Way Out* helps tremendously to break down racial barriers." With that, Binford made glaringly apparent the miscegenation fears underlying his entire regime of racialized censorship. True obscenity to him was not Jane Russell's bosom or Hedy Lamar's orgasm, but black men engaging in "miscegenation matings" with white women, the image of which, in an almost quintessentially Freudian gesture, was projected into every instance of non-antagonistic interracial contact to hit the screen. Even Binford recognized that his review essay had overstepped the bounds of propriety. He made only three copies, for the mayor, the police commissioner, and Crump, calling it in a memo an "accerate [sic] description" of the film but explaining, "it is not [my] intention to give a copy to the public."<sup>46</sup>

Binford's euphemistic use of "social equality," as Myrdal indicated, was far from an isolated incident. As historian Kevin Mumford has shown, miscegenation was "understood to be so obscene as to be outside the pale of permissible academic discourse" for sociologists of the 1920s, and Binford-like tropes commonly marked southern rhetoric, such as Arkansas Governor Orval Faubus' sexualized diatribes against integration at Little Rock's Central High in 1957.<sup>47</sup> But the sexual undercurrents of "social equality" had remained relatively latent in Memphis during the late 1940s, as race-based censorship strove for social control in response to newfound black assertiveness that was more vocal than organized.

As the NAACP gave more formal definition to the civil rights movement in the 1950s—and as the breakdown of the Hollywood Production Code concurrently allowed for more daring depictions of interracial romance—these sexual undercurrents would resurface quite directly in a new concept of racialized obscenity. Lloyd Binford would not live to see the process; after retiring in 1955, he died the next year at the age of 89.<sup>48</sup> But the subsequent trajectory of Memphis censorship shows that the most notorious censor's legacy long outlived him.

### Obscene Integration

Like the comparable cities of Greensboro, North Carolina and Atlanta—the city “too busy to hate”—1950s Memphis operated within what William Chafe calls “the politics of moderation,” which essentially amounted to a triangulation by the white power structure in which black civil rights goals were held in check by the threat of labeling them extremist while white violence was contained by the quiet and marginal nature of civil rights advances. This satisfied everyone to some extent, especially the business community that valued tranquility over any particular civil rights stance. Thus in Memphis the local black community engaged in a gradual but steady effort to desegregate the city, making requests but following them with demands when not met. The NAACP filed a series of lawsuits over a matter of years to desegregate Memphis State University (1955), public libraries (1958), the zoo and city parks (1959), and elementary and high schools (1960). The Memphis Committee on Community Relations, a coalition of largely white elite economic interests, desperately sought to avoid the turmoil and bad press of having another Little Rock, and so ultimately worked behind the scenes to quietly desegregate downtown stores and local schools, which opened with token integration in the fall of 1961 without any announcement or violence. Movie theaters followed in 1962, again with the consent of the local press to give the occasion no publicity.<sup>49</sup>

This slow integration generally proceeded peacefully, but not always. When a black family moved into a white neighborhood in 1953, a late-night explosion injured no one but shattered windows and sent a clear message. More common was white verbal resistance to various forms of integration. Staunch resistance to Mayor Edmund Orgill's 1955 plan to appoint black Dr. J.E. Walker to the board of John Gaston Hospital resulted in Orgill's withdrawal of the nomination, and the liberal mayor's plan to build public housing projects for African Americans near white residential neighborhoods drew similar opposition. Over two hundred white citizens in one neighborhood signed a petition bemoaning the decline in their property value, “the status of the neighborhood, and the peace and quiet of the neighborhood.” Another woman suggested similar “disastrous [sic] results” and hinted at more unsavory racial implications in claiming the projects could be opposed “just for health's sake alone.”<sup>50</sup>

A sexualized understanding of integration was never far from the surface of white resistance. For instance, after the Supreme Court's 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* decision, the Jackson Heights Missionary Baptist Church in Memphis adopted a resolution against the decision. Calling *Brown* “ILLEGAL, ILLOGICAL and unconstitutional,” the church went on to accuse the Court of depriving the “white Gentile race” of its “God given right . . . to preserve its racial

purity, integrity and culture." Pastor M.E. Moore clearly read integration sexually; *Brown*, the resolution went on, "makes possible the mongrelization of the white and negro races."<sup>51</sup> This reading of integration also informed the censor board in the late 1950s, as another Supreme Court decision led to a policy of racialized obscenity.

Obscenity took the national stage in 1957. If the term had been embedded in such codewords as "social equality" in the Binford era, the United States Supreme Court's decision in *Roth v. U.S.* was intended to peel away such obfuscations, offering a clearly delineated test of obscenity: "whether to the average person, applying contemporary community standards, the dominant theme of the material taken as a whole appeals to prurient interest." To make clear how rigorous he intended this test to be, Justice William Brennan made clear that obscenity consisted only of that material "utterly without redeeming social importance," and that "all ideas having even the slightest redeeming social importance" were protected.<sup>52</sup>

*Roth* was decided June 24, 1957. Little more than a week later, the Memphis Board of Censors revealed the persistence of Binford's racialization of obscenity by ignoring the Supreme Court in declaring *Island in the Sun*, Hollywood's most direct story of interracial romance yet, obscene. Set on an imaginary Caribbean island, the film's story involved parallel interracial romances, with black Harry Belafonte and white Joan Fontaine swooning at the forefront and black Dorothy Dandridge enticed by white John Justin in a subplot. The four women on the Board of Censors declared the film "inflammatory, too frank a depiction of miscegenation, offensive to moral standards and no good for either white or negro," though one member added, "the scenery is exquisite."<sup>53</sup>

Local white film critic Edwin Howard noted that the ban "undoubtedly, is unconstitutional," but he rightly predicted that no Memphis theater was likely to have shown the film anyway, thus precluding the possibility of a legal challenge. Howard also reflected the position of "moderate" white Memphis as he explained his failure to take offense at the interracial romances, treated so gingerly in the film that no cross-color kisses are ever seen. "Perhaps I was unoffended," Howard speculated of the romances, "because I was perfectly aware that they were taking place, not in our own South, but in the British West Indies where the population is 97 per cent negro or mixed blood, and such things are not unheard of." Such a position, while less rabid than that of Binford, nonetheless reflected a passive acceptance of the structural racism of mid-century Memphis, as well as a willful disregard for the actuality of interracial sex in the South, which of course had a long history with a coercive imbalance of power, in terms of white men's access to black women's bodies—a situation that never generated the same white concern as black men's imagined lust for white women.<sup>54</sup>

Even without Binford or the Crump machine present to keep it in check, the *Memphis World* declined to address the ban. By 1957, though, another local black paper had emerged and staked out a more militant perspective. The *Tri-State Defender* carried page-sized advertisements for a boycott of the *Commercial Appeal* for its "vested interest in bigotry," manifested in its demeaning lower-case n's in "negro" and its refusal to use such titles as Mr. or Mrs. for black citizens. The *Defender* ran several articles extolling the courage and merit of *Island in the Sun* early in 1957, and though the paper did not directly address the local ban, it

did offer a bold response in August with an article titled "Racists Protest *Island in the Sun*," dealing with Klan members in Florida but carrying clear and local implications.<sup>55</sup>

The *Defender* also carried a sarcastic story about *Band of Angels*, released shortly after *Island* and dealing with a Civil War-era romantic triangle in which white Clark Gable and black Sidney Poitier contend for the heart of white Yvonne DeCarlo. "There is actual 'body contact' between Miss DeCarlo and Poitier," reporter Rob Roy wrote, but the film escaped being banned—largely, Roy argued, because of what he called "the mulatto link," for DeCarlo's character is revealed to have mixed blood, thus apparently rendering her fit for the advances of the black man. "We didn't like the picture, but we couldn't put our finger on any legal reason for banning it," explained Mrs. B.F. Edwards of the censor board, showing yet again how closely intertwined ideas of interracial contact and obscenity remained in Memphis—if the black Poitier had touched a "truly" white DeCarlo, the film would certainly have been banned. When Roy asked Edwards what distinguished *Angels* from *Island*, she told him, "There is not as much romance in this film, and it is handled much more discreetly [sic]."<sup>56</sup>

A new awareness of the Supreme Court did not prevent the Board of Censors from continuing to police the color line as best it could. When *Island in the Sun* was finally scheduled for Memphis screens in early 1960, the Board again condemned the film. One censor explained, "Memphis just isn't ready for that kind of thing," but the more astute head of the Board, Mrs. Judson McKellar, showed her familiarity with the new legal lexicon when she termed the film "obscene."<sup>57</sup>

Once again, resistance from the black community was minor, though this time effective. The *Memphis World*, in covering the reapplied ban, offered only very subtle criticism, noting that *Island* had not been banned elsewhere. While the white *Commercial Appeal* in 1957 had noted that miscegenation "is treated quite frankly" in the film, the black *World* reported in 1960 that it "deals mildly with interracial love." When a three-member panel on all-black radio station WDIA's "Brown America Speaks" show protested the ban, the city took note. C.O. Horton, a lawyer on the panel, argued that the ban would not withstand a court test of obscenity, while another panelist said, "It was banned, and wrongly so . . . because the movie had negro and white romance." With the facts so plainly and publicly stated, the city attorney recognized the futility of the ban and ordered the Board to lift it.<sup>58</sup>

Even with its legal powers of enforcement delimited, the Board of Censors continued to use "obscenity" as a means of articulating its racial concerns. When *This Rebel Breed*, a teenpic featuring warring white, black and Latino gangs—and including a black girl passing for white who is beaten by her white boyfriend—was scheduled in Memphis shortly after *Island* in 1960, McKellar called it "obscene and racially objectionable." But she hedged by adding, "it has not been officially banned," in the apparent hopes of influencing local theaters not to run the film without ordering that they refrain. When producer William Rowland filed suit in federal court, the Board quietly dropped its objections.<sup>59</sup>

For the next few years the Board of Censors operated quietly, delivering no bans until the "nudie" film *Paradisio* in November 1962. But the next month the Board sprung back into action, motivated yet again by the "obscene" threat of

interracial sex when the French film *I Spit on Your Grave* opened on Christmas Day. The story of a light-skinned black man who passes as white after seeing his brother lynched, *I Spit on Your Grave* follows its protagonist's quest for revenge as he embarks on multiple affairs with white girls, climbing his way through socio-economic strata by progressing from a teenage delinquent to a wealthy debutante. Response was delayed slightly by the holidays but still swift; as an article heading four days later read, "Vice Officials Ask Theater To Stop Showing Race Film."<sup>60</sup>

That the police vice squad "asked" Studio Art Theater manager William Kendall to stop screening the film shows the official confusion over authority, but more important to city officials than proper procedure was the suppression of the film. Kendall was arrested on charges of exhibiting obscenity, but his attorney suggested the lack of Censor Board action precluded official charges. Mrs. Minter Somerville Hooker of the Board explained on December 31 that "we decided to take no action" on the film because Kendall had already declared his intentions to run it regardless; "We weren't sure if we could keep it from being shown," so "condemning it would bring attention to the picture and do more harm than good." Despite this, Mayor Henry Loeb wholeheartedly endorsed charges against the film, and one week later Hooker revised her version of the Censors' actions, claiming the Board had declared *I Spit on Your Grave* obscene before Kendall had opened it.<sup>61</sup>

While the case awaited trial in 1963, another challenge to the color line emerged in the British film *The L-Shaped Room*, starring Leslie Caron as a young, pregnant white woman living alone in poverty and thrown into what critic Edwin Howard called "unexpected intimacy with a handsome, penniless writer, and a lonely negro musician." New censorial chairman F.C. Hudson clearly recognized the Board's legal limitations, but remained determined to prevent the film from defiling Memphis screens. In what the newspapers called an "unofficial ban," Hudson requested to Columbia's regional branch manager that *The L-Shaped Room* not be shown in Memphis; the manager agreed that the film had "strong language" and "some scenes involving negroes that would make it controversial," and he recommended the studio halt distribution for the city. When the studio disagreed, Hudson meekly requested a small cut in the film. The regional distribution manager agreed to this but attempted to downplay it, telling the press the cut involved "one slight scene with a negro and so forth and so forth." Chairman Hudson articulated the removed content in a well-established Memphian style, calling it "a love scene—right obscene and obnoxious."<sup>62</sup>

The Board of Censors avoided legal challenge on *Room*, but it came to naught when the *I Spit on Your Grave* verdict was read. After several months on the criminal court docket, Kendall's case finally came before the bench. Ordering the obscenity indictment "quashed and set aside as being void and having no effect," local judge Preston Battle went one step further and declared the Tennessee obscenity statute itself unconstitutional. The state predictably appealed, but before the case came up, the Tennessee State Supreme Court supported the invalidation of the statute in another case, ensuring the upholding of Battle's ruling.<sup>63</sup>

With the Tennessee state obscenity law nullified, the Memphis city censorship ordinance was next to fall, declared unconstitutional by a federal district

judge in 1965. Though Tennessee quickly replaced its obscenity law with a modernized version, increasingly permissive Supreme Court decisions made casual charges of obscenity less likely than ever. With courtroom convictions unlikely, though, cultural convictions of the obscene nature of interracial contact persisted.<sup>64</sup>

One example came in 1966. When a phone tip about locally produced 16mm films of "pure filth" led the Memphis Police to arrest two men at a processing lab, the case seemed closed. Instead, it led to an eight-month investigation as police searched for the participants in the films. While details are sparse, the *Press-Scimitar* tantalizingly noted, "both white and Negro people took part in the movie." Two black brothers were arrested and convicted for their participation as actors and models, while an 18-year old white woman also charged jumped bond and fled Memphis. The police were clearly motivated mostly by the interracial aspects of the films.<sup>65</sup>

Again relying on suggestive hint, a 1969 newspaper article on "Smut for Sale in Memphis" offered two lengthy columns on the quantity of magazines, peep shows, and films infiltrating the Memphis city limits. Only one concrete descriptive example appeared, in bold print: "One recent copy of *Playboy* printed a series of pictures of a nude white girl in bed with an almost nude Negro in acts which were clear sex play." Circumventing Lloyd Binford's euphemistic fears of social equality, the article went straight for the baseline of miscegenation fears in attempting to rouse public outcry against pornography.<sup>66</sup>

The race-structured notion of obscenity continued into the early 1970s. When a local parent complained to Mayor Henry Loeb about the presence of coming-of-age novel *A Separate Peace* on a high school syllabus in 1970, the Mayor simply responded with a form letter, adding in an internal memo that the book, which contained some mild swear words, was in poor taste, but that "I have seen thousands that are even worse than this one." The matter quickly died. But when another angry parent in the same month complained about *Black Like Me*, 300 "mostly white" parents showed up at a Board of Education meeting to protest the book, about a white author disguised as black to gain a more intimate perspective on southern race relations. Reporter Jerry Robbins' headline claimed, "Book About Sex Disturbs 300 at Board Meet." Two days later, having now actually read the book, he admitted it contained no sex. His retreat, however, failed to efface the conflation of race and obscenity that he both reflected and fueled, as can be seen in another example from 1970. When a display of Le Corbusier paintings went up in an art gallery in Overton Park, complaints about the paintings' obscenity quickly drew local media attention. The gallery's director explained that a nude picture of a white woman and a black woman "probably was the one which caused the criticism," though he declined to remove the picture from the exhibit.<sup>67</sup>

In one final example of this unspoken tradition, the Memphis Board of Review, a pale imitation designed to replace the Board of Censors, with power only over juveniles, declared *The Great White Hope* "obscene for children" in early 1971. The film, a biopic of black boxer Jack Johnson, contained no violence outside the ring and one "out-of-wedlock" love scene sufficiently inexplicit as to earn a GP rating from the MPAA. Johnson, of course, was renowned for his relationships with white women; asking the obvious question, critic Edwin Howard

wondered, "Could it be the bi-racial nature of the 'out-of-wedlock lovemaking' scene that aroused the Memphis Board of Review? Considering the recent GP films the board has not bothered to comment upon, one is forced to ponder that conclusion."<sup>68</sup> The ghost of Lloyd Binford haunted Memphis still.

### Pornography and the Discursive Displacement of Race

Another link between race and obscenity was forged in the late 1960s by Mayor Henry Loeb, who supported the *Great White Hope* decision. If the trajectory of Memphis' suppression of oppositional racial imagery reflected a concept of obscenity structured by the language of race, then Loeb's crusade against obscenity and pornography reflected an understanding of the use-value of obscenity as structured by what Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham has called the "met-alanguage of race."<sup>69</sup> In effect, Loeb and his allies used public outcries over pornography as a discursive displacement of the issue of race, which loomed large over late '60s Memphis, ultimately finding in pornography an effective replacement for his former and by-then-discredited language of segregation in shoring up white voters and preserving the status quo. As race grew less embedded in the conceptualization of obscenity, then, it remained implicated in the engineering of pornography as a topic of social significance.

Henry Loeb had been elected mayor of Memphis in 1959 on an openly racist platform. "I am a segregationist," he publicly stated that year, adding, "I don't think any good would come to the city if a negro were elected to the City Commission." As mayor, he showed little interest in censorship or obscenity beyond a general support for the Board of Censors, but he did openly strive for a ceiling on black ambition, vetoing A.W. Willis' appointment to the Memphis Transit Authority as punishment for Willis' participation in the NAACP. So obvious were Loeb's racial designs that the normally restrained local NAACP branch responded to the veto with a scathing comparison of Loeb to Arkansas Governor Orville Faubus and Hitler, accusing him of "never hesitat[ing] to use the race issue as a means of inflaming various segments of our community for personal political power."<sup>70</sup>

Running for re-election in 1963, Loeb maintained his stance, claiming in a debate that, if re-elected, he "would do everything within the law to prevent desegregation." But before the election Loeb decided to return to private business, allowing his opponent William Ingram a victory. More progressively inclined, Ingram had long supported civil rights, and would even go on to inspire the outraged retirement of Police Commissioner Claude Armour when Ingram instigated an investigation into the police beating of a young black robbery suspect in 1967. As mayor, Ingram showed little concern for censorship or obscenity, indicating his lack of interest in prosecutions by proposing that "voluntary cooperation is much better than a court case." When the federal district court ruling against the Board of Censors in 1965 went almost out of its way to suggest that the addition of "procedural safeguards" to the local ordinance would render the Board constitutional, Ingram made no effort to secure the simple additional legislation that would sustain the life of censorship in Memphis. To Ingram, censorship and obscenity were clearly low priorities in a troubled city.<sup>71</sup>

When Henry Loeb returned to politics in 1967 and defeated Ingram, the dif-

ferences were glaring. Despite winning nearly none of the black vote (which had split between Ingram and black candidate A.W. Willis, thus allowing Loeb his victory), the mayor understood that his old rhetoric of segregation no longer fit the times. Instead, he began a discursive downsizing of race, attempting to remove the steadily increasing racial conflicts of Memphis from the city's social and political map. When black sanitation workers went on strike in early 1968, Loeb refused to recognize the legitimacy of their demands. The strike culminated in Martin Luther King's visit to Memphis, where he was assassinated on April 4. Loeb's response was telling: in a terse, five-sentence statement, Loeb extended his "deepest sympathies" to King's family and proclaimed three days of mourning, all without offering a single positive comment about the slain leader. When 7000 Memphians gathered for a biracial "Memphis Cares" rally four days after the killing, Loeb declined to attend.<sup>72</sup>

Likewise, when students and teachers of the Memphis public school system began a series of "Black Monday" protests of the city's failure to desegregate in 1969, Loeb simply ignored them. Over 67,000 students, teachers, and sympathetic workers reported absent to march in protest, but Loeb refused to acknowledge the substance of their complaints. Instead, he supported an ordinance to limit parades and wrote to white supporters that he was "just as fed up with Black Mondays as you are."<sup>73</sup> He repeatedly turned down invitations to dinners honoring local civil rights activist Benjamin Hooks, and in response to complaints about police officers using "nigger" to describe suspects, Loeb simply assured complaining citizens that "there was no intention of offense" and that "the matter is closed." His own feelings came out clearly when a local black man volunteered to help prevent crime in a poor neighborhood; Loeb sent a memo to a friend in the police department reading, "This is a negro, but I think a very good one."<sup>74</sup>

Meanwhile, the emerging Black Power movement grew more militant. Inspired by the Black Panthers, a local group called the Invaders formed in 1968. Blamed for the violence during Martin Luther King's final protest march, the Invaders drew the wrath of Memphis police, and by early 1969 twenty-six members were in jail on charges running from drugs to murder. Though an illegal FBI-funded COINTELPRO conspiracy helped undermine the Invaders, other Black Power groups emerged. Similar patterns of police repression followed, leading to increasingly aggressive rhetoric on the part of the activists; "Death to the Pigs," read one militant flier.<sup>75</sup>

Instead of addressing the racial turmoil engulfing Memphis, Henry Loeb sought to divert attention from it by manufacturing obscenity as an issue of great social importance. He promised during his campaign to revive censorship in the city. "I concede that there's not much law left to support a censor board," Loeb said in early 1968, "but I plan to go ahead" regardless. He also responded to a teacher who complained that Academy Award nominations for the chaste interracial love story *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner* were "terrible for the younger generation" by explaining, "this is just one of the several reasons I feel we should have a Review Board in Memphis." More important than winning the censorship battle, the politically savvy Loeb understood, was rallying conservative support and creating a solid coalition behind him. Indeed, Loeb's constituents sup-

ported him vocally; "I want to commend you for naming a Censor Board," one woman eagerly wrote.<sup>76</sup>

Luck favored Loeb in his quest, for in April 1968 the U.S. Supreme Court developed the idea of "variable obscenity," upholding a New York law that restricted the sale of material considered "harmful to minors" but not legally obscene. As a result, "obscene for minors" was quickly codified in various cities and states, and Loeb made sure Memphis was no exception. After some bureaucratic delays, a similar measure came before the Memphis City Council in the fall of 1969, with Loeb recommending it vigorously. With his ally Frank Holloman, director of fire and police, Loeb brought "obscene material" to the meeting, but he declined to show it when the only female member of the Council refused to leave the room. The council voted to postpone the ordinance while a similar state law was tested, but members were "anxious to declare themselves opposed to obscenity," the *Commercial Appeal* reported. By picking an issue on which dissent was easily demonized, Loeb insured his success, and the obscenity ordinance was soon passed, as was his Board of Review. Though the Board's functions were limited to rating films "obscene for children," its presence stood as a monument to Loeb's moral agenda.<sup>77</sup>

This moralism re-appeared in Loeb's 1969 campaign against the presence of Philip Roth's novel *Portnoy's Complaint* in the Memphis Public Library. When a local doctor wrote to both Loeb and library director C. Lamar Wallis to protest the book, calling it "the most lewd book I have ever read in my life" and asking Loeb to "see if anything can be done to eradicate this and other similar types of literature," Wallis responded dismissively. Loeb, however, recognized the political capital inhering in a book so base as to feature its narrator masturbating with a piece of liver intended for his family's dinner. "I simply feel and I know you agree," the mayor wrote the complaining doctor, "that your and my tax dollars shouldn't be used to buy this kind of pure unadulterated smut."<sup>78</sup>

Loeb quickly publicized the issue, and made the public money a central motif of his argument, thus effectively tying together the two threads of the nascent New Right: anti-government libertarianism opposed to the New Deal era and a moralistic fervor opposed to what Loeb, in a fawning letter to Vice President Spiro Agnew, called "the basic immorality in our country." In his first public statement against *Portnoy* Loeb began by noting, "I'm no prude," emphasizing that "one of [his] main objections is that the book costs \$6.95" and he opposed spending taxpayer dollars on "that kind of tripe." But after pointing out that teenagers could check the book out, Loeb concluded with the statement, "This country has to turn back to some kind of morality."<sup>79</sup>

"Turning back," of course, carried with it inescapable connotations of reversing the civil rights movement and regressing to a "simpler" era, where social roles were more clearly defined and black students did not hold weekly protest marches. Loeb and his ally Robert James, a Goldwaterite City Councilman, understood how to convey their antiquated language of segregation in coded terms aimed at morality. The Supreme Court, for instance, had been a focal point of racist anger since the 1954 *Brown* decision. While Loeb would invoke the Court to white citizens irritated by Black Monday marches in 1969, utterly effacing structural racism by explaining, "The problem is created by our Supreme Court,"

James would make it his own bugbear in regard to obscenity. Responding to a citizen's letter, James assured her that he was doing all he could to oppose the "filthy, rotten, depraved sources of pornography and immorality," but that "the Supreme Court has left us very little power in these matters." Growing even more explicit in his grafting of the old rhetoric onto the new situation, James wrote in regard to *Portnoy*, "the City shouldn't have to buy it—just for a minority group that is depraved enough to read it." Surely attacks on the Supreme Court and "minorities" carried a special visceral charge after years of deployment in the racial arena.<sup>80</sup>

Loeb and James failed to remove *Portnoy's Complaint* from the library. In losing the battle, though, the politicians won the war, capitalizing on their stands to win both public and private displays of support. "I not only sympathize with Mayor Loeb myself," one man wrote to the *Commercial Appeal*, "but I admire him more than I ever did." To Councilman James, one couple pledged their support, calling defenders of *Portnoy* "typical of the present day liberal thinking."<sup>81</sup>

Loeb's policies did inspire dissent. Theater manager William Kendall called Loeb's censorship agenda "illegal," while a *Press-Scimitar* editorial compared the mayor to Don Quixote "charging the windmill" in the *Portnoy* debate. But politically, a moral stance against "smut" was clearly a winning proposition, since it managed to rouse slumbering voters and mobilize them. As one woman wrote to Robert James in regard to his vocal anti-pornography campaign, "I've never paid much attention to local politics," but now awakened to the presence of pornography, "*I want the laws changed.*"<sup>82</sup>

Loeb continued to direct his energies toward magnifying the importance of pornography. With the help of rightwing ally and police director Frank Holloman, he sent female police officers to churches and women's clubs to display magazines such as *Beaver* and arouse outrage. This generated numerous letters imploring Loeb for help against this "filthy literature" being sold in "our wonderful city of Memphis," and Loeb responded with promises to "do everything we know how . . . but we need the public's backing and active support."<sup>83</sup>

One way Loeb was able to position himself as a "moderate" was by surrounding himself with others who offered more inflammatory rhetoric. For instance, in 1969 Loeb appeared at several local anti-obscenity rallies. While he held himself to general platitudes of "get active" and "write your Congressman," Loeb also aligned himself with police director Holloman, who described "a concerted and planned campaign to destroy the morals of our young people." "I'm convinced the goal is to destroy America," he added, before claiming that Memphians "don't have to accept the rulings of the Supreme Court," which functionally doubled as an allusion to massive resistance. Though Loeb avoided such overwrought language, he nonetheless conveyed an emotional intensity in letters, writing "There are not many things that I hate, but I hate the purveyors of smut and pornography." He also outlined a very archetypal New Right perspective in "feeling there is a direct connection between so many things like pornography, dope, 'no-win' policy in Vietnam, and other examples of moral decay," furthering the erasure of racial discord by conspicuously omitting race as a significant factor in the tumult of the late 1960s. Supporters continued to express congratulations and "deep appreciation" for Loeb's stand on smut.<sup>84</sup>

As in the *Portnoy* episode, Loeb's stance delivered very few concrete results.

Sexually explicit films and magazines grew increasingly prevalent in Memphis in the late 1960s, and obscenity convictions proved rare and were nearly always overturned on appeal. But Loeb continued to cement his reputation as a porn fighter; even though convictions rarely resulted, the downtown Adult Center was raided three times in three months in 1969. Loeb made this harassment official city policy, ordering the city director of public service in 1970 to deploy the Health Department, Building Department, Fire Department, and "any other Department who might have jurisdiction" in continuously repeated inspections of the city's porn theaters, to "make damn certain" they met city codes. "I would like, well within the law, to nail them," Loeb explained. Nonetheless, adult theaters continued to proliferate into the early 1970s. In 1971 Loeb even hoped to use obscenity charges against revolutionary Black Panther publications, but a reluctant legal advisor quashed the idea.<sup>85</sup>

Despite this, Loeb's efforts can only be judged a success. Articulating his philosophy in a 1971 letter, the mayor explained, "I think the answer is in harrassing [sic] the purveyors of pornography over, and over, and over again . . . I don't mind losing in this battle, if in losing, and losing, and losing, we finally win through stopping this osmosis." The implicit corollary to Loeb's approach was that losing the porn battle meant nothing compared to winning the other, unspoken battle: the erasure of race in public discourse, as each porn loss raised the volume of public outrage and kept attention diverted from racial issues. To a significant extent, he succeeded; while citizens sent letters cheering, "Hurrah for a clean minded mayor," the issues raised by the civil rights movement went unaddressed by the local power structure. Loeb's successor, Wyeth Chandler, referred to black Memphians as "they" and "your people." When a federal judge in 1972 ordered busing to desegregate Memphis schools, white flight led to a quick de facto re-segregation, while strategic suburban annexations perpetuated a white voting majority. As late as 1991, Memphis remained one of only two of the fifty largest American cities with a population at least 40% African American not to have elected a black mayor. And when that changed with the election of W.W. Herenton that year, it was described as one of the "most racially polarized mayoral elections in urban American history."<sup>86</sup>

Obviously, Henry Loeb's anti-obscenity activism did not single-handedly or entirely displace public discussion of race in Memphis; it also operated in conjunction with overlapping and interweaving stances against taxes, hippies, student protests and SDS, Supreme Court Justice Abe Fortas, drugs, and other threats to the "law and order" so cherished by Loeb and other New Rightists. But the indisputable net effect of this wave of largely white, suburban resentment was to supply a steady stream of headlines and debates that removed the urban crisis of race from the white public eye, thus laying the groundwork for Richard Nixon's national policy of "benign neglect" toward structural racism. And put in conjunction with the lengthy history of racialized censorship and obscenity in Memphis, Loeb's policies showed the malleability of obscenity as a tool of power, as he reconfigured the local dynamics of the relationship between race and obscenity dramatically from the days of Lloyd Binford, while still using it as a mechanism to silence and suppress oppositional ideas and images. For the fifteen years from 1945 to 1960 Memphis had won the "Nation's Quietest City" award from the National Noise Abatement Council.<sup>87</sup> The lesson to civic

leaders invested in the preservation of the status quo seems to have been that the louder they condemned obscenity, the quieter pleas for racial justice would sound in comparison. Eventually, Henry Loeb shouted loudly enough to drown them out altogether.

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## ENDNOTES

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1. Lester Velie, "You Can't See That Movie: Censorship in Action," *Collier's*, 6 May 1950, 12, 66.
2. James Gunter, "Censors Deprived of Right to Ban Film by High Court," *Memphis Press-Scimitar*, 5 Jan. 1960 (hereafter PS).
3. Legalistic and nationally-oriented works include Max Ernst and Alan Schwartz, *Censorship: The Search for the Obscene* (New York, 1964); Ira Carmen, *Movies, Censorship, and the Law* (Ann Arbor, 1966); Richard Kuh, *Foolish Fingleaves? Pornography in and out of Court* (New York, 1967); Richard Randall, *Censorship of the Movies: The Social and Political Control of a Mass Medium* (Madison, Wisc., 1968); Edward de Grazia and Roger Newman, *Banned Films: Movies, Censors and the First Amendment* (New York, 1982); Leonard Leff and Jerrald Simmons, *The Dame in the Kimono: Hollywood, Censorship and the Production Code from the 1920s to the 1960s* (New York, 1990); Edward de Grazia, *Girls Lean Back Everywhere: The Law of Obscenity and the Assault on Genius* (New York, 1992); Richard Hixson, *Pornography and the Justices: The Supreme Court and the Intractable Obscenity Problem* (Carbondale, Ill., 1996); Matthew Bernstein, ed., *Controlling Hollywood: Censorship and Regulation in the Studio Era* (New Brunswick, NJ, 1999); and Jon Lewis, *Hollywood v. Hard Core: How the Struggle Over Censorship Created the Modern Film Industry* (New York, 2001). The lone historical monograph on obscenity at the local level is Andrea Friedman's *Prurient Interests: Gender, Democracy, and Obscenity in New York City, 1909-1945* (New York, 2000), but other recent efforts include Brian O'Leary "Local Government Regulation of the Movies: The Dallas System, 1966-93," *Journal of Film and Video* 48 (1996): 46-57; Pat Murdock, "The Lone 'Lady Censor': Christine Smith Gilliam and the Demise of Film Censorship in Atlanta," *Atlanta History* 43 (1999): 68-82; Gregory Lisby, "'Trying to Define What May be Indefinable': The Georgia Literature Commission, 1953-1973," *Georgia Historical Quarterly* 84 (2000): 72-97; and R. Bruce Brassell, "'A Dangerous Experiment to Try': Film Censorship During the Twentieth Century in Mobile, Alabama," *Film History* 15 (2003): 81-102.
4. *Gelling v. Texas*, 343 U.S. 960 (1952); in 1957, for instance, the Atlanta censors banned the interracial romance *Island in the Sun*, and also cut a scene of "white girls kissing and embracing [a] negro girl" from *Green Eyed Blonde*, a "Negro man slapping down [a] white woman" in *Band of Angels*, and scenes of "racial conflict" in *Something of Value*, "Report of the Censor, Year of 1957," in Minutes of the Board of Trustees, Atlanta-Fulton Public Library; James Wesberry to Rice Pierce, 14 Sept. 1963, Georgia State Literature

Commission Administrative Files, box 3, folder: Wesberry, Georgia State Archives, Atlanta. J. Douglas Smith, "Patrolling the Boundaries of Race: Motion Picture Censorship and Jim Crow in Virginia, 1922-1932," *Historical Journal of Film, Radio, and Television* 21 (2001): 273-91; Wayne Dowdy, "Censoring Popular Culture: Political and Social Control in Segregated Memphis," *West Tennessee Historical Society Papers* 55 (2001): 98-117; Lee Grieveson, *Policing Cinema: Movies and Censorship in Early America* (Berkeley, 2004), esp. 121-150. See also Cindy Patton, "White Racism/Black Signs: Censorship and Images of Race Relations," *Journal of Communication* 45 (1995): 65-77.

5. Leslie Taylor, "'I Made Up My Mind to Get It': The American Trial of *The Well of Loneliness*, New York City, 1928-1929," *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 10 (2001): 250-86; Whitney Strub, "Vice's Devices: The Sexual Politics of Obscenity in Postwar Los Angeles," in Kylo-Patrick Hart, ed., *Film and Sexual Politics: A Critical Reader* (Cambridge, forthcoming); "Rat Busted!" *Rat*, 24 Feb.-9 Mar. 1970, 2; Paul Ferguson, "A Judicial Farce," *Wilson Library Bulletin* 43 (1969): 653-56.

6. Robert Sigafos, *From Cotton Row to Beale Street: A Business History of Memphis* (Memphis, 1979), 1-40; James Boyd Jones, Jr., "A Tale of Two Cities: The Hidden Battle Against Venereal Disease in Civil War Nashville and Memphis," *Civil War History* 31 (1985): 270-76; John Ellis, "Disease and the Destiny of a City: The 1878 Yellow Fever Epidemic in Memphis," *West Tennessee Historical Society Papers* 28 (1974): 75-89; Lynette Bonney Wren, *Crisis and Commission Government in Memphis: Elite Rule in a Gilded Age City* (Knoxville, 1998).

7. Racial violence was, if not common, at least consistently present in nineteenth-century Memphis; an 1866 race riot reflected it most explosively, and reformer Ida B. Wells was chased out of town in 1892 for opposing the lynching of black men. See Altina Walker, "Community, Class and Race in the Memphis Riot of 1866," *Journal of Social History* 18 (1984): 233-46; Kevin Hardwick, "'Your Old Father Abe Lincoln is Dead and Damned': Black Soldiers and the Memphis Race Riot of 1866," *Journal of Social History* 27 (1993): 109-28; Linda McMurry, *To Keep the Waters Troubled: The Life of Ida B. Wells* (New York, 1998), 130-68.

8. The only full biography of Crump is William Miller's uncritical but factually informative *Mr. Crump of Memphis* (Baton Rouge, 1964), though Wayne Dowdy has offered insightful accounts of the Crump machine in "E.H. Crump and the Mayors of Memphis," *West Tennessee Historical Society Papers* 53 (1999): 78-99, "'A Business Government by a Business Man': E.H. Crump as a Progressive Mayor," *Tennessee Historical Quarterly* 60 (2001): 162-175, and "Expansion of the Crump Machine: Politics in Shelby County, 1928-1936," *West Tennessee Historical Society Papers* 56 (2002): 17-39; Roger Biles, *Memphis in the Great Depression* (Knoxville, 1986), 37.

9. Roger Biles, "Robert R. Church, Jr. of Memphis: Black Republican Leader in the Age of Democratic Ascendancy, 1928-1940," *Tennessee Historical Quarterly* 42 (1983): 362-82; David Tucker, *Lieutenant Lee of Beale Street* (Nashville, 1971), 120-54; Wayne Dowdy, "The White Rose Mammy: Racial Culture and Politics in World War II Memphis," *Journal of Negro History* 85 (2000): 308-14.

10. William Shelton, "Movie Censorship in Memphis, 1920-1955" (Master's thesis, Memphis State University, 1970), 8-9; Wayne Dowdy, "Censoring Popular Culture" 98-100; J. Douglas Smith, "Patrolling the Boundaries of Race". The Memphis Board of Censors could exercise its power on two grounds: first, "immoral, lewd or lascivious" works, and second, works "inimical to the public safety, health, morals or welfare." See Mem-

phis Municipal Code, Article XIV: Public Amusements, n.d., box 47, folder: Censors 1943, Walter Chandler Papers, Memphis/Shelby County Public Library, Memphis, Tenn. (hereafter MSPL).

11. "Lloyd T. Binford Dies at 89," *Memphis Commercial Appeal*, 28 Aug. 1956 (hereafter CA).

12. *Binford v. Carline*, 9 Tenn. App. 364 (1928).

13. Binford to Watkins Overton, 7 Apr. 1937, Watkins Overton Papers, box 1, folder: Board of Censors 1932–38, MSPL; Harry Martin, "Footlights and Flickers," CA, 22 June 1937; "Vice Racket Picture is Cut by Censors," CA, 23 June 1937; "Future Lunt Shows on 'Watch' List Here," CA, 6 Apr. 1939; "Double-Cross Charged in 'Ecstasy' Versions," CA, 11 Apr. 1939; "Lloyd T. Binford, Mrs. McCallum in Surprise Wedding at Gulfport," PS, 6 Sept. 1937.

14. Michael Honey, *Southern Labor and Black Civil Rights: Organizing Memphis Workers* (Urbana, Ill., 1993), esp. 177–213.

15. Edwin Connell, "Curb on Syphilis Spread Possible by Proper Care," PS, 6 May 1941; "One Who Has Experienced and Knows Where Of I Speak" to Draft Board, 17 Sept. 1942, and "Several Weman [sic] of the City" to Chandler, 20 Sept. 1942, Chandler Papers, box 39, folder: Negroes-1942. On U.S. military policy toward venereal disease and the frequently distorted perception of black men, see Allan Brandt, *No Magic Bullet: A Social History of Venereal Disease in the United States Since 1880* (New York, 1987), 116, 169–70. The grammatical subjugation of African Americans through use of the lower-case "n" in "negro" was a staple of both white Memphis newspapers well into the 1950s. The original style will be preserved in subsequent quotes without the "sic" it obviously merits.

16. On World War II-generated civil rights activism, see Aldon Morris, *The Origins of the Civil Rights Movement: Black Communities Organizing for Change* (New York, 1984); John Egerton, *Speak Now Against the Day: The Generation Before the Civil Rights Movement in the South* (New York, 1994); and Manning Marable, *Race, Reform, and Rebellion: The Second Reconstruction in Black America, 1945–1990*, revised 2nd ed. (Jackson, Miss., 1991), 13–39.

17. P.L. Harden to Chandler, 8 Oct. 1942, and Chandler to Harden, 12 Oct. 1942, Chandler Papers, box 39, folder: Negroes-1942.

18. B.E. Boothe to Chandler, 11 Sept. 1942, and A.B. Clapp to Chandler, 3 Oct. 1942, Chandler Papers, box 39, folder: Negroes-1942; Chandler to Worth Tippy, 20 July 1945, Chandler Papers, box 79, folder: Negroes-1945.

19. On the Detroit riot, see Harvard Sitkoff, "The Detroit Race Riot of 1943," *Michigan History* 53 (1969): 183–206; Dominic Capeci, Jr. and Martha Wilkerson, *Layered Violence: The Detroit Rioters of 1943* (Jackson, Miss., 1991).

20. Dowdy, "Censoring Popular Culture," esp. 106; Resolution, n.d. (1943), Chandler Papers, box 47, folder: Censors (1943).

21. Edwin Howard, "Binford's Action Brings Protest By Columnist," PS, 15 Sept. 1947; "Memphis Censorship Evokes Court Fight By Film Industry," CA, 20 Sept. 1947; "Court

Rules Against Memphis Censor Board in Movie Case," *Memphis World*, 20 Dec. 1949 (hereafter MW).

22. "'Brewster's Millions' is Banned in Memphis," *New York Times*, 7 Apr. 1945 (hereafter NYT).

23. Lt. Dunbar McLaurin to Mayor Chandler, 23 May 1945, Chandler Papers, box 79, file: Negroes, 1945.

24. Laurie Beth Green, "Battling the Plantation Mentality: Consciousness, Culture, and the Politics of Race, Class and Gender in Memphis, 1940-1968" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Chicago, 1999), 146-77, 262-63; "Boyle Issues Strong Rebuke to Group for Racial Charges," CA, 5 Dec. 1940; "Boyle Plans New Board to Censor Books," PS, 29 Oct. 1946. This book censorship board failed to materialize.

25. "Censor Binford Gets Big Salary Increase," CA, 5 Dec. 1945; S.L. Kahn, "Memphis Censor Goes on a Spree," NYT, 4 May 1947; Harry Martin, "'Outlaw' Banned in Memphis; Too Much Shootin' For Censor," CA, 19 Feb. 1946. On *The Outlaw's* various trials and tribulations, see Leff & Simmons, *The Dame in the Kimono*, 112-25.

26. Harry Martin, "'Annie, Get Your Gun' Targeted As Binford Bangs Away Again," CA, 29 Sept. 1947; "'Annie' Still Has Chance in the South," PS, 30 Sept. 1947; "Censor Binford Says 'No' To 'Annie Get Your Gun,'" PS, 29 Sept. 1947.

27. "Memphis Censorship Evokes Court Fight By Film Industry," CA, 20 Sept. 1947.

28. Harold Austin to James Pleasants, 17 Oct. 1947, and Paul Killinger to Pleasants, 17 Oct. 1947, James Pleasants Papers, box 2, folder: Censors, Board of 1947, MSPL; Conrad Clark, "Memphis Ban on Film First Challenge to 'Freedom Train,'" MW, 26 Sept. 1947.

29. "Movies Winner in 1st Round With Binford," PS, 8 Oct. 1947; Walter Frank to Eric Johnston, 7 Oct. 1947, and Petition for Writ of Certiorari, *United Artists v. Board of Censors*, Chancery Court of Shelby County, n.d., American Civil Liberties Union Papers, box 755, folder 11, Seeley G. Mudd Library, Princeton University, Princeton, New Jersey. The precedent the ACLU hoped to overturn was the 1915 case *Mutual Film Corp. v. Industrial Commission of Ohio*, 236 US 230, which ruled that films were commercial entertainment and not "speech" as defined by the First Amendment.

30. Binford quoted in Shelton, "Movie Censorship in Memphis," 47; "Censored!—A Song Can't Be Born Here," CA, 2 Dec. 1948; "Memphis Movie Censors Ban 'A Song is Born,'" PS, 2 Dec. 1948.

31. Herbert Levy to Edward Meeman, 9 Feb. 1949, and Meeman to Levy, 14 Feb. 1949, ACLU Papers, box 756, folder 22.

32. Thomas Cripps, *Making Movies Black: The Hollywood Message Movie from World War II to the Civil Rights Era* (New York, 1993), 215-249; Robert Johnson, "Censor Board Puts O.K. on 'Home of the Brave,'" PS, 3 Aug. 1949; Edwin Howard, "Censors' O.K. on 'Intruder,'" PS, 9 Sept. 1949; "Censors Approve Movie 'Pinky,'" PS, 5 Dec. 1949.

33. John Nickel, "Disabling African American Men: Liberalism and Race Message Films," *Cinema Journal* 44 (2004): 25-48.

34. *Home of the Brave* (Mark Robson, 1949); *Pinky* (Elia Kazan, 1949); "Binford Will Cease Banning Race Films After Court Action," CA, 18 Dec. 1949.
35. "'Lost Boundaries' Banned Here," PS, 20 Aug. 1949; "Ministers Here Prevented From Seeing Banned Film," MW, 11 Oct. 1949.
36. "'Home of the Brave,' Picture Featuring Problem of Race Discrimination Set for Malco," MW 9 Aug. 1949; "'Home of the Brave' to New Daisy, Sun., Sept. 25," MW 20 Sept. 1949; "James Edward [sic], 'Home of the Brave' Star, To the Palace," MW 7 Oct. 1949; "'Home of the Brave' At Harlem—Tuesday," MW 14 Oct. 1949; "James Edwards, 'Home of the Brave' Star, On Palace Stage," MW 21 Oct. 1949; "Jewish War Vets Vote 'Home of the Brave' Annual Award," MW 1 Nov. 1949; "'Pinky' Okayed by Censor, Will Be Shown At Palace," MW 27 Dec. 1949; "Memphians Cross River To View 'Lost Boundaries,'" MW 1 Nov. 1949.
37. David Tucker, *Memphis Since Crump: Bossism, Blacks, and Civic Reformers, 1948–1968* (Knoxville, 1980), 58–59. On WDIA, see Louis Cantor, *Wheelin' on Beale: How WDIA-Memphis Became the Nation's First All-Black Radio Station and Created the Sound that Changed America* (New York: Pharos, 1992). The station converted to an all-black format in 1949.
38. *United Artists v. Board of Censors*, 225 S.W. 2d 550 (1949).
39. "Can't Ban Films Because of Negro Actors, Rules State Supreme Court," PS, 17 Dec. 1949; "Binford Will Cease Banning Race Films After Court Action," CA, 18 Dec. 1949.
40. "Racial Problem Film is Banned Again in City," PS, 19 Jan. 1950.
41. Gunnar Myrdal, *An American Dilemma: The Negro Problem and Modern Democracy*, Twentieth Anniversary Edition (orig. 1944; New York, 1962), 58, 586–92.
42. "Economic Equality vs. Social Equality," n.d., Pleasants Papers, box 2, folder: Censors, Board of 1947.
43. Ibid.
44. "No Way Out," n.d., Watkins Overton Papers, box 16, folder: Fire and Police: Board of Censors, 1950, MSPL.
45. Ibid.
46. Ibid., with attached memo from Binford to Watkins Overton, 14 Oct. (?) 1950.
47. Kevin Mumford, *Interzones: Black/White Sex Districts in Chicago and New York in the Early Twentieth Century* (New York, 1997), 54; Phoebe Godfrey, "Bayonets, Brainwashing, and Bathrooms: The Discourse of Race, Gender, and Sexuality in the Desegregation of Little Rock's Central High," *Arkansas Historical Quarterly* 62 (2003): 42–67. Miscegenation has generated a sizeable historiography in recent years. See, for example, Joel Williamson, *New People: Miscegenation and Mulattoes in the United States* (New York, 1980); Martha Hodes, "The Sexualization of American Politics: White Women and Black Men in the South After the Civil War," *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 3 (1993): 402–17; Peggy Pascoe, "Miscegenation Law, Court Cases, and Ideologies of 'Race'

in Twentieth-Century America," *Journal of American History* 83 (1996): 44–69; Charles Frank Robinson II, *Dangerous Liaisons: Sex and Love in the Segregated South* (Fayetteville, Ark., 2003). See also numerous of the essays collected in Martha Hodes, ed., *Sex, Love, Race: Crossing Boundaries in North American History* (New York, 1999), and Werner Sollors, ed., *Interracialism: Black-White Intermarriage in American History, Literature and Law* (New York, 2000). Elise Lemire problematizes the word "miscegenation," noting that its 1864 origin conceived it as a derogatory term, but she also observes the futility of articulating the concept through other euphemisms, in "Miscegenation": *Making Race in America* (Philadelphia, 2002). That Tennessee fit squarely into the southern trend of abhorrence toward interracial contact is shown in Roger Hardaway, "Race, Sex, and Law: Miscegenation in Tennessee," *Journal of East Tennessee History* 74 (2002): 24–37.

48. Ben Parker, "Censor Binford To Step Out," CA, 26 Oct. 1955; Clark Porteous, "Lloyd Binford Dies," PS, 27 Aug. 1956. On the decline of the Production Code, see Leff and Simmons, *The Dame in the Kimono*, 185–266.

49. William Chafe, *Civilities and Civil Rights: Greensboro, North Carolina, and the Black Struggle for Freedom* (New York, 1980); Ronald Bayor, *Race and the Shaping of Twentieth-Century Atlanta* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1996); Tucker, *Memphis Since Crump*, 118–23.

50. "Blast Breaks Windows of Negro Homes," PS, 29 June 1953; Tucker, *Memphis Since Crump*, 79; Petition to Mayor, 25 Feb. 1958, Edmund Orgill Papers, box 28, folder 1B, Mississippi Valley Collection, University of Memphis; Doris Stokes to Orgill, 23 Jan. 1956, Orgill Papers, box 16, folder 10.

51. Resolutions, Jackson Heights Missionary Baptist Church, 28 Aug. 1955, Orgill Papers, box 16, folder 13. This sexualized reading of *Brown* was quite common among southern segregationists. See Jane Dailey, "Sex, Segregation, and the Sacred after *Brown*," *Journal of American History* 91 (2004): 119–144.

52. *Roth v. United States*, 354 U.S. 476 (1957).

53. "Island in the Sun' Banned Here," PS, 3 July 1957. Though *Island in the Sun* was the only film of its period to address black-white romance, Susan Courtney points out that it came as part of a 1950s cycle of films addressing white characters in romantic relationships with other races, such as Native Americans in *The Searchers* (1956), Asians in *Sayonara* (1957) and Mexicans in *The White Orchid* (1954). Courtney, *Hollywood Fantasies of Miscegenation: Spectacular Narratives of Gender and Race, 1903–1967* (Princeton, 2005), 193.

54. Edwin Howard, "Banned 'Island in the Sun'—What it's All About," PS, 3 July 1957. For a more realistic look at interracial sex in the South—i.e., white-on-black rape—see Danielle McGuire, "It Was Like All of Us Had Been Raped": Sexual Violence, Community Mobilization, and the African American Freedom Struggle," *Journal of American History* 91 (2004): 906–31.

55. "Why the People Support the Crusade Against the Commercial Appeal," *Tri-State Defender* (hereafter TSD), 24 Aug. 1957; Hilda See, "The Dandridge Story: Mixed Romance on Screen," TSD, 2 Feb. 1957; Edward Scobie, "Finds 'Island in the Sun' Not Dimmed by Bias," TSD, 9 Feb. 1957; "Racists Protest 'Island in Sun,'" TSD, 24 Aug. 1957. Hugh Davis Graham outlines the differences between the accommodation-oriented *Memphis World* and the "aggressive" *Tri-State Defender*, which "seethed with

moral outrage," in *Crisis in Print: Desegregation and the Press in Tennessee* (Nashville, 1967), 251–68. With the 1954 death of E. H. Crump, the local political machine crumbled.

56. Rob Roy, "Strings Tighten 'Band of Angels,' So Memphis Censors Okay Interracial," *TSD*, 3 Aug. 1957.

57. Thomas Pappas and Fred Chisenhall, "4 Films Have Censors in a Dither," *PS*, 11 Feb. 1960; "New Censor Board Bans 'Island in the Sun,'" *PS*, 23 Feb. 1960.

58. "'Island in Sun' Again is Banned in Memphis," *MW*, 27 Feb. 1960; "'Isle in the Sun' Can't Shine Here," *CA*, 3 July 1957; "Memphis Censor Board Criticized by Panel," *PS*, 28 Mar. 1960; Edwin Howard, "Censor Board is Examining 'Nudie' Film," *PS*, 6 Nov. 1962.

59. Richard Connelly, "Producer Sues Censor Board," *CA*, 7 May 1960; "'Rebel Breed' is Interracial," *TSD*, 30 Apr. 1960.

60. Edwin Howard, "Five Films Open," *PS*, 25 Dec. 1962; "Vice Officials Ask Theater To Stop Showing Race Film," *PS*, 29 Dec. 1962. *I Spit on Your Grave*, released by Audubon, is quite difficult to locate today, so my thanks to Mondo Video in Los Angeles for carrying a copy. The film infuriated at least one non-Memphian: Boris Vian, French author of the 1946 novel on which the film was based (which had vastly more sex, violence, and graves, as seen in its slightly different title), grew so angered that he had a heart attack and died minutes into his first viewing of it. See James Sallis' introduction to Boris Vian, *I Spit on Your Graves* (Edinburgh, 2001).

61. "Theater Man Held to State in Film Case," *PS*, 31 Dec. 1962; "Film Not Passed or O.K.'d by Censors," *PS*, 8 Jan. 1963.

62. Edwin Howard, "'L-Shaped Room' Cut for Censors," *PS*, 8 Oct. 1963; Clark Porteous, "British Film Unofficially Banned on Local Screens," *PS*, 22 May 1963.

63. *Ibid.*; Order Quashing Indictment, *State vs. William Kendall*, Criminal Court Case File 94240 (1964), Shelby County Archives, Memphis. The State Supreme Court case invalidating the obscenity statute (T.C.A 39–3001) was *Ellenburg v. State of Tennessee*, 384 S.W. 2d 29 (1964).

64. Edwin Howard, "RIP—Memphis Censorship," *PS*, 13 July 1965. On the convoluted reasons for charging William Kendall under state rather than city law, see Howard, "Friction Over Film Strikes a Light," *PS*, 8 Jan. 1963; Donald Paine, "Obscenity Legislation in Tennessee," *Tennessee Law Review* 29 (1962): 562–72. On Supreme Court decisions of the mid-1960s, see Richard Hixson, *Pornography and the Justices*, 41–79.

65. "Phone Tip Started Search for Lewd Films," *CA*, 9 Jan. 1966; "Arrests Made in Obscenity Case," *PS*, 26 Aug. 1966; "Six Are Sentenced in Pornography Sale," *CA*, 5 Mar. 1967.

66. "Smut for Sale in Memphis," *PS*, 29 Aug. 1969.

67. J.W. Scott to Loeb, 28 Jan. 1970; Loeb to Scott, with cc to Lewis Polk, 31 Jan. 1970, Henry Loeb Papers, box 10, folder: Board of Review, 1969–70, MSPL; Jerry Robbins, "Book About Sex Disturbs 300 at Board Meeting," *PS*, 17 Jan. 1970; Robbins, "Book Held Objectionable, but Not For Sex Passages," *PS*, 19 Jan. 1970; "Review Board Will

Not Censor Art Display," PS, 26 May 1970. While *Black Like Me* contains no sex, it does repeatedly document white men's obsession with black male sexuality; John Howard Griffin, *Black Like Me* (New York, 1961), 88, 100.

68. Edwin Howard, "Great White Hope Black Mark: Why?" PS, 17 Feb. 1971.

69. Henry Loeb to Lewis Polk, 2 Dec. 1970, Loeb Papers, box 10, folder: Board of Review 1970; Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, "African-American Women's History and the Metalanguage of Race," *Signs* 17 (1992): 251–74. Higginbotham explains race as a metalanguage in terms of its "powerful, all-encompassing effect on the construction and representation of other social and power relations, namely, gender, class, and sexuality" (252). While her examples include media depictions of welfare, legal rulings stripping slave women of their femaleness, and racialized ideas of class in the forging of the modern economy, I take it as a corollary of her argument that campaigns to divert attention from race also fall within this framework.

70. "Loeb May Endorse One Of White Candidates," PS, 8 July 1959; "Negroes Reply to Mayor Loeb," PS, 3 Aug. 1961.

71. John Spence, et al., "Last Three Queries to Mayor Candidates and Their Replies," PS, 2 Oct. 1963; Brown Alan Flynn and Menno Duerksen, "Retiring Armour Says Ingram Unfit, Bitterly Attacks Him," PS, 12 July 1967; Paul Vanderwood, "Mayor Gives Newsstands Till June 12," PS, 27 May 1964; *Embassy Pictures v. Hudson*, 242 F. Supp. 975 (1965). The necessary procedural safeguards to maintain a system of prior restraint included the placing of the burden of proof on the censor and prompt judicial review, as specified by the U.S. Supreme Court in *Freedman v. Maryland*, 380 U.S. 51 (1965).

72. "Attorney General Clark Confident King's Assassin Will Be Captured," PS, 5 Apr. 1968; Ray Wilson, "Memphians Rally in Search for Trust and Respect," PS, 8 Apr. 1968. On the sanitation strike, see Gerald McKnight, "The 1968 Memphis Sanitation Strike and the FBI: A Case Study in Urban Surveillance," *South Atlantic Quarterly* 83 (1984): 138–56; Joan Turner Beifus, *At the River I Stand* (Memphis, 1990); Steve Estes, "'I AM A MAN!': Race, Masculinity, and the 1968 Memphis Sanitation Strike," *Labor History* 41 (2000): 153–70; Laurie Green, "Race, Gender, and Labor in 1960s Memphis: 'I Am a Man' and the Meaning of Freedom," *Journal of Urban History* 30 (2004): 465–89.

73. "Holloman Invokes March Restriction," PS, 3 Nov. 1969; Loeb to Lynn Walker, et al., 6 Nov. 1969, Loeb Papers, box 67, folder: Negro Protest—Black Monday.

74. David Tucker, *Memphis Since Crump*, 141–42; Mantri Sivananda, "Controversial Memphis Mayor Henry Loeb III, 1920–1992: A Biographical Study" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Memphis, 2002), 218–20; Loeb to Washington Butler, 4 Feb. 1969, and Loeb to Benjamin Hooks, 14 June 1971, Loeb Papers, box 67, folder: Negro Protest; Loeb to William Simmons, 19 Jan. 1971, Loeb Papers, box 67, folder: Negro Militants; Loeb cc to Frank Holloman, on carbon copy of Loeb to "Black Jack" Odom, 5 Dec. 1969, Loeb Papers, box 31, folder: Holloman. Loeb was hardly alone in marginalizing complaints about Memphis police language; Police Chief Henry Lux simply said, "I'm trying to decide which is the worst—a Southern pronunciation of 'Negro' or 'pigs.'" "NAACP Objection Filed With Police," CA, 20 Jan. 1970.

75. Kay Pittman Black, "Invaders vs. the Law—Box Score to Date," PS, 20 Feb. 1969; Gerald McKnight, "A Harvest of Hate: The FBI's War Against Black Youth—Domestic Intelligence in Memphis, Tennessee," *South Atlantic Quarterly* 86 (1987): 3–21; "Free

the Memphis 12" flier, n.d., Loeb Papers, box 67, folder: Negro Protest—Black Power. On increased militance in the civil rights movement, see Clayborne Carson, *In Struggle: SNCC and the Black Awakening of the 1960s* (Cambridge, Mass., 1981), 215–43.

76. Charles Thornton, "New Censor Board May Be More Bored Than Effective," CA, 4 Oct. 1967; Edwin Howard, "Censorship Snow is Piling Up!" PS, 16 Jan. 1968; Charles Thornton, "Picture Blurs for Censor Unit," CA, 16 Jan. 1968; Bessie Applebury to Loeb 12 Jan. 1968; undated memo to Loeb summarizing telephone call from Mrs. Binford Taylor; and Loeb to Taylor, 28 Feb. 1968, all in Loeb Papers, box 10, folder: Board of Review 1968–69.

77. *Ginsberg v. New York*, 390 U.S. 629 (1968); "City Ordinance Postponed; Obscenity Law to be Tested," CA, 13 Aug. 1969.

78. Robert Taylor to Loeb, 27 June 1969; C. Lamar Wallis to Taylor, 3 July 1969; and Loeb to Taylor, 11 July 1969, all in Library Collection, C. Lamar Wallis Correspondence, folder: Portnoy's Complaint, MSPL. My thanks to Wayne Dowdy for identifying and pulling this material from its unprocessed collection.

79. Loeb to Spiro Agnew, 4 June 1970, box 3, folder: Agnew; "Loeb Calls for Decency At Library," PS, 11 July 1969. On the folding of the two named trends into the singular New Right—and on the tensions wrought by the odd combination—see Jerome Himmelstein, *To the Right: The Transformation of American Conservatism* (Berkeley, 1990); William Berman, *America's Right Turn: From Nixon to Bush* (Baltimore, 1994); Mary Brennan, *Turning Right in the Sixties: The Conservative Capture of the GOP* (Chapel Hill, 1995); Thomas Byrne Edsall with Mary Edsall, *Chain Reaction: The Impact of Race, Rights, and Taxes on American Politics* (New York, 1991); John Andrew III, *The Other Side of the Sixties: Young Americans for Freedom and the Rise of Conservative Politics* (New Brunswick, 1997); Matthew Dallek, *The Right Moment: Ronald Reagan's First Victory and the Decisive Turning Point in American Politics* (New York, 2000); Lisa McGirr, *Suburban Warriors: The Origins of the New American Right* (Princeton, 2001); Jonathon Schoenwald, *A Time for Choosing: The Rise of Modern American Conservatism* (Oxford, 2001).

80. Loeb to Stephen Bennett, et al., 30 Oct. 1969, Loeb Papers, box 67, folder: Negro Protests; Robert James to Marjorie Weber, 31 July 1969, and James to Mr. and Mrs. Russell Kirm, 4 Aug. 1969, Robert James Papers, box 8, folder: Pornography/Obscenity Correspondence, MSPL.

81. Resolution of the Executive Board of the Memphis and Shelby County Public Libraries Staff Organization, 17 July 1969, Library Collection, Wallis Correspondence, Folder: Portnoy, con't.; Owen Rauch, letter to editor, CA, 16 July 1969; Olive and Russell Kirm to James, 19 July 1969, James Papers, box 8, folder: Pornography/Obscenity Correspondence. Though *Portnoy* survived Loeb's attacks, the Library did implement a new policy of requiring parental permission for minors to check out sexually explicit novels as a result of the controversy. "Board Rules on 'Portnoy's Complaint,'" PS, 7 Aug. 1969.

82. Howard, "Censorship Snow is Piling Up!" PS, 16 Jan. 1968; Robert Johnson, "Good Evening," PS, 24 July 1969; Ernestine Bonicelli to James, 22 Oct. 1969, James Papers, box 8, folder: Pornography/Obscenity Correspondence.

83. Mr. and Mrs. Farrell Evans to Loeb, 23 Sept. 1969; Mrs. John Helton to Loeb, 1 Oct. 1969; and Loeb to Mrs. Leva Osborn, 2 Sept. 1969, in Loeb Papers, box 76, folder: Pornography—Citizens' Letters, 1969–70.

84. John Clark, "Loeb and Holloman Point to Indifference on Smut," *PS*, 2 Oct. 1969; Lloyd Holbeck, "100 Picket Adult Center After Antismut Meeting," *CA*, 3 Oct. 1969; Loeb to Lewie Polk, 13 Aug. 1971, Loeb Papers, box 10, folder: Board of Review, 1971; Loeb to Polk and George Morrow, 19 Mar. 1970, Loeb Papers, box 10, folder: Board of Review, 1970; Mrs. B.D. Hicks to Loeb, 29 Sept. 1969, Loeb Papers, box 76, folder: Pornography—Citizens' Letters, 1969–70; Jack May to Loeb, 19 Sept. 1969, *ibid.*
85. Beth Tamke, "Scene III: Lights, Camera, Action," *CA*, 18 July 1969; Loeb to Harry Woodbury, 15 Oct. 1970, Loeb Papers, box 76, folder: Pornography—Citizens' Letters, 1969–70; Ronald Krelstein to Chief H.E. Lux, 22 Apr. 1971, Loeb Papers, box 67, folder: Negro Militants—Black Power.
86. Loeb to Lewie Polk, 29 June 1971, Loeb Papers, box 10, folder: Board of Review 1971; Mrs. W.G. Jackson to Loeb, 11 Aug. 1969, Loeb Papers, box 76, folder: Pornography—Citizens' Letters 1969; Marcus Pohlmann and Michael Kirby, *Racial Politics at the Crossroads: Memphis Elects W.W. Herenton* (Knoxville, 1996), 20–23, 108–11, xviii, xv; George Noblit and Thomas Collins, "School Flight and School Policy: Desegregation and Resegregation in the Memphis City Schools," *Urban Review* 10 (1978): 203–12.
87. William Vath, "Memphis: The 'Quiet, Please' City," *Today's Health*, Feb. 1963, 61.

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