

“Hunkies,” “Gasbags,” & “Reds”: The Construction and Deconstruction of Hegemonic Masculinity in *Black Fury* (1935) and *Riff Raff* (1936)

Graham Cassano—Oakland University

Introduction

When, in 1935, the sociologists Helen and Robert Lynd returned to Muncie, Indiana to complete their second study of the community, *Middletown in Transition* (1937), they found a city struggling with the collective consequences of the Great Depression. Despite the manifest impact of the downturn in the business cycle, Muncie community leaders and the Republican dominated press consistently downplayed that impact in the years between 1929 and 1935. A brighter day was always just around the corner. And the causes of the Depression were often portrayed as primarily psychological. As one newspaper editorial put it early on, “If tomorrow morning everybody should wake up with a resolve to unwind the red yarn that is wound about his old leather purse, and then would carry his resolve into effect, by August first, at the latest, the whole country could join in singing, ‘Happy Days Are Here Again.’”²² At the same time, despite an upsurge of labour activity, the union movement in Muncie was decimated by a combination of factors, including the municipality’s open shop policy, a continuing welfare capitalism in some of the largest manufacturing firms, and perhaps most importantly the shocking inability of the traditionalist American Federation of Labor to use the continuing economic crisis as an organizing wedge. For Middletown’s “working class”, the city’s majority, this led to disillusionment with traditional labour organizations, and a general sense of fear and insecurity as the effects of the Depression made “getting a living” an increasingly precarious endeavour. Moreover, the ideological forces arrayed against workers, combined with a long tradition of American republican liberalism, led many and perhaps most workers to see their plight as an individualized phenomenon, the result of personal failure, and not the consequence of systematic processes at work. As the Lynds put it, “this fear, resentment, insecurity, and disillusionment has been to Middletown’s workers largely an *individual* experience for each worker, and not a thing generalized by him [sic] into a ‘class’ experience.”²³

But, as their title indicates, the Lynds’ own intervention was decidedly the tale of a city in transition. While labourers were disillusioned and isolated in 1935,

already by 1936, some Middletown citizens from the working class Southside neighbourhoods began to show signs of a growing class awareness. “The fact that, as one worker describes it, ‘We workers licked the big bosses here [in Middletown] by our majority for Roosevelt [in 1936]’ may foreshadow some increase in South Side morale.”⁴ Roosevelt became the symbolic representation of a “working class” community, a totemic emblem of social solidarity.⁵ Americans were increasingly willing and able to perceive society through the lens of class and contradiction. A working class community was being forged; and this construction depended, at least in some part, upon the representations offered by mass culture and mainstream cinema.⁶

Through public signs, working Americans learned the proper meaning of cultural tropes like “masculinity” and “femininity”; through ritual, workers learned how to act the part prescribed by these gendered norms. Just as in a small scale society, interpellation⁷ begins with the collective mythic tales told to the tribe by elders gathered about a night fire, so too the cinematic experience in 1935 still contained the residue of ritual enchantment. True, the public theatre was a bustling place, with babies crying, children chomping popcorn, and lovers in the back rows exploring the limits of sexual license. It was in the darkness that powerful collective myths were elaborated; and the spectator, drawn in by the camera, learned the lessons of gender, race and class, through the power of the camera’s projection. Undoubtedly, these lessons would have little value were they not reinforced by experiences beyond cinema’s three walls. Cinema was part of a broader representational apparatus, and the messages in the movie house were both reinforced and at times contradicted by symbolic structures outside the theatre.⁸

In the autumn of 1935, a story appeared on page 22 of the *New York Times*.

Bitter personal animosities engendered by the rivalry between industrial and craft unionists broke out on the floor of the American Federation of Labor Convention today, resulting in a fist fight between John L. Lewis, president of the United Mine Workers of America, and William S. Hutcherson, president of the United Brotherhood of Carpenters and Joiners of America.⁹

This demonstration of a decidedly masculine prowess on the part of Lewis represents the birth pangs of the new vision of industrial unionism offered by the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO). Just a little more than a year later, what began as a fistfight between two old men turned into a nation-wide wave of sit-down strikes. For a brief moment, the CIO offered new possibilities of solidarity to workers who had been abandoned by the parochial business unionism of the American Federation of Labor.¹⁰

The years 1935, 1936, and 1937 were pivotal years in the history of the American working class. From the founding of the CIO and the Popular Front, to Roosevelt’s 1936 re-election campaign full of rhetoric about monopoly capital

and “economic royalists”, and the sit-down strikes at General Motors, American labourers were gaining a new sense of confidence and forging new principles of hope.¹¹ Within ten years, with the passage of Taft-Hartley in the wake of the 1946 strike wave, and the beginnings of the latest “red scare”, that hope would be decisively deflated.¹² The defeat of this promising moment for American social democracy consisted of a complex set of interacting causes. These included the nation’s entry into the Second World War, with the resulting transformation of class-based “cultures of solidarity” into an imagined national community, as well as the American left’s complicated relationship to the Soviet Union and the American Communist Party. Racialized and gendered hierarchies at home, in neighbourhoods, and at the workplace were, as a consequence, perpetuated. While this retreat from social democracy had much to do with coercive practices produced by the state apparatus, workers themselves participated in the decline of their brief moment of relative power. In particular, attitudes toward racial others and women set limits that foreclosed the possibility of wider circuits of solidarity.

Since the 1930s seemed to so many at the time full of social democratic possibility, and since, within ten years, those possibilities ended in a tragic failure, I think it worthwhile to spend some time exploring the popular cultural representations of labour, race, and gender that both fueled this moment and limited its potential. Thus, I will examine two films from 1935 and 1936 that directly deployed images of labour struggles, *Black Fury* and *Riff Raff*, reading these films for the messages they conveyed regarding the politics of work, gender and race. Let me begin by frankly admitting that there is nothing “typical” about these two films. Indeed, the very fact that they represented the struggles of organized labourers made them atypical for the period. Between 1929 and 1949, only a handful of movies dealt with the struggles of working people, and fewer still directly addressed organized labour.¹³ Nonetheless, both films were successful at the box office, and both provide clues to the broader attitudes expressed by labourers in the United States and encouraged by filmmakers in Hollywood.¹⁴ Their very success suggests that they participated in a broader cultural matrix, producing a set of representational categories that corresponded to representations in other cultural fields. Furthermore, by dealing with these two films, I will be making two simultaneous, but related, arguments. This style of presentation is necessary since *Riff Raff*, the later film, can be understood as a dialogic response to *Black Fury*. In fact, the two films come from opposite sides of mainstream political discourse. *Black Fury* was a Warner Brothers production, and the Warner studio was well known for its “social problem” films and its sympathetic attitude toward the New Deal.¹⁵ Meanwhile, *Riff Raff* came from Louis B. Mayer’s MGM lot, a producer as well known for his conservative politics and virulent anti-communism as the Warner Brothers were for their liberalism.¹⁶ Thus, it is all the more remarkable that both films offer sympathetic portrayals of union activity. As we shall see, however, the grounds for that sympathy is very different in the two films.

While *Black Fury* does take the side of New Deal liberalism toward unskilled unionized workers, its attitudes toward women partake of a kind of “radical paternalism” familiar to many in the labour movement, confining women to the household, and at best, to an auxiliary status in labour struggles. Thus, while *Black Fury* provides a sympathetic vision of industrial unionism, at the same time it sets imaginary limits to labour solidarity by excluding women from full participation in the movement. On the other hand, *Riff Raff* offers an economic justification for traditional AFL craft unionism, attacking militancy and communism with a visual rhetoric that employs a much more complicated notion of women’s gendered roles in the household and the workforce. In fact, perhaps because *Riff Raff* was largely the product of two powerful women screenwriters, Frances Marion and Anita Loos, it examines labour struggles from the perspective of the excluded woman and manages to pierce the veil of ideology that surrounded this male dominated discourse. The result is a picture that deconstructs the labour movement’s hegemonic masculinity, reveals “radical paternalism” to be a screen for masculine domination, and, consequently, rejects radicalism itself upon those grounds.

***Black Fury*, Radical Paternalism, and the Limits of Labour’s Solidarity**

Following the lead of Eric Hobsbawm’s groundbreaking study, “Man and Woman: Images on the Left,”¹⁷ various labour historians and cultural theorists have explored the themes of “masculinity” and “femininity” in radical political discourse and in labour’s visual iconography. In *Community of Suffering and Struggle*, Elizabeth Faue devotes a pivotal chapter to “Gender, Language, and the Meaning of Solidarity, 1929-1945,” in which she finds women represented as part of the labouring community, but never as labourers. Examining political cartoons from labour newspapers, Faue finds women portrayed as proletarian republican mothers, adjuncts and necessary auxiliaries in the masculine confrontation between labour (or the “community”) and capital. Men appear as radical paternalists defending their community of “dependent” wives and children. Gary Gerstle’s study of the Woonsocket, Rhode Island labour press during this same period parallels Faue’s, and supplements her findings, adding the celebration of the patriarchal nuclear family to labour’s iconographic arsenal.¹⁸ These studies are animated both by the hope and the tragedy of this moment in American history: the hope for a socialist, or at least, social democratic, reorganization of the American polity and the tragedy of this project’s ultimate failure. While the collapse of social democratic hopes during the post-World War Two period had a complex, and in fact decidedly overdetermined set of interacting causes, these scholars suggest that among the various determinants was what might be called a *failure of imagination*. The inability of workers and activists to escape hegemonic gendered and raced norms, to see women and racial “others” as full members of the working class “community”, circumscribed the boundaries of solidarity and thereby restricted

possibilities for political agency and collective resistance.¹⁹

Radical paternalism thus simultaneously resists and helps to secure the reproduction of capitalist processes of exploitation. As a trope, this version of working class “masculinity” associates duty to the community (the labouring man as the protector of the weak, helpless and dependent) with both wage labour (through his hard work, he shelters and provides for his family) and with an invidious prestige that makes the man a lord within his household. Meanwhile, this version of the trope of “femininity” subordinates women, but validates that subordination by figuring domestic partners as essential supports in the manly struggle against capital’s assaults. Women are discouraged from participating in wage work and capitalist processes of exploitation even as they are encouraged to labour within the household. And while men are compensated for their efforts through wages, women labour within the household out of “duty” to their family and, perhaps, out of “love.” The radical paternalist household becomes a kind of feudal fiefdom, in which women serve their husband-lords out of a divinely ordained sense of duty.²⁰

The day *Black Fury* opened at the Strand in New York City, Albert Maltz’s radical attack upon the coal industry, *Black Pit*, was continuing its run at the Theatre Union.²¹ “Although ‘Black Fury’ is immersed in the same materials as the militant Theatre Union melodrama ‘Black Pit,’” wrote the *New York Times*’ critic, Andre Sennwald, “you would be phenomenally naïve if you expected that it adopts the same bias as that angry product of the left-wing theatre of action.”²² Both Sennwald and Maltz recognized the rupture between the radical representation of class struggle in the Theatre Union, and the “conservative propaganda” found in the Strand. On the other hand, given our historical perspective, we need to be careful not to make too much of this rupture. While *Black Fury* did not offer a radical representation of class struggle, there was nonetheless a profound continuity between the systems of signs populating that film and the messages that constituted labour’s own self-representation. Whatever the overt political differences between *Black Fury* and the products of the labour press and Popular Front artists, on a symbolic level they shared a common set of constructions that often represented labour as inherently “masculine,” while women were represented as necessary adjuncts and subordinates in labour’s manly struggle with capital.

In her iconographic analysis, “Gender, Language, and the Meaning of Solidarity,” Elizabeth Faue studied the gendered representations that populated the labour press of the 1930s. She writes:

Conscious of their role in history, militant labor unions viewed their actions through a highly refined lens and recorded them in essay, iconography, and ritual. They forged a web of symbols which romanticized violence, rooted solidarity in metaphors of struggle, and constructed work and the worker as male.²³

Labour’s struggle was an industrial war, with labour’s forces led by manly proletarian generals against the effeminate bosses and child-like scabs.²⁴ And, despite the centrality of women workers to many of the labour struggles in the 1930s, “What is noticeably absent from these cartoons is any representation of the worker (and especially the union worker) as female.”²⁵ At best, women were adjuncts, auxiliaries, or, perhaps, proletarian mothers in need of patriarchal protection.

Black Fury is overtly a film about class and class struggle. But as a film about class, it is simultaneously and necessarily a film about gender, about the proper place of women in relation to working men. At the same time, as a film about class and gender, *Black Fury* is also (and perhaps necessarily) a film about “race” and racial constructions. The film appeared eleven years after the restriction acts that put an end to the great, post-1890 immigration wave that brought masses of Southern and Eastern Europeans to the United States. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, these “new” immigrants were often represented in popular and scholarly discourse as racially separate from the native-born Anglo stock that made up much of the American labouring population. But with the influx of new immigrants, racial categories slowly began to change. A new language of ethnicity emerged to describe these foreigners who were not quite white, yet not entirely black. In the binary racial divide that had captivated the American political imagination since the eighteenth century, Italians, Jews, Greeks, and Slavs became what the historians David Roediger and James R. Barrett call “in-between peoples”, neither wholly white nor entirely “other.” For these “in-between peoples,” race-making was a “messy process.” Racial categorizations did not change overnight, but evolved slowly, in response to changing social, political, and economic conditions. By 1935, some representations of ethnicity suggested a conditional whiteness for the new immigrants (that is, if they were properly “Americanized”), while other representations continued to associate a racial alterity with the new immigrants. *Black Fury* takes a “progressive” position regarding these new immigrants.²⁶ Although neither the words “race,” nor “ethnicity” appear in the film, the narrative posits an invisible boundary that separates white Americans from the immigrants who populate the coal fields, while, at the same time, criticizing that very boundary.²⁷

Black Fury begins with a shift whistle sounding and an industrial montage with images that dissolve and shift from a smokestack planted in a background of farmland; coal cars and company towns; miners, faceless in the shadows; to a scene of domestic support, as a mother and daughter prepare a meal for their men. Mike comes into the kitchen, yawning.

“Where’s Joe?”

“He’s not up yet,” Mike’s wife responds, “I woke him the same time as you. ... Ah, that fella. Every morning the same thing,—Joe” she knocks, “he never want to get up.”

Joe Radek loves to sleep. His precious slumber might simply be the result

of his hard day's labour, but there's something else at work. As the film will shortly reveal, Joe sleepwalks through life, hardly aware of the labour struggles around him. He is a dull-witted "hunky" miner whose greatest hope in life is to marry his sweetheart, Anna Novak, and settle down on a pig farm. Like Radek, the workers in the mines are overwhelmingly "in-between peoples": Italians, Slavs, Southern Europeans. African American extras are present at the union meetings and in the mines, but they have no speaking parts. Thus, the central concern of the narrative is with these "new immigrant" ethnics and their second-generation children. Anna Novak (Karen Morley), with her short hair and perfect English, represents this Americanized second-generation.

Later, in the bowels of the mine, the camera pans across lines of men moving about, working, hauling coal, while in the background Joe sings to himself as he digs. When a manager insists upon a speed-up, Joe's happy to comply. But not all the workers are so pleased with their lot. Croner, a disgruntled miner with an Eastern city accent, begins to sound off.

"Here's me shoveling gum, you yourself pulling down slate. They call that 'dead work' so we don't get paid for it. Look at Pratt and Butch over there laying track. They've been breaking their backs all morning carrying rails and banging spikes...more dead work. And we can't even begin to earn a nickel for ourselves until all that dead work's done."

As the audience will soon learn, Croner is an agent provocateur, trying to incite a strike so his Pinkerton agency can profit off the turmoil. Nonetheless, at this point in the film, the audience, like some of the miners themselves, is swayed by Croner's argument and sees the obvious injustice of miners' working for nothing. These lines and others scattered throughout the film clearly attempt to solicit the audience's sympathy for the miner's condition. Thus, despite his otherwise perceptive reviews, Andre Sennwald was quite wrong to claim that *Black Fury* "took the side of the coal operators against labor unionism."²⁸ In fact, the film offers a clear defense of what might be called a *responsible* unionism. In the film, the responsible, conservative union leadership serves an important function, protecting the interests of workers, although under the slogan "Half a loaf is better than none." This decidedly *anti-radical* but *pro-union* perspective becomes clearly evident in the exchange between Mike and Croner.

The miners eat lunch, Croner sitting in the centre of their circle, sounding like an organizer for the Industrial Workers of the World. "You know, I've been kicking around coal mines for years, and I never seen conditions worse than you got 'em right here." Although he begins by attacking the company, he soon turns his critical attention to the union itself. But Mike, the responsible unionist, takes offense at Croner's attack upon the union.

The exchange continues until Croner leaps to his feet and flies toward Mike. Joe grabs Croner by the collar, and says, "If you touch Mike, I break you to

pieces. You want fight, come on, I give you.” In this sequence, several pivotal representations appear. First, Croner’s discourse persuades many miners, and the audience itself, that conditions within the mine need to be changed. Furthermore, Croner makes his appeal not just on the grounds of social justice, but on racial grounds as well: “They got you figured for a bunch of dumb hunkies.” At the same time, as the voice of responsible unionism, Mike resists Croner’s militancy, based on the principle that “things aren’t as bad as they used to be and they’re getting better all the time,” or, as the union’s vice president will put it later in the film, “half a loaf is better than none.” Finally, the conflict between ‘militant’ and ‘responsible’ unionism is settled not by arguments, rhetoric, or appeals to reason; rather, it turns into a display of masculine prowess, a contest of force between Mike and Croner. And when Joe intervenes, he succeeds because he is more powerful than the other two. Precisely because of his elemental masculinity, Joe garners the admiration and approbation of the other miners.

After the scene is set, a love affair between Joe Radek and Anna Novak drives the subsequent narrative forward; and, in particular, a racial dialectic of desire sets the plot in motion. Joe wants Anna; but Anna does not love Joe. Instead, she has a secret affair with a white, native-born company cop. As the incarnation of the Americanized “second generation” immigrant, Anna lusts after whiteness and cannot understand why, although she looks white, she is not. The scene opens with a close-up of a poster: “Auspices—Federative Mine Workers—Tommy Poole secretary—DANCE—Slovak Hall—September 22nd.” Inside, Joe laughs and drinks and waltzes with Anna to an old-world tune played by a band in lederhosen and feathered hats. As he hops from foot to foot, Joe says: “Old country dance more better than American jazzbo hot stuff mama, no?” Anna replies with a silent and sad smile. Three company cops come in the door.

The first says, “come on Slim, I’ll buy you a drink of that hunky bug juice.”

“Nothing doing,” says Slim, “one of us has got to stay sober in case these hunyaks wind up in a brawl.”

As this exchange makes clear, whether the miners were conceived of as a separate race or ethnicity matters less than the fact that they are on the other side of the boundary demarcating “whiteness.” A cultural divide cuts across the community, with the cops, as white men on one side, and the “hunkies” and “hunyaks” on the other.

As Joe goes off to the bar with his friends, to negotiate the purchase of a new farm for “my Anna,” he says “Slim, you take care for Anna, please...” Now alone, Anna speaks to Slim. Slim is leaving Coal Town for a new job.

“Oh Slim you can’t leave me here alone. You promised me, if you ever had a chance to get out of Coal Town you’d take me with you....You said yourself, if I stay here I’ll just be another worn out miner’s wife. Pinchin’ and starvin’. Tryin’ to raise a bunch of squealing kids. I don’t want to spend the rest of my life like that.”

This sequence illustrates the overdetermined meaning of racial categorizations. A series of binary oppositions structure and reveal this process. On one side of the divide, poverty, dirt, foreigners with old world customs; on the other side, abundance, cleanliness, American modernity. Slim is the symbolic incarnation of whiteness. He represents Anna's escape from poverty, from degradation, from Coal Town. In this context, whiteness is more than simply a racial marker; it is, simultaneously, a class and a gender marker. Anna does not want to be "just...another worn out miner's wife." She lusts after the escape from "pinchin' and starvin'" promised by a white woman's identity and the freedom from the confined domesticity of a "hunky" woman "tryin' to raise a bunch of squealing kids." For Anna, Joe represents the "old world," racial alterity, poverty, and patriarchy; while Slim symbolizes "Americanism," freedom, abundance, and assimilation.

Anna Novak runs away to Pittsburgh, trailing Slim. When Joe discovers her betrayal, he breaks down and soaks his trouble in alcohol. That night, with Mike at his side, Johnny Farrell, Vice President of the FMW, speaks to the assembled miners.²⁹ Farrell's talk echoes Mike's earlier defense of a responsible unionism. Of course things are not perfect. But they are better than they were. And if the miners violate the contract, they would nullify the years of struggle it took "to make the bosses recognize" the FMW. "We'll all lose." But what's equally striking in Farrell's discourse is the fact that in the last analysis, he tries to hold the men to the agreement through an *appeal to their masculinity*. Men stand by their words. Men honour their agreements. Farrell ends his harangue with the question, "What answer are you gonna make to the men when their wives and children are starving?" Again, concealed in these words, is an appeal to the workers' masculine identity. After all, a man takes care of his wife and protects his children. He does not let them starve for the sake of principle.

When Croner offers his retort, he also appeals to the masculine identity of the miners, and challenges the masculinity of the union leadership. In answer to Farrell's challenge, Croner says, "We'll tell 'em that if they wanna win, they gotta starve." He suggests that if Farrell and his bunch were men enough, they would fight, and keep fighting until they won. "But they aren't men. They're leeches". At this point, Joe stumbles into the meeting, drunk and angry. He hears fragments of Croner's speech and says "Joe Radek not afraid to fight!" Mike tries to stop him, saying, "what's a matter with you? Are you crazy?" But he is too late as Croner points to Radek and claims, "There's your answer, Farrell. We're through with your whole rotten outfit." Then, saying, "take this back to headquarters," Croner throws his union button at Farrell. Following his lead, half the miners in the room pelt Farrell and the other union officials with their buttons. As the barrage falls, Radek yells "betcha my life, fight! Everybody fight!"

The next morning, Joe awakens, hung over, in Croner's room. What follows is a classic scene of cinematic seduction, with Croner playing Mephistopheles to Joe's Faustus.

“You know, we got Farrell’s bunch on the run. Yeah, half the boys walked out on him and signed with us. Now we’re gonna form a real union, huh Joe?”

“What I care for union? What I care for anything?”

“I know what’s on your mind. You don’t have to tell me what it means to a guy when his girl runs out on him....Take it from me Joe. It ain’t worth it. It don’t get you any place. You gotta step out and be somebody. A big shot. Then she’ll be sorry she walked out on ya. Joe you’re a smart guy. You can be a big shot And don’t think the boys don’t know it either. Now listen kid”—a close-up shot of Croner whispering in Joe’s ear—“you stick to me and you’ll go places.”

Notice how Croner plays on Joe’s desire for Anna in his attempt to marshal the miner for his plan. In these lines, there’s an implicit recognition that Anna desired Slim for the status elevation that he would provide. Croner promised to make Joe more important than Slim, thus making Anna “sorry she walked out.” Joe’s desire for Anna leads to his desire for power and status. Later, after Joe’s been elected President of the new, insurgent union, he stumbles home in the arms of Croner, dead drunk again. Tripping over his words, he brings his face close to Croner’s and says, “President more better than coal policeman, no?” Joe took the bait. Whatever the merit of the grievances expressed by the insurgent union, Joe’s motivation comes from his love of Anna. For her sake, for her desire, he wants to be a “big shot.”

When the strike begins and scabs appear, Radek finds himself ostracized by his fellow workers. Meanwhile, the cinematic iconography of the strike evokes the “masculine” representations of labour strife, as angry miners charge the coal cops and throw stones and insults toward the scabs. The camera offers a close up of a miner’s wife, baby in her arms, careworn expression on her face, as she says to another woman, “I remember the last strike.” With those words the audience realizes that Radek was more than a fool, he was a traitor. He betrayed his community, and more than that, he betrayed his own masculinity and his responsibility, *as a man*, to protect dependent women and children. By trying to be a “big shot,” Radek lost his community, his job, and his manhood.

Scenes of eviction, poverty, and suffering follow as the miners’ families are driven from the company town. Meanwhile, Joe sinks deeper into drink and depression. But the final blow comes with Mike’s blood sacrifice. While attempting to protect the honour of a young woman, Mike is stabbed to death by a group of marauding coal company cops. Joe, who had come to his friend’s aide, ends up injured and in the hospital. While Joe recovers, Anna returns to Coal Town. She visits Joe in the hospital, but he does not respond to her pleas for forgiveness. However, when Joe learns that the miners had decided to end the strike, he is unable to stand the thought of Mike’s sacrifice being in vain. Sitting up in bed, Joe says:

“It’s no good they go back. Mike he didn’t want now they should go back. They got to win. Sure, it my fault. I got to fix. Sure fix for Mike. He fight

for them. Die. They don't can do this to him. I stop. Sure, stop. I got all figured out. They no can go back. They got to win. What Joe Radek break he fix. I promise Mike. Got to make good promise... They no go back. They got to win." Mike's sacrifice serves to rouse Joe's indignation. In fact, when speaking of the miner's community, Joe now says "*they* got to win," "*they* no go back," rather than "*we* got to win," or "*we* got to go back." This is no longer "our" fight, no longer "Joe's" fight. It is "their" fight to be won or lost. But Mike's sacrifice will bind Joe once more to the community. And in the events that follow Joe will win back his community precisely by winning back his masculinity.

After escaping from the hospital, Joe gathers a load of dynamite. Meanwhile, Anna discovers Joe's plan and helps him plant the charges. Joe lays siege to the mine, threatening to blow the shafts if management doesn't settle the strike. A stand-off follows, with Joe deep in the mines and, as the audience knows from the montage of newspaper headlines that cross the screen, Joe wins back the affection and admiration of his community. When Magee, the detective responsible for Mike's murder, tries to flush Joe from the shaft, Joe beats him to a pulp, handcuffs him, and holds him hostage. Then, as Joe begins to blow some of the charges, the mine manager begs Anna to talk Joe out of the mine, but she responds: "This is Joe's fight and he's got to fight it his own way." This is no longer a collective battle for social justice, but Joe's individual fight to win back his manhood. Or, more accurately, the collective struggle has been subsumed by Joe's individual effort. He restores his place in the community through his masculinity. "What Joe Radek break, Joe Radek fix."

At the same time, by calling this "Joe's fight" Anna effaces her own labour, and ultimately, her own identity. After all, Anna helped lay the charges. Her labour was an essential support for Radek's siege. But Anna subsumes her identity within Joe's. And here, once again, there is a profound continuity between *Black Fury's* representation of the woman's role within labour struggles and the broader discourse of organized labour. It was as if Anna, during her sojourn away from Joe, had stumbled upon these words from the labour press:

You too must realize that, in this struggle for a decent living, for the right to educate your children and give them a fair chance to continue to live peacefully after you have passed on, you must take your place beside your husband. *His struggle is your struggle. His wages are your livelihood.* Stand shoulder to shoulder with him and fight.³⁰

We do not know what happened to Anna while away from Coal Town. But whatever happened, she returned having learned the proper place of a work-ingman's woman. Because his wages are her livelihood, his struggle is her fight too; but as an auxiliary worker in the important manly struggle for social justice.

When Joe emerges victorious from the mine and as the newsreels record

the cheering crowds greeting him at the gate, he takes Anna once more into his arms. Magee, Mike’s killer, leaves in handcuffs. “Mr. Radek, please say just a few words” begs the radio reporter, pushing Joe and Anna toward the microphone.

“I glad we win,” says Joe.

In the hospital, it was their struggle. Now, emerging victorious from the mines, “we win.” With these words, Joe rejoins the community. As Joe and Anna are carried off on the shoulders of the crowd, a miner cries out, “hey Joe, now you can raise them pigs and kids, uh?” Looking at Anna, he replies, “you betcha me life.” With the restoration of the ruptured community, Joe learns the proper paths for his desire. He no longer needs to be a “big shot,” just an ordinary Joe, wife by his side, trying to raise a bunch of squealing pigs and kids.

Black Fury is hardly a radical representation. Yet it did attempt to resist the dominant racial categories that excluded new immigrants from mainstream American society. Here I return to the theme of the “inbetweenness”³¹ of these new immigrant “hunkies.” They are clearly not white. Over and over again, we are reminded that they are “hunkies.” And yet by that very insistence (coming, as it does, from the mouths of the cinematic villains), *Black Fury* self-consciously indicts the very racial categories it seems to be upholding. True the “hunkies” are not white. They are also, however, not black. Furthermore, Anna Novak, a woman who could pass as white, reveals the racial categories at work could equally be perceived through the lens of culture. In other words, the Hungarian director, Michael Curtiz, and the others behind *Black Fury*, may well be arguing that the children raised by Anna and Joe will be—or could be—white. If that was the case, then Anna’s domesticity, and the domesticity of the other women in the picture, could represent the movement from racial alterity to conditional whiteness.

Black Fury’s mode of representation is realism. It is a realism, however, that is purely stylistic. It is an historical document, not a documentary. And, as a document, it patently falsifies the reality of working peoples’ experience. During the 1930s, with male employment episodic at best among many in the labouring classes, women moved into the formal economy in record numbers, often becoming the household’s primary breadwinner. In *Black Fury*, however, not a single woman works outside the household. Rather, evoking a fictional and idealized golden age, men, and men only, worked in the “formal economy”, while women took their “rightful” place as domestic labourers, caring for children and cleaning up after the men. Remarkably, *Riff Raff*, a film that openly eschews the realistic mode common to the Warner Brothers’ social problem films, nonetheless comes much closer to the “reality” of women’s experience during this period.

Riff Raff: “...just look after your wifely duties”

When *Riff Raff* was released in January of 1936, it created none of the uproar that greeted the release of *Black Fury*.³² This despite the fact that, at least for the first

few reels, *Riff Raff* closely parallels *Black Fury*'s narrative but with some important differences. For instance, in order to situate the stories in decidedly working class contexts, both films begin with a shift whistle and a montage reflecting the early morning activities of the communities. But before the shift whistle blows, *Black Fury* sets the tone for its narrative with the soundtrack of a driving march, drums and horns creating an ominous aura. Before *Riff Raff*'s shift whistle sounds, the audience experiences a very different montage. After the Metro lion roars and the credits appear, pastoral and comic music introduces the caption, "Early morning on the waterfront," followed by idyllic scenes of the white working class fishing community as it rises from an evening's slumber. A man stretches outside his fishing shack. A woman lowers a beer bucket from a second store window to the cigarette stand on the first. Next, a close-up reveals a smoke stack shrouded in smog and the sounding of the shift whistle. Shanty tunes play as the montage continues, illustrating the work of faceless men around the docks, hauling nets and setting tackle then dissolving to a lush stumbling home to his shack on the dock. The scene then cuts to inside of the shack, where a blond woman stands before a washbasin, while the drunk stumbles in the door, stage left. The first lines of the film come from the woman as she rings out a piece of cloth:

"Stinko again."

"Is that a way to talk to your father?"

"Where was you all night?"

"I was lookin' for a job."

"What was you tryin' to do? Sneak up on it in the dark? Gee, if you was ever to get one, I'd drop dead." The scene cuts to a bedroom, where two children are stretching. They shake Hattie (Jean Harlow) out of her sleep.

These opening moments of the film are so close to the introductory scenes of *Black Fury* that *Riff Raff* at first seems to be a remake of the previous film. But as the narrative unfolds, the audience realizes that the Jean Harlow/Spencer Tracy vehicle is not so much a remake as a response, dialogically engaged in a political and social argument with the prior film. The terms of that engagement are announced in the opening moments. Not only does the music suggest that *Riff Raff* is somehow less serious and less ominous than *Black Fury*, but the visual montage of white workers beginning their day on the docks tell the audience that this is a film about "our" community. If *Black Fury* was about "them", new immigrants, foreigners, racialized others, *Riff Raff* was about an imagined "us", skilled, white craft workers. Something else, more significant still, emerges from these opening scenes. While *Black Fury*'s montage ends with a shot of Joe Radek's slumbering visage, thus communicating to the audience that this is his story, *Riff Raff*'s opening passage ends with Hattie's peacefully sleeping face. This is her story. This is a version of *Black Fury* told from the point of view of the women in the working class community.

Hattie lives with her sister Lil, their younger brother, their father, Pop,

Lil’s husband and daughter. As we learn from the sequence above, the women in the household do the majority of the work. Pop is unemployed. Lil sees to the domestic chores in the household. Hattie works in a cannery. We never see Lil’s husband at work, though we know he is a musician and probably out of work or underemployed. Thus, at least in this household, women are workers, while men are represented as dependent wastrels. The first words in the picture, that comic exchange between Lil and Pop, offer a symbolic representation of a central social trauma caused by the Great Depression. Elizabeth Cohen argues that, “[u]nemployment among husbands forced many wives and children into the work force during the 1930s as the sole support of their families....When the male breadwinner suffered prolonged unemployment, traditional authority relationships within the family, between husbands and wives and between parents and children, began to break down.”²³³ Rather than taking this breakdown of patriarchal authority as a cause for mourning, however, *Riff Raff*’s comic presentation suggests that the loss of male authority is an occasion for celebration.

Riff Raff goes further still. From the first shot of Lil washing, women are situated as workers. True, *Black Fury* opens with a similar representation. While the women in *Black Fury* labour—“naturally”—for workingmen, however, *Riff Raff*’s women labour for lazy scoundrels. For instance, although Lil tells Pop to get his own morning coffee, she ends up pouring it for him. Moments later, in a parallel scene, Pop asks Hattie for “two bits.” Although she replies, “ah go ask the government,” she instantly reaches into her purse and gives him the quarter. In both cases, women’s surplus is appropriated by a man whose marginal authority carries only a vestige of prestige. He does not—and can not—order them to give him the fruits of their labour. They give out of love. They produce a surplus. He lives without working. The fact that the film offers parallel portrayals of women working—Lil labouring at home and Hattie in the cannery—suggests that both women are being exploited, though the form of exploitation varies. This focus on women’s labour in the household as well as outside of it highlights a central absence in *Black Fury*. By portraying women’s work as a natural duty, *Black Fury* essentially conceals the processes of exploitation that happen within the household. On the other hand, *Riff Raff*’s narrative offers an implicit critique of the “traditional” male dominated household. This household exploitation remains implicit precisely because no formal language exists to express its reality. Traditional Marxian discourse remained blind to non-capitalist surplus production within the household; and this blindness on the part of the traditional left had representational consequences. Perhaps the fact that the women behind *Riff Raff*—screenwriters Anita Loos and Frances Marion—did not recognize themselves in radical discourse influenced their dismissive attitude toward militant labour and political radicalism.

Both women had been writing screenplays since the days of silent cinema, and by the 1930s Frances Marion was among the highest paid writers in

Hollywood. In addition, both women were active in the re-formation of their craft union, the Screen Writer's Guild, with Marion elected vice-president in 1933.³⁴ Anita Loos' experiences with organized labour began during the "red summer" of 1919, when the Actors Equity Association was transformed from a toothless guild into an authentic union. Loos' husband at the time, John Emerson, helped lead the actors' strike; and the labour strife had a significant impact upon the young writer.³⁵ While she clearly admired the fact that "the actors' strike of 1919 was one of the first ever to be organized by white-collar workers," her account of the period takes an ironic, distinctly jaundiced form.³⁶ Although the strike begins as a "struggle for better working conditions",

...it soon evolved that the strike would give them [striking actors] a more imposing stage than they ever occupied before. And when strike activities began to give actors more publicity than they could earn onstage, the call to strike was sounded....Never had actors, *en masse*, attained so many headlines or had more fun, for the strike turned ever producer into a villain, and every striking supernumerary became a star.³⁷

The strike was a stage; the strikers acting their parts for publicity and personal prestige. In the end, it was clear to Loos that the struggle was not for justice—but for power. "Actors were now entering into the twentieth century's melodramatic switch of power; no longer underdogs, they now had their turn to trample on the boss, and this is only fair, considering the many centuries that the converse had been true." And to this rather Machiavellian view, she adds a touch of anti-communism (seemingly via *Ninotchka*): "I had seen an early demonstration of the triumph of the underdog in Berlin, where Soviet commissars, 'in town on business,' were spending government funds on German baby dolls with all the abandon of capitalistic sugar daddies."³⁸ Loos' ambivalent attitude toward the strike and the strikers plays out in Dutch Muller's desire to use the coast's labour troubles as a wedge to win personal status. And the film's anti-militant attitude may have something to do with Loos' experience of a strike that "split up families and old friendships" and divided a community of "artists" who fancied themselves beyond politics.³⁹ Consequently, in *Riff Riff* Marion and Loos offer an ambivalent but sympathetic portrayal of craft unionism, from a woman's perspective. While this perspective still largely depends upon an androcentric iconography, it also offers a veiled critique of labored paternalism.

On her way to the cannery, Hattie finds the men crowded on the dock, listening to a radical organizer's harangue. The scene cuts to an office interior, with Nick, the dark-skinned Italian cannery owner, hanging his hat on a hook. One of his thugs, "Flytrap," agitated and pacing, tells the boss that the workers are ready to strike. Nick, apparently more interested in the fox stole he just purchased for his girl, doesn't seem to care. "...Look Flytraps, look. The men signa a five

year agreement with me to work on certain percentage without pulling walkout, didn't they?...Is plenty tough for Nick, poor fellow. So what he gonna do? Nick is gonna for to bring in cheap labor and catch the fishes at half the price.”

This sequence stands as a stark contrast with the presentation of the capitalists in *Black Fury*. Here Nick's image is much closer to the laboured representation of capital as effete, with his primping and vanity. To this, *Riff Raff* adds a distinctive racial cast. Nick is a racial other, and his accent and malapropisms, an echo of Chico Marx's riff on Italian ethnicity, suggest an almost minstrel-like character. Moreover, the film plays upon the cinematic and cultural image of the Italian gangster, and Flytrap's offer to “smoke” the union organizer solidifies the impression that Nick is somehow “connected.” So while *Riff Raff* almost approaches the historical “reality”—Nick wants to provoke the men into violating their contract so he can bring in cheap labour—the racialized representation of capital circumvents class critique.

The scene cuts to “Ptomaine Tony's”, an eatery where Dutch sits at the counter flirting with the waitresses. The union leader, Brains, comes in, followed by Dutch's side-kick, Lew⁴⁰. Like Flytrap, Brains is worried that the men are about to strike; and he's particularly disturbed that his fellow workers are listening to the radical organizer. “He's a red if I ever saw one.”

“Why that gas bag, I'll break him in half. I'll show them dumb-dumbs.”

Dutch pushes his way through the men and confronts Red Belcher. “Ah shut up and get offa that barrel. Where do you think you are, Roosha?” From the distance, Hattie watches with a group of women. As Dutch begins, one says “oh my, what a man.” Hattie mockingly rolls her eyes and the scene cuts back to Dutch. “When we was kids we used to fight like wildcats. But if an outside gang come in we stuck together and threw 'em out. [Laughter.] Brain says that Nick wants us to strike. ...He thinks we're suckers. But we ain't. We ain't gonna fight. And I'll sock the first guy in the puss who says we are.” At that point, a riot erupts, with Dutch leaping into the fray. As a cop grabs Dutch and begins to drag him away, Hattie, in a balcony above, yells “watch out below, it's a bomb” and throws a tuna can. The cop releases Dutch, grabs the can and begins to throw it to the bay before realizing the trick. As the men return to their boats, the “strike” over, at least for now, Hattie says “come on, Lil, I'm gonna show that big lug who saved his skin.” After the riot dissolves, a newsreel crew stops Dutch. “Mr. Muller, will you say something to the Metrotome news while we take your picture?”

The similarities between the opening minutes of this picture and the beginning of *Black Fury* are almost too obvious to mention. Like Joe Radek, Dutch Muller is a dense workingman, relatively indifferent to the union. Like Joe, Dutch has a close friend and advisor, a “responsible” unionist, Brains. Furthermore, an agitator, Red Belcher (“that gas bag”) goads the men to break a five-year contract and strike. Dutch, like Joe, takes the side of his friend, and through a display of masculine prowess, persuades the men to stay on the job.

Important differences appear in the framing of this conflict. In particular, Hattie's narrative perspective orients the entire scene, and her consistent parody of Dutch's "masculinity" and self-importance undermines the patriarchal iconography. Hattie sees through Dutch's narcissism, and the audience sees Dutch through Hattie's eyes. Like Anna Novak's, Hattie's efforts—in this case, her improvised "bomb"—are central to Dutch's success and his escape from the police; but in this instance, Hattie resists Dutch's attempt to erase her part in the process. Standing before the newsreel camera, talking about what he decided, what he did, Dutch is dumped into the bay by a fish Hattie throws. With that, the audience learns how to read Dutch's masculinity and Hattie's agency. She's no demure product of old world custom willing to defer to male authority. Thus, from its first moments, *Riff Raff* inverts the typical iconography of a labouring community consisting of manly workers and their dependent women and children. With the single exception of Brains, men in the picture are consistently represented as either dependent good-for-nothings or vain gasbags, while women support families and sustain the community, even as they are systematically blocked from formal participation in the union and the life and death communal decisions made by men.⁴¹

Riff Raff disrupts the normative system of gendered representations, but it does not do so by abandoning those gendered tropes. Rather, it re-orientates the spectator's perspective by imagining gendered constraints through Hattie's eyes. The film goes further still by envisioning women as workers, even industrial workers. After Hattie dumps Dutch in the bay, an industrial montage follows comprised of uniformed women working on assembly lines. Unlike *Black Fury*, where women work, but exclusively within the confines of the household, *Riff Raff* extends this gendered division of labour. The docks and the union hall represent the men's world. The industrial cannery represents feminine space. The montage that precedes the dialogue offers a single male representation, and the man seems to be servicing a machine. In other words, men do the "skilled" craft labour, while women do the low status, and low paid "unskilled" line work. Furthermore, an exchange between Hattie and the foreman ("you're gonna get the gate [get fired]," says the foreman) suggests that these women workers don't share the union standards that protect the male dockworkers.

Hattie is led from the line to Nick's office. She slams the door as she enters. Rather than firing her, Nick gives Hattie a new fox stole. This sequence introduces the racial dialectic of desire that drives the rest of *Riff Raff*'s narrative forward.⁴² Once again, as in *Black Fury*, there are indications that Nick lusts after Hattie because of her metonymic connection to "whiteness." After all, Nick has money and power. But he lacks something. As he says to Hattie, "you got what it takes for Nick." The audience doesn't know exactly what "it" is. We do know that Nick socializes with the otherwise exclusively white workers who make up his tuna fleet. We also know that Nick is decidedly vain, vain enough to hang a picture of himself prominently in his office. Finally, despite Nick's attempts to social-

ize with white workers and to put on a “white” mask—e.g. his attempts at rhetorical eloquence that come out as foreign malapropisms—he remains on the other side of a barrier. True, this “racialized” barrier has class overtones (after all, Nick is the capitalist); but it is hard not to see Nick’s desire for Hattie as a desire for assimilation, acceptance, and whiteness. And, at the end of the picture, when Nick has given up his desire for Hattie, we find him quite satisfied in the arms of another blond “factory girl”, adding further evidence for this reading. Whatever Nick’s racial ambitions, there is another aspect of his desire for Hattie that is unambiguously indicated. “You know, I like the way you dumped that Muller guy in the water. That was pretty good.” Nick desires Hattie because she put Dutch in his place. That is to say, Hattie becomes a prize in the symbolic and material struggle between Nick Lewis and Dutch Muller. In fact, the struggle between capital and labour that will consume much of the rest of the film is driven forward by Nick’s desire for Hattie, and Dutch’s desire to claim what Nick wants.

The next scene finds Dutch on a tuna boat, away from Hattie’s and Brain’s moderating influences. Now Dutch listens to Red. The filmmakers take this opportunity to attack and pillory Marxian value theory. Red tells Dutch that he “could do a lot” for the working men on the coast, and launches into an “explanation” of Marxian value theory.

“Wages are not the working man’s share of a commodity he has produced. Wages are the share of a commodity previously produced of which the employer buys a certain amount of productive labor power. That’s right, isn’t it?”

“Huh?...Oh sure, sure.”

“Alright. The wage-worker sells labor power to capital. Why does he sell it?”

“Huh?...Why, because he’s a sucker, that’s why.”

“Now, look, is work an active expression of a man’s life?”

“Yeah,” says Lew.

“No,” says Red.

“No, you dope,” says Dutch.

By the time this exchange occurs, the audience already knows that Red’s loyalties lie with big ideas, not with the workers. Red uses Dutch’s ignorance and arrogance, his desire to be a “big man”, as a seductive wedge. In that scene of seduction, the audience recognizes only deception; and the claims made by Red represent an obvious *inversion* of the truth. According to the film, wages are the workingman’s fair share of what he produces. At least for the skilled craft workers on the boat, labour is the active expression of a man’s life. Here, again, let me suggest the possibility that this critical attitude toward Marxian discourse and the Marxian theory of exploitation, represented by the screenwriters as essentially meaningless, may have much to do with the blindness that traditional Marxists often showed toward women and household exploitation. After all, from the first shot of *Riff Raff* onward, it is women who do the lion’s share of the labour, both industrial and household production, while authority remains vested in the men

who exploit and appropriate that labour. Because the formal language of Marxian exploitation seemed to bypass the experience of domestically labouring women, Frances Marion and Anita Loos portray it as hollow rhetoric, one more empty exhalation from a male gasbag. While I do not mean to suggest that a more inclusive Marxism would have opened a larger space for radical representations within American cinema, I would like to suggest the possibility that Marion's and Loos' attitude might be symptomatic of a broader cultural perception among American women that Marxism did not speak to their reality.

Although Red appeals to Dutch with an obviously meaningless theory of exploitation, his seeds of seduction only take root once Dutch recognizes Nick's desire for Hattie. And here, as in *Black Fury*, a racial dialectic plays out in the context of a communal celebration. The scene on the tuna boat ends with Red's words: "We need you Muller, you're a born leader." And before the last syllable fades, the tune "You are my lucky star" frames the sign: "July 4th. Entertainment! Dancing! Fireworks! Come one! Come All! Celebrate the 4th on board the Fairy Queen." Hattie enters with Nick on her arm and his brown fox stole around her neck. When she sees Dutch at a table with one of the waitresses from Ptomaine Tommy's, Hattie makes a bee line for the adjacent table, dragging Nick along, and clearly intent upon inspiring Dutch's jealousy. On the bandstand, a man attempts to silence the crowd. A newsreel rolls. The narrator, "...Muller, a strong silent man, reluctantly offers his own modest comments on how he stops strikes." The camera pans to a shot of Dutch standing atop his boat. Meanwhile, Flytrap says to Nick, "Hey boss, boss, you want me to knock his block off?"

"Ah leave him alone. He's full of escaping gas."

The scene then cuts back to Dutch on film, "Well what I done was no more than anybody woulda done who used their brains in the same situation...I wanna say that I don't—" then Hattie's flying mackerel slaps Dutch in the side of the head, he tumbles into the bay, and the audience in the dancehall explodes into laughter and applause. Dutch pretends not to care and leads his date out of the room, but Nick blocks his path. The struggle between Nick and Dutch over Hattie turns into a dice game as the men clear a table and begin to cast lots. At first, Nick wins cast after cast. When Dutch is busted, Hattie says "ah let him roll one more."

"You better go downstairs," says Nick.

"Hey, who are you ordering around?" asks Hattie. "I'm staying right here." She moves close to Dutch and spits on his dice for luck. Dutch begins to win, taking most of his opponent's cash. Afterwards, he and Hattie dance close on the floor while Nick watches, anger rising. Nick tries to break the two apart. "Hey listen, big shot," Dutch says to Nick, "a little more respect outta you or I'll tie up your whole dirty water front."

At this point Brains intervenes, "You're heading for trouble, Dutch."

Dutch ignores Brains and downs Nick with a right hook. As the lights

go out, the dance breaks into a riot. Grabbing Hattie by the arm, Dutch takes flight. Blue notes distant in the night, Dutch and Hattie escape the workers' brawl for the solitude of a docked tuna boat. Dutch takes Hattie's fox stole and tosses it to the sea. Hattie's anger melts when Dutch takes her in his arms and presses his lips to hers. Still in his arms, her voice almost a whisper:

“You don't wanna marry me just 'cause Nick does, do ya? ... You didn't dream about getting married 'till I told you about Nick, did you?”

“Ah, don't be screwy. I wanna marry you 'cause you spit lucky.”

The audience knows better than to believe Dutch. Despite Hattie's clear affection, Dutch avoided her, or offered only flirtatious promises, until Nick provoked Dutch's desire. In other words, Dutch wanted Hattie precisely because Nick wanted her. And this passionate circuit is further complicated by Nick's own ambiguous social status. On the one hand, he represents a capitalist, and so commands Dutch's obedience, if not his respect. On the other hand, Nick is a racialized other, a dark-skinned Italian who possibly desires Hattie precisely for her whiteness. Nick wants Hattie because normative American culture valorizes and validates her ethnicity. In turn, Dutch wants Hattie because Nick wants Hattie. And Nick has what Dutch wants. Nick is a “big shot.” What began as a scene of cinematic humiliation before the other members of the community, ends in Dutch's public victory over Nick when he seizes Hattie, and in the subsequent scene marries her. And, when Hattie stands at the altar, she wears a pure white fox stole, this one a present from Dutch.

Like Anna Novak in the previous film, Hattie is offered a path out of poverty and away from her working class community. Although Hattie considers the possibility of an affiliation with Nick, the audience realizes that her central interest in her boss comes from his ability to inspire Dutch's desire. At the same time, like Joe Radek, Dutch is driven by the desire to be more than a simple worker, to be a big shot, a born leader, to have what Nick has. But Radek's desire for prestige was derived, ultimately, from his desire for Anna. Prestige became a symbolic compensation for his lost love. In *Riff Raff*, however, that same circuit is inverted. Dutch's desire for Hattie derived from his desire to be a big man, his desire for authority and prestige; and Hattie, as the object of Nick's passion, became a symbolic compensation for Dutch's lack of authority over himself and his labour. Finally, unlike Anna Novak, Hattie refuses to be a passive object passed from man to man. Rather, she continually resists the authority and impositions of both Dutch and Nick (“Hey, who are you ordering around?”) and attempts to establish her own agency. Hattie's power is continually circumscribed by gendered norms, and her agency and resistance necessarily takes on a subtle and often concealed form.

After the wedding, Dutch takes Hattie home to their love nest, a consumer's paradise full of electrical appliances and new furniture. Although Hattie is impressed, she is shocked by the fact that Dutch bought everything on the

installment plan. And her shock turns to horror when Dutch tells her that he and the men have decided to strike. "Oh, come on squirt," he pulls her onto his lap. "Don't worry about the strike. Let me worry about it. It's my business," he says, nuzzling her neck, "you just look after your wifely duties."

Another montage follows, beginning with a newspaper headline: "Muller calls strike." Images of docked tuna boats; men fishing off the side of the docks for their family dinner, women and children moving through a bread line, close-ups of angry faces, women and men, yelling "scabs!"; along with headlines reading, "Strike reaches tenth week" and, "Scab fleet brings in tuna." The montage concludes by dissolving to Nick's office, with Brains and Dutch negotiating.

"Listen Nick," says Brains, "those scabs ain't fishermen. 50% of the load of tuna is spoiled already because they don't know how to pack them in ice after they catch them....You need the men. They're real fishermen. You've never lost a pound of fish out of their catches yet."

The scene cuts to the words, FISHERMEN'S UNION, LOCAL NO. 14, the sound of angry male voices and, inside the hall, Dutch standing behind a table, Red at his side. The camera cuts away to the building's exterior. Outside the window, women with worried faces watch the men's deliberations, with Hattie at the head of the gathered crowd. Back inside, Dutch is pounding his gavel, trying to restore order. "None of you got a right to think," yells Dutch, "I'm thinkin' for you." Cut to Hattie's worried face.

Another voice is heard exclaiming: "I vote for a new leader. I nominate Brains McCall."

Again, the parallels with *Black Fury* are striking. Like Joe Radek, Muller, pushed by his desire to be a big shot, forces a strike and loses. At the same time, a significant difference comes to light. In *Black Fury*, the sympathetic attitude toward "responsible unionism" depends upon an argument for social justice. After all, the miners and their families are mired in poverty, and, added to that, the audience learns about the "dead work" the miners do without any recompense. *Riff Raff*, however, stages a very different justification for "responsible unionism." On the one hand, from the available evidence, it seems that fishermen and their families lead relatively comfortable lives. At one point, we see the interior of Brain's home, and it is the ideal of lower middleclass domesticity. There is poverty on the docks, but it seems especially prevalent among the cannery workers. They have no union. On the other hand, when the argument for unionism is made, it is made on the basis of the skills of the tuna men. The scabs are ruining the catch. They lack the skills of "real fishermen." The union makes sense because it promotes industrial efficiency and secures capitalist profit.

As in *Black Fury*, Dutch's desire to be a big man severs his relationship with the community. At the same time, the differences with the prior film are also instructive. Despite the fact that the union decisions impact the entire community, including the women, the strike is men's business. Dutch makes this quite

explicit. (“Don’t worry about the strike. Let me worry about it. It’s my business.”) Men are the community’s agents while women become passive observers, standing outside the window, watching the gasbags fight among themselves. Again, this re-orientation in perspective serves a critical purpose. For all his strutting and display, Dutch’s masculinity is revealed as hollow. As Brains puts it, “I don’t care whether you’re running the union or not. Our families are starving.” Dutch’s masculinity isn’t a shelter for the weak and the dependent; his paternalism is not a defence of community. Rather, machismo serves as a vehicle for personal ambition and Dutch is perfectly willing to throw the men of the union, as well as the community’s women and children, overboard in his narcissistic pursuit of personal power. By underscoring the self-serving character of Dutch’s masculinity, *Riff Raff* offers a veiled critique of the tired laboured paternalism that effaced women’s labour, made them subservient under the guise of “protection,” and left the life and death decisions that affected the entire community exclusively in the hands of men.

After Dutch breaks with Brains and the union, the parallels between *Riff Raff* and *Black Fury* largely come to an end. Dutch returns from the union meeting to find the furniture man repossessing everything he had bought on installment. Meanwhile, when Brains and Hattie attempt to bring Dutch back into the fold, they do not use a language of abstract or communal solidarity. That is, they do not appeal to Dutch’s loyalty to his comrades and his community. Rather, the appeal is closer to a form of blackmail. “Well you get in wrong with the union and you’ll see what you’ll be doing with that shovel.” The union is a vested interest controlling the most lucrative and high status jobs on the waterfront. It is not on the basis of class solidarity that Hattie and Brains make their argument; rather they appeal to Dutch’s pecuniary self-interest. Moreover, when Dutch refuses he says, again, “That’s my business.” But Hattie knows better, and from her perspective, “It’s my business, too.” Again, Dutch’s longing for status, prestige and power becomes a betrayal of his love for and solidarity with Hattie.

At the same time, both Dutch and Hattie remain prisoners of desire. On the one hand, nothing stands in the way of their happiness; nothing, that is, but Dutch’s pride. And in this context, “pride” is a synonym for “masculinity.” Hattie can go back to work and support the household. But Dutch cannot stand the thought of his humiliation. He cannot stand the thought of failing in the eyes of the other men or the thought of their laughter. In short, he remains imprisoned by their gaze, their expectations, and his own conception of hegemonic masculinity.⁴³ But Hattie is as much a prisoner as Dutch. “Dutch, look at me. I love you, honey. I’d do anything in the world for you.” He may be a gasbag, a blow hard, a swelled head “big I am,” but Hattie is unable to escape her longing for the man.

Dutch cannot allow Hattie to return to the cannery precisely because he is so invested in the traditional trope of the nuclear household. He sees Hattie’s participation in processes of capitalist exploitation as an implicit threat to his domestic authority; and the public display of his domestic authority is fundamen-

tal to his conception of masculinity. At the same time, Hattie is prepared to accept a “double shift,” both as a household worker and as a wage labourer, precisely because she loves Dutch. Her own attachment to a traditional trope and a traditional circuit of desire prepares her simultaneously for domestic exploitation and capitalist exploitation in the cannery. Unlike *Black Fury*, *Riff Raff* does not endorse Hattie’s attachment to Dutch and the forms of exploitation that come from her love. Rather, its critical and ironic representation offers an implicit critique of these circuits of social desire.

This theme of imprisonment by desire helps explain the extremely odd suspended resolution that ends the film. After Dutch and Hattie part, Dutch falls on hard times. When Hattie learns that he is sick in a hobo jungle nearby, she steals money from Nick Lewis to give to Dutch. Although she is unable to find him, the cops find Hattie, and as she is taken away, the arresting officer tells her “you’ll get twenty years for this.” The audience then learns that Hattie is pregnant, and she has Dutch’s baby behind bars. Meanwhile, Dutch comes back to the waterfront and begs to be readmitted to the union, to no avail. He learns of Hattie’s imprisonment—though not of the child—and formulates an escape plan. When he visits Hattie in prison and tells her his idea, she is insulted and leaves the room angry. Working in the institution’s kitchen, she has a conversation with two other inmates.

“Ah, what’s the use of kidding myself. I’ll never get over it. What a sap I was for sending him away....Oh, why do I keep on thinking about him? What do you do to forget a guy like that?” asks Hattie, rhetorically.

“I cut his throat,” responds her co-worker, “that didn’t do no good.”
Fade to black.

These lines explain *Riff Raff*’s otherwise incomprehensible transformation into a women’s prison movie. The audience realizes that the prison house is a material embodiment of women’s desire. Like Hattie, the other women are trapped by their longing for men who are no good gasbags. The hegemonic masculinity that imprisons men through its constraints and demands simultaneously imprisons the women who love them.

When he returns to make amends with Brains, Dutch is a broken man. His suit is torn, his face dirty, his pride gone. Although Brains cannot get Dutch back in the union, he does manage to find him a non-union security job guarding the docks. This sets up the final parallel with *Black Fury*. Recall, in the previous film, Joe Radek ends the strike by dynamiting some of the mineshafts and threatening to destroy the entire works. Joe’s manly and violent resistance makes him once again a hero in the community. *Riff Raff* inverts *Black Fury*’s climatic moments. While Dutch is watching the docks, Red returns with two men from the hobo jungle. The three communists have come with a load of dynamite. They plan to blow the docks to pieces. Red says, “so if they aint going to let us work, we aint going to let them work.” Dutch plays along, pretending to agree to the sab-

otage. At the decisive moment, though, Dutch turns against his former comrades, beats them, and seizes the dynamite. By foiling Red’s plot, Dutch saves the waterfront, and becomes a hero of the men, even winning the admiration of Nick Lewis.

Meanwhile, Hattie escapes from prison and Lil hides her from the cops. While Hattie’s hiding, the workers hold a party in Dutch’s honour, giving him back his union card. When he learns of Hattie’s escape, he rushes to her side. She is ready to flee with him to Mexico. But Dutch will have none of it. “There’s something I gotta tell you. I just want you to know that I ain’t the big shot I thought I was. See, Belcher kept telling me I was Trotsky or somebody, but I ain’t, see? I couldn’t be...I know what I am now. I’m just the best tuna fisherman on this coast. And I can still knock the nut offa anybody who thinks he’s big enough to say that I ain’t. And that’s all.”

Recall, once more, *Black Fury*. When the picture ends, both Anna Novak and Joe Radek learned important lessons. Joe learned the value of solidarity, and the limits of his capacity as a leader. He learned how to moderate his desires. Anna learned the proper place of a working class wife, as adjunct and support for the workingman’s struggle. *Riff Raff*, too, offers a tale of transformation. Dutch Muller learns that he is no Trotsky, no big shot. He is a skilled craftsman, and that alone should provide sufficient support for his masculinity. Dutch also learns the value of community. But the tone of that lesson is different. While Radek learns lessons of solidarity, Dutch learns that the union holds the power and without its privileges he is nothing. Where was Hattie’s lesson? What did she learn? How was she transformed? In fact, Hattie did not learn anything, because she didn’t need a lesson. From beginning to end, Hattie was the voice of the community, responsibility, and reason. Throughout the film, Hattie saw through the screens of masculinity and mocked and parodied Dutch’s blustering attempts to be a big man. Although Hattie saw through the cracks of Dutch’s self-presentation, she remained trapped in a world controlled by men, and, more importantly, by a hegemonic masculinity. Thus, we have the remarkably odd end of the picture. The cops wait outside her door to bring her back to prison where she’ll presumably finish her twenty-year sentence. Although Hattie pierces the veil of masculine ideology, there’s no escape from its constraints.

Conclusion

While *Black Fury* marks out the boundary separating white workers from “hunkies,” it simultaneously criticizes that boundary. The constant repetition of racial slurs by cinematic villains combined with the visible whiteness of Anna Novak signifies the irrationality and injustice of this racial division. The representation of African Americans as workers silently resists Hollywood’s “Jim Crow” standards. Thus the film both figures and resists the racial boundary that separates “hunkies” from whites. *Riff Raff*, however, offers an uncritically racialized world-

view and presents a working community made up of native born and unambiguously white low wage industrial workers and privileged skilled craftsmen. The portrayal of the union workers as both white and skilled had a clear political meaning at a moment in American history when the Congress of Industrial Organizations was attempting to build an industrial union movement with a largely ethnic and immigrant constituency.

At the same time, both films built upon a gendered rhetoric that places communal power primarily in the hands of men. But while *Black Fury* unambiguously endorses the laboured paternalism that portrayed men as the protectors of the dependent and helpless, *Riff Raff*, telling the same story through a woman's eyes, deconstructs hegemonic masculinity and reveals labour's paternalism as a screen for masculine domination. In particular, while *Black Fury* leaves women completely out of the industrial workforce, and represents household production as the natural duty of a loving wife, *Riff Raff* focuses squarely upon the question of women's exploitation, both within the industrial plant and within the household. Men live off women's surplus production, and women submit out of love and desire. During the opening moments of the film, Pop asked Lil for a cup of coffee, Hattie for two bits. Both women initially refused, and then silently surrendered. Both were imprisoned by their love. Traditional Marxian discourse remained as silent as these women on the question of the feudal household. Exploitation began at the factory gates. Perhaps it's not surprising that women who did recognize this form of exploitation, yet had no formal language through which to express that recognition, might perceive talk about male worker's exploitation as so much hot air.

Once again, I think that *Riff Raff's* implicit critique of gendered norms, traditional forms of desire, and household exploitation, have much to do with its origin. Let me return to screenwriter Anita Loos' autobiographical reflections upon gendered labour. Like Hattie, Loos faithfully fulfilled her wifely duties. For instance, her care work allowed John Emerson to pursue his organizing activities during the 1919 labour unrest. "Sometimes when he returned from late committee meetings John would be either too exhausted or too keyed up to sleep, so I spent hours ministering to him, treating his ailments, both real and imagined, listening to his outlines for the next day's campaign, or reading aloud the countless fan letters he had been too busy even to open."²⁴⁴ Without her material and emotional labour, Emerson's strike might have failed. But Loos was hardly a traditional woman who surrendered her efforts with quiet fortitude. She was already an actress and writer, capable of supporting herself from her earnings. The fact that she worked in the formal economy as well as taking a second shift within the household helped fuel the anger she felt when others saw her as Emerson's "inconsequential little doll." After all, "John's 'inconsequential little doll' was his nurse, secretary, masseuse, collaborator, and friend beyond all other friends, and had earned the better part of the family fortune."²⁴⁵ Not only did she occupy mul-

tiple class positions, as an earner she proved superior to her household master. This over-determined perspective put her in a privileged position to critique the traditional household and the forms of desire that sustained it. Yet as the passage above suggests, even as Loos bridled under domestic exploitation, she herself remained a prisoner of the traditional gender expectations associated with love. And while I do not mean to psychoanalyze Loos, it is possible that the anti-radical, anti-communist, and generally anti-left tone of her film represents a reaction formation on the screenwriter’s part. Her uneasy relationship with labour, symbolically bound up with her uneasy and unequal relationship with her husband, perhaps provoked the portrayal of labour leaders and radicals as self-serving narcissists. Like Dutch Muller, John Emerson “frankly cared more for himself than for anyone else, and his main thought at all times was to see that he was comfortable and happy.”²⁴⁶

During the 1930s, the labour movement continued the tradition of radical paternalism that had long animated much of its male constituency. In its public presentations, it tended to imagine women as dependent adjuncts in the manly struggle against capital, rather than as fully autonomous agents. That failure of imagination limited the labour movement’s potential by setting artificial boundaries to organized labour’s solidarity. True, women participated in the movement. But that participation was all but effaced from labor’s public self-presentation; and women in the movement were, for the most part, excluded from the highest leadership positions. At the same time, Marxian discourse seemed to have little to say to the experience of women, especially those outside industrial production. At best, it ignored the exploitation of women within the household; at worst, it endorsed the laboured paternalism that justified such exploitation as the natural outgrowth of a woman’s love for her family. Because of this exclusion, subordination, and blindness, radical politics and the labour movement came to appear to many women as “men’s business” and the screenwriters behind *Riff Raff* responded accordingly, offering a film that pilloried labour and the left for its continual refusal to burst the boundaries of hegemonic masculinity.

NOTES

- 1 Acknowledgements: I would like to thank Rick Wolff, David Fasenfest, Dave Roediger, Harriet Fraad, the anonymous reviewers, and especially, the editors at *Left History* for their helpful comments on earlier versions of this essay.
- 2 Robert S. Lynd and Helen Merrell Lynd, *Middletown in Transition: A Study in Cultural Conflicts* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1937), 17.
- 3 *Ibid.*, 41.
- 4 *Ibid.*, 44.
- 5 For an example of the meaning of FDR’s mystique to working people, see Vincent J. Roscigno and William Danaher, *The Voice of Southern Labor: Radio, Music, and the Textile Strikes, 1929-1934* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004), 32-45.

- 6 On the function of new forms of mass communication for group/class formation during the early twentieth century, see especially Lizabeth Cohen's study of the Chicago CIO, *Making a New Deal: Industrial Workers in Chicago, 1919-1939* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991) and Roscigno and Danahers, in *The Voice of Southern Labor*, study on the effect of radio on the textile strikes of 1934. See also, Graham Cassano, "Radical Critique and Progressive Traditionalism in John Ford's *The Grapes of Wrath*" *Critical Sociology* 34:1, (January 2008) (date?): 99-116.
- 7 Althusser argues that cultural tropes and ideological forms function "by that very precise operation which I have called *interpellation* or hailing." Ideology attempts to impose socially constructed and hegemonic patterns of behavior such that the subject experiences these social forms as "natural." Louis Althusser, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses," in *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1971), 174. As I will argue below, two of the screenwriters behind *Riff Raff*, Frances Marion and Anita Loos, responded to gender's interpellating call by using their film to subvert and deconstruct the hegemonic masculinity offered both by the labour movement and by Hollywood cinema.
8. My approach is primarily informed by a theoretical constellation based upon the work of three thinkers: Siegfried Kracauer, Walter Benjamin, and Louis Althusser. See Siegfried Kracauer, *From Caligari to Hitler: A Psychological History of the German Film* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1947), 5-6. Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility" in *Selected Writings, Volume 4: 1938-1940* (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 2003), 260. . Finally, I have learned much from the Lacanian tradition of cinematic critique that extends from Christian Metz to Slavoj Zizek. For some of the most impressive scholarship in this tradition, see Christian Metz, *The Imaginary Signifier: Psychoanalysis and the Cinema* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982); Mary Ann Doane, *The Desire to Desire: The Woman's Film of the 1940s* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987); Jacqueline Rose, *Sexuality in the Field of Vision*. (New York: Verso, 1986); Slavoj Zizek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (New York: Verso, 1989). For the purposes of this study, I follow the more strictly historical approach pioneered by scholars like Michael Rogin. See Michael Rogin, *Blackface, White Noise: Jewish Immigrants in the Hollywood Melting Pot* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996).
- 9 Louis Stark, "Fist Fight Puts A.F. of L. in Uproar," *New York Times*, 10/20/35, p.22.
- 10 On the General Motor sit-down strike of 1936-1937 that gave birth to this wave, see Sidney Fine, *Sit-Down: The General Motors Strike of 1936-1936* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1969). On the cultural and political significance of the United Auto Workers victory over General Motors, see Nelson Lichtenstein, *State of the Union: A Century of American Labor* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002) 35-53; and Graham Cassano, "Labor, Desire, and the Wages of War" *Rethinking Marxism* 18:3 (July 2006): 453-462.
- 11 On the importance of the Popular Front during the age of the CIO and after, see Michael Denning, *The Cultural Front: The Laboring of American Culture in the Twentieth Century* (London: Verso, 1997) and Barbara Foley, *Radical Representations: Politics and Form in U.S. Proletarian Fiction, 1929-1941* .(Durham: Duke University Press, 1993).
- 12 George Lipsitz, *Rainbow at Midnight: Labor and Culture in the 1940s* (Urbana: University of Chicago Press, 1994.)

- 13 In the earliest years of cinema, a broader range of representations existed and a number of films spoke directly to the experience (and the exploitation) of American workers. With the emergence of the powerful Hollywood Studio system, however, this range of political possibilities was considerably narrowed. See Steven J. Ross, *Working-Class Hollywood: Silent Film and the Shaping of Class in America*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998).
- 14 Cari Beauchamp, *Without Lying Down: Frances Marion and the Powerful Women of Early Hollywood*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 327.
- 15 Joel W. Finler, *The Hollywood Story* (New York: The Wallflower Press, 2003), 291. While the Warner Brothers were liberals, it is important to note the fact that *Black Fury* was originally a radical indictment of the coal industry. It was redacted and transformed by Joseph Breen, chief agent of the Hays Office, into an argument for “responsible unionism” and a capital-labour entente. On the political censorship of *Black Fury*, see Francis Walsh, “The Films We Never Saw: American Movies View Organized Labor, 1934-1954” *Labor History* 27:4 (Fall 1986): 564-580. For a slightly different take on the censoring of *Black Fury* see Leonard J. Leff, “The Breening of America,” *PMLA* 106:3 (May 1991): 432-445. For a fuller examination of (political and sexual) censorship in early sound cinema, see Lea Jacobs, *The Wages of Sin: Censorship and the Fallen Woman Film, 1928-1942* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995).
- 16 Beauchamp, *Without Lying Down*, 353.
- 17 In Eric Hobsbawm, *Uncommon People: Resistance, Rebellion, and Jazz* (New York: The New Press, 1998), 94-112.
- 18 Elizabeth Faue, *Community of Suffering and Struggle: Women, Men, and the Labor Movement in Minneapolis, 1915-1945* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1991); Gary Gerstle, *Working-Class Americanism: The Politics of Labor in a Textile City, 1914-1960* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002), 193. See also Barbara Melosh, *Engendering Culture. Manhood and Womanhood in New Deal Public Art and Theatre* (Washington: Smithsonian Institute, 1991). The literature and theory of the Popular Front period draws the attention of Paula Rabinowitz in her monograph, *Labor and Desire*. She pays particular attention to the Popular Front’s “pronatalist rhetoric”—that is, the celebration of the proletarian mother—as well as the depiction of capital as effete, feminine, and homosexual. Paula Rabinowitz, *Labor & Desire: Women’s Revolutionary Fiction in Depression America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991).
- 19 It is vital not to lose sight of the complex, often contradictory functions inherent in the discourse of radical paternalism. Radical paternalism, and radical traditionalism more generally, help shape narratives of class conflict that figured the forces of capital as enemies of the labouring community. For a discussion of E.P.Thompson and some of his American students on “radical traditionalism” see Graham Cassano, “Radical Critique and Progressive Traditionalism in John Ford’s *The Grapes of Wrath*,” *Critical Sociology* 34:1: 99-116; and Graham Cassano, “The Corporate Imaginary in John Ford’s New Deal Cinema,” *Rethinking Marxism* (forthcoming).
- 20 The postmodern Marxian economists, Stephen Resnick and Richard Wolff, reject the notion that any single mode of production encompasses all the complexities of contemporary social formations. Thus, they offer a model in which various, competing, and sometimes contradictory class processes simultaneously exist together. “The feu-

- dal form is appropriate because it requires no intermediary role for markets, prices, profits, or wages in the relation between the producer and the appropriator of surplus labor.” Fraad, Resnick and Wolff, *Brining it all Back Home: Class, Gender, & Power in the Modern Household* (London: Pluto Press, 1994), 7
- 21 Maltz later gained some notoriety as one of the “Hollywood Ten” targeted by the House Un-American Activities Committee. Ellen Schrecker, *Many are the Crimes: McCarthyism in America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998), 321n.
- 22 Andre Sennwald, “Coal Mine Melodrama,” *New York Times* 4/7/35, p.X3
- 23 Faue, *Community of Suffering and Struggle*, 71
- 24 See also Rabinowitz, *Labor and Desire*, 17-62
- 25 Faue, *Community of Suffering and Struggle*, 76
- 26 The term “hunky” was applied to many different ethnicities. But since the root of this particular slur comes from the term “Hungarian”, it’s worth noting that *Black Fury*’s director was the Hungarian born Mahala Kurtz, who, once in Hollywood, changed his name to Micheal Curtiz. Beauchamp, *Not Lying Down*, 306.
- 27 On the Americanization of the “new immigrants,” see especially James R. Barrett, “Americanization from the Bottom Up: Immigration and the Remaking of the Working Class in the United States, 1880-1930”, *The Journal of American History* (December 1992): 996-1020. PAGES?; Gwendolyn Mink, *The Wages of Motherhood: Inequality in the Welfare State, 1917-1942* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995); on the “inbetween” racial status of the “new immigrants,” see David Roediger and James R. Barrett, “Inbetween Peoples: Race, Nationality, and the ‘New-Immigrant’ Working Class” 138-168 in David Roediger, *Colored White: Transcending the Racial Past*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002). See also David Roediger, *Working Toward Whiteness: How America’s Immigrants Became White* (New York: Basic Books, 2004).
- 28 Andre Sennwald, “As the Old Year Draws to a Close,” *New York Times* 12/29/35, p.X5
- 29 It’s worth noting that within the union hall, the “new” immigrant miners are portrayed together with African American miners. Although, as already mentioned, the African American extras have no lines, the director and cinematographer take particular care to emphasize the presence of “Negro” miners at the union meeting. This rare cinematic representation of inter-racial labour solidarity provides further evidence that *Black Fury* participated in a broader symbolic discourse of solidarity and a labour inflected iconography.
- 30 Quoted in Faue, *Community of Suffering and Struggle*, 89. Emphasis added.
- 31 My use of “inbetweenness” follows David Roediger’s and James Barrett’s. The term “liminality” could also be used to describe the experience of the “new immigrants.” See David Roediger and James R. Barrett, “Inbetween Peoples: Race, Nationality, and the ‘New-Immigrant’ Working Class”
- 32 *Riff Raff* opened to generally positive reviews and grossed over a million dollars, a tidy sum when movie ticket prices ranged from a nickel to a quarter. Beauchamp, *Not Lying Down*, 327.
- 33 Cohen, *Making a New Deal*, 247.
- 34 Beauchamp, *Without Lying Down*, 307.
- 35 The Actors’ Equity strike is the subject of the final chapter of Loos’ first autobiography, *A Girl Like I*. (New York: Viking Press, 1966), 252-275

- 36 Ibid., 253.
- 37 Ibid., 253
- 38 Ibid., 263
- 39 Ibid., 254
- 40 “Lew” is played by Vince Barnett, an actor who had previously appeared in *Black Fury*.
- 41 While it is true that Brains’ masculinity seems to be a positive counterpoint to the blustering vanity of both Nick Lewis and Dutch Muller, nonetheless Brains, too, is part of the androcentric power structure that puts agency and communal control primarily in the hands of men.
- 42 The racial dialectic of desire that I’m documenting was only one cinematic pattern among many. During the 1930s, the so-called “new immigrants” were represented on both sides of the racial boundary separating “white” from “non-white” Americans. This racial dialectic of desire also plays out in films that address the “yellow peril.” See especially Michael Rogin, “Making America Home: Racial Masquerade and Ethnic Assimilation in the Transition to Talking Pictures”, *The Journal of American History* 79:3 (December 1992): 1050-1077, and Gina Marchetti, *Romance and the “Yellow Peril”: Race, Sex, and Discourse Strategies in Hollywood Fiction* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993).
- 43 In my use of “hegemonic masculinity,” I follow R.W. Connell’s definition: “In the concept of hegemonic masculinity, ‘hegemony’ means (as in Gramsci’s analyses of class relations in Italy from which the term is borrowed) a social ascendancy achieved in a play of social forces that extends beyond contests of brute power into the organization of life and cultural processes.” R.W. Connell, *Gender and Power: Society, the Person and Sexual Politics* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1987), 184.
- 44 *Black Fury*’s racial politics anticipate the imagery of Philip Evergood’s *Wheels of Victory* picture; and David Roediger’s analysis of Evergood’s work applies equally as well to the imagery in the Warner Brother’s picture. “Four centrally located and well-illuminated white workers huddle, exchanging words and the time of day. Looking wistfully at them from a catwalk is a patrolling black guard. The painting strikingly captures what civil rights leaders at the time called the need for a double V—victory over the Nazis abroad and victory over racial exclusion at home. But what the painting assumes is perhaps as important as what it argues. The four foregrounded figures, checking watches, stand for the included white worker. But just a quarter century before, during the World War I era, the dress and the sometimes orientalized and sometimes ‘hunky’ features of the four would have signaled their ‘inconclusive’ whiteness. ...Clearly important processes of inclusion were occurring, shaped by the continuing exclusion of people of color.” Roediger, *Working Toward Whiteness*, 134.
- 45 Ibid., 261. Emphasis added.