In(di)visible Dream: Rhetoric, Myth, and the Road in America

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IN(DI)VISIBLE DREAM:
RHETORIC, MYTH, AND THE ROAD IN AMERICA

by

Raymond L. Blanton

A DISSERTATION

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The Graduate College at the University of Nebraska
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This dissertation takes a rhetorical approach in exploring the mythology of the road in American culture, and in particular the road as an encounter with the other. Specifically, I argue for the road as a mythic archetype, developing an ultimate vocabulary of the road as an Upward/Downward Way in an effort to transcend the dialectical tensions inherent in extant discourse of the road as rebellion. I begin by situating the road as psychagogic rhetoric, a leading of the soul, in Plato’s *Phaedrus*, to delineate a fixed and reasoned progression of an ultimate order of the road. Then, I extend these considerations to the road in American culture. From there, I substantiate these claims in two distinct but interrelated case studies, each a demonstration of the Upward/Downward Way in relation to particular periods, places, people, and poetry in twentieth-century American culture. In my first case study, I focus on the archetype in American folk music, attending to the road as a rhetorical encounter with the other in the fieldwork of folklorist Alan Lomax in the Mississippi Delta. In my second case study, I explore the archetype in public discourse, centering on the road as a rhetorical encounter with the other in the civic and sermonic discourse of Martin Luther King Jr. in the American civil rights movement. Throughout this study, I bring elements of rhetoric, myth, and the road in American culture into critical focus, employing John Durham Peters’ “hermeneutic principle of retroactive enrichment,” I reread aspects of rhetorical
history and American culture. Furthermore, I build on ideas in Richard T. Hughes’ critical work on myth in America and Kenneth Burke’s mythic methodology to substantiate my claims. My ultimate objective is to emphasize the archetypal (Upward) and ethical (Downward) dimensions of an ultimate order of the road as an encounter with the other, with the aim of equipping scholars of rhetoric, media, and culture with a new critical lens for understanding how the road functions rhetorically, mythologically, and poetically in American culture.
The cities of a world of nations, with all their manners, minds, and fashions, he saw and knew.


As regards languages, I believed that I had already devoted sufficient time to them, and even also to the writings of the ancients, to their histories and mythical stories. To hold converse with those of other ages is almost, as it were, to travel abroad; and travel, by making us acquainted with the customs of other nations, enables us to judge more justly of our own, and not to regard as ridiculous and irrational whatever is at variance with them, as those ordinarily do who have never seen anything different.

–Rene Descartes, *Discourse on Method* (1637)

Travel is fatal to prejudice, bigotry and narrow-mindedness, and many of our people need it sorely on these accounts. Broad, wholesome, charitable views of men and things cannot be acquired by vegetating in one little corner of the earth all one’s lifetime.

–Mark Twain, *The Innocents Abroad* (1869)

Folklore can show us that this dream is age-old and common to all mankind. It asks that we recognize the cultural rights of weaker peoples in sharing this dream. And it can make their adjustment to a world society an easier and more creative process. The stuff of folklore—the orally transmitted wisdom, art and music of the people can provide ten thousand bridges across which men of all nations may stride to say, “You are my brother.”

–Alan Lomax, “America Sings the Saga of America” (1947)

This is always one of the interesting things about traveling, that you learn to know people. Travel abroad. I think this is the greatest education that can ever come to an individual. I think if more of our white brothers in the South had traveled a little more, many of our problems would be solved today. So often we live in our little shells because we’ve never risen above the province. We’ve never risen above sectionalism. And so it was a great pleasure to meet people, various sections of the world, various sections of our own nation.

–Martin Luther King, Jr., “A Walk Through the Holy Land” (1959)

[Communication] the task is to recognize the creature’s otherness, not to make it over in one’s own likeness and image […] To live among others is necessarily to incur obligations; to be mortal is to be incapable of paying them all back […] To treat others as we would want to be treated means performing for them in such a way not that the self is authentically represented but that the other is caringly served.

IN MEMORIAM

I dedicate this project to the memory of Ronald Ray Blanton, my father, in whom the spirit of the road is now so evident to me. I also dedicate this project to the memory of several individuals with whom I will not be able to share in the joy of its completion. For Mick Langley, who believed in me when I did not believe in myself; for J. Alan Groves, who showed me humility, cultural awareness, and fortitude; and for Karen Lee, in honor of Ronald Lee, for her inspiring faith and ever-ready willingness to serve others. For Ronald, Mick, Al, and Karen.
DEDICATION

I dedicate this project, with the utmost appreciation, to my wife Hope Annette (Maher) Blanton, for her steadfast support, particularly during dogged days of doubt. Comparably, I dedicate this project to Cana, Thea, and Nias (our children), whose rambunctious spirits have given me countless hours of necessary respite and retreat. I hope this completed work reminds you to be vigilant and diligent in all that you do. You are my living, active, and endless dissertations.

Furthermore, I dedicate this work to my beloved parents. To the late Ronald Ray Blanton, whose work ethic, cultural curiosities, and quiet sacrifices are so fundamental to who I am and what I do. I am ever grateful for the possibilities you envisioned and the opportunities you provided, even when you were not able to share in actualizing them with me. To Evelyn Lorene Blanton, my mother, for her loyal love and faithful support, that has carried me through the valleys of our days in the Redwood Estates trailer park to the peaks of this accomplishment. Finally, though no less important, to March and Sheila Maher, whose great care and comfort has helped see us through these seasons of domestic migratory travel and adventure. Immeasurable gratitude.
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PROLOGUE

Over the course of my graduate tenure at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, I have pedaled nearly two million revolutions and commuted almost five thousand miles, as though cycling from Anchorage, Alaska to Mexico City, Mexico. Along the way, I have tested the limits of my mental, emotional, and physical abilities through every season and almost every imaginable climate: in the light of day and dark of night; in mist, fog, hail, torrential rain, and the loom of thunderous lightning; in sleet, ice, snow, and drift; into gale force headwinds; in sub-zero and triple-digit temperatures; amidst thunderstorm and tornado warnings; in pedestrian and motorized traffic; on roads paved and unpaved; enduring a bee swarm, crashes, and close encounters of the automotive kind; all while wearing a pack ranging from ten to thirty pounds. Beyond the seat and pedal, I have traveled more than twenty-three thousand air miles and thirty-seven thousand domestic road miles—totaling almost sixty seven thousand miles during my graduate studies—more than two-and-a-half times around the circumference of the earth.

Over the course of these studies, in both my actual and discursive travels, I have come to realize how versatile the idea of the road is in helping us attain latitudinal and longitudinal perspective about the adversities of life. For instance, if I were to analogically compare the arduousness of my graduate studies to the conditions of moving west across the frontier with the nineteenth-century pioneers that would be reasonable. However, having actually mounted my bicycle and endured these conditions, the road becomes more than a metaphor. Experiencing these elements firsthand has given me a much greater appreciation for, and kindred connection with, the people who have overcome crueler roads—the Native Americans on the Trail of Tears or the African
American slaves on the Underground Railroad, for instance. In other words, the significance of the road extends beyond its analogical utility. Our actual experiences on the road give perspective to our analogical uses and representations. Jack Kerouac’s *On the Road*, for example, was not merely a fictional imagining of the road in American culture, but rather, a reimagining of his actual travels. Likewise, in this dissertation, though I recognize the substantial role that our analogical significations play in our popular imagination about the road, I am more interested in the interplay of these two dimensions. Moreover, in this endeavor, I am interested exploring how the *ethos* of the road produces an *ethic* of the road. More plainly, the road is a rhetorical encounter with the other. To this end, using theoretical lines to establish particular lanes of argument from which to ponder the vistas of discourse around rhetoric, mythology, and the road in American culture, this project is both a product of the road and like a road.\(^1\)

I believe this study is important because in my survey of the pervasiveness of the road in human expression, it seems apparent to me that the road is less important as an embodiment of self-expression than it is a communal experience dramatized by encounters with others. But it is the cultural myths bound to ideas of progress, rugged individualism, and rebellion, sentiments indebted to twentieth-century popularizations of countercultural politics that receive so much of our critical attention. Rather, I explore the mythic ideal or archetype of the road. For instance, using the mythology of the road as a connective thread, this project brings studies on American folk music and the blues

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\(^1\) I use the term America/American to refer to the domestic United States, while also acknowledging Kirsten Silva Gruesz’ recognition that “America” also includes an entire hemisphere that includes Latin Americans and Canadians. See Bruce Burgett and Glenn Hendler, eds., *Keywords for American Cultural Studies* (New York: New York University Press, 2007), 16-21.
together with Martin Luther King, Jr. and the American civil rights movement, illustrating how movements and marches mediate human interaction. To be more explicit, to repurpose the adage of finding one’s self, in this project, we move from the self to an encounter with the other toward the perspective by incongruity of the “other self.”

To substantiate these claims, here, I consider some examples that illustrate how the road facilitates human relations and understanding. In *The Odyssey*, for instance, consider these various translations of the poem’s opening lines: “Wandering from clime to clime, observant stray’d; Their manners noted, and their states survey’d”\(^2\); “He saw many cities of men, and learnt their mind”\(^3\); “He saw the cities of many people and he learnt their ways”\(^4\); “He saw the townlands and learned the minds of many distant men”\(^5\); “Many were they whose cities he saw, whose minds he learned of”\(^6\); and “Speak of all the cities he saw, the minds he grasped.”\(^7\) Subtly but significantly, each of these translations emphasizes the importance of encountering *others*—seeing firsthand their cities, grasping their minds, and learning their ways. Furthermore, in reference to the epigraph that inaugurates this project, Rene Descartes emphasizes the importance of the road in acquainting us with the customs of people from *other* nations;\(^8\) Mark Twain, the need for Americans to travel to confront our prejudices with wholesome views of *others*;\(^9\) American folklorist Alan Lomax, that experiencing folk music firsthand is a bridge to

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\(^7\) Homer, *The Odyssey*, trans. Stanley Lombardo.
\(^8\) Rene Descartes, *Descartes’ Philosophical Writings, Volume 1*, trans. Norman Kemp Smith (New York: Macmillan, 1952), 96.
\(^9\) Mark Twain, *The Innocents Abroad or the New Pilgrim’s Progress* (London: Wordsworth, 2010), 427.
others;¹⁰ and Martin Luther King Jr., that travel can help us overcome sectionalism and connect us with others, noting that one of the most interesting things about traveling is “that you learn to know people.”¹¹ Collectively, each of these individuals, from the ancient to the modern world, underscores how the road mediates human interactions and enhances our understanding of the self by way of the “other self.”

Moreover, even our scholarly language is inherently oriented toward encountering the otherness of discursive realms, our key terms derived from the analogical nature of language and the road: method is related to the Greek word for road, hodos; theory is sight produced by critical distance from some theoretical home; a trope is a turn; research is a search; questions are quests; and discourses chart intellectual courses. In sum, in all cultures, meaning is contested and negotiated at intersections of tradition and progress amidst the tensions between permanence and change.¹² In such times as these, human communication, and in particular its historical taproot rhetoric, remain useful social tools for confronting our living and moving us further down the road toward a better life. As such, this dissertation considers the road at the root of the Western rhetorical tradition, as both an actual place and a poetic space, and follows it through rhetorical history and on through American culture.

CHAPTER ONE

At the Crossroads of Rhetoric: Rhetoric as Road, Road as Rhetoric

Socrates: “Phaedrus my friend! Where to? And from where?”
Phaedrus: “I am going for a walk around outside the wall [...] I take walks along the roads for [...] they are more invigorating than those in colonnades.”

–Plato, Phaedrus

Introduction

This dissertation explores the rhetorical dimensions and functions of the road as an active mythology in rhetorical history and American culture. I begin this rhetorical quest on the country roads outside of ancient Athens, where by the testimony of their feet, under the flowering peak of a wide-spreading plane tree, Socrates and Phaedrus grapple with the truth about the nature of the soul by “seeing its experiences and deeds.”

“Tell me,” asks Phaedrus, “Socrates: are you persuaded that this mythical speech is true?” Socrates’ (or Plato’s) response leads us, along with the characters, on a spiritual journey, a tale of the soul divided into a “two-horse shaped” form and a third charioteer form, about the “madness” that comes into being from god, that is more beautiful than the soundness of the minds of men. In this story, the road mediates an encounter between a philosopher and a non-philosopher, and is animated by sensory and mythic

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2 Plato, Phaedrus, 230b.
3 Plato, Phaedrus, 245c.
4 Plato, Phaedrus, 229c.
5 Plato, Phaedrus, 253c.
6 The idea of “madness,” as it relates to motion, movement, or travel is explored in Plato’s Phaedrus, Kenneth Burke’s Towards a Better Life, and Jack Kerouac’s On the Road.
7 Plato, Phaedrus, 244d.
images and poetic symbolism. As I argue, this road represents the mythic archetype of the road as a rhetorical encounter with the other—or psychagogia, a leading of the soul.

Coming from another realm of history, having taken a seventh avenue subway to the end of the line at two-hundred-and-forty-second street, then transferring to a trolley headed toward the city limits, Sal Paradise hitches his way along Route Six toward San Francisco. Together, Sal and Neal Cassady\(^8\) drive apace across the continent in a white-horse-powered Hudson Commodore, an automotive chariot, leaving a “big dust cloud over the American night.”\(^9\) Similar to Socrates, Sal is interested in madness, “the ones who are mad to live, mad to talk, desirous of everything.”\(^10\) In its explorations of movement, Eros, and self-knowledge, Jack Kerouac’s *On the Road* is a modern-day *Phaedrus*, leading its readers on an automotive and spiritual journey toward the beauty of self-knowledge. This road, I argue, represents the mythology of socio-cultural rebellion and individualism in contemporary culture.

Collectively, these discourses bring the ancient rhetorical world together with contemporary American culture. In essence, both road discourses demonstrate the rhetoricity of the road. However, these roads lead us with different ideals. For instance, Sal and Dean guide the contemporary reader along the thoroughfares of self-knowledge, in Plato’s language, toward the Individual/Good. Dialectical in nature, this road positions the rebel in opposition to the traditional values of America, giving the road and the rebel a persuasive appeal. It is this myth of the road in American life that has captured the world’s attention and imagination in its collective connections to “transport, popular

\(^{8}\) Dean Moriarty in the 1957 publication of the novel *On the Road.*


\(^{10}\) Kerouac, *On the Road*, 113.
culture, and commerce,” syndicated in song, literature, film, and various modes of public discourse.\textsuperscript{11} Alternatively, Socrates and Phaedrus exemplify the road as an encounter with the other, transcending the dialectical order with an ultimate order. To be more specific, Kenneth Burke outlines three specific terms that order experience, that is, positive, dialectical, and ultimate.\textsuperscript{12} Positive terms name the things of experience. Dialectical terms refer to ideas rather than things. And ultimate terms, and this is where the \textit{Phaedrus} distinguishes itself from \textit{On the Road}, transcend the positive (sensory images) and dialectical (ideas) through a fixed and reasoned progression from one to another toward a mythic image \textit{beyond} ideas. For Burke, an ultimate order is the archetypal origin of dialectical and positive terms, an active process that moves us hierarchically from images to ideas to the mythic archetypal image that orders these opposing principles. In this order, Burke defines Plato’s Good as the Upward/Downward Way.

As such, this dissertation attempts to develop an ultimate vocabulary of the road by establishing the mythic archetype of the road as that which moves from the self toward an encounter with the other and ultimately toward the “other self.” To that end, I situate the archetype at the crossroads of classical rhetoric and contemporary American culture, using Plato’s conception of rhetoric as \textit{psychagogia}, a leading of the soul toward the Good, to argue for an alternative understanding of the road. I advance these claims in two distinct ways. First, I argue rhetoric is like a road, using the road as a conceptual tool to reorient our understanding of rhetoric as \textit{psychagogia}. Second, and subsequently, I use


\textsuperscript{12} Kenneth Burke, \textit{A Rhetoric of Motives} (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969), 183-203.
this reoriented rhetoric to enlarge our perspective about the rhetoricity of the road in
American culture. As I argue, the road mediates the grand convergence of human
relations, making it an ideal representative anecdote for comprehending and confronting
meaning in American culture, illustrating the entanglements of various material and
relational histories and possibilities, where sensory images and ideas are transcended by
the archetype of mythic images.

Problematic to this cause, however, is a dominant orientation about the road in
extant discourses. Kenneth Burke used a perspective by incongruity to define this
tendency, that is, trained incapacities, whereby our rhetorical training can limit our
abilities to see beyond the dominant ways of conceiving the subject of the road.  

Positioned differently, our mythologies about the road as a symbol of progress, bolstered
by both our rugged individualism and socially rebellious consciousness are inadequate
for confronting many of the issues of mobility in the twenty first century. Broadly, I
begin this chapter by looking at the relationship between the road and rhetoric. In chapter
two, I examine the interrelations of that association in American culture. Both of these
chapters function as an apostrophe or address to the road in the manner of Walt
Whitman’s “Song of the Open Road.”  

Furthermore, I demonstrate the merits of my claims in two distinct but interrelated
case studies, each serving as a pattern for apprehending the rhetorical functions of the
road as an active mythology. In my first case study, I establish the rhetoricity of the road
as psychagogia by examining Alan Lomax’s Mississippi Delta recordings and fieldwork.

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13 Kenneth Burke, *Permanence and Change* (Berkeley: University of California
14 Walt Whitman, “Song of the Open Road,” in *Leaves of Grass* (New York:
Specifically, I make this mythology of the road distinct through an exploration of his encounters with others while on the road, and more particularly, in the blues. In my second case study, I illustrate the rhetoricity of the road as psychagogia in the sermonic discourse of Martin Luther King, Jr., focusing on the road as a rhetorical encounter with the other in his Samaritan Ethic. Both of these cases work together to lead us toward a clearer and more complex understanding of the rhetorical dimensions and functions of the road in American culture.

My objective, simply put, is to reread elements of rhetorical history and American culture through the critical lens of this archetype as a form of psychagogic rhetoric. To these ends, I retain John Durham Peters’ “hermeneutic principle of retroactive enrichment,” or method of rereading, in an effort to reread particular scenes in rhetorical history and American culture. With that principle in mind, I reread Plato’s Phaedrus using conceptual leads in Daniel Werner and Thomas Frentz, crafting a vision for psychagogic rhetoric as a living mythology. Further, I reread public experience related to the road in twentieth-century American culture using myth as a methodology, extending the work of Richard Hughes and Kenneth Burke. Collectively, I also use these cases to develop a critical vocabulary, of an ultimate order for confronting issues that bear upon American mobility. To borrow a poetic sentiment from Robert Frost, being one critical traveler, I have looked down many roads at great length and having seen the want for wear of one in particular, have taken a road less traveled. My ultimate objective in broadening our understanding of rhetoric as a road, and subsequently, the rhetoric of the

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road, is to equip rhetorical scholars with an ultimate vocabulary of the road that is “lovely, dark, and deep,” with “miles to go” before we sleep.17

1.1 The Significance of the Road

In this project, I argue for the road as a rhetorical encounter with the other—as a “strategy of strategies,” to use Kenneth Burke’s phrase.18 Ideas and meaning related to human mobility, travel, and roads are far reaching and have broad points of application. The road may refer to an actual bodily movement across space and time for the purposes of exploration, expedition, expansion, and most certainly, exploitation. The road may also refer to an analogical movement across poetic space for the purposes of intonation, innervation, inspiration, and most assuredly, imagination. I am interested in the interplay of actual and analogical roads as they animate the road as an active mythology. In order to particularize the parameters of this project, I consider three questions about the road: (1) what is the road; (2) why is it significant; and (3) what is its function in human relations? To be clear, my answers to these questions will unfold progressively throughout this project. However, to be more explicit, I address these questions in chapter one by focusing centrally on the road in relation to rhetoric. In chapter two, I extend these considerations by looking at the road in relation to myth in American culture. Collectively, these two chapters work together to establish the groundwork for my respective case studies.

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This section will provide some perspective related to the significance of the road. In the following sections, I consider what the road is in relation to rhetoric and outline its contribution to human relations. In chapter two, I apply these considerations to the road in American culture with an eye toward its mythological character. First, there are two substantive ways of accounting for the road. As I have briefly outlined, and will continue to develop, the road is a mythological force that constitutes a poetic space from an actual place. Though each is significant independent of the other, it is their interrelationship that makes them most significant—both/and rather than either/or. As such, there are five reasons the road is significant: (1) the road is material, in both the natural sense, from waterways to landscape, and the commercial sense, for the purpose of trading and transferring goods and services; (2) relatedly, the road, in connecting good and services, presupposes a people to whom these are directed—it is relational; (3) consequentially, these interrelations influence the creation of culture, through expedition, exploration, and expansion, and the destruction of cultures by exploitation through emigration; (4) subsequently, through the connection of human cultural goods and services, the road mediates the exchange of economy; (5) and finally, and collectively, the road is political, a resource used to administer governance, control, and power over all facets of the roads material, relational, cultural, commercial, and economic conditions.

From a different angle, Hilaire Belloc writes, “[The road] is the humblest and the most subtle […] but the greatest and the most original of the spells, which we inherit, from the earliest pioneers of our race. It was the most imperative and the first of our necessities.”\(^\text{19}\) Which is to say: the road is significantly subtle, embodying an altogether

varied character; it is open and closed, strange and long, old and wrong. For this reason, the road inspires our imagination. In a more rhetorical framework, the road is synecdochic. To elaborate, Kenneth Burke defines a synecdoche, or representation, as that which stresses a relationship or connectedness between two sides of an equation, a connection that extends in either direction, “like a road.” On one hand, part for whole, the road is American opportunity, observable in the move West across the frontier in the nineteenth century and by the rebel beatnik barreling down the postwar highway in an automobile in the twentieth century. On the other hand, whole for part, America is defined by its roads, both its vastly variegated landscapes and its symbolic literary and cinematic works, like Jack Kerouac’s *On the Road* or Terry Southern, Peter Fonda, and Dennis Hopper’s *Easy Rider*, respectively. Even the social achievement and technological innovation of the automobile, ultimately serve the road.

These are just some of the reasons that the road is significant in American culture. However, as I previously alluded, these discourses tell different, at times, partial stories. I see two reasons for this. On one hand, despite how expansive our empirical and expressive history with the road is, from the ancient world to today, our critical study of the road has been around for only forty years. We are only just now beginning to broaden our understanding of its significance and implications. On the other hand, these discourses, by making the theme of rebellion dominant, often limit our understanding of the road, confining it to studies of literary and cinematic genre bound by disciplinary agendas. A more interdisciplinary approach is needed to broaden our perspectives.

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Rhetoric, I argue, can perform such a critical task. Clarissa Pinkola Estes refers to this tendency as *story simplex*, that is, an overreliance on select dominant themes. In a rhetorical frame, Kenneth Burke referred to this same tendency as *trained incapacities*. In American culture, I contend that our understanding of the road relies on prominent cultural myths that can be better understood by seeing them in relationship to an archetype. Specifically, I argue this archetype situates the road as a rhetorical encounter with the other. I substantiate these claims by drawing from both ancient and contemporary cultural ideas and texts. To be clear, I concentrate on the archetype in Plato’s *Phaedrus*, to situate its importance to rhetoric, while also giving some indication of its historical antecedents.

In pursuing these ends, I argue that the road in American culture is important because of its connection to our national mythology. By road, I do not mean leisurely travel or commercial tourism, or even the cultural myth of progress, but rather, the “politics of mobility,” as argued by Mark Simpson in *Trafficking Subjects*. Indeed, this project seeks to make a twentieth century critical contribution to Simpson’s nineteenth century framework. Put differently, the road is not only a means of individual self-expression or socio-cultural rebellion. Rather, it is a human and ethical encounter with the other—be it human, natural, or divine. Moreover, by myth, I do not mean illusory, but rather, in the Burkean sense, a social tool and psychological bridge useful for working together with others;\(^{22}\) as a “strategic” and “stylized” answer to the questions posed by

our situations.\textsuperscript{23} When I refer to the mythology of the road in American culture, I am not privileging the commercial or popular ideas associated with the frontier or the highway,\textsuperscript{24} respectively, though these are inherently important to my analysis, but rather, the road as a rhetorical encounter with the other, illustrated by the Underground Railroad and the American civil rights marches. This project gives a rhetorical perspective on the road, beginning at the crossroads of rhetoric, Plato’s \textit{Phaedrus}.

1.2 Rhetorical Routes: An Overview of Rhetoric and the Road

In this section, and this chapter, I situate the road as a rhetorical encounter with the other in Plato’s \textit{Phaedrus} as an archetype. Though it has historical antecedents in Hebraic and Homeric history, I position it here for the purposes of foregrounding its rhetorical significance. By archetype, I mean to refer to an ideal patterning or a way of representing the ineffable. For instance, in the \textit{Phaedrus}, Plato uses the analogical imagery of the chariot to give form to the soul. Comparably, I give attention to the underlying imagery of the road as both an actual or bodily movement and an analogical or spiritual movement. Specifically, I delineate the archetype as having a tripartite nature—one essence, with three interworking dimensions, those being, movement or road, myth, and poetic symbolism. My objective, in part, is to use the road as a way of thinking about and conceptualizing rhetoric as \textit{psychagogia}—a leading of the soul. To that end, I argue that the road is at the root of the Western rhetorical tradition.

\textsuperscript{23} Burke, \textit{Philosophy of Literary Form}, 1.  
\textsuperscript{24} Slethaug and Ford, \textit{Hit the Road, Jack}, 3.
To be clear, rhetoric can be construed in a number of ways. First, with a bit of Platonic pessimism, it can be understood as mere flattery.\footnote{Plato, \textit{Gorgias}, trans. James H. Nichols Jr. (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1998), 463b.} Of this sort, rhetoric misleads and deceives, implicating the sophistry of the Sophists (no coincidence), leading to civic injustices, as when the Greeks executed Socrates. Second, alluding to Aristotle, rhetoric is the tactical use of the available means of persuasion.\footnote{Aristotle, \textit{On Rhetoric: A Theory of Civic Discourse}, trans. George A. Kennedy (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 36.} We use the aesthetic language of symbolism to exert influence. Third, Richard Lanham frames rhetoric as the “economics of attention,” in which rhetoric adapts to the short supply of attention amidst the stuff and fluff of the “information economy.”\footnote{Richard Lanham, \textit{The Economics of Attention: Style and Substance in the Age of Information} (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), vi.} Fourth, identifying with Burke, rhetoric is a means of identification in which we can persuade others insofar as you we speak their language by gesture and tonality, order and image, attitude and idea, \textit{identifying} their ways with ours.\footnote{Burke, \textit{A Rhetoric of Motives}, 55.} Of course, there are many more nuanced ways we can see rhetoric working in human relations: the Apostle Paul’s sacred rhetoric, Foss and Griffin’s invitational rhetoric, Bitzer’s situational rhetoric, and in reference to Calloway-Thomas and Lucaites and Richard Weaver’s notion of the sermonic power of language, rhetoric can be profoundly ethical and even spiritual.

With these in mind, I proceed with residual elements from a combination of these perspectives to focus on rhetoric as \textit{psychagogia}—a leading of the soul. I argue this rhetorical form contributes to a reoriented rhetoric that demonstrates the archetype of the road that I then follow into American history and culture. The central purpose of this
section, then, is to serve the larger objective of the project in helping us interpret the relationship of the road to rhetoric. To accomplish this, I concentrate on Plato’s *Phaedrus* to provide specific access points that help us see the road as a living myth and rhetorical encounter with the other, using the poetic symbolism of song. Furthermore, I argue that our attempt to distinguish myth and rhetoric neatly, and specific to this argument, *mythos* and *logos*, is a (in) *convenient* myth that over simplifies the complexities of Plato’s aesthetic *psychagogic* rhetoric to raise philosophy, and him, atop the Greek world.²⁹ I then briefly connect these ideas to historical antecedents in Hebraic and Homeric history to broaden our understanding of this archetypal myth, and then situate the road in the language of contemporary rhetorical theory.

### 1.2.1 Plato’s *Phaedrus*

One of the central themes in the *Phaedrus* is movement, body and soul. Collectively, as I argue, the dialogue as a whole is an archetype about the road as a rhetorical encounter with the other. To validate this claim, consider that the dialogue begins with our two central characters walking on a country road outside of Athens and uses the underlying imagery of the chariot to contemplate the divine journey of the soul. According to Thomas S. Frentz, “As immortal self-motion, the form of the soul cannot be represented adequately through the binary logic of language. The best Socrates can do, being mortal himself, is to tell what the soul’s form is *like* analogically through the

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chariot figure.” In my estimation, this is an archetype that uses the imagery of the road. Further, Daniel Werner contends that Plato’s view of the soul is closely tied to his notion of *psychagogia*, a “leading of the soul.” Both examples substantiate the importance of the road as central to our understanding of the *Phaedrus*. Put differently, this archetype, this *psychagogic* rhetoric, has distinct features that can be followed from the primordial world to contemporary culture, one that, using the language of Frentz, may “touch our souls as well as our societies.” In this section, I reread the *Phaedrus* through the thematic importance of movement and journeys to advance three ideas. These are, that the dialogue is an archetype fundamentally concerned with movement, myth, and poetic symbolism. Indeed, the interplay of these three features comprises the tripartite nature of *psychagogic* rhetoric. In the following section, I detail each of these elements and conclude by considering two mythical and one rhetorical implication.

First, the dialogue is fundamentally about bodily and spiritual movement. Our first indication of this comes in the opening scene of the dialogue. “Where to? And from where?” asks Socrates. Phaedrus’s response: “I am going for a walk around outside the wall […] I take walks along the roads for […] they are more invigorating than those in colonnades.” Note that *Phaedrus* is the only one of Plato’s dialogue to take place

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30 Thomas Frentz, “Memory, Myth, and Rhetoric in Plato’s *Phaedrus,*” *Rhetoric Society Quarterly* 36, no. 3 (Summer 2006): 258.
32 Frentz, “Memory, Myth, and Rhetoric,” 259.
33 By poetic symbolism, I intend song. I situate this notion in the relation to the Hebrew’s “Songs of Ascents,” Homer’s *Odyssey*, and as I argue in my case studies, the blues and freedom songs.
34 Plato, *Phaedrus*, 227a-b.
outside of the city.\footnote{Werner, \textit{Myth and Philosophy}, 21.} Moreover, not only does the \textit{Phaedrus} begin with a reference to our central characters walking on a road, but more importantly, the dialogue as a whole demonstrates the thematic importance of journeys and movement, with references throughout, to “paths,” “turning,” “leading,” “searching,” “guiding,” and “arriving,” proving to be wholly focused on “finding one’s way.”\footnote{Werner, \textit{Myth and Philosophy}, 20.} Werner even frames the dialogue as Phaedrus wavering between “two roads.”\footnote{See Werner, \textit{Myth and Philosophy}, 123, 129, 150, 169, 248, 260.} William Cobb comes close to this assertion, and outlines my argument of the \textit{road} as a rhetorical encounter with the \textit{other}, when he foregrounds the two most substantial themes of the dialogue as friendship and movement.\footnote{William Cobb, \textit{The Symposium and the Phaedrus: Plato’s Erotic Dialogue} (New York: SUNY Press, 1993), 141.} In essence, the dialogue is about a crossing of boundaries, where both characters move beyond their usual haunts, where Plato “moves beyond the boundaries of traditional philosophical discourse (dialectic) and explores other kinds of discourse (myth and rhetoric).”\footnote{Werner, \textit{Myth and Philosophy}, 21.}

Second, Plato supplements his use of journey imagery with a variety of myths to move the non-philosopher toward philosophical inquiry. Similarly arguing for the importance of myth in the \textit{Phaedrus}, Frentz, in reference to Joseph Campbell, asserts that we come to know with greater depth and clarity our wisest selves through the study of myth.\footnote{Frentz, “Memory, Myth, and Rhetoric,” 245.} For instance, Plato uses traditional myths in the dialogue, oral stories prevalent in Greek culture from the time of Homer to Hesiod. Additionally, Plato uses myths of his own creation—Platonic myths—for example, the myth of the cicadas in the \textit{Phaedrus}.
One of our first clues to the use of myth comes in Plato’s description of life outside of the city along the road, using the breeze, the stream, the sunlight, amongst the trees, on a grassy slope, near fragrant blossoms, amidst the sounds of cicadas. These descriptors are allusively rich with Greek mythology. More than a single occurrence, they are present throughout the dialogue. When Socrates glories in the pleasantries of wetting one’s feet in the Ilyssus, we are in the realm of myth.

Similarly, there was an altar to the Muses near the Ilyssus where they were walking. Still further, the Nymphs are a cautionary reference to the poetic dangers associated with the Sirens of Homer’s *Odyssey*. In sum, Werner contends, “In connection with the use of myth as a form of *psychagogia*, the opening scene of the *Phaedrus* reveals a broader place for myth within the life of philosophy.”

Third, and finally, Plato uses poetic symbolism to give additional meaning to his use of movement and myth. More than just an ornate description for dramatic effect, the poetic setting is noticeably unusual, almost a third character in the dialogue, setting up a kind of “hermeneutical warning” for non-philosophers through the remainder of the dialogue. For Plato, the mythic-poetic way is full of distractions, leading one away from philosophy. However, I argue that these are both essential features to the road as an archetype. Giving more precise form to my understanding of the poetic, Socrates alludes to the song of the cicadas and speaks of them “singing” overhead, likening them to the

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41 Plato, *Phaedrus*, 229a, 230b.
43 Werner, *Myth and Philosophy*, 42.
45 Plato, *Phaedrus*, 258e.
song-filled Sirens\textsuperscript{46} and going so far as to describe the palinode itself in poetic or musical terms, as a kind of song.\textsuperscript{47} According to Werner, Plato’s hope is that those with an appropriate disposition of soul will be moved by the warnings within the narrative and turn themselves toward philosophy.

Collectively, these three elements—movement, myth, and the poetic—form the essence of \textit{psychagogia}, a “leading of the soul.” Put differently, Plato frames his ideal rhetoric using bodily movement to illustrate spiritual movement. The dialogue essentially asks us to consider where we are in relation to where we are going, where we should go, and how we should get there.”\textsuperscript{48} Specifically, Socrates references \textit{psychagogia} in relation to the cicada myth in order to move Phaedrus away from the palinode and toward dialectic.\textsuperscript{49} Platonic myth, then, serves to move certain individuals “\textit{toward} the philosophical life.”\textsuperscript{50} To frame it in explicit terms pertinent to this project, we could read the dialogue as a “reflection on how one should undertake the journey of life and the role of relationships and conversations with \textit{others} in that journey.”\textsuperscript{51} We find further indication of Plato’s \textit{psychagogic} intent, and the importance of the road, here: “Socrates: What you say is true. That’s why all our statements must be examined backwards and forwards to see whether there’s a quicker and easier way along the road to this art so that

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item Plato, \textit{Phaedrus}, 259a.
\item Werner, \textit{Myth and Philosophy}, 141.
\item Cobb, \textit{Plato’s Erotic Dialogues}, 141.
\item Werner, \textit{Myth and Philosophy}, 248.
\item Werner, \textit{Myth and Philosophy}, 130.
\item Cobb, \textit{Plato’s Erotic Dialogues}, 141.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
one will not waste effort on a long and rough road when there is a short and smooth one.”

Philosophical dialogue in the *Phaedrus*, read through the motif of movement and myth, is a perfection of rhetoric. According to Charles Griswold, the second half of the *Phaedrus* is actually, “A voyage from a narrowly and politically defined conception of rhetoric to a much more comprehensive, and for Socrates, paradigmatic conception. It is a voyage from the cave of the polis up to the pure realm of dialectic.” To this, I would add that the *Phaedrus* embodies the archetypal myth of the road as a rhetorical encounter with the other, a myth that is central to the dialogue as a whole. More explicitly:

This effort at reorientation and *psychagogia* does not take place merely on the dramatic level of the characters—it also takes place on the extra-textual level between Plato and *us*. Just as Socrates tries to turn Phaedrus toward self-examination so too does Plato try to turn us toward self-examination.

Put differently, we are not simply spectators in this dialectic; we are also participants in it. The *Phaedrus*, then, is an encounter with the non-philosophical other, Socrates with Phaedrus; and a spiritual encounter with the divine other—a *psychagogic* encounter with the soul. This archetype, I contend, is comprised of movement, myth, and poetic symbolism.

In sum, for millennia, Plato’s Socratic dialogues have been, and remain, a valuable resource for philosophical and rhetorical study. I have focused on one dialogue, the *Phaedrus*, and one particular theme within that dialectic, the interplay of bodily and

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54 Werner, *Myth and Philosophy*, 42.
spiritual movement. Plato seems to be arguing that it is not just Phaedrus that is wavering between two roads; it is all of us. Phaedrus’s *wavering* reveals that “sometimes the soul faces a choice about how to proceed. Some paths are straight and easy to follow, while others are dark, twisting, and difficult. A guide is needed.”\(^\text{56}\) Psychagogic rhetoric, then, is mythic and poetic, intent on leading the soul. That is, “Not only in law courts and other public gatherings, but also in private ones, the same art being concerned with both small and great things.”\(^\text{57}\) In the mythical language of the blues, I contend, the *Phaedrus* may be an indication that Plato sold his soul to displace Homer, at the crossroads. Harold Bloom thinks along similar lines when he likens the focus of Susan Levin’s *The Ancient Quarrel Between Philosophy and Poetry* as recognizing the urgency and determination of Plato “to triumph over Homer.”\(^\text{58}\) Likewise, Andrew Ford, in *The Origins of Criticism*, urges us to be wary of “Platonic constructions of literary history that make it culminate in his own philosophical positions.”\(^\text{59}\) Furthermore, Harold Bloom’s work in “Plato’s Contest with Homer” demonstrates that the ancient quarrel between philosophy and poetry resulted in Plato the philosopher and “polemic” writing dialogues that were “unique dramatic poems.”\(^\text{60}\)

\(^{56}\) Werner, *Myth and Philosophy*, 112. One should notice that Odysseus must enlist the help of a guide prior to his descent to Hades (*Odyssey* 10:504-540) and that Paths are mentioned in *Odyssey* 24:10.

\(^{57}\) Plato, *Phaedrus*, 261a-b.


Living Myth

There are three particular implications that I want to consider in more detail. The first implication, contrary to the traditionally dominant dialectical reading, is that the *Phaedrus* is a living myth. Here, I am taken with the argument of Thomas Frentz in “Memory, Myth, and Rhetoric in Plato’s *Phaedrus.*” Specifically, he poses the possibility that the dialogue, in its entirety, can be read as a living myth that *guides* both characters and us as readers toward self-knowledge. As I read the *Phaedrus,* it demonstrates the road as a rhetorical or *psychagogic* encounter with the other. Specifically, Frentz is following a line of thinking in Griswold, who is also intrigued by Plato’s use of myth. For Griswold, a myth has the capacity to act as a “complex mirror in which people can recognize not just who they are but who they might become at their best.” More vividly, particularly as it relates to the notion of the road, Frentz contends that Griswold sees myth in the *Phaedrus* as “access points” to self-knowledge, the central mythic example being the soul’s motion in the chariot image.

More particularly, Frentz, drawing upon an insight by Derrida, argues that the last third of the *Phaedrus* uses a dead myth—an Egyptian myth involving Theuth and Thamus. According to Frentz, the soul’s journey portrayed in the chariot allegory, in Socrates’ second speech, is a myth positioned within an older mythic setting. To illustrate the importance of this point as it relates to my argument, the mythic road as an encounter with the *other,* Frentz asserts that self-knowledge does not derive from Socrates or even

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philosophy, but rather, from the “emerging relationships between characters.” Put differently, as a dialogic myth, the *Phaedrus* is an intensifying relationship between two people, “a dynamic model of how self-understanding within the myth might unfold for the reader outside of it.” Both characters are affected. In sum, Frentz bridges myth with rhetoric, composing the dialogue as a type of song, with the first third a figural procession of similarities and differences, the second third a virtuoso performance of Socrates’ “mad” dialectic, and the final crescendo, a myth within a myth, forming one collective mythic body—a living myth.

For a more nuanced perspective on what living myth might look like, I turn to Joseph Campbell, who defines myth as the one, “shape-shifting yet marvelously constant story that we find together with a challengingly persistent suggestion of more remaining to be experienced than will ever be known or told.” More specifically, Campbell notes:

> Throughout the inhabited world, in all times and under every circumstance, the myths of man have flourished; and they have been the living inspiration of whatever else may have appeared out of the activities of the human body and mind. It would not be too much to say that myth is the secret opening through which the inexhaustible energies of the cosmos pour into human cultural manifestation. Religions, philosophies, arts, the social forms of primitive and historic man, prime discoveries in science and technology, the very dreams that blister sleep, boil up from the basic, magic ring of myth.

In a more rhetorical framework, Kenneth Burke refers to our need for an “active” categorical strategy that confronts both works of art and our social relations and living. As an instance, consider Philip Doddridge’s *The Rise and Progress of Religion in the*
Soul,⁶⁷ which influenced William Wilberforce, who then took up the serious study of spiritual matters and helped abolish slavery in Britain. This may be the exception rather than the rule, but the point remains, active strategies confront living and, as I argue, the archetypal road as a rhetorical encounter with the other is such an active strategy.

Psychagogic Rhetoric

Second, in view of Frentz’s living myth, I now consider the Phaedrus as a consolidation of psychagogia and dialectic—“applicable to all discourse, public and private, persuasive and expository, which aims to influence men’s souls.”⁶⁸ To be clear, I have argued that Plato positions his approach to discourse in the prime position, ideally situated to supplant the enchantment of epic myths with dialectic and philosophy. However, the dialogue gives us other indicators. That is, the road is an archetype framed as a rhetorical encounter with the other that functions psychagogically. In this way, just as the dialogue uses the imagery of the road to stage an encounter between Socrates and Phaedrus, and the soul by chariot, so too the dialogue attempts to lead the reader toward dialectic. The question remains, what is Plato leading us toward? Or how would we frame this contemporarily? To be direct, much like Burke’s conception of myth, our conceptions of the soul may be used for bad or good ends, but the soul cannot be dispensed with—it is, like myths, as “real as food, tools, and shelter are.”⁶⁹ In this sense,

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⁶⁸ Frentz, “Memory, Myth, and Rhetoric,” 251.

⁶⁹ Burke, “Revolutionary Symbolism in America, 267.
Plato’s journey toward the Good, in our own terms, can be defined as a more just society, the sublime, a better life, or the good life.\(^{70}\) Frentz clarifies the issue:

An increasing number of contemporary rhetorical scholars are reconsidering the relationship between rhetoric and the unconscious. And whether the unconscious is viewed as the repository of repressed drives, the fantastic realm of some preconscious imaginary, or even the seat of hard-wired spiritual potentials, the possibility that rhetoric might touch our souls as well as our societies seems to be an idea whose time has come around—once again.\(^{71}\)

Plato’s *Phaedrus* is an ideal site to consider this. However, where Frentz is concerned with memory and myth in relation to rhetoric, I am concerned with the road and myth in relation to rhetoric. Specifically, I have argued that the *Phaedrus* foregrounds the relationship between the road and rhetoric, giving us clear indication of how the road functions as a form of *psychagogic* rhetoric—a leading of the soul, one that relies on the use of myth and poetic symbolism. In tension with the exclusive dialectical character of the dialogue, I explore the mythic-poetic nature of rhetoric as it bears upon the road. To be clear, though, just as Raymond Williams’s defined culture as a “whole way of life,”\(^{72}\) so too Daniel Werner emphasizes Socrates’ interest in “an entire way of life,” and not merely for the attainment of “self knowledge,” but for a clearer understanding of who we are as human beings.”\(^{73}\) All other intellectual pursuits are secondary. This theme is

\(^{70}\) See Plato, *The Republic*, 508e.


\(^{73}\) Werner, *Myth and Philosophy*, 36.
essential to understanding the archetypal nature of the road and how it manifests in rhetorical history and popular American culture.

A (In) Convenient Myth

Finally, in consideration of the possibilities that the *Phaedrus* may be read as a living myth and *psychagogic* rhetoric, I offer one final implication pertaining to myth. As Frentz indicates, while myth has enjoyed thorough study in literature, anthropology, religion, and psychology, rhetoric has not always, or vigorously, shared in that concern. There is, to be sure, an anxiety within contemporary critical discourse about myth. For some, myths are too closely connected to religion and superstition. For others, translating the traditional study of political words and action to personal growth is unsettling. For still others, subsequently, and relatedly, such an association would render rhetoric indecipherable from psychology.\(^74\) Along these lines, perhaps we are unwilling to concede, with Jung, that the ethical task of humanity should be concerned with the *other* as a conscious recognition of our interdependence among all life forms,\(^75\) myth as the culture’s unconscious, or, along with Frentz, that the *Phaedrus* is a living myth that raises our awareness of spiritual insights in the soul. Regardless, as Frentz argues, and as I address in my critical considerations section, often times, possessing a spiritual attitude about spiritual texts prevents us from missing meaning that we might otherwise lose with a secularizing hermeneutic.

\(^74\) Frentz, “Memory, Myth, and Rhetoric,” 245.

Is it possible to overcome the apparent anxiety in contemporary discourse about myth, where we move past our sense that just below the surface of narrative’s innocence, underground, lay ideological geysers just waiting to erupt. Given the complex history of the two terms most pertinent to Plato’s dialogues and the ancient world, *mythos* and *logos*, if we want to understand meaning in spiritual texts, and spiritual people, we may need to extend some mythic credibility to dialectic. To be explicit, the scholarly narrative that neatly divides Greek intellectual history into a mythical age and a post-mythical age (the “Greek miracle”) is little more than a convenient myth, or more precisely, an *inconvenient* myth. There is no simple movement from mythos to logos; no “unidirectional and irreversible shift” from a mythical mode of thought to a rational mode of thought. It is as convenient in contemporary critical discourse as it was for Plato.

It is important to recognize that the Greek philosophers, Plato in particular, initiated their own line of legitimation—a “rhetoric of exclusion, situating their own *logos* in stark opposition to the traditional *mythoi*—as a means of defining themselves as philosophers.” This rhetorical posturing is simply inaccurate as a representation of ancient society and texts on the grounds that it rests on the presupposition of a pre-philosophical era that somehow lacked rationality, giving it an ahistorical character. In actuality, “nearly all of the early Greek philosophers continued to use myth in their writings.” Relevant to more than just the *Phaedrus*, however, these problematic assumptions also apply to similar presumptions in contemporary critical discourse that

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*78* Werner, *Myth and Philosophy*, 5. See also Jean Pierre Vernant, *Myth and Thought Among the Greeks* (London: Routledge, 1983), 343. Here, philosophy is depicted as a “traveler without luggage, entering the world without a past, without antecedents, without affiliations.”
continue to neatly divide mythos and logos. Bruce Lincoln eloquently frames the entire dilemma:

Heroic accounts of progress and the march of civilization, when narrating the beloved Greek Miracle, regularly grant prominent place to the transformation in speech and thought that led from the mythos of Homer and Hesiod to the logos of Heraclitus and Plato, a transformation associated with the move from symbolic to rational discourse, anthropomorphism to abstraction, and religion to philosophy.  

As Lincoln further argues, Plato’s dismissive attitude toward myth, granted, while used to make a philosophical point, “prevailed through the Enlightenment and produced the master narrative of the entity that calls itself ‘Western Civilization.’”

Of particular note in Plato’s account, specifically as it pertains to the hierarchic nature of souls, is that the philosophers are placed in the paramount position, while poets are relegated to sixth position, religious authority is placed in fifth position, and democrats are placed in eighth position, just above tyrants. By placing philosophers in the utmost position, Plato’s “self-interest” becomes clearer. Philosophy was not, in Plato’s moment, an established profession, but a new idiosyncratic term, one in which Plato sought to distinguish himself and his circle from their numerous rivals. In other words, what we have in the *Phaedrus*, and his other dialogues as well, is a contentious cultural discourse between the sophists, rhapsodes, orators, poets, rhetoricians, and philosophers, all attempting to legitimate themselves. Plato’s *Phaedrus* illustrates that the individual can influence myths just as much as myths influence individuals.

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framework, myths may be used for bad ends and good ends, but cannot be dispensed with.\textsuperscript{83}

\subsection*{1.2.2 Historical Antecedents: Hebraic and Homeric History}

In order to keep these considerations about the road in the \textit{Phaedrus} in proper perspective, here, I discuss two historical antecedents to the archetypal road that I considered in the \textit{Phaedrus}. The first considers the “Songs of Ascents” in Hebraic history while the second considers Homer’s \textit{Odyssey} in Homeric history. The objective here, rather than entering into an extended study of these intellectual worlds, is to help us understand not only the prevalence of the road in human culture and history, but also to attune us to that particular type of rhetorical road that I am interested in: \textit{psychagogic}. Specifically, I will illustrate the importance of both bodily and spiritual journeys related to ideas around the road, myth, and the poetic in Hebraic and Homeric history.

First, we find aspects of this \textit{psychagogic} archetype, the road as a rhetorical encounter with the divine other, in the Hebrew’s “Songs of Ascents.” In these Psalms, Hebrew pilgrims endure bodily movement on the Jericho road leading up to Jerusalem, in order to encounter the divine other—Yahweh. In line with my argument, these poetic songs sung en route to Jerusalem align with the archetype that I have outlined. Moreover, movement defines the entirety of Old Testament historical and theological identity. Consider, for instance, Yahweh’s creation mandate, that is, that the people disperse over the face of the earth.\textsuperscript{84} Further, the myth of Babel is dramatically characterized by the

\textsuperscript{83} Burke, “Revolutionary Symbolism in America,” 267.
\textsuperscript{84} See Genesis 1:22, 28; 9:1, 7 (ESV).
Babylonians desire to not move over the face of the earth. Still further, the call of Abram indicates, “Go from your country and your kindred.” Indeed, all of these initial indications of movement establish an important connection between movement and national identity, one that defined Israel’s history with Yahweh.

Looking back further, dated by scholars between 1446 and 1260 B.C.E., the myth of the Exodus, derived from a Greek noun in the Septuagint, exodus, and meaning “a going out” or “departure,” is an adventure story par excellence, featuring an account of Israel’s bondage, deliverance, and passage through the Red Sea. Relatedly, the book of Numbers, derived from the Hebrew word bemidbar, meaning “in the wilderness,” recounts Israel’s forty-year wandering journey from Mt. Sinai to Canaan. Other brief, though no less important, examples include the quest story of the sojourning Moabite Ruth, the century-plus account in Ezra of the peoples’ going out and return from exile, and the declaration of Isaiah the prophet that anticipated Jesus of Nazareth: “In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord; make straight in the desert a highway for our God. Every valley shall be lifted up, and every mountain and hill be made low; the uneven ground shall become level, and the rough places a plain.”

In essence, this emphasis upon movement is as true for the New Testament as it was in the Old Testament. For example, in the book of Luke, there is an elaborate travel section, comprised of 9:51-19:27 that specifically accounts for various journeys to Jerusalem. In this account, we find the ancient road narrative of the Good Samaritan on

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85 See Genesis 11.
86 See Genesis 12:1.
87 See Isaiah 40:3-4.
the Jericho road,\textsuperscript{88} which holds particular importance in this project, as it does in American culture. Specifically as it relates to my argument of the road as a rhetorical encounter with the other, the Samaritan Ethic represents an alternative terminology and discourse that helps substantiate these claims. Roads also account for transcendent changes of identity, on the road to Emmaus, on which a resurrected Jesus appears to his followers,\textsuperscript{89} and the road to Damascus, where a radiant Jesus blinds Saul of Tarsus before his sight is restored at a home located on Straight Street,\textsuperscript{90} what Kenneth Burke calls the great change from “No to Yes that struck down the thirteenth apostle, Saul-become-Paul, on the road to Damascus.”\textsuperscript{91} In sum, when we pattern the historical experiences of the Hebrew people, both theological and national identity comes while on the road. Kenneth Burke even situates the central charge of rhetoric in Hebraic history, when he writes: “Rhetoric is concerned with the state of Babel after the Fall,” the task of rhetoric, then, being a response to division or otherness.\textsuperscript{92}

Second, not only do we find historical antecedents to the psychagogic road in Hebraic history, but also in Homeric history, offering a much more relevant cultural relationship to the issues of the \textit{Phaedrus}. Essentially, Plato refigures and rearranges numerous tropes from the \textit{Odyssey} in the \textit{Phaedrus}. For instance, Socrates’ voluntary exodus from the city could be likened to Odysseus’s departure from Ithaca. More specifically, as it relates to the road as an encounter with the other, one needs only to consider the importance of the egalitarian treatment of the stranger in \textit{The Odyssey}. Of

\begin{thebibliography}{99}

\bibitem{90} See Acts 9.
\bibitem{91} Kenneth Burke, \textit{Attitudes Toward History} (Los Altos, CA: Hermes, 1959), xv.
\bibitem{92} Kenneth Burke, \textit{A Rhetoric of Motives} (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969), 23.
\end{thebibliography}
the many interpretations one could take toward the *Odyssey,* I rely on some of those indicated here by Planinc, who reads the tale as an allegory on shamanistic spiritual travel along the *axis mundi* in the direction of the supreme divine reality, a voyage that never reaches its goal in this life.\(^{93}\) To be clear, my interest here is not in the particulars of Planinc’s arguments, but rather, how he helps clarify the *other* oriented nature of the epic poem as being principally concerned with the road as an encounter with others, as when Telemachus is vexed when a stranger arriving from a long journey is kept waiting at the gate.\(^{94}\) Specifically, as it bears upon how the *psychagogic* road leads us toward the Good, for Planinc, in the course of wandering, Odysseus is transformed from a cunning scoundrel into a more just man who is open to the formation of his soul in accord with divine order.\(^{95}\) In this sense, it is illustrative of *psychagogic* rhetoric in that it expresses a mythic and poetic story about the road. It was an attempt to “lead” Greek souls.

With regards to myth, Planinc contends that the true function of myth is to “describe with symbols or metaphors what we encounter as we travel along the *axis mundi* (which is itself a metaphor) in our souls.”\(^{96}\) In the *Phaedrus,* Socrates’ second speech uses images that try to capture the soul’s experiences of higher reality.\(^{97}\) The point being, to inquire into the literal truth of the myths is to ask the wrong question because it is beyond the power of the human mind to discover answers to such questions. The best we can do, as I indicated with regards to Thomas Frentz’ argument, is to allude to what it is like analogically. Planinc further argues that spiritual transformation described in


\(^{95}\) Quoted in Rhodes, *Eros, Wisdom, and Silence,* 420.

\(^{96}\) Quoted in Rhodes, *Eros, Wisdom, and Silence,* 420.

\(^{97}\) Quoted in Rhodes, *Eros, Wisdom, and Silence,* 434.
images of travel along the axis mundi is Plato’s project of refiguring the Odyssey to present Socrates as the New Odysseus.\textsuperscript{98} Perhaps Planinc’s most telling claim, as it pertains to my own, is as follows:

A human being, by nature, is not an entirely self-sufficient and autonomous entity. To learn about oneself, one must learn about the ways in which one participates in orders of being that transcend one’s particularity and singular existence. One also learns from other human beings, and, in their absence from their writings. Odysseus’s family traveled throughout the world, and beyond, to learn of the cities and minds of human beings (Odyssey 1.1-5).\textsuperscript{99}

Put differently, Homer made Odysseus’s distant wanderings represent spiritual travel; and building on Homer, Plato has Socrates internalize his own journeys.\textsuperscript{100} In sum, both of these historical antecedents give us some context in which to further consider how the archetypal road animates human encounters with others while on this psychagogic road that attempts to lead souls toward the Good.

1.2.3 Contemporary Rhetorical Roadmaps

To this point, I hope that I have made the relation of the road to rhetoric more apparent. In this section, my objective is to show how contemporary rhetorical theorists have used the metaphor and language of the road to arrange and organize rhetoric as a discipline. Most importantly, psychagogia indicates both what rhetoric is and what it does. In this way, rhetoric does something for us. Put differently, Kenneth Burke refers to it as “equipment for living.”\textsuperscript{101} For instance, in The Prospect of Rhetoric, rhetoricians situated problems in contemporary life to show how rhetoric could be applied more

\textsuperscript{98} Quoted in Rhodes, Eros, Wisdom, and Silence, 420.
\textsuperscript{99} Zdravko Planinc, Plato through Homer: Poetry and Philosophy in the Cosmological Dialogues (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2003), 83.
\textsuperscript{100} Planinc, Plato Through Homer, 83.
\textsuperscript{101} Burke, “Philosophy of Literary Form, 304.
effectively to address current and future needs.\footnote{Lloyd Bitzer and Edwin Black. \textit{The Prospect of Rhetoric} (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1971), 1.} In other words, scholars held faith in the possibility that their work could affect social change. \textit{Reengaging the Prospects of Rhetoric} revisited these twentieth century issues for the twenty first century: its “fundamentals” (Karl Wallace-Stephen H. Browne); its action for a contemporary world (Samuel L. Becker-Barbara Bieseker); its uses (Richard McKeon-David Depew); its intellectual physiology (Lawrence W. Rosenfield-Robert S. Iltis); its trends in rhetorical theory (Henry Johnstone-Steve Fuller); its scope (Wayne Booth-Paul Kameen); its emotive potential (Chaim Perelman-Celeste Michelle Condit); its needs (Hugh Duncan-Peter Simonson); its trends of study (Wayne Brockriede-John Lyne); its queries and caveats (Burnet Baskerville-Mark Porrovecchio); and its quests (Edward P. J. Corbett-Steven Mailloux).\footnote{Mark Porrovecchio. \textit{Reengaging the Prospects of Rhetoric: Current Conversations and Contemporary Challenges} (Abingdon, UK: Taylor & Francis, 2010), 1.}

Aside from considering the possibilities and limitations of rhetoric, both the \textit{Prospect} and \textit{Reengaging} presume that rhetoric does something for us as a society. As for rhetoric, the metaphor of the road has become a prominent strategy for broadening its scope. Such examples include: \textit{The Rise of Rhetoric and Its Intersections with Contemporary Critical Thought} and \textit{At the Intersections: Cultural Studies and Rhetorical Studies}. In interdisciplinary study, \textit{intersections} are useful metaphors for depicting the convergence of disparate ideas. Put differently, the analogical nature of language, and the metaphor of the road in particular, offer productive access points for challenging the \textit{story simplex}, or trained incapacities of dominant discourses. Here, I offer three examples, among many,
from contemporary rhetorical theory to demonstrate how the discursive road functions as a rhetorical encounter with the theoretical other toward self-knowledge and the intellectual Good.

First, there is Sonja Foss and Cindy Griffin’s “A Feminist Perspective on Rhetorical Theory: Toward a Clarification of Boundaries.” In this article, Foss and Griffin, in foregrounding the importance of “boundaries,” bring forth the imagery of the road as a means to examine the borders of rhetorical practice. For Foss and Griffin, rhetoricians consider how rhetoric constructs our worlds and how theories provide particular perspectives. However, they recognize that theory is simply one view among others and does not always get translated into a discovery of its particular biases. I pause here, for the sake of opportunistic emphasis, to show how Foss and Griffin substantiate my argument about the dangers of story simplex (and trained incapacities):

A few master theories may come to dominate a discipline without a clear understanding of the ways in which they limit our understanding. Only through challenging and questioning the placement of the boundaries of our theories will we be able to understand what kinds of pictures of rhetoric our theories present and to account for rhetorical activity that previously has not fit into existing rhetorical theories.

In sum, Foss and Griffin recognize the propensity of rhetorical theory to follow the “mainstream,” which actually circumscribes the theoretical lines of rhetoric. As such, their language takes on the language of questing and remapping in order to lead others, psychagogically, toward some semblance of the better life or intellectual Good.

Second, Cheryl Glenn’s “Remapping Rhetorical Territory” is more explicit in its

road imagery, utilizing the metaphor of “maps” to reconsider the borders of rhetorical theory. Plainly, we are beginning to see the emergence of a sophisticated rhetorical cartography. Specifically, Glenn maps “rhetorical terrain.” For Glenn, remapping allows us to consider ignored borders on the rhetorical map, the “shadowy regions where roads run off the edge of the paper and drop away at sharp angles.” Perhaps her simplest, but most ardent, claim is that our histories do something for us (or they should). Such theories address particular needs, for particular times, in specific places, for particular theorists—resonating with Kenneth Burke’s notion that our answers are always stylized answers addressed to particular problems in the times which we live.

My third and final example comes from Carly Woods’s “(Im)mobile Metaphors: Toward an Intersectional Rhetorical History,” which foregrounds road imagery in both her examination of metaphors and her study of “intersectionality.” Because metaphors structure our experience, arrange reality, and prescribe how we should act, the metaphorical language of the road can help us see the specific ways in which contemporary theorists may re-conceptualize rhetoric. Woods writes:

Feminist scholars have long grappled with the figurative language of intersectionality in order to find the conceptual framing that best accounts for varied relationships between power, oppression, and privilege. Similarly, rhetorical historians have an obligation to think critically about the metaphors we use. One cluster of metaphors, in particular, characterizes both intersectional and rhetorical-historical research: the spatial and geographic.

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Put differently, the “language of intersections and maps suggests a fixed location that does not fully account for the fluidity and shifting of human relationships.” In sum, contemporary rhetorical history provides new spaces from which to study and extend intersectionality. In all, each of these examples demonstrates, at a minimum, the concrete nature of the imagery of the road as an agent for perspective, and at most, the significance of the road as a means of enacting rhetorical encounters with others.

1.3 Road Work Ahead

In this section, I chart a detailed course that will guide us through the remainder of this project. First, I look at how the road has been conceptualized in academic disciplines, paying attention to particular themes with the aim of contributing a rhetorical contribution to the study of the road. Second, I focus on a particular gap in the discourse, what I have referred to as story simplex, or trained incapacities, while also bringing recent studies into focus and how this dissertation adds to those studies. Third, I offer three critical considerations as we move from rhetorical history to American culture. Fourth, I articulate my primary research questions. Fifth, I substantiate these questions as a means of developing a new critical vocabulary of the road that enable us to confront an array of issues related to mobility in the twenty-first century, one that may even enable us to develop an ultimate vocabulary of race. Sixth, I situate the methodological attitudes and theoretical perspectives that will lead us through this study. And seventh, and finally, I offer a preview of the remaining chapters in this dissertation.

111 Woods, “(Im)mobile Metaphors,” 78.
112 Woods, “(Im)mobile Metaphors,” 92.
1.3.1 Road Dis/Courses

In this section, I give a brief overview of the various discourses pertaining to the road in American culture, with a critical eye to the pervasiveness of the theme of socio-cultural rebellion. To begin, one of the first studies related to the road is Cynthia Golomb Dettelbach’s *In the Drivers Seat*, which focuses on the automobile in American fiction and popular culture. Ronald Primeau’s *Romance of the Road*, twenty years after *Drivers Seat*, examined America’s romantic idealism for the road, its infatuation with cars and travel, speed and open spaces. Giving a counter perspective to Primeau’s *Romance*, Kris Lackey’s *Road Frames* problematizes the romantic idealism embedded in rediscovering America, perhaps coming closest to the claims I am trying to make, through an exploration of African American road experiences. At the turn of the century, Rowland Sherrill’s *Road Book America* argued that, since the mid-1950s, an astonishing number of Americans have found themselves “literally or imaginatively ‘on the road,’” and upon their returns, have written about it. In other words, Sherrill writes a book about road books, from William Least Heat Moon’s *Blue Highways* to John Steinbeck’s *Travels with Charley* to Kurt Vonnegut’s Jr.’s *Breakfast of Champions* to Robert Pirsig’s *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance* to the small screen of Charles Kuralt’s “On the Road with Charles Kuralt.”113 In all, literary studies helped move the idea of the road from the mobility of the car to the space of the highway to the fluidity of identity politics.114

Second, in the realms of the road’s materiality, scholars are exploring the road as a matter of leisure and tourism. For instance, Andrew Wood, in an article titled, “Two

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Roads Diverge: Route 66, ‘Route 66,’ and the Mediation of American Ruin,” considers the implications of two manifestations of Route 66, particularly the mediated notion tied to entrepreneurs that create, sell, and enact images of the “Mother road” to tourists, travelers, and others.  

115 Brian Ireland’s “American Highways: Recurring Images and Themes of the Road Genre” argues that Americans are a “restless people” endowed with a “nervous energy” that culminates through music, literature, and film.  

116 And Karl Raitz’s “American Roads, Roadside America” examines how road expansion manifested in an opportunity to create a new American roadside, a distinct space for townspeople to encounter travelers. Each of these studies, and others like them, focus on the postwar American notion of travel as leisure related to identity politics.

Third, perhaps the most thorough and popular discourse lay in film studies. Mark Williams’ *Road Movies* was the first book to give attention to the road as a genre, defining it as “almost any film in which a motor vehicle is elemental to the plot.”  

117 However, it is Timothy Corrigan’s single chapter on the road film in *Cinema Without Walls* that is widely considered the harbinger of cinematic road study. For Corrigan, the road film is a postwar phenomenon defined by the breakdown of the family and mechanized transportation, characterized by hyper-masculinity and cataclysmic events acting upon characters. Steven Cohan and Ina Rae Hark’s *The Road Movie Book* was the first comprehensive study on the road film, an anthology of essays that address issues such as the romanticization of alienation and the problematizing of uniform identity in

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American culture, examining key moments of the road movie as they emerged in periods of American upheaval and dislocation, arguing that a utopian/dystopian strain has dominated road movies since *Easy Rider*.\(^{118}\)

With the others comprising a combination of individual chapters, anthologies, and fandom, perhaps the most focused study of the road is David Laderman’s *Driving Visions*. For Laderman, the fundamental impulse of the road movie is rebellion against social norms, against the unwelcome oppressive social circumstances of the time.\(^{119}\) He also argues that there is a tension in the road genre’s “neo-modernist” impulse with a concurrence of conformity and suspicious disillusionment that dominate cinematic, cultural, political institutions.\(^{120}\) While Laderman’s decade-by-decade approach to the genre contributes important considerations on the American road film, Katie Mills seeks to “go off the map” by focusing on fictional milestones and minority storytellers, challenging Corrigan’s assertion regarding the “male hysteria” of the road genre, and instead, asserting that this was more a product of academic discourses in the 1980s.\(^{121}\)

Other film studies include Jason Wood’s *100 Road Movies*, which provides a taxonomic overview of twentieth-century road films and defines the road genre as undertaking a journey to seek adventure, or to seek redemption or escape from constricting society norms, illustrating once again an emphasis in the discourse on the resistance to traditional norms.\(^{122}\) On an international level, Ewa Mazierska and Laura

\(^{118}\) Steven Cohan and Ina Rae Hark, eds., *The Road Movie Book* (New York: Routledge, 1997), 2.
\(^{120}\) Laderman, *Driving Visions*, 6.
\(^{121}\) Mills, *The Road Story and the Rebel*, 3, 10.
\(^{122}\) Jason Wood, *100 Road Movies* (London: British Film Institute, 2007), xv.
Rascaroli’s *Crossing New Europe* considers the broader implications of the road, comparing European and American road movies, while considering migration, nomadism, displacement, and shifting identities in postmodern and post-Berlin Europe. Additional examples include Devin Orgeron’s *Road Movies*, which considers the social function of images of human mobility and Neal Archer’s *The French Road Movie*, which looks at the road film in relation to the political and cultural events of May 1968. For many scholars, the road as a genre shifted in postwar America due in part to the influence of Jack Kerouac’s *On the Road*. However, few scholars, give attentive critical focus to the influence of social movements like the Montgomery Bus Boycotts, the Freedom Riders, or the Selma marches, or even, the expansive history of road songs in American folk music as a source of inspiration or significance related to the mythology of the road in American culture.

Additionally, though not scholarly in nature, other modes of road discourse include television and visual rhetoric through photography. For instance, a number of programs, beginning in the 1960s began featuring the road more prominently, from serial shows like *Route 66* and *Kung Fu*, showcasing life on the road in an automobile and the wandering foot. In *Star Trek*, for instance, the mythic imagery of the American frontier is taken to space: “Space, the final frontier. These are the voyagers of the Starship Enterprise. Their ongoing mission: to explore strange new worlds, to seek out new life forms and near civilizations, and to boldly go where no one has gone before.”

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another instance, while the small screen was exploring the road, so too were photographers. Robert Frank went out on the road to capture images for his groundbreaking portraiture of America, in *The Americans*. Similarly, out on the road taking pictures for the Farm Security Administration, Dorothea Lange happened upon a sign for the camp at which she stopped and photographed Florence Owens Thompson and her children in 1936. The American popular imagination might never have gazed upon the “Migrant Mother” if Lang had not been out on the road, encountering others. Likewise, had folklorist Alan Lomax not been willing to go out on the road, we might never have heard Muddy Waters—and without Waters, we might never have encountered the Rolling Stones, the Beatles, Cream, Led Zeppelin and countless others from the birth of rock-and-roll on through soul, rhythm and blues, rap, hip-hop, and remix. The point here is not hyperbole, but rather, to illustrate how fundamental the road is and has been in the acquisition of and expression of music and visual images.

Though there are various theories about what makes the road meaningful, the theme of socio-cultural rebellion has become a dominant theme, particularly in literature and the cinema.\(^{125}\) Put differently, the road has become a means of making *declarations of independence* about American life.\(^{126}\) Katie Mills argues that Americans have learned to adapt their narratives about movement into a genre of rebellion using whatever means available to them to “tell stories of their differences from the mainstream.”\(^{127}\) This is Baudrillard’s *America*, the land of “empty, absolute freedom of the freeways” and “desert

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\(^{125}\) Mills, *The Road Story and the Rebel*, 5.
speed.” Collectively, these discourses pattern the road as a genre of rebellion, covering more than sixty years of rebellion in literature, film, television, and digital media. 

To the point, central to my argument is the claim that extant road discourses hover around one or two dominant story themes, *story simplex*, what Clarissa Pinkola Estes defines as focusing “almost exclusively only on one or two story themes, inhibiting or forbidding all others, or only excessively touting a favorite one or two,” thus colluding in the “gradual destruction” of its own panoramic spirit and breadth. In the next section, I offer an alternative consideration about the road in American culture, arguing for the road as a living mythology based on the archetype of the road as a rhetorical encounter with the other. Put a different way, well before the photographic image or the cinema captured the popular imagination, Americans established their sensibilities about the road through their hardships on actual roads, and here, I am thinking with a critical eye toward the “politics of mobility,” by focusing on the road in African American experience in American history, and most directly, in twentieth-century American culture, by centering on its ethical nature as a rhetorical encounter with the other in American folk music and the marches of the American civil rights movement.

1.3.2 Road Less Traveled

In the Introduction to the commemorative edition of Joseph Campbell’s *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, Clarissa Pinkola Estes discusses the importance of telling the “whole story,” that is, that journalists, writers, and artists properly consider the archetypal

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129 Mills, *The Road Story and the Rebel*, 274.
components and power of mythic stories. For Estes, Campbell is concerned with spiritual
frontiers that confront the soul in an effort to keep myths alive. These become most clear
as we encounter others on our journey through personal, cosmological, and spiritual
realities. Estes argues that by maintaining archetypal themes in our stories, immersing in
the nuances of other human beings’ unpredictable fates, we prevent stories from being
shortened into “bytes.” When we become content with the fragmented stories that
dominate our wants and needs, we miss deeper meanings. Instead, Estes, as an activist for
mythic form, contends that we may benefit from slowing down, to take a moment, and
listen to stories with rich and far-reaching mythical implications. Put differently, when a
contingency of powerful people, or even an entire culture, looks only to one or two
dominant themes, we become complicit in the collusion of our storytelling capacities—
trained incapacities. Estes gives us an image to go with the issue, “The story tradition
becomes so narrowed that, like an artery that is clogged, the heart begins to starve. In
physiology, as in culture, this is a life-threatening symptom.”

In this project, I take Estes’s concern seriously enough to suggest that the
discursive road has become too enamored with cultural myths concerned with themes
driven by individualism and socio-cultural rebellion. What I propose, then, is that we
consider the alternative of an archetype of the road as a rhetorical encounter with the
other. I have outlined one primary text, and historical antecedents, from which to explore
such an idea. In American culture, this archetype, as I argue, is represented richly in
American folk music, in the blues most specifically, and also in the American civil rights
movement, in King’s sermonic discourse. Put differently, in American culture, our

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cultural myths dominate the mythology of the road. As such, I intend to reorient the flattened discourse of the road back into some semblance of its multi-dimensional character.  

Conceiving the subject beyond its dominant themes is a beneficial critical practice. One way of conceptualizing the road differently is through the other rather than the self. However, because of story simplex and trained incapacities, this is a difficult charge. To remedy this, I propose a perspective by incongruity—the “other self.” For an indication, consider how our poetic and aesthetic depictions of roads always situate what Burke refers to as the grand convergence of human relations. For example, what would have become of the explorations of Lewis and Clark if not for Sacagawea, who accompanied them for thousands of miles on their journey to the Pacific?

To demonstrate how scholars are beginning to take the road less traveled, I have arranged two categories of emerging scholarship. The first addresses, broadly, the intersection of the road as a place with critical and rhetorical considerations. The second addresses, generally, the connection between the road and poetic symbolism or music. In each of these studies, often times, the road is implicated without being explicitly stated. Further, much of the focus of these studies centers on nineteenth-century experience, giving me more cause to focus on twentieth-century possibilities.

Road as Place

In category one, I outline six different studies, in chronological order of issue, that look critically at some dimension of the road as a place in relation to rhetoric and/or culture. The first is John Brinckerhoff Jackson’s A Sense of Time, a Sense of Place, a

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134 Burke, A Grammar of Motives, 324.
landscape study, which argues that the road has become an actual place rather than a means of getting some place. Jackson asserts:

One of the least investigated aspects of our European-American culture is our ambivalent attitude toward the road and the street. In their infrequent mention of roads, historians and even many geographers tend to adopt the establishment point of view that roads are essentially for the maintenance of order and for commerce (or warfare) with neighboring states. Nevertheless, there has always been and probably always will be a widespread distrust among average men and women of all roads which come from the outside world, bringing strangers and strange ideas. Reactions to such roads vary from age to age, from one region, one class, one stage of economic or social development to another; yet underlying all those variations there seems to be a basic human response: the road is a very powerful space; and unless it is handled very carefully and constantly watched, it can undermine and destroy the existing order.¹³⁵

Put differently, Jackson contends that because of our ever-evolving industrialized society, transient movement has become increasingly important and the road has become a place of leisure and social intercourse. In essence, Jackson guides us through the rhetoricity of American landscapes past and present to show how the road as a place reflects changes in the broader culture. Though it does not necessarily address the “politics of mobility” that I have alluded to with regards to the term travel, the benefit of Jackson’s landscape study is that it clearly demonstrates the cultural importance of the road as a site of study.

Second, Omar Swartz’ *The View from on the Road* argues that Jack Kerouac’s *On the Road* constitutes a rhetorical vision that suggests possibilities for social change. Using Bormann’s fantasy-theme analysis, Swartz contends that Kerouac’s vision proves a capable social tool for responding to the questions posed by their times, one that contributes to the identity of culture in America. Put differently, Swartz asserts that in adopting this vision, through the act of questioning the dominant culture, particularly the

cultural myths, new social reality can be constructed. Michael Calvin McGee notes, “So long as ‘the people’ believe basic myths, there is unity and collective identity. When there is no fundamental belief, one senses a crisis which can only be met with a new rhetoric, a new mythology.” Swartz’ study is unique in that it offers a contextualized insight on how the emerging theme of socio-cultural rebellion was itself a movement, responding to the fragmentation of society. However, that movement has become the dominant discourse and, taking McGee at his word, it may be time to question that myth and conceive of a new rhetoric, a new mythology.

Third, Gregory Clark’s *Rhetorical Landscapes in America* explores the rhetorical power of landscapes connected to American tourism. Using Kenneth Burke’s notion of rhetoric as identification, Clark broadens our understanding of public discourse to that of public experience, detailing how rhetorical power is founded, prior to discourse, upon experience, that is, the immersion of oneself with others in an immediate encounter with, in Clark’s case, a public symbol such as the Lincoln Highway or Yellowstone. Moreover, Clark extends that argument even further in his critical study of Kenneth Burke’s poetry, in “‘Sinkership’ and ‘Eye-Crossing’: Apprehensive in the American Landscape.” *Rhetorical Landscapes*, though, stresses how place functions rhetorically, which is significantly tied to memory. Clark’s study is of importance to rhetoricians

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137 Gregory Clark, *Rhetorical Landscapes in America: Variations on a Theme from Kenneth Burke* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2004), 71.
interested in place. However, his attention is primarily centered on nineteenth-century public experience, whereas I will be interested in twentieth-century public experience.

Fourth, Mark Simpson’s *Trafficking Subjects: The Politics of Mobility in Nineteenth-Century America* makes a valuable contribution to the ongoing conversations in contemporary cultural and social theory related to the material and ideological dimensions of human movement, specifically pertaining to the formation and dissolution of subjectivities, local and national, racialized and classed. Moreover, Simpson inflects the claims I mean to develop when he argues that travel, as a universal form of mobility, both erases and conflates those bodies and identities that are invisible, to use the language of Ralph Ellison. Simpson is confronting trained incapacities by dislocating, defamiliarizing, and displacing those dominant conceptions of travel that legitimate some material and discursive practices at the expense of all others. Travel, put differently, “cannot escape the historical legacies of capitalist development and accumulation, of imperialist expansion, and of inequities of numerous kinds.” Simpson’s notion of the “politics of mobility” meaningfully frames the substantive tone of this project.

Fifth, Peter Simonson’s *Refiguring Mass Communication*, though an intellectually historical study of mass communication, adequately frames the important connections between rhetoric and place and communication and transportation. For instance, Simonson argues that many more forms of mass communication lay in mass transportation, including subways, railroads, roads, buses, ferries, and in earlier eras,

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141 Simpson, *Trafficking Subjects*, xix; See also Kaplan, *Questions of Travel*, 131.
ships, canals, wagon trains, and other means of “collective movement.” More specifically, Simonson explores these dynamics through the life and work of the Apostle Paul, a man who traveled thousands of miles across the seas and roads of the Roman Empire, and who was reared in the crossroads city of Tarsus, and Walt Whitman, a man who sauntered the streets of Brooklyn, whose encounters with others captured and enlarged his social imagination. Simonson’s study offers a panoramic vision for the importance of actual and rhetorical pathways.

Sixth, and finally, Gordon Slethaug and Stacilee Ford’s anthology, *Hit the Road, Jack*, more in line with my attention on actual and analogical roads, explores the significance of the road as reality and metaphor through an interdisciplinary study. For Slethaug and Ford, the “road trope” extends beyond actual highways to describe the attitudes and values bound to American cultural, social, and political landscapes, past and present. For instance, Max J. Skidmore’s “Politics, People Moving, and the American Myth” adds to the study of the other and broadens our understanding of national myths. In mapping the trope, however, we get more of the same, as Slethaug looks to how the trope of the road as rebellion has stimulated subsequent generations of rebels. Regardless, these scholars works, considered collectively, helps us consider the many others that have been abandoned “on life’s roadside.”

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143 Martin Luther King, Jr., “On Being a Good Neighbor,” in *Strength to Love* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2010), 27.
Road as Poetic

In the second category, centered on the road in relation to the poetic or music, I give an overview of four different studies, likewise in chronological order of issue. First, Andrew Berish’s *Lonesome Roads and Streets of Dreams* considers the importance of songs about the road as an indicator of how musicians crossed racial and geographical boundaries and found expression for their physical movements in the music they were creating. “Roads,” Berish tells us, “brought more than music — they brought new ways of hearing and understanding America.” Berish gives us a means of grappling with connections between musical expression and the social experience of place in the soundscape of a burgeoning American folk music tradition. Moreover, Berish also sees popular music in ways that go beyond the business of making music, even going so far as to title his project after two road songs, “The Lonesome Road” and “Street of Dreams,” to frame his study:

> The journey of ‘The Lonesome Road’ is a familiar one in American popular music […] Besides being another example of the racial complexities that shaped the development of American popular music, the history and success of ‘The Lonesome Road’ illustrates the era’s preoccupation with place and mobility.  

What is intriguing about Berish’s work, particularly for my project, is its focus on songs like Charlie Barnet’s “Pompton Turnpike” or “Drop Me Off in Harlem,” which embody a move from segregation to integration, of others coming together, through the language of travel, specifically the road. Berish demonstrates the relationship between roads and music as an important part of American history. I do as well.

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146 Berish, *The Lonesome Road*, 27.
Second, turning back to Slethaug and Ford’s *Hit the Road, Jack*, Susan Kuyper’s “The Road in American Vernacular Music,” which I consider at length at the end of Chapter two, and thematically, throughout the duration of this project, focuses on the broad range of folk songs that become key components of the trope of the road in American culture. Kuyper argues that at the heart of all road songs are the “travelers,” giving further credibility to the importance of the relational dimension of the road.\(^{147}\) However, where Kuyper’s study is primarily concerned with songs of travel in the development of nineteenth-century American culture, I focus on the twentieth century, while also giving more attention to the archetype than to cultural myths. Third, Scott H. Church’s doctoral dissertation, *All Living Things are DJs: Rhetoric, Aesthetics, and Remix Culture*, looks at the varied uses of remix culture and music as a productive site to generate insights on both the nature of rhetoric and rhetoric’s place in remix. Specifically, Church, through both a theoretical and performative study, remixes rhetorical theory to create a new critical vocabulary for addressing contemporary issues related to rhetoric and remix culture.

Fourth, and perhaps most significantly, is Gregory Clark’s *Civic Jazz: American Music and Kenneth Burke on the Art of Getting Along*, which looks at the collaborative nature of jazz in relation to the interaction of individuals in the American democratic experience. As I see it, there are at least three striking similarities between Clark’s *Civic Jazz* and my project. One is a focus on rhetoric and music. Second, a consideration of this relationship mediates collaborative encounters with others. And finally, we both use the

theoretical and methodological insights of Kenneth Burke related to identification to
demonstrate the pertinence of our respective claims. Collectively, I argue, American folk
music illustrates an aesthetic rhetoric of identification that brings people together,
through song, around shared national experiences. Clark and Burke’s work are useful in
helping me apprehend insights on some of the specific ways in which the mythology of
the road influences American folk music and helps us sort through ways that we can
improve civic life in a democratic culture. For instance, in an early, albeit brief mention
in Jack Sargeant and Stephanie Watson’s *Lost Highways*, there is a small but nonetheless
important consideration of the importance of the road and music.\(^\text{148}\)

These discourses compel us as critics to expand our thinking beyond dominant
ways of conceiving the subject of the road. In this way, I am mindful of an insight from
Susie Linfield, alluding to the work of Walter Benjamin, that the power of images, or in
my case, both poetic and mental images, “make us want to enter the world it depicts and
even, sometimes, change it.” In other words, images, and road images in particular,
“spur” us to “identification and action.”\(^\text{149}\) As such, we can create a community of
interest with the oppressed and exploited. Linfield also accentuates my concern with the
other, when she notes:

Solidarity! It is a frayed ideal, yet it continues to inspire […] hope that a powerful
human connection will sweep away division of nation, race, and class, and that
the deepest wounds of history can be healed. Against fragmentation, it posits
unity; against loneliness, brotherhood; against abandonment, support; against
weakness, strength.\(^\text{150}\)

\(^{148}\) Jack Sargeant and Stephanie Watson, eds., *Lost Highways: An Illustrated

\(^{149}\) Linfield, *Cruel Radiance: Photography and Political Violence* (Chicago:
University of Chicago Press, 2010.), 17.

\(^{150}\) Linfield, *Cruel Radiance*, 129.
In sum: the road is a space at which our differences and similarities converge. Peter Simonson’s insight on how our encounters with others open “analogically toward yours and mine,” giving us perspective by incongruity and helping us find points of unity with distant others, is pertinent here. Roads mediate human encounters and reflect the “chances and misfortunes and expectations and domesticity and wonderment” of humanity. In our discursive attempts to see ourselves more accurately represented in depictions of the road we have become overly enamored with our selfhood. Rather, the road also underscores, to use a representative anecdote, the “other self,” that is, we find our self as we encounter others. Put differently, we must come to see the other in brother—as in brotherhood. Or to demystify the gendered aspect of that phrase, we must come to see the invisible in indivisible, something I address at greater length in chapter two. To these ends, I fill a textual and cultural gap by looking at how the road as a rhetorical encounter with the other in formative periods and iconic texts, has influenced and transformed twentieth-century American culture.

1.3.3 Critical Considerations

In this section, I offer three critical considerations to keep in mind as I move toward my conclusions. In part, I provide these because of the complexities inherent to critical study. More plainly, Burke’s understanding of the deflective nature of selection is helpful. Terminological language is like a terministic screen that directs our attention,

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152 Hilaire Belloc, *This and That and the Other* (New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1912), 153.
while simultaneously deflecting our attention.153 “Look at these” is another way of saying, “don’t look at those.” For instance, each of the component parts of my project—rhetoric, myth, the road, and American culture—have volumes of work devoted to their complexities and nuances. By combining select aspects of these discourses, there is great potential to steer off course from where I am hoping to lead us. As such, I offer these considerations to keep us on the right track.

Spiritual Attitude

My first critical consideration comes from Thomas Frentz’ study of memory and myth in Plato’s Phaedrus, where he asserts that approaching certain texts with a decidedly spiritual attitude can be useful for interpreting meanings in rhetorical and cultural texts. To be clear, I am not advocating any particular spiritual position, only that a spiritual attitude is sometimes necessary to get at the more nuanced elements of meaning in a text. To ignore such, as Frentz states it, “is to miss the meanings.”154 In the context of this study, like Frentz, I also address periods, people, and poetry that touch on aspects like soul and myth. I do so with the understanding that, as one cautionary comment of Frentz’ manuscript suggested: “Uttering the word ‘spirit’ in print is a capital offense and must be punished by the black batons of secular humanism.”155 I too hope that rhetorical scholars, if they should feel the urge to unsheathe their batons, would consider, instead, looking at these complex texts through a spiritual lens.

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For the sake of clarity, allow me to offer two examples. The first is Carol Poster’s “An Organon for Theology: Whately’s Rhetoric and Logic in Religious Context.” This is an example of what it looks like to “miss the meanings.” What Poster ascertained is a tendency in scholarship to secularize, in the case of Whately, the “intellectual history of a profoundly religious era, and one in which issues of faith and doubt were at the forefront of most intellectual endeavors.”\textsuperscript{156} Similarly, we should guard against secularizing spiritual matters and concerns. As a counter example, Peter Simonson, in his study of mass communication, reminds us that an understanding of religious texts, perspectives, and vocabularies, used by the likes of Ralph Waldo Emerson, Walt Whitman, William James, Kenneth Burke, James W. Carey, and John Durham Peters, has been effective in helping us make sense of “communication and social life.”\textsuperscript{157} It is my hope, then, that the objects of study I am concerned with will be given appropriate considerations.

Trained Incapacity

My second critical consideration is a concern with trained incapacities—what I have, up to this point, referred to primarily as \textit{story simplex}. For a more detailed perspective on this, I turn to Kenneth Burke’s use of Thorstein Veblen’s concept of a “trained incapacity” in \textit{Permanence and Change}. Simply put, a trained incapacity is a term designed to help us understand the complexities of seeing subjects from only one dominant perspective. Veblen restricts the concept to those who through extended training have “built their scheme of orientation about this kind of effort and ambition that

\textsuperscript{157} Simonson, \textit{Refiguring Mass Communication}, 6.\end{flushright}
they cannot see serious possibilities in any other system.”

Put differently, a trained incapacity is simply a rhetorical way of articulating the dangers of *story simplex*. As to what this looks like in critical motion, I turn our attention back to an earlier example I outlined in this chapter, when I referred to Foss and Griffin’s concern with how a “few master theories may come to dominate a discipline without a clear understanding of the ways in which they limit our understanding.”

I argue this is true of road discourse.

In rhetorical study, this manifests as “rhetoric of” discourse. To avoid misunderstanding, I am not suggesting that all such discourse is a trained incapacity. Rather, I am acknowledging a subtle tendency, a presumption, even, at least in the language of our discourse, that we know all we need to know about rhetoric—enough to use it in the study of *other* subjects. As an alternative, I use the road to conceptualize rhetoric. An example of such an approach is found in *Mapping Christian Rhetorics*, which asserts that religious rhetorics tell us something about “rhetoric itself—its boundaries, its characteristics, its functioning,” meeting at the intersections of rhetoric and Christianity to locate religion more centrally within the realms of rhetorical studies in the twenty-first century, by acknowledging works that have been overlooked or ignored.

In a similar spirit, Scott Church uses remix culture as a productive site to generate perspectives on the nature of rhetoric and the role of rhetoric in remix. As it pertains to this project, then, I offer a conclusion similar to Foss and Griffin. That is, it is

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159 Foss and Griffin, “Clarification of Boundaries,” 330.
161 Scott Church, *All Living Thins Are DJs: Rhetoric, Aesthetics, and Remix Culture* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska, Dissertation, 2013), 68.
only by challenging the themes that dominate the study of the road that a clearer understanding of the ways in which that discourse may limit our understanding be seen and new possibilities be remapped.

With a bit more detail, allow me to offer one more substantive example of how a trained incapacity might undermine or hinder critical work. To be plain, given that one of the true marks of critical work is being able to make explicit distinctions of difference, I want us to consider the ways in which critical considerations of similarity may be overlooked. Truth be told, we want to be the kind of person, first, and scholar, second, who offers judgments that “humanize, that make us better people,” but we find the “Critical Life” difficult to turn off.\(^{162}\) In this project, however, given the nature of archetypal and cultural myths, of bringing people together around common ideals, I am quite interested in how roads denote human similarity. Rather than always making others over in our own image, there may well be value in making oneself over in the image of the other. Consider these critical attestations: “What binds societies together are common vocabularies and common hopes.”\(^{163}\) “It is the affirmative, not the negative, that is in the end important, wrote Charles Cooley.”\(^{164}\) Humans want to be considered for what they are rather than what they are not.\(^{165}\) All those to say, regardless of our differences, the road mediates our differences while at the same time revealing our similarities.

Furthermore, in his speech “Revolutionary Symbolism in America,” Kenneth Burke argues that it is the *positive* symbol of the people rather than the *negative* symbol of the worker that is best suited for the poet as a socio-psychological tool for producing perspective and change.\(^{166}\) Inclusion matters as much, and perhaps more so at times, than exclusion. Joseph Campbell stresses this sentiment in the preface to his 1949 edition of *The Hero With A Thousand Faces*:

> There are of course differences between the numerous mythologies and religions of mankind, but this is a book about the similarities; and once these are understood the differences will be found to be much less great than is popularly (and politically) supposed. My hope is that a comparative elucidation may contribute to the perhaps not-quite-desperate cause of those forces that are working in the present world for unification […] in the sense of human mutual understanding.”\(^{167}\)

Campbell’s aspirations of “human mutual understanding” are indicative of the other.

Likewise, this project is about the similarities that the road conduces—that our differences may not be all that they seem. This is not naïve utopianism. Rather, it is a legitimate consideration of the ways in which we falsely assume that our differences with others are polar rather than synecdochic. Here, I pause to give some clarification to my sense of the other. For instance, in our relations with others, be that stranger or neighbor, meaning is generated in symbolic language by both similarity *and* difference. I stress the conjunction because critical discourse often privileges the latter at the expense of the former. Which is to say: meaning in language is not exclusively the function of difference (or Derrida’s *differance*). Put differently, the very recognition of difference implies, indeed, motivates, the drive for perfection toward similarity, indeed through *antagonistic*…

\(^{166}\) Burke, “Revolutionary Symbolism in America,” 271.  
\(^{167}\) Campbell, “Myth and Dream.”
cooperation.\textsuperscript{168} For clarification, Burke cues us to the differences between polar otherness and synecdochic otherness. That is, “synecdochic otherness” is that which unites things that are \textit{different} than one another, whereas, “polar otherness” unites things that are \textit{opposite} to one another. When emphasizing nuances of meaning in language, and more broadly, and importantly, to human encounters, it is always synecdochic otherness that is at work and not polar otherness. Put differently, particularly as it bears upon my interest in the road as a rhetorical encounter with the other, human, institutional, natural, and spiritual otherness is fundamentally grounded not in \textit{opposites}, it is just \textit{different}. Burke even clarifies the confusion further, by noting that under dialectical pressures, “any difference may come to be felt as an antithesis.”\textsuperscript{169}

Additionally, situating his own critical work on Mass Communication, Peter Simonson, using a road metaphor, notes:

Individuals can function as thread ends into the communicative fabrics of an era. Their lives provide starting points and pathways toward places and practices of communication in their times […] The stories of the historical figures here open analogically toward yours and mine, both through variations on what Kenneth Burke called “perspective by incongruity,” and through finding points of commonality with distant others.”\textsuperscript{170}

\textsuperscript{168} This ideas is driven by Thomas Frentz’ construction of Plato’s \textit{Phaedrus} as a living myth in relation to John S. Wright’s analysis of Ralph Ellison’s perfecting of Burke’s perspective by incongruity in \textit{Invisible Man}, as a “way out” of either/or to both/and, and to antagonistic cooperation. See Frentz, “Memory, Myth, and Rhetoric,” 256-7; John Wright, “Race Ritual, Then and Now.” In \textit{Transcendence by Perspective: Meditations On and With Kenneth Burke}, ed. Bryan Crable (Anderson, South Carolina: Parlor Press, 2014), 45; and Bryan Crable, “Antagonistic Cooperation,” in \textit{Ralph Ellison and Kenneth Burke: At the Roots of the Racial Divide} (Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 2012), 46-78.

\textsuperscript{169} Burke, \textit{Philosophy of Literary Form}, 78.

\textsuperscript{170} Simonson, \textit{Refiguring Mass Communication}, 2.
Simonson’s argument inflects my own. As critics, on a more semantic level, we would do well to remember that even our figures of comparison, from analogy to metaphor and simile, are meaningful because they capture “similarities among differences.” \(^{171}\)

Memory Lane

My third and final critical consideration pertains to memory. To be direct, “Memory is not neutral; it is always motivated, always interested, and always has consequences. That is to say, memory is persistently partial.” \(^{172}\)

The objective, then, is to make my memory work explicit, of which there are two points to consider. The first aspect of memory work is remembering. Because we learn through sensorial experience, garnering perspective or articulating opinion requires that we reflect on these experiences. For example, when considering how the road has shaped America, one might remember the pioneers moving across the frontier, while others remember the Trail of Tears. Or, when contemplating how specific dreams or visions have influenced America, one might think of the American Creed, with its inalienable rights and indivisibility, the United States, while others might think of, to use the language of Ralph Ellison’s *The Invisible Man* and Dostoevsky’s *Notes from Underground*, those invisible Americans associated with the “Dream” of Martin Luther King Jr., together with images from the Birmingham or Selma marches.

The second component of memory work in this project is actually an attempt to reconfigure the notion of remembering. That is, because of its partiality and selective

\(^{171}\) Frentz, “Memory, Myth, and Rhetoric,” 257.

nature, memory work can also be an act of re-membering. In other words, in giving critical attention to how the road has influenced American culture, I challenge our mental configurations of the road as being centrally about the frontier or the interstate highway, and instead, focus on those less remembered roads like the Underground Railroad or the marches for civil rights. Both Richard Hughes’ *Myths America Lives By* and Kris Lackey’s *Road Frames* are both examples of re-membering African American experience in American history. With more breadth, Howard Zinn’s *A People’s History of the United States* provides an alternative history of the United States told through the perspective of the *people* rather than the political elites. To illustrate the discursive nature of remembering and re-membering, almost twenty-five years after its publication, Zinn released a companion book to the original for a new generation of Americans, titled *Voices of a People’s History of the United States*. Responding to a criticism of this work, Zinn writes:

> [Walter Kirn] is irritated because his ‘truth’ is not mine. His truths—built around veneration of the ‘great men’ of the past: the political leaders, the enterprising industrialists—add up to exactly the simplistic history fed to young people over the generations, which my book tries to replace […] My history […] describes the inspiring struggle of those who fought slavery and racism.  

To be clear, I am most interested in the roads of American that resemble Zinn’s historical work.

In sum, these three critical considerations are not intended to produce trouble-free interpretations. In a work of this scope and complexity, there will always be points of contention. I find courage in Simonson’s recognition of the imperfect ethic of finding

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useful reflections in “flawed texts, ideas, and people.” Collectively, then, in considering my claims, it is best to anticipate potential intellectual roadblocks and make preparations. I have provided three specific considerations to help along the way.

### 1.3.4 Research Quest/ions

Many of the critiques of the road, from literary or cinematic perspectives, in particular, pattern the road as a genre of rebellious experience in twentieth-century American life. However, to begin to grasp the fullness of the road’s significance as an archetypal myth and a rhetorical encounter with the other, we have to move beyond dominant ways of conceiving the subject. There have been noteworthy theoretical approaches to the road that focus on the theme of postwar rebellion, as I outlined earlier in this chapter. While these approaches address important questions about the phenomenon, this project will focus on understanding the rhetorical and mythical dimensions of the road in American culture. Put differently, instead of exploring “the rhetoric of the road,” though this remains an important consideration, my aim is to consider how the road enables us to broaden our conceptualization of rhetoric.

In chapter one, in addition to laying the foundation for a rhetorical perspective on the road, I have also offered a brief glimpse into the intellectual history of the road in rhetorical history. As such, I bring a traditional, though reoriented, conception of rhetoric, with a mythic-critical lens, to contemporary American culture. Simply put, these questions are profitable to think about as both an ethical consideration, and a critical consideration, enhancing our understanding of rhetoric. To these ends, I proceed with

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these research questions in mind. First, are there rhetorical dimensions to the road? Second, how might a rhetorical perspective of the road distinguish its form and function while also implicating its historical and cultural significance? Third, can a vocabulary to confront these dimensions and functions of the road be developed? Fourth, and most specifically, can an ultimate vocabulary of the road be formulated for addressing the grand convergence of human relations? These questions guide my assessment of the road.

1.3.5 Ultimate Vocabulary

Throughout this project, I rely on the critical and civic attitudes of Kenneth Burke for perspective. I do so, with careful attention to the ways in which other thinkers have embraced Burke as both a public intellectual, deeply concerned about living, and an academic theorist. Over the course of this project, then, I turn to Burke’s *A Rhetoric of Motives* to develop an ultimate vocabulary of the road. In the introduction to this chapter, I briefly outlined the functions of these three orders. Specifically, developing an ultimate vocabulary means transcending the positive and dialectical orders. As to how this happens, in the dialectical order, when either side fails to yield their interests to the other, the competing voices are left only with compromise, or what Burke refers to as “horse-trading.” Demoralized by the compromise, each is left “in a jangling relation with one another.”\(^{176}\) However, an ultimate order positions these competing voices in a developmental sequence, moving us toward the language of an ultimate order. To be specific, there is a guiding principle behind the diversity of voices that moves toward a design. It is a glimpse, whereby organizing one’s attitude to suggest why one

compromise might be more superior to another can have a “contemplative effect.” For example, in the Marxist dialectic, the sequence develops from the feudal to the bourgeois to the proletarian. In the Platonic dialogue, the sequence moves from sensory images to ideas to a mythic image. As I argue, this sequence moves from self-knowledge toward an encounter with the other toward the “other self.”

In the Grammar, Burke introduces us to the notion of the Upward Way. This is equivalent to Plato’s Absolute Good. Bearing this in mind, however, we should also note that the Downward Way is an important element in this mythic image. In bringing this mythic image into cohesive clarity, then, after we reach the realm of the mythic image in the Upward Way, we start on the Downward Way, which now “requires a totally new vocabulary” because something incommensurable has intervened leading to a momentous leap.177 When we cross into the realms of transcendence, “The Upward Way is matched by a Downward Way,” “whereupon the visionary can once again resume [their] commerce with the world, which [one] now sees in a new light, in terms of the vision earned.”178 According to Crable, the Upward Way and the Downward Way are part of Burke’s dialectical method par excellence, one in which “Burke not only describes the Upward and Downward Ways, but he takes readers on this Platonic journey in order to arrive at the “perspective of perspectives” necessary to transcend the divisive rhetorical realm.”179 Indeed, Crable argues that the Rhetoric can be read, as a whole, as an ultimate order.

177 Burke, A Rhetoric of Motives, 245.
178 Burke, A Rhetoric of Motives, 95.
As such, the mythic image, or “principle of principles,” transcends the dialectical order. More particularly, in the ultimate order, we should not expect to find an antithesis between self and other, but rather, each should be treated as a way into one another. As I argue, the self is a way into the other and the other is a way into the self, culminating in the “other self,” a perspective by incongruity that enables us to reorient our understanding. Even more specifically, this ultimate vocabulary, the sequence in particular, moves toward the perfection of the ultimate design. In the fullest understanding, one gets the “immediacy of participation in a local act, yet sees in and through this act an over-all design, sees and feels the local act itself as but the partial expression of the total development.” In chapter three, for instance, this develops through Lomax’s encounters with others on the road and in the blues. In chapter four, this emerges through the marches of the civil rights movement and in the freedom songs and sermons of King. To demonstrate how conducive the road is to the Upward and Downward Way, consider how Burke insists the most natural means of the “ultimate” comes in narrative forms, where plot is unnoticeably ultimate:

> Usually, in narrative, it is so implicitly that we may not even discern it […] developed through a succession of encounters, each of these encounters may represent a different ‘principle,’ and each of these principles or stages may so lead into the next that the culmination of one lays the ground for the next.  

In essence, then, the vision of the ideal, the archetype myth, would be a reduction of the pure idea to terms of an image or fable. In this case, the myth is a “forward-looking partisanship.” However, to be clear, this ultimate is a two-way path. It moves up as it reaches beyond ideas. And it moves down, descending from the purity of the image, to be

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enacted. This is precisely where the ethos of the road produces an ethic for the road. As such, in each case study I develop and argue for particular ethics. Here, we must also make another clarifying distinction. That is, in pursuit of a mythic image beyond ideas, moving from sensory images to ideas on through to the end of ideas, we may come to see the imperfection of rendering what is beyond as an image. Be that as it may, we “have only idea and image to choose from.”\textsuperscript{183} In other words, the mythic and ultimate ground must emerge from the temporal ground. This is uniquely similar to the argument used by Frentz with regards to the Upward Way of the chariot allegory in Plato’s \textit{Phaedrus}, namely, that the form of the soul cannot be represented adequately through the binary (or dialectical) logic of language, and so, “the best Socrates can do, being mortal himself, is to tell what the soul’s form is \textit{like} analogically through the chariot figure.”\textsuperscript{184}

To make this even more distinct, the essential insight of the ultimate order is, through the disciplined movement of the Upward Way and the qualitative transformation of the vocabulary that arranges the competing voices of the dialectical realm into an ordered whole:

\begin{quote}
The trick […] is not to seek a way out of distinction, hierarchy, and order; the trick is to embrace the responsibility inherent to our social order—the moral nature of our symbolic constitutions […] To flee this responsibility is to cheat ourselves, and others, of our full humanity—and to thus do nothing to ameliorate the blindness and violence so characteristic of the history of race in this country.\textsuperscript{185}
\end{quote}

In other words, an ultimate order seeks a way into the other not a way out of distinction. John Durham Peters gives us a framework for understanding this “trick” of the ultimate order. In his intellectual history of the idea of communication, comparably, we embrace

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{183} Burke, \textit{Rhetoric of Motives}, 202
  \item \textsuperscript{184} Frentz, “Memory, Myth, and Rhetoric,” 258.
  \item \textsuperscript{185} Crable, \textit{Ralph Ellison and Kenneth Burke}, 173.
\end{itemize}
the chasms of our “splendid otherness” as a “project of reconciling self and other.”186

Here, Peters illustrates the misdirection of miscommunication:

A cheerful sense of the weirdness of all attempts at communication offers a far saner way to think and live […] But the attainment of communicative goods can never be easy or formulaic […] Communication, in the deeper sense of establishing ways to share one’s hours meaningfully with others, is sooner a matter of faith and risk than of technique and method […] Too often, ‘communication’ misleads us from the task of building worlds together. It invites us into a world of unions without politics, understanding without language, and souls without bodies, only to make politics, language, and bodies reappear as obstacles rather than blessings […].187

Put differently, the ethical problem of communication, its dialectical nature, which so often leaves us in a jangle, requires an ultimate vocabulary. And an ultimate or Upward Way also demands a Downward Way, where an ethic can be enacted. An ultimate vocabulary, then, as seen through Ellison and Peters’ insight, means that we embrace our “splendid otherness” rather than trying to escape it. This requires a determined attention to the ethic. To use Reinhold Niebuhr’s language, we must recognize the “ironic tendency of virtues to turn into vices when too complacently relied upon.”188 For Hughes, “It is precisely when powerful people absolutize their virtues that the interests of the poor and marginalized are most at risk.”189 For Ellison, by way of Emerson, we must develop, “[…] consciousness, consciousness, consciousness. And with consciousness, a more refined conscientiousness, and most of all, that tolerance which takes the form of humor,

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186 Peters, Speaking Into the Air, 5, 7, 9.
187 Peters, Speaking Into the Air, 30-1.
189 Richard Hughes, Myths America Lives By (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2003), 5, 192.
for when Americans can no longer laugh at each other, they have to fight one another.”

And for Clark, by way of Burke, the “essential act of democratic citizenship [is] to pay unrelenting critical attention” to the “marvels and mysteries of identification that come to an ultimate focus in that scarcely noticeable workaday pronoun, ‘we.’” For there is much at stake in such attention:

True, there are mean places. Each day the news assiduously hunts them out […] But there is also the humanity of our people, the fountain of good will that keeps swelling up anew […] with this we must be identified, for otherwise the supersonic this or that, the moon shots, the great new realms of knowledge, the sheer genius of all such accomplishments, the whole thing becomes a damned lie.”

1.3.6 On Methodology: Kenneth Burke

In “On Methodology” in the Philosophy of Literary Form, Kenneth Burke indicates that the primary pointers of direction in a critic’s conceptual and methodological work, and the pivot that distinguishes critical schools, are questions rather than answers. For Burke, all questions are leading questions. Put another way, our selections are also deflections that form the nature of our answers. Within any given perspective, there are two kinds of questions. The first type of question is ontological and addresses matters of what and why. For instance, in this project, I ask (1) what is the rhetorical nature of the road and (2) why is its significant to American culture? The

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192 Clark, Civic Jazz, 44-5; See also Burke, “Responsibilities of National Greatness,” The Nation, 50.

second type of question is methodological and addresses the how, when, and where. For example, each of my case studies is structured around addressing and particularizing these three questions. In this section, I address these matters specifically, juxtaposing Burke’s framework on methodology with my own.

The task of the critic, then, is to be explicit in stating one’s critical position even to the point of seeming to “lay down the law,” and to that end, to develop a methodology that is formed by the “collective revelation of accumulated critical lore.”¹⁹⁴ For instance, I apply Burke’s notion of situating dramatic alignments to twentieth-century American culture, positioning the rebellious self in tension with an encountered other as my dramatic or dialectical opposition. Likewise, just as the critic must be able to establish interpretive clarity directly from the work itself, so too my case studies draw from specific periods, places, people and poetry to make such distinctions. Burke’s examples, which I might add are appropriately fitted to orientations of the road, depict a crossing or a journey. Comparably, I have set the poetic symbolism and mythology of the road in American culture as my basis of analysis. From this point forward, I establish a particular “lead,”¹⁹⁵ to use Burke’s language, that guides me through the critical work of Burke that helps indicate why I have selected, not only Burke’s critical conceptions and methods, but perhaps even more so, Burke himself as a method of inquiry. Put differently, in applying Burke’s understanding of method (ology) to Burke himself, considering what the critical work does for the critic, I find the road to be of supreme importance both in his personal life and in his varied work of letters, fiction, poetry, and criticism, giving us an accumulation of Burkean critical lore from which to establish a Burkean methodology.

¹⁹⁴ Burke, Philosophy of Literary Form, 68.
¹⁹⁵ Burke, Philosophy of Literary Form, 80.
For instance, I find that a large proportion of Burke’s critical concepts and methodological examples are framed around mobile oriented concepts and ideas. To be more specific, throughout the book in question, we find various references to the “end of the line” serial in literature.\textsuperscript{196} We may also note Burke’s reference to citational bridges, linking the imagery within a poem to the poet’s life outside the poem. Still further, Burke’s main line argument, one that considers leads that give us a way in to poetic strategies, critical points, and underlying imagery in which agonistic trials take place, includes: a labyrinth, a maze, hell, an abyss, mountains and valleys, exile, migration, being lost, submergence, and going to the end of the line.\textsuperscript{197} Even further, observing the differentiae needed in particularizing our delineation of poetic strategy, we find these variants to pilgrimage: a journey, migration, quest, tour, traveler, hunt, vagabondage, and a spiritual journey. Each of these imageries is symbolically representative of transformational experience on the road.

Additionally, beyond Burke’s collection of conceptually mobile terms are various literary examples he uses to exemplify his concepts. In the “The Ancient Mariner,” for instance, we have a mariner’s tale about a long sea journey. In The Grapes of Wrath, we have John Steinbeck’s iconic American Depression era road story. In title rather than content, Burke uses Robert Penn Warren’s Night Rider. And finally, there is Burke’s reference to wandering as representative of migration in John Steinbeck’s Of Mice and Men. Of note, most of these examples are in books from the period in which Burke is writing, an indication of what Burke delineates in a later essay from the same book, that literature is “equipment for living,” which I address in chapter two. Beyond my own

\textsuperscript{196} See Burke, Philosophy of Literary Form, 3, 38 n., 70, 83, 84, 86, 88.
\textsuperscript{197} Burke, Philosophy of Literary Form, 83.
observations, other scholars confirm my suspicions. For instance, in “An Address to Kenneth Burke,” John Crowe Ransom compares reading The Philosophy of Literary Form to an adventure, “like following the intrepid explorer who is making a path through the jungle.”¹⁹⁸ In Permanence and Change, Hugh Duncan likens Burke’s work to stalking ideas through the thickets, those ranging far and wide, leading us on one of the great “intellectual adventures of our time.”¹⁹⁹

Going beyond The Philosophy of Literary Form, Burke, in A Grammar of Motives, uses the road to distinguish the nature of synecdoche, describing it as a connection or relationship that extends “like a road” in either direction.²⁰⁰ Moreover, in Attitudes Toward History, Burke demonstrates his interest in the ritual of “transcendence” imagery, in both Whitman’s triumphant crossing²⁰¹ and Mann’s tragic pit²⁰²; in “change of identity” as a way of “seeing around the corner”²⁰³ and repossessing the territory rendered homeless by the vast public superstructure of symbolism, regulating “the traffic of material and social intercourse”²⁰⁴ Likewise, roads have long been the sites of spiritual transformations, from the Damascus road of Paul to the road to Erfurt on which Martin Luther was changed. Considered together, we become consubstantial with the road, drawn to its ritual of transcendence and change of identity, a mobility rendered necessary

²⁰⁰ Burke, A Grammar of Motives, 509.
²⁰¹ Burke, Attitudes Toward History, 208.
²⁰³ Burke, Attitudes Toward History, 269.
²⁰⁴ Burke, Attitudes Toward History, 212.
by the growth of alienation, that must be matched by our conceptual mobility.\textsuperscript{205} Still further, in his considerations of transformation in general, using the dialectic of Plato, Burke uses the imagery of the “Upward Way and Downward Way,” of “Crossing and Return,” “Exile and Homecoming,” Movement Inward and a Movement Outward.”\textsuperscript{206} Our mobility, then, mediates these rituals of identity change, whereby we are at once the same and new, giving us a “greater complexity of coordinates” for perspective.\textsuperscript{207} “From this shift of co-ordinates” we derive this perspective—of which, “all perspectives are perspectives by incongruity,” ever producing varied angles from which to see all at once—the road, the ultimate producer of perspectives of incongruity.\textsuperscript{208} In one sense, to reference a reframe of a well-known Burkean title, the road mediates the “permanence of change.”\textsuperscript{209}

Relatedly, beyond Burke’s critical work, the underlying imagery of the road permeates Burke’s creative works, moving through his fiction, poetry, and letters, illustrated in his personal life, in devotion to long walks and decades worth of cross-country travels by automobile. William H. Rueckert reminds us that years after most people retire, Burke was tirelessly “on the road as a counteragent,” teaching and admonishing all who would listen, perfectly embodied in the title of his novel \textit{Toward a Better Life},\textsuperscript{210} telling us to “join him, follow him in the search for knowledge.”\textsuperscript{211} Still further, Burke’s best-known and most assessed poems are his road poems, modeled as

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{205} Burke, \textit{Attitudes Toward History}, 217.  \\
\textsuperscript{206} Burke, \textit{A Rhetoric of Motives}, 11.  \\
\textsuperscript{207} Burke, \textit{Attitudes Toward History}, 210.  \\
\textsuperscript{208} Burke, \textit{Attitudes Toward History}, 269.  \\
\textsuperscript{209} Burke, \textit{A Grammar of Motives}, 329.  \\
\textsuperscript{210} William H. Rueckert, \textit{Encounters with Kenneth Burke} (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1994), 44.  \\
\textsuperscript{211} Rueckert, \textit{Encounters with Kenneth Burke}, 44.
\end{flushright}
responses to the road poetry of Walt Whitman. Burke even refers to himself in a letter to William H. Rueckert in this way: “I am restive with a kind of verse-thing that goes on and on built around the role of driving as a Wandering Scholar.” Again, these examples serve to effectively complement the “accumulated critical lore” necessary to establish not only a methodology, but in particular, a Burkean methodology, one that is integral to the claims and conclusions of this project. For perspective, this is more than a Burkean tendency. For instance, Descartes, whose great dictum might well should have been, “I travel, therefore I am,” made clear in his *Method* that his “great good fortune” was finding himself “traveling by paths” that led to reflections and maxims that supplied him a method.

More than a creative conception of critical language, then, the preponderance of the road in Burke’s work, in particular, together with his emphasis upon living, gives the critic reason to suspect that the road does something for Burke the critic, which gives me sufficient reason to set forth a generalization from behind that particular. To that end, I argue the road is a synecdoche that connects American mobility to rich mythic,

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rhetorical, and poetic meaning. Comparably, myth is a synecdoche with the road. As I will demonstrate in the following chapters, in relation to Burke’s conception of “citational bridges,” or attendant material drawn from biographical and poetic resources in relation to the poet, I draw from an abundance of American cultural biographical and poetic resources to establish grounds for the construction of my case studies, in which I locate critical points in the underlying imagery of the road in American folk music and American civil rights discourse. The point here, to be clear, is to try to uncover what the road is doing for particular poets, and in so doing, to discover some generalizations as to what the road may be doing for the people.

In summation, I want to proceed with some cautionary road signs as well. For instance, Kenneth Burke’s particular method was not necessarily intended to be a method for others to follow as much as it was a way of crystallizing his own exposition. However, I follow his lead because, like Burke, they offer a clear delineation of my own exposition and are immediately conducive to Burke’s style and interests. Moreover, taking a cue from a fellow methodological traveler, Rene Descartes, it is also useful to acknowledge that what we sometimes call “diamonds and gold is merely a little glass and copper.” Put differently, it is not my intention to imply that I have discovered a back road shortcut or hidden passage, but rather, I am opening up one particular view of the road in American culture of which there are many, each with their own particular vantage point.

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215 Burke, *Philosophy of Literary Form*, 69.
217 Descartes, *Discourse on Method*, 94.
point and insights.\textsuperscript{218} For the purposes of my work, Kenneth Burke is the ideal journeyman to help me find a “way in” through the critical points of the road in American culture.

1.3.6 Preview of Chapters

In this chapter, I have attempted to give a general account of the intellectual history of the road at the root of the Western rhetorical tradition. Admittedly, further considerations of this history and its significance lie outside the parameters of this project—a matter I address in more detail in the conclusion to this dissertation. In particular, however, I have reread the \textit{Phaedrus} with a critical eye to the road as a form of \textit{psychagogic} rhetoric, a leading of the soul. As a rhetorical form, it relies substantially on the use of myth and the poetic to lead others toward Plato’s Good, or Burke’s \textit{Toward a Better Life}. Comparably, I have also indicated two specific historical antecedents to this archetypal road while also situating the trope of the road in contemporary rhetorical history. In essence, I have argued that the archetypal road has distinct rhetorical, mythical, and poetic characteristics that work together and I take these indications to the study of the road in American culture.

Put differently, thus far, I have been concerned with preparations for considering the mythology of the road in American culture and have attempted to lay a foundation for this endeavor. Plainly, I have identified three characteristics that help define my understanding of archetypal myth. First, there is an emphasis upon human or divine movement and mobility. Second, this form relies on an archetype myth. Third, this

\textsuperscript{218} Werner, \textit{Myth and Philosophy}, 18.
mythic form gets expressed in aesthetic or poetic forms. Some examples include Homer’s *Odyssey*, the Hebrew “Songs of Ascents,” and, as I have indicated, Plato’s *Phaedrus*. To those, I intend to include Muddy Waters’ “I Be’s Troubled,” James Carter’s “Po’ Lazarus,” and Martin Luther King Jr.’s “I’ve Been to the Mountaintop.”

To these ends, in chapter two, having looked at the relationship between the road and rhetoric, I account for the relationship between myth and the road in American culture by offering a representative anecdote to frame the substance of the project as a whole and that chapter in particular. Then, I frame these considerations through the language of dreams about American culture, giving a brief intellectual history of the other road in American history. In order to reach these conclusions, I take three distinct steps. First, I consider the significance of myth, engaging the discourse and specifying my use of the term, using it as a methodology to argue for the road as an encounter with the other as equipment for living. Second, I explore the importance of myth in American culture, giving three specific examples from American folk music as mythic tools. Finally, I detail two defining characteristics of the road in American culture and demonstrate how this road functions mythically in the road songs of America.

From that point, each of my case studies will focus on illustrating how this mythology of the road as a rhetorical encounter with the other gets enacted in American culture. In chapter three, for instance, I explore this mythology in American folk music. For clarification, and reiteration, I have resisted the impulse to focus on the cinema, a discipline in which the road plays perhaps most prominently, as a structural perspective by incongruity, instead giving my attention to the fundamental and foundational aspects of the road as a mythology in folk music and public discourse. This is both tactical and
necessary, for well before the popular images of the cinema defined the road, for generations, Americans constituted their mythology in the poetic form of songs and in civic discourse. Specifically, I show how the myth of the road in American culture can be followed through American folk music, giving particular attention to the blues and prison/work songs.

On this particular path, I follow the odyssey of folklorist Alan Lomax, who documented and recorded the people and poetry of America, giving particular critical attention to his work in the Mississippi Delta. I have chosen the life and work of Lomax because I believe he best illustrates the road as a rhetorical encounter with the other. I focus on three aspects of his work in Mississippi. First, I examine how Lomax’s summer collecting trip with his father in the summer of 1933, in conjunction with his encounters with others on the road, helped lay the foundations for his work. Second, I concentrate on Lomax’s Coahoma County fieldwork in the Mississippi Delta in the summer of 1941, particularly his encounter with Muddy Waters, and two particular road songs, that demonstrate how the archetypal myth of the road functions in the blues. Third, and finally, I consider Lomax’s encounter with James Carter at a Mississippi penitentiary in September of 1959, looking specifically at the work road song “Po’ Lazarus,” a song featured prominently in the film O’ Brother, Where Art Thou.

In chapter four, I extend claims related to the mythic road and music to the orality of African American sermonic and civic discourse. Specifically, I will show how the mythic road can be followed through the varied discourses of the civil rights movement, in public speeches, freedom songs, and in parables and sermons, each illustrating the

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219 I analyzed materials from the Alan Lomax Collection in the American Folklife Center in the Library of Congress.
mythic nature of the road as an encounter with the other, from the ritual of civic marches to the sermonic discourses of the Exodus and the parable of the Good Samaritan. Along this critical route, I follow the sermonic discourse of Martin Luther King, Jr. at select points throughout the civil rights movement, focusing exclusively on the road parable of the Good Samaritan. As a parameter to this case, I trace the Samaritan Ethic of King’s discourse through some of his civic speeches and sermons to account for how the road functions mythically and rhetorically, with particular attention given to his final public oration in Memphis, Tennessee, “I’ve Been to the Mountaintop.”

In this, King provides an even broader path that further substantiates the importance and significance of the mythic road in American culture. Furthermore, I see this case as a concise companion to the works of Gary S. Selby’s The Rhetoric of Freedom and Richard Hughes’ Myths America Lives By, both of which enhance our understanding of American culture through the lens of African American experience. Succinctly, I believe the Samaritan Ethic offers a more nuanced understanding of King and the civil rights movement than Exodus discourses. The Samaritan Ethic is a more spiritualized and contemporary framework for understanding the archetype of the road as a rhetorical encounter with the other. Though the Exodus is and remains a clear window through which to see twentieth-century African American experience, the Good Samaritan further extends this understanding.

In chapter five, I offer a conclusion to this project by considering some of the implications of my study for contemporary scholars, especially those interested in either rhetoric, mythology, the road, or American culture. Specifically, I reposition the inquires that have guided this study while also considering some of the limitations of my research.
From there, I can better situate building new bridges to future studies of the mythology of the road. Simply put, there were some critical roads I chose not to take, selections that inherently created blind spots. In the end, though, my objective is to move in the direction of a better understanding of the rhetorical functions and complexities of the mythology of the road in American culture, specifically as it relates to encounters with others.
CHAPTER TWO

American Dream(s): Myth of the Road in American Culture

You must travel a long and difficult road, a road fraught with peril, uh-huh, and pregnant with adventure. You shall see things wonderful to tell [...] and oh, so many startlements. I cannot say how long this road shall be. But fear not the obstacles in your path, for Fate has vouchsafed your reward. And though the road may wind, and yea, your hearts grow weary, still shall ye foller the way, even unto your salvation.

2.1 A Representative Anecdote: O Brother, Where Art Thou?

Before we see images, we hear the faint blow of driving hammers colliding with rock. In syncopated rhythms, with staggered impacts, the sledging sounds grow more distinct. “In black, we hear a chain-gang chant, many voices together, spaced around the unison strike of picks against rock. A title burns in.” Bleached words slowly develop onto the screen: “O Muse! Sing in me, and through me tell the story of that man skilled in all the ways of contending, a wanderer, harried for years on end…” In between hammered clanks, we hear a man call out, “Po’ Lazarus,” with each man down the line resounding the name, like an echo in a canyon. Then, nearly a full minute removed from those first sounds, our first image appears as the men begin singing: “Well the High Sheriff, he tole de deputy, won’t you go out an’ bring me Laz’us. Bring him dead or alive. Lawd, Lawd, bring him dead or alive.”

The first images we see frame a flat Delta landscape in a wide-angle. The camera

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2 Coen, *O’ Brother, Where Art Thou?*
proceeds through a series of establishing shots, alternating from ground-level low to horseback high, each revealing an up-close perspective on the singing men, chained together at the ankles, working on a road in the high-noon sun. The screenplay notes emphasize, as the chant continues, “wider angles show the chain gang at work. They are black men in bleached and faded stripes, chained together, working under a brutal midday sun. It is a flat delta countryside, the straight-ruled road stretches to infinity,” while mounted guards with shotguns lazily patrol the line. These sights and sounds open Joel and Ethan Coen’s film, *O’ Brother, Where Art Thou*, and frame three important themes for this project.

The first, and perhaps the most prominent theme of the film is the road. The first sounds we hear are of men working on actual roads; the film’s epigraph features the opening line of Homer’s *Odyssey*, an epic road narrative about a wanderer on a long journey home; the first song we hear tells the story of Lazarus, a disgruntled worker on the run from the law; our main characters are three escaped convicts on the run; and their central encounters are with racial others on the railroad and at the crossroads. From beginning to end, the symbolism and mythology of the road is a personified character in the film. The second prevalent theme in the film is American folk music. Truly, one could argue that the film may be more renowned for its Grammy award-winning soundtrack than the actual movie. Similar to the prevalence of the road, the music is also a personified character in the film, intonating the musical styles of the period while also accenting the peculiarities of place. For instance, of the nineteen songs featured in the original soundtrack, sixteen feature some aspect of wandering or traveling, both secular

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5 Coen, *O Brother, Where Art Thou?*
and divine.

The third,\(^6\) and final, motif that I want to focus on from the film is public or civic discourse. That is, the filmmakers, using the symbolism of the road and American folk music as a mythological and aesthetic backdrop, stage the dramatic relations of the film around a political campaign between incumbent Governor Pappy O’ Daniel and an up-and-comer named Homer Stokes. At the same time, this campaign, which features the candidates traveling through the region, using radio and public address, is used to establish the underlying political issue at stake in the narrative: race relations in the segregated south. Considered together, the themes related to the road, American folk music, and civic discourse join forces to form a powerful interconnected mythology, each connected by the underlying imagery and sounds of the road. This mythology foregrounds the main argument of this project, that is, that the road is *psychagogic*, mediating our encounters with others and leading the soul toward a better life. In chapter three, I focus on this mythology in American folk music. In chapter four, I concentrate on this mythology in civil rights discourse.

I have outlined the thematic importance of this film to establish the fundamental claims and themes of this chapter and the remaining chapters in this dissertation. Released in the year two thousand, *O’ Brother, Where Art Thou* is uniquely positioned at the crossroad of a new century and millennium to serve as an ideal representative anecdote from which to consider the significance of the road as a mythology in twentieth-

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\(^6\) There is a fourth theme, which I have tactically omitted. That is, the film enters into a broad cinematic conversation about the mythology of the road in American culture, drawing from a rich history of films about prisons and the road. Though the cinema may be the most popular means of disseminating the mythology of the road in American culture today, for generations, long before the photographic image or the cinema, American folk music and civic discourse formed the foundation for this mythology.
century American culture. It is one of the great cinematic stump speeches about the twentieth century in the new millennium. Specifically, the film offers valuable insight on how the mythology of the road gets disseminated in American culture. Its use of archetypal myth, represented in the thematic tones of Homer’s *Odyssey*, characterizes the issues that are most pertinent to twentieth-century American culture, animating them on Delta roads in the Deep South and coloring them with Depression era hues. Moreover, the film further substantiates my claim to the road as a rhetorical encounter with the other through its array of character encounters and its meditation on race relations. But what is a representative anecdote and how does it establish my fundamental claims?

In an essay titled “Literature as Equipment for Living,” Kenneth Burke refers to the representative anecdote as a pattern of experience that is *representative* of the social. A “true vehicle,” Burke calls it. In this essay, writing in the midst of the Great Depression, Burke seeks to apply the comforts of proverbial wisdom as a social tool for living to all of literature. Furthering this idea, in his essay, “Burke’s Representative Anecdote as a Method in Media Criticism,” Barry Brummett refers to the representative anecdote as a “trained awareness” toward types of dramatic form. It enables us to extract some semblance of order from the cultural chaos while also helping us decipher what a culture “most deeply fears and hopes.” Both Burke and Brummett give us a method for confronting not just our living, but in particular, that living in relation with others. With a representative anecdote, we can decipher patterns of experience from the confusing signals of cultural coding. In this case, I use the themes of the film to frame pertinent

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issues in twentieth-century American culture using the mythology of the road as my “true vehicle.”

To substantiate this Burkean idea, I turn to Gregory Clark, who offers an example of Burke’s representative anecdote in action, by applying the idea to Burke himself, namely his poetry, lending further credibility to the argument that I am making:

Maybe he can use this representative anecdote of the automobile, and his experiences driving one in the traffic of the continent, to make the problem of a technological identity immediate. He also can talk about how, driving in our cars, identified with them rather than with the others with whom we share the road, and not with the landscape itself that makes our lives possible, we are living at high risk, individually and collectively. Repeatedly in these poems, the technological displacement of nature is accompanied by a distancing of humans from one another.9

In other words, Clark sees the use of the automobile in the poetry of Burke, particularly “Tossing on the Floodtides of Sinkership,” as a way of framing the problem of identity and human displacement as it relates to technology. Similarly, I use the representative anecdote of the road, specifically, as an archetype animated by encounters with others, particularly in American folk music and civic discourse, as a way of situating the problem of identity and human displacement as it relates to twentieth-century American culture.

Moreover, as a final point of emphasis, O’ Brother is also an ideal representative anecdote because it appears in that most functional of frames, the comic. Specifically, Burke argues that the comic frame is the most serviceable in the handling of human relationships because it promotes a realistic sense of our limitations—charitable but not

9 Gregory Clark, “‘Sinkership’ and ‘Eye-Crossing’: Apprehensive in the American Landscape,” KB Journal 2, no. 2 (Spring 2006) (italics are author’s emphasis).
More specifically, Burke writes about the motives we assign to our neighbors and ourselves, namely, that they are essential in the formation of both private and public relationships. In those relations, a comic frame of motives avoids the “sentimental denial of materialistic factors in human acts” and the “cynical brutality that comes when such sensitivity is outraged.”

Put differently, the comic frame, as a “method of study (man as eternal journeyman),” is a better personal possession, marked by “mature social efficacy” and a more “adventurous equipment,” than a mere empty accumulation of facts. In this elaborately woodcut framework, O’ Brother equips Americans to be observers of their history and be liberated from their passiveness through a maximum consciousness that transcends the liabilities of our foibles—changing the rules of the game of life.

At stake then, as Richard Hughes writes, “There is perhaps no more compelling a task for Americans to accomplish in the twenty-first century than to learn to see the world through someone else’s eyes.” Using rhetoric as a road, and road as rhetoric, this is the goal of this dissertation. To that end, what has existing road discourse, primarily as a genre predicated on socio-cultural rebellion in postwar America, done to help us understand the more complex dimensions of the road in American life? In my effort to address the questions, using myth as a methodological access point, I aim to see American culture through the perspective African American experience.

In our present moment, having emerged into a new century and millennium, I take this opportunity to reflect on twentieth-century American culture. However, given that

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America is comprised of such a vast ideological landscape, it becomes essential to chart a particular route so as not to get lost. As I argued in chapter one, despite the broad history of the road in human history, much less American history, study of the road is quite nascent. In part, this may help explain any limitations to such studies. Indeed, I have argued that *story simplex*, or rhetorically, trained incapacities, often limit our abilities to see beyond the boundaries of dominant discourse. To counter this tendency, I have used the road as a way of conceptualizing rhetoric, and now, I put this reoriented rhetoric to the test by considering it in relation to the road in American culture. Put differently, the ethical character and implications of the road as an archetype have not been sufficiently explored and this dissertation seeks to mind that gap. Collectively, these two chapters work together to prepare us to enter into chapters three and four. In this section, I make the remaining component parts of this dissertation more explicit. That is, having delineated my intent with regards to rhetoric, here, I make clear what I intend by myth and the road in American culture.

2.2 In(di)visible Dream(s)

Perhaps more than any other people, Americans have been locked in a deadly struggle with time, with history. We’ve fled the past and trained ourselves to suppress, if not forget, troublesome details of the national memory, and a great part of our optimism, like our progress, has been bought at the cost of ignoring the processes through which we’ve arrived at any given moment in our national existence.\(^\text{15}\)

In this section, I offer a brief overview of the intellectual history of the road in America through the eyes of the other. First, I situate the archetype of the road in relation

to a collection of visions and dreams about America that dramatizes the myth of 
indivisibility in tension with America’s *indivisible* citizens. Then, I distinguish two 
particular histories related to the road, exploring some of the historical and metaphorical 
roots of the road in American culture. Third, and finally, I position where we are in 
relation to the discourse and propose an alternative course of consideration and action.

One way of processing American values and ideals is to see them against the 
backdrop of its many dreams or visions for itself. Americans are dreamers, and a dream is 
a vision, full of imagination, possibility, and hope. Our most basic sense of these dreams 
come from political documents like the Declaration of Independence. For many, these are 
more than just political documents, they are synecdochic for all that Americans are, can 
be, and will become. These documents and ideals, for better or worse, are sacred 
sentiments. Sacred because where there is no vision, the people cast off restraint and are 
discouraged. Americans, either consciously or subconsciously, hold faith in the 
possibility of a better future—and faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of 
what we do not see. 

In the Declaration of Independence, for instance, the American Creed declares: 
“We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are 
endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are Life, 
Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness.” This vision for America might well have been 
called the Indivisible Dream. Walter Fisher writes that some of our most compelling 
stories are mythic stories that reflect “public dreams” and give meaning and significance

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16 See Proverbs 29:18. 
18 Thomas Jefferson, Declaration of Independence.
Moreover, many of these dreams are ideologically connected to the land, and subsequently, its movement on roads. Along this line of thinking, John Jerome refers to America as a “road epic,” substantiated by an expansive body of aesthetic roads, from *Huck Finn* to *The Grapes of Wrath* to *Easy Rider*, each paving a path to the “dream.” Widely understood in contemporary American culture, the American Dream was not a terminological adage until the early twentieth century, when James Truslow Adams used the phrase in the aptly named, *The Epic of America*. It was a dream of a “land in which life should be better and richer and fuller for everyone.”

Significantly, Adams proposed this American Dream during the Great Depression. In a more telling description, Adams continues:

> It is not a dream of motor cars and high wages merely, but a dream of social order in which each man and each woman shall be able to attain to the fullest stature of which they are innately capable, and be recognized by others for what they are, regardless of the fortuitous circumstances of birth or position.

I wonder if contemporary Americans have ever had a clear sense of Adams’ dream. Perhaps we have become too preoccupied with those motorcars and high wages rather than a concern with social order.

In yet another dream, in 1963, thousands of Americans marched together on the streets of Washington D.C. to protest, sing, and listen to the dreams of various civil rights figures in the shadow of one of the nation’s great dreamers, Abraham Lincoln. On that day, Martin Luther King, Jr., in his iconic sermonic intonation, spoke, or perhaps more

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accurately, sang, in that beautifully poetic African American ministerial orality, about his dream for America. In the first reference to his dream, he sings, “And so even though we face the difficulties of today and tomorrow, I still have a dream. It is a dream deeply rooted in the American dream.” Amongst its many themes, it is a dream about brotherhood. Put another way, it is a dream about the other in brother.

Relatedly, just two years prior to that speech, King delivered a commencement address at, uniquely, Lincoln University in Pennsylvania, titled “The American Dream.” There, he spoke of the indignities and injustices of segregated travel and championed the road as a method of action. This method, he notes, brings results, will help us enter the new age with the proper attitude, and may be able to “teach our world something that it so desperately needs at this hour.” The road was at all times a moral means, bringing moral ends, interested in the “freedom of the whole human race and in the creation of a society where all men can live together as brothers, where every man will respect the dignity and the worth” of others.

From the founders’ dream to King’s “Dream,” both envisioned indivisibility. But how do we make sense of our nation’s history in light of, or rather, the darkness of, its exploitations as a ways of actualizing those dreams through exploration and expansion? Clearly, not all citizens have shared in the actualization of this Indivisible Dream. As such, to use the language of Ralph Ellison’s The Invisible Man, and the spirit of Dostoyevsky’s Notes from Underground. Put differently, African Americans, and many

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other marginalized citizens, embody the Invisible Dream. Invisible because, along the way, political leaders explored and expanded the nation by exploiting its invisible citizens. Along the way, the American government forcibly displaced the Native Americans from their lands and relegated them to the Trail of Tears, freeing up southern land to establish a cotton industry that relied on slave labor. Along the way, African Americans desperately sought to escape their oppressive conditions on the Underground Railroad. And along the way, these same invisible Americans have turned to the road as a method of morals and ethics, singing along the way. This history has left us an incredibly disturbing, but more so, historically rich account of dreams, songs, poems, parables, sermons, and roads to consider. This “underground stream of people’s literature has begun to permeate our whole culture,” standing as evidence that an “enslaved people can create music of compelling beauty and poetry of great power.”

These experiences attest to the faith they held in one another to actualize those ideals associated with that Indivisible, American Dream—true social order. Along the way, their hope should not be mistaken for naïve utopianism. Rather, hope is their human right. In this chapter, and indeed, throughout the remainder of this dissertation, I explore a rich and expansive mythological tradition about the road in American culture. As I establish this relationship between myth and the road, I am also laying the groundwork for a consideration of the fundamental power of the poetic in relation to this mythic road. Put differently, the foremost way Americans have accounted for the road in American life is through song. Through song, African Americans have made their mark not by “naively whistling when life is dark,” but rather, by “honestly facing the typical insecurities that

\[26\] Lomax, “America Sings the Saga of America,” in Alan Lomax: Selected Writings, ed. Cohen, 86; 90.
beset us” and putting them in their rightful place.\textsuperscript{27} When we sing, there is a reason, beyond musical theory, that we repeat refrains. The foundation of American road mythology is found in American folk music and civic discourse, together, an “incantation willing this dream world into reality.”\textsuperscript{28} In the following section, I account for the \textit{duel of democracy} represented by this two dreams—two roads through American history—and conclude by positing us to understand how the road functions as a living and national mythology.

\subsection{The Duel of Democracy}

“Out of many, one.” This is the meaning of the motto etched upon the Great Seal of America: “\textit{E Pluribus Unum}.” This maxim characterizes the public dream of the United States of America. Unique to the argumentative claims of this project, in addition to the adopted motto, there were also several other proposals. According to \textit{The Journals of Continental Congress}, from July 1776, a committee was devised to design a seal for the United States of America, consisting of Benjamin Franklin, John Adams, Thomas Jefferson, and artist Pierre Eugene Du Simitiere, with each individual submitting a proposal.\textsuperscript{29} Franklin’s featured an image of the Red Sea from the biblical Exodus, with the motto: “Rebellion to Tyrants Is Obedience to God.” Similar to Franklin’s, Thomas Jefferson’s proposition also centered on the Exodus, featuring an image of the children of Israel wandering in the wilderness, governed by a cloud during the day and a pillar of fire.

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\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{27} Peterson, \textit{A Long Obedience}, 86.
\item \textsuperscript{28} Berish, \textit{The Lonesome Road}, 30.
\item \textsuperscript{29} See Greatseal.com at: \url{http://www.greatseal.com/committees/firstcomm} (accessed on July 28, 2014).
\end{itemize}
by night. John Adams’ proposal featured a crossroad image from the allegorical painting *Judgment of Hercules*, in which a young warrior must choose to travel either the path of self-indulgence or ascend the rugged way of duty to others. Collectively, each of these proposals illustrates how national narratives function as psychosocial mythological tools, and the symbolic importance of road imagery in constituting a sense of national identity that has implications for human relations. However, the symbolism of the Great Seal does not tell us about the complex history of the United States. To this end, I chart two courses through American history.

On July 4, 1803, President Thomas Jefferson, in the *National Intelligencer*, declared that the United States had purchased “Louisiana” from Napoleon. On that same day, Meriwether Lewis received an letter from the president authorizing what would become one of the most recognized expeditions in American history. The Lewis and Clark Expedition, which has long gripped the American imagination, is an important contribution to our popular mythology about the road in American culture. In the decades after this expedition, Americans pushed west across the Great Plains on the Oregon, Mormon, and California trails, where “Oregon fever” inspired emigrants to go west for more than forty years. In the nineteenth century, as Americans, explored and expanded the nation, they left us a rich history of poetic hymns, ballads, and anthems that account for that history, something I address further in the conclusion to this chapter and in the case studies, respectively.

Throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the road has shaped our most

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valued cultural myths. They signify the restive spirit of American opportunity, harkening back to Benjamin Franklin’s suggested motto: “Rebellion to Tyrants is Obedience to God.” An updated version of Franklin’s motto for contemporary American culture might read: “Rebellion to Tradition is Obedience to the Self.” However, there is another course that runs through American history. Under Andrew Jackson, for instance, in 1830, the U.S. Congress passed the Indian Removal Act, which forcibly (re) moved Native Americans from their homes to reservations that were away from white settlers. In 1838, this led to the forced march of the Cherokees from Georgia to Oklahoma on *Nu-No-Du-Na-Tlo-Hi-Lu*, “The Trail Where They Cried.” The roots of Indian removal in America began in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, in the policies of Britain and America, when colonial governments restricted Indians from particular areas and land cession treaties ushered in a more regular trend of pushing Native Americans westward.

In the period between 1836 and 1838, the U.S. military, along with government emissaries, regional militia, and wagon drivers, descended upon Hamilton County in Chattanooga, Tennessee to prepare for the bureaucratic intricacies of the huge effort of gathering, feeding, and eventually moving the Cherokees prior to transporting them west. A witness account from the *New York Observer* dated January 26, 1836, details the progress of the Cherokees: “We learned from the inhabitants on the road where the Indians passed, that they buried people at ‘every stopping place,’ and they made journeys of more than ten miles per day on average, with the elderly and children being the hardest

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32 Vicki Rozema, *Voices from the Trail of Tears* (Winston-Salem, NC: John F. Blair, 2003), 40.
34 Rozema, *Voices from The Trail of Tears*, xii.
Vicki Rozema has arranged many of these encounters using the words of those who experienced and witnessed the forced march firsthand, utilizing newspaper articles and editorials, correspondence, and official documents. Rozema writes:

> The removal of the southeastern Native Americans … is one of the great tragedies in United States history … While each of the five civilized tribes has shown incredible resilience in fighting back from the decimating effects of their removal, the terrible injustice of broken treaties, discriminatory laws, unenforced court rulings, land grabbing, and ethnocentric intolerance, all done in the name of western expansion, will forever be a blight on the memory of the American people.  

The Trail of Tears demonstrates that the literal and ideological roadside of American exploration and expansion was constructed with the brick and mortar of exploitation. Life on the frontier may have been difficult but it still maintained a sense of human dignity. In *Oregon Trail Stories: True Accounts of Life in a Covered Wagon*, for instance, the book’s subtitle reminds us that the challenges on the trail could be endured from a covered wagon. One account notes, “The months of outdoor living and scenery unencumbered by accident, disease, or misfortune was an experience to be savored as a favorite memory for years to come.” Arduous but satisfying may have defined life on the Oregon Trail, but it was not a sentiment shared by either the Cherokees or the runaway slaves. Where the pioneers traveled by their own volition and for opportunity, the Cherokee were forced from their lands and homes and the runaway slaves on the Underground Railroad sought to escape an oppressive slave system. On the Oregon Trail, one could travel in the open at a leisurely pace and with one’s family. On the Underground Railroad, travel possessed a more dangerous setting:

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35 Rozema, *Voices from The Trail of Tears*, 34-35.
36 Rozema, *Trail of Tears*, 41.
37 Reneson, *Oregon Trail Stories*, ix.
I have been thus particular in my statement, because the case seems to us one of unusual danger. We have separated the company for the present, sending a mother and five children, two of them quite small, in one direction, and a husband and wife and three lads in another … The mother and children we have sent off of the usual route, and to a place where I do not think they can remain many days.\textsuperscript{38}

The Underground Railroad was a loosely organized network of safe houses in border-states, helping thousands of slaves run away wherever and however they could. One of the most telling accounts comes from the life of Frederick Douglass, who at the age of six, was escorted by his grandmother, Betsy Bailey, to a plantation twelve miles away in Maryland. After the long journey, Bailey abandoned her grandson. Douglass spent the next fourteen years in slavery. After multiple efforts at escape, Douglass succeeded on his third attempt, executing a highly planned route that included two trains and three ferryboats, crossing both the Susquehanna and Hudson rivers.\textsuperscript{39} In 1841, at the age of twenty-three, Douglass was now a free man living in Massachusetts and speaking publically as an abolitionist. One newspaper columnist aptly framed the complacency of this course through American history:

Frederick Douglass and George Thompson delivered the third of a series of Anti-Slavery Lectures last night to a large audience. Although their lectures produced great effect, our city papers this morning slightly condemn the movement on the ground that the interference of Canadians in the question is impolite.\textsuperscript{40}

As an additional example, in December 1848, William and Ellen Craft, realizing that slaveholders had the privilege of taking their slaves to any part of the country they


\textsuperscript{40} Gates, “The Age of Slavery.”
thought proper, conceived a plan to escape where Ellen, who was nearly white, passed as a gentleman master traveling with her slave, her husband William. Like Douglass and the Crafts, thousands of slaves successfully escaped to the North. But, in response to the reputational and economic hardships of these roads, the powers that be in the South demanded much harsher laws against runaways and anyone who would attempt to help or harbor slaves seeking escape, resulting in the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850.

Another example that helps us see through the eyes of the other by way of the road is in Mississippi, The Forks of the Road. At one time this was the second largest slave market in the United States. Here, blacks were brought from the Upper South to be sold in the Deep South. Tens of thousands of human beings were sold in this slave market—men, women, and children, where a premium was placed upon females because they allowed plantation owners to drastically increase their labor force. Newspaper advertisements from that period offer a glimpse into the horrific hardships of African Americans on the road during the nineteenth century.

42 Gates, “The Age of Slavery.”
43 I have annotated the text and positioned the headlines exactly as they appear in each respective newspaper.
SLAVES! SLAVES!! SLAVES !!!
FORKS OF THE ROAD, NATCHEZ.
THE SUBSCRIBERS have just arrived in Natchez and now stopping at Mr. Elam’s house, Forks of the Road, with a choice selection of Slaves, consisting of
MECHANICS,
FIELD HANDS,
COOKS,
WASHERS and IRONERS, and…
GENERAL HOUSE SERVANTS

Having had their identities removed from their genealogical lines by their masters, many slaves survived only as names on a ledger. The ancestors of many African Americans will forever remain anonymous or invisible. Profoundly, though, against seemingly all odds, African slaves (quite literally) built this nation, from its roads and bridges to its factories and farms to its towns and cities—constituting one of the greatest historical and cultural legacies in all of human history. Slaves were the fuel of the global economic system. They farmed the fields of America through every major agricultural progression, from tobacco to rice, wheat, cotton, and the like. And they accomplished all of this even while they were enslaved. These two histories resound the “duel of democracy” that has troubled America’s Indivisible Dream from its inception to the present day.

2.2.2 On the Road Again

All human beings share a migratory history that encompasses world, modern, and American history.\(^\text{45}\) As a site of critical attention, the road is a versatile resource for the study of human cultures and history. For millennia, we have traveled along roads to explore the horizons of our possibilities are and to expand our opportunities. As I

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\(^{44}\) *Natchez Daily Courier*, November 27, 1858.

indicated in chapter one, I use the term road to signify the interplay of actual and analogical roads, while at the same time recognizing the difficulties associated with the term travel and the politics of mobility. Additionally, I employ the term road because it is ideally suited to the popular imagination in association with works like Jack Kerouac’s *On the Road*. However, in this project, I see the road as an encounter with the other, moving beyond considerations of its leisure, either through road trip tourism or cultural experiences.

For instance, one facet of the road as an encounter with the other that I do not explore in this project is the “down and out,” the downtrodden, tramps, and homeless. These play a prominent role in American culture and give us important perspectives about the complexity of the road. The silent films of Charlie Chaplin serve as a paradigm for this experience. Though such films are not technically classified as “road films,” they embody many of the characteristics of road mythology that I am interested in. For instance, the road is a thematic bookend in Chaplin’s *The Tramp*, where the film opens with the Tramp walking alone up a an unpaved path, and then, ending, with the Tramp walking, alone, down that same unpaved road into the distance, leaving us a lasting image of the great bindlestiff wanderer. Moreover, the final images of *The Circus*, likewise, reveal the Tramp, alone again, repositioning his bowler hat, silhouetted by the sun, shuffling toward the end of the yardarm. And perhaps the most vivid of Chaplin’s images, is the last scene from his final silent picture, *Modern Times*, where the Tramp, not alone, but prancing arm-in-arm with his love interest, sways down a stretch of desolate paved, this time, Sierra Highway near Wallace Canyon Road, gallivanting toward the vanishing point of the setting sun. It remains an iconic image of modernity,
taking us from the isolated unpaved roads of yesteryear to the paved highways of modernism. Slethaug argues that Walt Whitman’s “Song of the Open Road,” which romantically celebrates the democratization of mobility, paved the way for those like Charlie Chaplin in *The Tramp* and John Steinbeck’s *Grapes of Wrath*, to be more critical of the ways in which the society had “failed to make equal allowance for all its people, particularly its marginalized and underclasses.”

Turning, then, to John Steinbeck’s, and John Ford’s, *The Grapes of Wrath*, both give us another framework for understanding the road as an ethic. Both the novel and the film challenge the mythical stereotype of the individual, alone against the elements, which Slethaug argues is pertinent to the development of the myth and trope of the road. During this same period, African Americans had to turn to *The Negro Motorist Green Book*, for information about safe lodging, businesses, and gas stations that would serve them along the road. For some, life on the road hopping trains for a period of time was more desirable than enduring low wages and dead-end jobs. During the Progressive Era, for instance, a substantial increase in walking and hiking long distances coincided with Jack London’s *The Road*, a serialized book accounting for London’s own experiences of “tramping” across the United States in 1894. London’s hobo epic exposed the protean face of life on the road in America. In sum, the road is more than a metaphor and when we reduce it as such, we displace important facets of the road’s

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meaning, and of the people who traveled those roads, in the same way that urban renewal projects and interstate highway expansion continues to displace marginalized people. In other words, American stereotypes regarding the homeless have “often functioned to justify persistent class or racial inequalities in American society.”\textsuperscript{50} Though the people are varied, they have similar dreams about America.

2.3 The Significance of Myth

Up to this point, I have argued for the significance of the road in rhetorical history. In this section, I extend these considerations to American culture by addressing the significance of myth as it relates to the road. I do this in three ways, with each dimension building progressively upon the next to formulate a cohesive framework for understanding the mythology of the road in American history. To this end, I use my rhetorical reorientation of psychagogic rhetoric as a framework from which to assess the rhetorical significance of the road in twentieth-century American culture. To these ends, I use myth as a way in, an access point to argue for the archetypal road as an encounter with the other, framing this approach in contrast to the popular thematic focus of the individual rebel from contemporary road discourse with a focus on the “other self.”

First, I look to define myth as I intend it to be understood and applied. Specifically, I use a Burkean definition that focuses on the social function of myth. Second, having defined myth as I intend it, I look at America’s relationship with myth using Richard Hughes’ \textit{Myths America Lives By}, framing the road and myth as equipment

\textsuperscript{50} Kusmer, \textit{Down & Out}, vii.
for living. Third, and finally, having demonstrated America’s reliance on myth in relation to my definition, I illustrate how these two coincide with the road in American culture, as both an actual/astral place and poetic space, through a tradition of road songs in America. I do this to build on my connection between the road and rhetoric and establish a relationship between the road and myth. Both of these chapters work together to establish a clear conceptual line of sight from which to view each particular case study, where in chapter three, I consider the mythology of the road as an encounter with the other in American folk music, and in chapter four, I look at this mythology through the lens of civic or public discourse in the civil rights movement.

2.3.1 Mythic Criticism

Defining myth is perplexing and disorienting, taking one from the ancient world of sacred myths to the ideological falsehoods of the postmodern world. However, despite its complex character and fluid nature, myth has significant socially unifying potential. In this project, I understand and apply myth in the manner that Kenneth Burke does in “Revolutionary Symbolism in America,” that is, it is a social tool for working together for common ideals, despite differences. Put differently, “myths may be wrong, or they may be used to bad ends, but they cannot be dispensed with.”\(^5^1\) For this reason, myths should be taken seriously, particularly in matters of social crisis. Indeed, Burke is not merely delivering a speech or presenting a paper. Rather, and more importantly, as a

citizen of the 1930s, in the midst of the Great Depression, he is offering a perspective and 
a path for living.

More specifically, Burke is arguing that myths are our “basic psychological 
tools,” for “welding a sense of interrelationships for working together for common social 
ends.” In this sense, myths are as real as food or shelter, reminiscent of Cervantes’ 

famous gentleman Don Quixote of La Mancha, who became so “absorbed in his books, 
spending his nights from sunset to sunrise, and his days from dawn to dark, poring over 
them, that he lost his wits and the fancy of his enchantments so possessed his mind that to 
him no history in the world had more reality in it.” Whatever we may think of myths, or 
more precisely, the people who adhere to them, we as critics would benefit from Burke’s 
recognition that they might also be used for good and not only for bad; a point that 

presupposes, even demands, our discernment as to what may make a myth useful and 
good rather than presupposing all myths are ideological and bad. Here, then, I offer a 
variety of perspectives as to how scholars have sought to define the traits and functions of 

myth.

I begin with a question my daughter asked me recently. “What are you reading 
is not true?” Alas, this notion of myth as a falsehood has belabored the perception of 

myth since the days of Plato. Perhaps the most appropriate way to begin is to turn to 
Bruce Lincoln, who effectively captures the frustrations of defining myth: “It would be 
nice to begin with a clear and concise definition of ‘myth’, but unfortunately that can’t be  

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52 Burke, “Revolutionary Symbolism in America,” 267.  
done. Indeed, it would be nice to begin with any definition.”

Broadly, though, Lincoln defines myth as a style of narrative discourse that makes assertions of validity and authority that can be construed as positive (sacred story), negative (false), or something in between (story for children). Since myths can be interpreted so broadly, let us begin with how a child might understand myth and work our way forward.

In a telling title, Helen Archibald Clarke’s *A Child’s Guide to Myth* describes myth as “an immense forest of almost countless kinds of trees.”

David Wiles uses similar language to describe the prevalence of Greek myths, bejeweled on fingers, etched on drinking vessels, and in statues on the street. Whatever myths may be, they have not been made all at once, but rather, have grown up “gradually from small beginnings, like oaks from acorns, or pines from pine cones—and the soil in which they grew was the minds of primitive men ages and ages ago.” To be sure, “We are not now, and never will be, free of myth or ritual.” Moreover, Joseph Campbell, with a deeply Jungian view, defines myth as that one “marvelously constant story” with “more remaining to be experienced than will ever be known or told.”

More broadly, Campbell notes:

> Throughout the inhabited world, in all times and under every circumstance, the myths of man have flourished; and they have been the living inspiration of whatever else may have appeared out of the activities of the human body and

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mind. It would not be too much to say that myth is the secret opening through which the inexhaustible energies of the cosmos pour into human cultural manifestation. Religions, philosophies, arts, the social forms of primitive and historic man, prime discoveries in science and technology, the very dreams that blister sleep, boil up from the basic, magic ring of myth.”

Though Campbell’s language is mystical and grand, he rightly connects myths to the breadth of life—religion, philosophy, science and more. Along similar lines, Kasen argues that myth is to the meaning of society, defining it as an “important element within the belief system of a people,” relating it to the “values and aspirations of a people.”

More specifically, Rowland sees myths as stories that address the problems of society that enable us to deal with psychological crisis.

Rowland’s definition gives us two cues to consider—stories and crisis. First, Richard Hughes refers to myths as stories of meaning and purpose, in the manner of Homer’s Odyssey: “O muse! Sing in me, and through me tell the story of that man skilled in all the ways of contending, a wanderer, harried for years on end.” Put another way, “Without a story,” notes John H. Westerhoff III, life “makes no sense,” for stories empower us to “order our experience.”

Closely related to story is narrative. Foss reminds us that, narrative can be traced back to classical Greece and Rome, where Aristotle and Quintilian wrote about narration. For Foss, narratives organize our

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60 Campbell, “Myth and Dream.”
64 John H. Westerhoff III, A Pilgrim People: Learning through the Church Year (Minneapolis: Seabury Press, 1984), 3-4.
experience so we can make sense of the people, places, events, and actions of our lives, helping us decide what a particular experience means and how it is connected across a range of experiences. Fisher defines myth as narratives raised to the status of public dreams. For Fisher, narrative is a paradigm of communication, while for Selby it is a basic form of human understanding that directs our knowledge, perceptions, and judgments, useful for telling meaningful stories. For Selby, who uses Burke to consider how the civil rights movement is predicated on the march, narrative is a sense of solidarity, the process whereby stories become our stories. Kenneth Burke explains, “To derive a culture from a certain mythic ancestry, or ideal mythic type, is a way of stating that culture’s essence in narrative terms.” Most importantly, for my consideration of the other, mythic narrative is “an internal, even emotional connection individuals feel which binds them to other people and to places, things, activities, ideas, memories, and words.”

Furthermore, in *Tropic of Discourse*, Hayden White asserts that when a historian accounts for the past in the form of a narrative, these are ultimately mythic in nature. For White, a historian does not simply draw out a story from the facts of history. Rather, a historian records a general notion of kinds of stories that draw from mythoi in order to

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appeal to the mythoi held in high regard in the minds of a particular individual or a collective so that one can supply the past with a sense of meaning and significance.  

While Claude-Levi Strauss suggests that the impulse to mythologize derives from the nature of language, giving it a poetic faculty. Additionally, Frye defines narratives as that which moves from one structure to another with a final resolution. Christopher Flood’s Political Myth defines myth as a “vision of total understanding,” a narrative or a story that presents a series of connected events, coming close to Foss’s notion of narratives as sequential orientations of connected events.

Second, myths seem most prominent during times of crisis. Though, here, we should be careful not to presume the traditional condescension of superstition, but rather: “We need a story to see in the dark.” That last word is crucial for understanding the importance of myth, for “in the dark” supposes that myths are responses to human problems. Put differently, as Burke argues, “Critical and imaginative works are answers to questions posed by the situation in which they arose. However, they are not merely answers, they are strategic and stylized answers.” While Edelman helps us understand why it is so difficult to refute myths and how myths maintain social viability, seeing myth as a succor against anxiety, functioning as a mold into which perceptions are organized,

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73 White, Tropics of Discourse, 60.
74 White, Tropics of Discourse, 104.
76 Christopher G. Flood, Political Myth (New York: Routledge, 200), 27. See also Foss, Rhetorical Criticism, 307.
77 Quoted in Hughes, Myths America Lives By, 2.
78 Burke, Philosophy of Literary Form, 1.
and once there, how these perceptions self-perpetuate. Crisis is merely another way of stressing that myths confront our living. Richard Hughes’ *Myths America Lives By* implies quite succinctly that myths are vital to our living.

Giving more particularity to the concerns of this project, however, amongst the many types of myth, I am interested in national myths. Throughout much of American history, Hughes contends, myth has meant little more than that which was intended to deceive the public and maintain the privileges of the elite. As I outlined in chapter one, often times, such discourses are themselves powerful myths—an embodiment of the privilege and elitism they claim to be demythologizing. Using the language of the popular film *The Usual Suspects*, the greatest trick America ever pulled, was convincing itself that myth did not exist. Plainly, Hughes defines national myths as those stories that explain why people love their country and that affirm the assumed public values of the United States.

Broadly, then, Janice Hocker Rushing’s “The Rhetoric of the American Western Myth” defines myth as “a society’s collectivity of persistent values, handed down from generation to generation, that help to make the world understandable, support the social order, and educate the society’s young.” Michael Osborn sees myth as offering new and important perspectives about what it means to be human. Across cultures, then, myths

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are stories expressed in dominant symbols that are enacted ritually.⁸⁴ Most explicitly, I argue that the mythology of the road performs “rhetoric upon American life.”⁸⁵ Hence, when I allude to American myths, similar to Richard Hughes, I mean stories that serve America as a nation. With even more distinction, I give attention to one particular aspect of the mythology, the road in American culture, and within that, to its cultural and poetic form, following that mode through American folk music and across the sermonic discourse of the civil rights movement.

In American history, exploration and expansion have always been underwritten by exploitation. In fact, most of what is deemed iconic about the road in the public and popular imagination focuses on ideas and images about socio-cultural rebellion, where resisting the staid traditions of twentieth-century American values animates a large proportion of literary and cinematic road stories. Together, these stories form specific narratives. These narratives, then, formulate a particular mythology that is reinforced through the rituals of public experience on actual and anagogical roads. In sum, no study of myth, regardless of its erudition or eloquence, will ever settle the matter completely. Which is to say: whatever myths may be, they are not words with fixed meanings, but rather, semantic sites of struggle for truth.⁸⁶ Raymond Williams, who gives undivided attention to words, reiterates the complexity of myth, referring to it as both a very significant and difficult word, one that has emerged in only the last one hundred and fifty

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years, coinciding with the disintegration of orthodox religion. However, as I address the substance and function of myth, I need to be forthright about my limitations as well. Clearly, I cannot apprehend the full implications of either myth or the road in one project. As such, I focus on one aspect of mythology, an archetype that I classify as the road as a rhetorical or psychagogic encounter with the other, with a concern for twentieth-century American culture, particularly African American experience, and only those pertaining to poetic form.

2.3.2 Myth as Method/ology

“If, in the suffering and horror of our time, we can develop a method for the analysis of what symbols do to us in our relations with each other, we may yet learn to lead a better life. Such is Burke’s message to our time.”

Method is more than a set of techniques. In the spirit of Raymond Williams, by way of John Durham Peters, method is both an ethical and existential question of how to enter into a relationship with our subject and an embodiment of the moral attitudes we take toward the “past, the world, and other people.” As such, my method is mythical. To this end, I argue that the road is a powerful and prominent American mythology—an archetype that is centrally concerned with mediating human encounters. In consideration of this archetype, I use the hermeneutical principle of retroactive enrichment, or

rereading, in the hopes of reorienting our perspective about the road. Moreover, beyond discursive discernment, I also hope to make a contribution to confronting the crises of mobility, actual and social, that we face in the twenty-first century. In this section, then, I delineate how I intend to use road stories as access points to apprehend the elements of myth, considering the values and ethical standards that these stories advocate or imply, with the objective of exploring how the road functions as an archetype in American culture.

In chapter one, I outlined the attitudes and dimensions of a Burkean methodology, using Burke’s “On Methodology,” to give some indication of how I substantiate my selections and deflections of study. I indicated that Burke makes a subtle, but necessary, distinction between method and methodology. As the critic seeks to find a way in to a particular work through the critical points of its underlying imagery, so too the critic seeks to apprehend a methodology from the collective revelation of critical lore. Here, I take my consideration of method/ology a step further by arguing that myth/road function as equipment for living. To arrive at these conclusions, I begin in The Philosophy of Literary Form, in “Literature as Equipment for Living,” where Burke takes the practical aspects of proverbs and extends it to all of literature, equipping us with attitudes to take action in confronting the difficulties of life. For perspective, in the prologue to Burke’s Permanence and Change, he writes:

Permanence and Change was written in the early days of the Great Depression, a time at when there was a general feeling that our traditional ways were headed for a tremendous change, maybe even a permanent collapse. It is such a book as authors in those days sometimes put together, to keep themselves from falling apart.90

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90 Burke, Permanence and Change, xlvii.
In this way, myth, and most particularly, the mythic road, interests me for its apparent ability to keep marginalized peoples from falling apart during moments of great despair.

In such times, Burke was concerned with orientations, and above all, with communication. So too, I am looking for a device by which to reintegrate the muddle of crises related to actual and social mobility in American life. One such instance, cinematically related to the Coen Brothers’ *O’ Brother, Where Art Thou*, is Preston Sturges’ *Sullivan’s Travels*, a road picture from 1941, which confronts “stark realism, the problems that confront the average man,” and holds up a mirror to life as “a true canvas of the suffering of humanity.” Put differently, for Burke, an “ideal myth” in the midst of great conflict would be a “vision that transcended the political, yet had political attitudes interwoven with it.” It is for this reason that I have selected myth as a method, to consider how the archetypal road as a rhetorical encounter with the other transcends the political, yet has people oriented or political attitudes. Simply put, myth helps us understand culture, providing a pattern that gives us a grip upon reality.

To position the “grip,” I opened this chapter with a representative anecdote, which should have scope, possess simplicity, and, broadly, be both a reduction of the subject matter and a summation—and I have positioned this anecdote in a comic frame. As I argue, the film effectively sums up the action of twentieth-century American culture, identifying the road, folk music, and public discourse as its most prominent features.

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92 Preston Sturges, *Sullivan’s Travels*, directed by Preston Sturges (1941; Los Angeles: Paramount Pictures, 1941), DVD.
93 Burke, “Ideology and Myth,” 201.
94 Burke, “Revolutionary Symbolism,” 279.
Moreover, the result, in following the implications of this representative anecdote, will inevitably lead to a perspective by incongruity by detaching the road from its discursively dominant setting. Simply put, a perspective by incongruity is one of the ways that Burke evicts words from their homespun surroundings and sends them on the road with a bindle. It interprets new situations by detaching words from their statutory setting. Put differently, it accurately names a situation that has been demoralized by inaccuracy.96

Myth/Road as Equipment for Living

Kenneth Burke defines myth as a psychological bridge that enables us to work together, though differently occupied. Extending Burke’s definition, Laurence Coupe defines myth as:

A narrative that effects identification within the community that takes it seriously, endorsing shared interests and confirming the given notion of order, while at the same time gesturing toward a more comprehensive identification—that among humanity, the earth, and the universe.97

In particular, I intend to stay close to this definition on two fronts. First, I focus on the road as a serious source of identification in the American narrative. Second, I concentrate on one particular aspect of a more comprehensive identification, humanity. To these ends, few have a keener sense than Kenneth Burke on how technological change has revolutionized the cities and landscapes of America in this century, an acceleration of scale and event that he analyzed and resisted in exemplary ways.98 As an example, in

98 Burke, “Counter-Gridlock,” 344.
another example of perspective by incongruity, recognizing the hastening of modernity, Burke’s “counter-gridlock” senses the dangers that the “incapacities of our training may outpace our ability to diagnose and discover adaptive perspectives for them.” 99 For this reason, Burke is uniquely relevant for a critical study of the road in twentieth-century American culture.

In The Philosophy of Literary Form, Burke argues that literature functions as equipment for living. Proverbs, for instance, address matters of welfare by instilling a sense of promise, solace, admonition, and instruction. 100 In codifying these situations, we might find “timeless” situations, drawing a generalization from a particular. Specifically, I argue for the road as an “essence,” a timeless and recurrent situation that is not bound by our own time. In this way, I am making more explicit one of the codification strategies that artists use in human relations to name a situation. 101 For Burke, this strategy for dealing with situations directs the larger movements of our “campaign of living.” 102 In discerning the general behind the particular, I argue that the particulars of American folk music, and the blues specifically, and the sermonic discourse of Martin Luther King Jr., and his Samaritan ethic, provide a general perspective related to our social situations. In this way, the road is an active category that gives us a re-integrative point of view. The symbol of the road helps us codify a pattern of experience. 103 When the poet has

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101 Burke, Philosophy of Literary Form, 301.
102 Burke, Philosophy of Literary Form, 298.
converted his pattern of experience into a symbolic equivalent, that symbol becomes a guiding principle.\textsuperscript{104}

Collectively, the component parts of my strategy, which could also be construed as an attitude or a method, would be an art form, comedy in this instance, that measures the dimensions of a particular situation, the road in American culture. In keeping with the various attitudes of this situation, its ingredients would be mythic and poetic in character, which I have situated in my case studies with a focus on American folk song and the Samaritan Ethic in Martin Luther King Jr.’s sermonic discourse. These discourses propagate a particular narrative about the road that results in a “strategy of strategies,” which I argue is the road as an archetypal mythology, with a particular rhetorical function, those mediating human encounters.\textsuperscript{105} In sum, Burke’s attention to the aesthetics of literature and its social function are of great importance. Coupe argues that though Burke began defining myth in relation to historical concerns, he became increasingly concerned and focused on the ways in which people communicate with others to consolidate communities.\textsuperscript{106} According to Anders, in reference to Hawhee, this is why Burke stressed aesthetics, for “poetry, broadly defined, is a locus of perspective by incongruity, a place where incongruous metaphors can be pushed together to create new ways of viewing the world.\textsuperscript{107} The road as a rhetorical encounter with the other is such a poetic incongruity—an equipment for living.

\textsuperscript{104} Burke, \textit{Counter-Statement}, 157.  
\textsuperscript{105} Burke, \textit{Philosophy of Literary Form}, 304.  
\textsuperscript{106} Coupe, \textit{From Myth to Ecology}, 30.  
\textsuperscript{107} Anders, “Pragmatism by Incongruity.”
2.4 Myths America Lives By

Given this understanding of myth as a social tool, one that emerges during periods of crisis or change, answering the question of why myths are used, here, I demonstrate an example of how, precisely, Americans use myths for living. In short, I argue that American folk music effectively illustrates this function. In essence, I assert that myth can be traced through a particular pattern, which I delineate in greater detail in chapter three, in consideration of the revolutionary symbolism in American folk music. This pattern is set in motion by the times, through crisis or change, producing particular questions. In turn, a diversity of people coheres around an underlying principle in an effort to produce strategic and stylized answers to those questions. Myths emerge. Moreover, within these myths, songs, for example, are usually some interplay of secondary and primary realities or symbols. Primary realities can be pointed to, like a road. Secondary realities cannot be pointed to, but are nonetheless still very real, like our interrelations with people. Religious creeds and songs, for example, tend to emerge during periods of cultural or ideological shift, in an effort to clarify confusions of identity. Collectively, then, I demonstrate this progressive pattern by examining how Americans cohere around songs during crisis and change, using three national patriotic songs in three different periods of American history.

Before I do this, however, I want to focus our depth of field on the importance of myths in American life as it bears upon one specific demographic, African American experience. To these ends, I turn to Richard Hughes’ work, and telling title, *Myths America Lives By*. At the turn of a new century and millennium, Hughes argues, it is important to reflect and reconsider the virtues and vices of our national narratives and
mythology—to look at our nation through the eyes of others. To do this, he explores five key myths connected to the American experience: Chosen Nation, Nature’s Nation, the Christian Nation, the Millennial Nation, and the Innocent Nation. Moreover, Hughes’ consideration of myth in American life is especially important to this study in that he considers the significance of national myths in relation to African American experience. In this regard, Hughes turns to the poetic language of Martin Luther King Jr., to help us understand that, with regards to our enemies, we must learn to “see the enemy’s point of view, to hear his questions, to know his assessment of ourselves [so that] we may indeed see the basic weaknesses of our own condition […] and learn to grow and profit from the wisdom of the brothers who are called the opposition.”

In light of these considerations, if myth is fundamentally a social tool that binds people together around common ideals during periods of change and crisis, then the record of American folk song gives us some of our greatest national myths. Indeed, in part, my scholarly contribution foregrounds the fundamental and foundational influence of the mythology of the road in American folk music and public discourse prior to the cinematic imaginary. Most assuredly, early Americans acquired their sensibilities about the road as a mythology and a trope through their encounters with actual landscapes and vistas long before the camera or the cinema shared their vision. Put differently, our analogical roads have always been subsidized by actual roads. Still differently, road songs have long been the projectionists of our mental and mythic pictures. Moreover, to be more precise, we must also account for how the creation of a singular myth gets

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appropriated and disseminated, constituting an actual living and active mythology. To that, we recognize the discursive nature of songs. As a contemporary example, while most students today, when they listen to Neil Young’s “Southern Man” and Lynyrd Skynyrd’s “Sweet Home Alabama,” may hear two distinctly unrelated songs, students of the day understood it as a poetic discourse that gave voice to the racial tensions of the South in the 1960s. Which is to say: American folk songs give us unique, colorful, and varied access points to understand how the myth of the road developed into an active strategy for living.

2.4.1 American Folk Song as Myth

In the spring of 1813, the British Royal Navy participated in the Chesapeake Campaign, a two-hundred-mile-long blockade of the Chesapeake Bay. In the summer of that same year, a seamstress named Mary Pickersgill, with the help of her daughter, two nieces, and an African American indentured servant, worked on the malt house floor of a local brewery for seven weeks making a garrison flag. In August of 1814, the federal city saw more than four thousand troops and fifty warships surround the riverfront town of Benedict. On August 24 and 25, the British swept through Bladensburg and marched into Washington, D.C., destroying government buildings as a retaliation for the burning of York in April 1813—burning the White House and the U.S. Capitol to the ground as President James Madison and hundreds of citizens fled the city. On September 12, 1814, the Battle of North Point, though a tactical defeat for the Americans, delayed the British
long enough for the American’s to strengthen their defenses in Baltimore. There, a
twenty-five hour British naval bombardment ensued upon Baltimore’s Fort McHenry.

On September 14, on board a truce ship positioned near the British fleet,
American attorney Francis Scott Key witnessed the bombardment. Afterward, Key
penned the “Defence of For McHenry” to commemorate the momentous event—recalling
the garrison flag, likely billowing in the smoke filled skies over Baltimore, the same one
woven together on a malt floor, which featured twenty-three inch stripes made of wool
bunting from Britain and cotton stars, measuring thirty by forty two feet. “The Star-
Spangled Banner” is more than Key’s personal recollection or just some inconsequential
patriotic song. Rather, “Banner” tells a particular story, one that is intended to stoke
public memory and strengthen our national narrative. “Banner,” then, is a prominent
American myth that testifies to the resolve of a young nation facing a formidable enemy.

In the weeks following the initial publication, newspapers began distributing the
poem with a new title, “The Star-Spangled Banner.” More than a century later, on March
3, 1931, “Banner” became our official national anthem. Since that time, the anthem has
served the people of our nation as a sacred site of public memory. As a myth, it illustrates
the generational role of Rushing’s definition of myth. That is, not only does it induce
memories about the Battle of Fort McHenry, but more so, it brings people together,
particularly after the events of September 11, 2001, around a common sense of
nationhood. It is one of our great national narratives. And when people come together in
sports cathedrals around the nation, irrespective of the differences in creed or team colors
they may be standing alongside, reverential acts are performed, hats removed and hands
of allegiance are placed, and the great ritual of national myth is performed. Beyond the
arena, thousands of Americans make their pilgrimage to the Smithsonian Institute’s National Museum of American History in Washington, D.C., where one can recount not only the broad history of the flag or the song, but also America as a nation. One can even relive the dramatic events between the British and Americans during the War of 1812, that inspired the song, by traveling the Star-Spangled Banner National Historical Trail, a five-hundred-and sixty-mile land and water route that connects Maryland, Virginia, and the District of Columbia. Here, the roads connect us to one of our most prominent national myths.

My second example examines “The Battle Hymn of the Republic,” a hymn that illustrates, through its resilient use in times of national crisis, its strong mythical character. First published in the February 1862 edition of *Atlantic Monthly*, “Battle Hymn” embodies the discursive nature of myth, marking the ideological battlegrounds at stake in the propagation of national narratives. Because music was an active medium in the nineteenth century, the absence of recorded sound made performing and appreciating music simultaneous actions. The Civil War elevated the cultural significance of music, making it an important social and discursive tool. Songwriters often wrote songs for the distinct purpose of mocking their opponents. As such, songs were highly adaptable and lyrical meaning was in constant flux. More than mere entertainment, music provided a narrative and mythic means for enacting public discourse. In *Battle Hymns*, for instance, McWhirter indicates that students filled their schoolrooms with songs like “America,” “The Star Spangled Banner,” and “The Battle Cry of Freedom.”

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Illustrative of its strong discursive character, “The Battle Hymn of the Republic” is culturally connected to its musical antecedent, “John Brown’s Body.” Originally a religious camp meeting refrain, the song moved through various military posts and became a marching song. The Union army had its own version and the Confederates had theirs—a version in which John Brown, rather than Jefferson Davis, was hanging from a tree. On an autumn day in 1861, abolitionist poet Julia Ward Howe, delayed by a marching regiment on her way to Washington D.C., heard a rendition of “John Brown’s Body.” The next morning, she awoke and penned a new lyric to the tune that would eventually become “The Battle Hymn of the Republic.” The final verse of the “Battle Hymn” articulates more profoundly than perhaps any other line in American letters the sense of responsibility we have in honoring America’s divinely favored status.\(^{111}\)

Mythically speaking, as a nation, we have turned to the “Battle Hymn” in all manner of situations. As a tribute to his American mother, for instance, the hymn was performed at the funeral of British Prime Minister Winston Churchill. John Steinbeck used its imagery to capture the harsh essence of the Great Depression in *The Grapes of Wrath*. Similarly, John Updike borrowed lyrical imagery from the hymn for his “In the Beauty of the Lilies.” More recently, in the aftermath of the events of September 11, 2001, “Battle Hymn” became an unofficial anthem that underscored President George W. Bush’s declaration of war on terrorism from the pulpit of Washington National Cathedral. One leader even remarked, “If there was ever an appropriate time outside of the nineteenth century for the hymn, it was that occasion.”\(^{112}\)

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\(^{112}\) Stauffer and Soskis, 5.
“The Battle Hymn of the Republic” has been important in ritually commemorating national public memory. Its discursive history challenges us to consider the great paradox of American democracy, that is, constituting laws and values that conceive of properties, i.e. corporations, as individuals, and individuals as property, i.e. slaves. “The Battle Hymn of the Republic” is one of our great American myths, broadly illustrating the mythic nature of song and the importance of American folk music to discerning that mythology in American culture.

Third, and finally, I look at the mythic nature of song in “America the Beautiful.” This example, more so than the previous two, emphasizes how the road plays prominently into American folk music. On a summer day in 1882, a thirty-three-year-old church musician named Samuel Ward, on board a steamboat en route to a family vacation on Coney Island, was suddenly struck with a moment of creative inspiration. Stimulated by the vistas that surrounded him during his travels, Ward used the cuff of a friend’s linen shirt to write down the melody that was resounding in his mind.113 Relatedly, Katharine Bates, having hired a prairie wagon to assist her in reaching the summit of Pikes Peak, at elevations of more than fourteen thousand feet, was similarly inspired. For hours, every twist in the road opened a new discovery. From the summit, she absorbed the panoramic sights, from north to south, east and west, the wheat and trees and the roads and rivers: “O beautiful, for spacious skies.” For Bates, “All the wonder of America seemed displayed there, with the sea-like expanse.”114 Bates poem, “Pike’s Peak,” was published in the Congregationalist on July 4, 1895. After returning to

114 Collins, Songs Sung Red, White and Blue, 17.
Wellesley College, the poem came to be known as “America the Beautiful.” Though many tunes were paired with Bates’ poem in those early years, a common occurrence with such music, it was not until 1904 that Clarence A. Barbour found a fitting melody for the poem. It was then that Samuel Ward’s cuff-written tune, “Mariterna,” was joined to Bates’ poem. “America the Beautiful” as we know it was born. “O beautiful for pilgrim feet, whose stern impassioned stress a thoroughfare for freedom beat across the wilderness!” In essence, “America the Beautiful” is a product of the road.

In sum, I have selected these three songs because they illustrate the mythic character of our national songs. In times of crises, we turn to myth and song to help us make sense of the confusion brought about by individual, communal, or national crisis. We use them to celebrate. We use them to mourn. For instance, published in the New York City Saturday Press in 1865, Walt Whitman’s “O Captain! My Captain!” uses the poetic symbolism and mythology of the road to eulogize President Abraham Lincoln. A poetic dirge, “O Captain” frames the life and death of Lincoln using a nautical journey:

O Captain! My captain! Our fearful trip is done. The ship has weathered every wreck, the prize we sought is won […] the ship is anchored safe, its voyage closed and done: From fearful trip the victor ship comes in with object won! Exult, O shores! And ring, O bells! But I, with silent tread, walk the spot my captain lies. Fallen cold and dead.

In consideration of myth as a social tool, and in recognition of the importance of myth in American culture, each of these songs does more than simply illustrate the mythic character of American folk song. Moreover, each of these songs meaningfully contributes to a living mythology about the road in American culture, one that moves fluidly through American popular culture.

2.5 The Mythology of the Road in American Culture

The point is not to write the sociology or psychology of the car, the point is to drive. That way you learn more about this society than all academia could ever tell you [...] all you need to know about American society can be gleaned from an anthropology of its driving behavior. Drive ten thousand miles across America and you will know more about the country than all the institutes of sociology and political science put together.116

Given both my definition of myth as a social tool and having (hopefully) effectively demonstrated how myths function in American life, I now look to substantiate my overarching claim that the road is a living mythology in American culture. As an example, in the magazine Mental Floss, a cover story titled “How the Road Trip Shaped America,” demonstrates the life on the road is not all “wood-paneled station wagons and trying to get truck drivers to honk,” but rather a versatile cultural course for art, nature, and feminism, using the stories of Alfred Hair, Alice Huyler Ramsey, John Muir, and Lewis and Clark to demonstrate how the road has shaped American culture.117

As I indicated in chapter one, given that the term travel fails to make distinct the privileging of unbridled, white, white American progress, I have turned to the more popularly evocative notion of the road.118 Irrespective of the term, though, I am here interested in how the road functions as a cohesive essence and active strategy—a rhetorical, mythical, and poetic archetype in American life. To do this, I focus on the interplay of actual and analogical roads, both/and, rather than either/or, to demonstrate how our prolific metaphors about the road as means of living draw their mythical strength from the road as an actual encounter with the other.

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117 Christina Ung, “How the Road Trip Shaped America.” In Mental Floss 12, issue 5, July/August 2013, 41-51.
However, if American history has testified to anything, it is that these prospective pathways have not, are not, intended for everyone. African Americans, in particular, have not enjoyed all of the benefits of the cultural myth of progress, which sees America as the “land of opportunity,” synechdochical connecting its material resourcefulness and mobility with social and economic mobility. Here, then, I show how myth as a social tool, exemplified through American folk songs, coalesces with the road in American culture, by focusing on two fundamental traits that define the twentieth-century American road and giving an overview of American road songs. As an indication of the importance of such a consideration, consider the Library of Congress’ “Songs of America Project,” which considers the lyrical legacy of American song and poetry from early settlement to postwar America. Comparably, Susan Kuyper’s “The Road in American Vernacular Music” makes a valuable contribution to broadening our understanding of the relationship and significance of the road in American history and culture. Specifically, though, where Kuyper is centrally concerned with the road in nineteenth-century American music, in chapter three, I focus on the road songs of the twentieth century. More specifically, where Kuyper focuses essentially on Alan Lomax’s *The Folk Songs of North America*, in chapter three, I focus on Lomax’s encounters with others on the road in three distinct trips, in one particular region, the Mississippi Delta. Here, though, I set the intellectual stage for my extended look down the lonesome roads of Alan Lomax’s fieldwork in the Mississippi Delta by focusing on some of the distinct features of road songs in nineteenth-century America.
2.5.1 The Road as Astral Place

The first distinct feature of the road in American life is as an astral place. For perspective, in the 1980s, Jean Baudrillard used this language to describe his experience in America. He described it as having an “astral quality,” that he had not found anywhere else. For Baudrillard, America was a land of “desert speed,” characterized by its “absolute freedom of the freeways.” In other words, the Depression era “Mother Road, the road of flight,” with its “tributary side roads” and “rutted country roads,” had transformed into multi-lane highways, inspiring autonomous storytellers to “exploit the mobility of narrative on various media platforms.” In astral America, we privilege efficiency and speed. In astral America, we are smitten with shortcut and allied with abridgement. In astral America, the individual supersedes the community. In astral America, the socio-cultural rebel lords over staid traditions.

Broadly defined, the road as an astral place is about human, if not spiritual mobility and freedoms. On the desert highways, the human spirit is like an automobile, “always on the move, always.” Using Genesis language, “God made the American restive.” Put differently, in his educational odyssey, The Majic Bus, Douglas Brinkley indicates that the American road is perhaps the only thing that can unchain the spirit of America. Collectively, then, the road is “fundamental to social existence,” giving us

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119 Baudrillard, America, 28; 5.
121 Mills, The Road and the Rebel, 6.
an imaginary array of adventures filled with outlandish characters, valiant heroes and anti-heroes, rabble-rousers and Rebel Rousers. Writing about the first successful transcontinental automobile trip undertaken by Horatio Nelson Jackson, Dayton Duncan writes, “There are few pleasures in life more satisfying than getting in a car and starting out on a road trip.”

Progressively, then, from the early twentieth century to Baudrillard’s America,Stephen Goddard writes that despite the trauma of the Great Depression, “road building was the success story of the demoralized 1930s.” In the 1930s and 1940s, America roads were being rapidly developed. In one account from this period, a travelogue by Soviet humorists Ilya Ilf and Eugene Petrov, describes America as being located on a large automobile highway: “Oh, that road! For two months it ran to meet us—concrete, asphalt, or grained, made of gravel and permeated with heavy oil.” In the cinema of the 1930s and 1940s, comparably, movies like It Happened One Night, I Am a Fugitive from a Chain Gang, The Grapes of Wrath, and Sullivan’s Travels centered their stories on the road. In the 1950s, The Bureau of Urban Research of Princeton University organized the

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125 Hilaire Belloc, The Road. Manchester, England: Charles W. Hobson, 1923. See also Jean Labatut and Wheaton J. Lane, eds., Highways in our National Life: A Symposium (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1950), v. It should also be noted that Hilaire Belloc’s book The Road (1923) was funded by the British Reinforced Concrete Engineering Co. Ltd, who may be seen as a predecessor of the road lobby. See Britain’s Changing Environment from the Air, ed. Tim Bayliss-Smith and Susan E. Owens, CUP Archive, 1990, 16.


129 See Andrew S. Berish, Lonesome Roads and Streets of Dreams: Place, Mobility, and Race in Jazz of the 1930s and ‘40s (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012), 83.
Highways in our National Life symposium, where historians, economists, sociologists, architects, engineers, and political figures (e.g., city planners), presented forty-five essays on the subject, collectively noting: “Today, Americans are conscious of the importance of roads as never before.”

Consider, that in 1921, American motor vehicles traveled approximately 55 billion miles on 387,000 miles of surfaced roads; in 1950, those numbers had increased significantly, covering more than 368 billion miles on 1.5 million miles of surfaced roads; at present, Americans drive approximately 2.97 trillion miles a year on more than 4.09 million miles of road in the United States. In an article titled “Roads to a Better Future” in The Rotarian from August 1971, W.H. Owens writes, “Around the world, the growing network of highways is bringing a better life, especially in the developing nations, by stimulating trade, tourism, and understanding between peoples.” More significantly, at least as it pertains to this project, the road is an archetype, a rhetorical encounter with the other, predicated on the slow pace of the activist’s foot on city streets, in the march, in a social movement that vividly illustrates the mythic construction of American national character.

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130 Labatut and Lane, Highways in our National Life, v; See also “How Many Miles of Roads are there in the United States,” at American Road & Transportation Builders Association at www.artba.org/about/transportation-faqs/


2.5.2 The Road as Poetic Space

In addition to the road as an astral place, the road is also a poetic space. By this, I mean to imply Gaston Bachelard’s consideration of how we experience intimate places. For Bachelard, our domestic space possesses a poetic function. More than some seemingly insignificant space in a home, our attics, closets, and doorknobs hold poetic meaning. To be more particular, because a child’s line of sight is confined to low angles, one might perceive how objects, like a textured brass handle or a certain scent or a particular song, physical and mental objects, might hold meaning. This meaning resides in the room at the end of what John R. Stilgoe refers to as the “hallway of the mind,” “vibrating at the ends of imagination, exploring the recesses of the psyche.” In part, as people travel on actual roads, astral and activist, these places progressively become poetic spaces where we create eloquent speeches, poetic songs, or variegated visuals. Relevant to this project, public space, in this case a road, with its material symbols and sounds, expansive vistas, and symbolic possibilities, helps constitute the road as a poetic space.

In the same manner that we can develop an intellectual awareness and emotional kinship with places or objects, we can also establish similar relations with the poetic symbolism and mythological narratives in our minds. One of the things that make the road so versatile is this character, extending in both the direction of actual place and poetic space. For instance, when we drive through our hometown and call attention to where we encountered our first dance or kiss, these are both actual places and poetic spaces. One does not even need to leave one’s hometown, as is the case with Franz Kafka’s novel *Amerika*, which tells the story of a poor teenager named Karl Rossman.

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who is shipped off to America, when, in fact, “Prague was actually all he knew—his entire world, his paradise and his prison. He yearned for other landscapes […] but the few journeys he could afford were short and hardly satisfactory. The most extensive journey he ever made took place wholly in his mind.”

Burke extends this idea further when he argues that the forms of expression used in our communication, like Huckleberry Finn, for example, are not solely within our minds but also a form of public existence. The road is such a place and space, a prism through which all aesthetic worlds see with “the soul of the eye.” In sum, in the introduction, I stated that I was most interested in the interplay of these two realms of actual and analogical roads. That is, actual roads supply the analogical road with perspective. Part of the problem in our discourse about the road is that we often become preoccupied with metaphor and representation at the expense of the actual. This is a legitimate interest, but it is also important to provide balance to the force of the road. The claim is a two-way street, though. Only emphasizing actual roads does little for apprehending our imaginaries. Here, look to both roads in motion, demonstrating how the road coalesces with the mythic character of song in nineteenth-century America.

### 2.5.3 Road Songs of America

In order to account for the mythic possibilities of the road in American culture, we need to account more fully for the interplay of these actual places and poetic spaces.

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136 Bachelard, Poetics of Space, x.
For some time, we have given little attention to the road as a place. Jackson frames our subtle neglect this way:

Disqualified by its own genealogy, outclassed by the prestige of private space, the road has long suffered from neglect by historians and students of landscape: dismissed as an unsightly, elongated, crooked space used by merchants and ravaging armies and highway robbers.\textsuperscript{137}

As I stressed in the previous section, though, roads no longer merely lead to places; they are places.\textsuperscript{138} In this section, in consideration of the mythic pattern I have outlined, I consider some of the changes and crises that motivate the underlying principles around which mythic songs are composed. Specifically, using Kuyper’s assessment of “Road Songs in American Vernacular Music,” and her assessment of Alan Lomax’s \textit{Folk Songs of North America} as an archive of road songs, I assess two changes in particular, coming and going, as both bear upon the importance of place, and more importantly, as those, collectively implicate people—encounters with others.

To begin, Susan Kuyper writes, “There is a large subset of road folk songs in the history of American vernacular music.”\textsuperscript{139} These road folk songs explore content and discontent, grief, weariness, and love. Carl Sandburg in \textit{American Songbag} writes:

\begin{quote}
Music and the human voice command this parade of melodies and lyrics. They speak, murmur, cry, yell, laugh, pray; they take roles; they play parts; in topics, scenes and “props” they range into […] houses, machines, ships, railroad trains, churches, saloons, picnics, hayrack and steamboat parties, and human strugglers chanting farewell to the frail frameworks of earthly glory.\textsuperscript{140}
\end{quote}
America’s earliest inhabitants, from its colonists to its pioneers, brought songs with them and sang them as they traveled. Today, the road trip playlist has taken the place of the traveling song. Specifically, these mythic road songs provide a framework for understanding how Americans imbue meaning into the idea of their nation through poetic narratives. Though these songs widely disseminate cultural myths like progress and rugged individualism, they are also grounded in archetypal myths about human encounters with people, nature, place, and the divine.

As I have argued, people constitute myths during periods of change and crisis. For instance, when slaves were forcefully and violently separated from their families at slave trading posts like Forks of the Road in Mississippi, they sang songs for comfort. When plantations banned the playing of instruments to counteract associations with the slave revolts, they used their voices as instruments. What is profoundly significant, though, is that slaves were not allowed to travel. This is a strong indication that songs functioned mythically as comfort—for living. For instance, when one considers the nature of the spirituals, and in particular, their coded messages, one notices that they are all road songs about escape, deliverance, and freedom, both bodily and divine. Furthermore, when slaves were reduced to hard labor in lumber camps or prisons, building infrastructure like levees and roads, they worked to the rhythm of songs. Gioia, in consideration of the prison work song, argues, “Above all, [songs] served as a tool for the prison workers, one that was perhaps even more important than the axes and hammers they held in their hands.” In essence, where songs are always and loudly sung, this is where we discover our most basic human impulses.

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Some of the first American folk songs that celebrated the road were the results of changes related to coming and going. For instance, in the early ballad tradition of the Puritans, Kuyper traces road songs from the Puritan colonies to the British folk song tradition, to lane songs like “Petticoat Lane,” “Scarborough Fair,” and “Strawberry Lane”: “As I walked out in Petticoat Lane,” “Are you going to Scarborough Fair,” and “As I was walking up Strawberry Lane.” Similarly, some of our earliest road songs were connected to the Great Revival, to the coming and goings of camp meetings, where families and neighbors would journey together with the poorer farmers bringing their black slaves with them. One Cheshire squire Puritan, for instance, set out on foot with his entire family, along with cook, butler, servants, tenants and neighbors, and “marched on” with a joyful and cheerful heart toward the house of God. In the South, furthermore, the music of white settlers encountered with the music of black slaves in call-and-response songs. Subtle but distinct differences in arrangements of songs like “Roll, Jordan Roll,” reveal how white congregants stressed a patriarchal and severe God while the black slaves added, “Dotted rhythms to reflect the speech patterns of confession of a personal God.”

Furthermore, coming and going presupposes a place one is coming from and going to. Thus, road songs demonstrate the pride of place, like Chicago, Amarillo, Traverse City, Alabama, and others. For instance, cowboys sang in the saddle as they herded longhorn cattle from the ranges of Texas to the markets in Abilene, Kansas. By

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142 Kuyper, “Road Songs in American Vernacular Music,” 60.
the mid-nineteenth century, settlers had pushed west beyond the Great Lakes and the Mississippi, singing their journey songs as they traveled. The movement of parting songs from the old country to the new speaks to the universality of the theme of leaving home. As the country settled and expanded, though, the need for transportation, for the shipping of cargo and mail service were crucial in the development of more roads, which led to more songs, particularly about modes of travel. For Kuyper, “The journey to heaven can be had by “Jacob’s Ladder,” by chariot (recall Plato’s Phaedrus) in “Swing Low, Sweet Chariot,” or by train, in “This Train is Bound for Glory.”

Moreover, just as coming and going imply place, so too, place presupposes the presence of people. At the heart of all road songs are the travellers, the freighters, bull-whackers, the wagoner, cowboys, lumberjacks, and equally important, runaway slaves, migrants, immigrants, and emigrants, accounting for the difficulties of their journeys, their hardships in love, and the loneliness of their life on the road, and also the revelry and entertainment they enjoy. In all these road songs, the wayfaring stranger wanders the American continent, singing for consolation and comfort. In each of these ways, then, the road folk songs “transport listeners and readers ‘outside’ of themselves, bringing meaning and comfort to personal journeys.” Bill C. Malone attributes the valorization of the cowboy in the twentieth century to the ideas of American exceptionalism and the promotion of Manifest Destiny in the mid-nineteenth century. John Lomax’s *Cowboy Songs and Other Frontier Ballads*, for instance, introduced America to “Home on the

146 Kuyper, “Road in American Vernacular Music,” 63.
147 Kuyper, “Road in American Vernacular Music,” 58.
Range,” as the cowboy faced the harsh elements of seasonal storms. John Lomax identifies the communal element of these cowboy songs:

The works of the men, their daily experiences, their thoughts, their interests, were all in common. Such a community had necessarily to turn to itself for entertainment. Songs sprang up naturally […] Whatever the most gifted man could produce must bear the criticism of the entire camp, and agree with the ideas of a group of men. In this sense, therefore, any song that came from such a group would be the joint product of a number of them.\textsuperscript{150}

In “The Old Chisholm Trail” when the cowboy gets to the market he fills himself with drink and repeats the journey all over again:

We’ll all liquor up and twirl those heifers round. Then back once more with my bridle and my boss. For old John Chisholm is a damned fine boss. ‘I’m A-Leavin’ Cheyenne’ is committed to trail life. The cowboys of these various road folk songs are wanderers, poor but rich in experiences. His songs of restlessness resonate with Americans of all ages.\textsuperscript{151}

Finally, in leading to places, the road brings us into constant relation with diverse people. It was the road, after all, that first brought us into relation with one another.\textsuperscript{152} For Jackson, the road naturally mediates “strangers and strange ideas.” Some of those peculiar exchanges, as I have sought to illustrate, have been American folk songs. Roads, however, have brought us more than music. As Berish argues, songs about the road have provided us new ways of understanding American life and the people who inhabit that life.\textsuperscript{153} As it pertains to my argument of the archetypal road as a rhetorical and ethical encounter with the other, Jackson gives further insight:

The archetypal road is one that not only serves the daily needs of the small community but also helps preserve its ethical values. It is essential to the work routine and the routine of worship and celebration, but more than that, it makes

\textsuperscript{150} Quoted in Kuyper, “Road in American Vernacular Music,” 70.
\textsuperscript{151} Kuyper, “Road in American Vernacular Music,” 73.
\textsuperscript{152} Jackson, \textit{A Sense of Place, a Sense of Time}, 189.
\textsuperscript{153} Berish, \textit{Lonesome Road}, 77.
virtuous behavior possible and it preserves the territorial integrity of the village."

As a familiar narrative device, the road became the symbol of a restless nation in search of more opportunity. In John Ford’s film version of John Steinbeck’s *Grapes of Wrath*, the road meant the loss of most everything that meant something in their lives—their farmland and their home. But the road also served as a symbol of hope, a way of bringing Americans together in community with one another. Substantively, the road is a liminal space that generates myths and associations where barriers can be broken down, connections made, social relations reoriented, and new communities developed.¹⁵⁵

In sum, a number of important changes and crises in American history, migrations in particular, like the Gold Rush, the Oregon and Mormon trails, the Underground Railroad, the Second Middle Passage, and American civil rights, have given us a storehouse of American road songs. Susan Kuyper has given us a perspective from one collection of American folk songs, from Alan Lomax. In chapter three, because the mythic conceptualizations that populate our discourses and that give shape to our cultural myths of progress, embodied by the myths of rugged individualism and socio-cultural rebellion, have done little in helping us move toward a more just society, I take the lead of folklorist Alan Lomax, whose fieldwork offers privileged access to understanding the importance of the road as a rhetorical encounter with the other, demonstrating its mythic character and poetic function in American culture.

¹⁵⁴ Jackson, *A Sense of Place, a Sense of Time*, 7.
¹⁵⁵ Berish, *Lonesome Road*, 83.
CHAPTER THREE

Long Lonesome Road:

Alan Lomax and the Mythic Road in the Blues

Folklore can show us that this dream is age-old and common to all mankind. It asks that we recognize the cultural rights of weaker peoples in sharing this dream. And it can make their adjustment to a world society an easier and more creative process. The stuff of folklore—the orally transmitted wisdom, art and music of the people can provide ten thousand bridges across which men of all nations may stride to say, “You are my brother.”

- Alan Lomax

3.1 Long Lonesome Road

In American culture, the road is a phenomenon of national importance, prevalent in film, television, the image, music, and public and political discourse. As I argue, the prominence of the road in our national consciousness is directly tied to our national mythology. Contrary to the cultural myths of progress, in this dissertation, I have taken up the road as an archetype, a rhetorical encounter with the other. Plainly, one of the ways this mythology is constituted and distributed culturally is through song. Recorded by folklorists John and Alan Lomax at Reed Prison Camp in Boykin, South Carolina in 1934, “Look Down That Lonesome Road,” is a vivid illustration of the thematic and mythic importance of the road in African American experience and American culture. “Look Down That Lonesome Road” is a spiritual, but more than a spiritual, it is a poetic and ritual account of African American experience, giving it a profoundly mythic character and psychagogic rhetorical allure. In this rendition of the tune, as a harmonizing group sings, with pauses between each lyrical refrain, we hear: “Look down […] Look

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down […] that long […] lonesome […] road […] where you […] and I […] must go […]”² In “On the Trail of Negro Folk Songs,” Scarborough and Gulledge argue that, “There are certain typical Negro touches about it, for the ‘lonesome road’ is often referred to in Negro songs, and in Negro ballads one often hangs down his head and cries, as in one of the religious songs.”³ Beyond the spirituals, though, this lonesome road reaches through African American musical lore and into the blues, the substantive focus of this chapter. For instance, in Texas bluesman Lightnin’ Hopkins version, titled “Lonesome Road,” we hear a similar story: “You know I hate to go down this lonesome road. Lord, I’m going to keep on traveling until I find some place to go. Lonesome when you’re traveling down this road by yourself.”⁴

Put differently, through their road songs, our American progenitors have given us an important mythic heritage about the road in American life. However, there are two distinct mythologies. On the side of progress, the cultural myths of rugged individualism and socio-cultural rebellion have shaped our public imagination about the road. On the other side is the archetypal myth of the road as a rhetorical encounter with the other. These roads were not mere metaphor, they were songs written about the road while on the road. Just as America’s expeditions, explorations, and expansion have instilled the road with culturally mythic meaning and ideological purpose, so too the exploitation of African Americans along those long and lonesome roads has imbued the road with the archetype of the road as rhetorical encounter with the other.

² Alan Lomax, “Look Down That Long Lonesome Road,” Deep River of Song: South Carolina, Got the Keys to the Kingdom, recorded by Alan Lomax, CD, 2002.
Up to this point, this dissertation has been mostly concerned with the nature of the road, with the first two chapters functioning as an apostrophe to the road in rhetorical history and American culture. In the previous chapter, I briefly outlined the importance of road songs in American folk music, which permeate all sorts of musical styles and genres, from different regions and periods, as a bridge to this first case study. In this chapter, then, I use the blues as a representative anecdote for assessing the grand convergence of human relations. Specifically, I use Alan Lomax’s recordings and fieldwork in the Mississippi Delta to demonstrate the psychagogic rhetorical functions of the blues. Using the language of rhetorical encounter, I show how the blues leads the soul toward along the Upward/Downward Way.

To do this, I focus on three particular collection trips in the Delta. First, I look at Lomax’s first collection trip in the summer of 1933, positioning the bluesman as psychagogic rhetors and Lomax as audience—this is the Upward Way, revealing an ultimate order in which the dialectical tension of self and other is transcended by the other-self. Second, transformed by his encounters with the people on the road and in the music, I consider Lomax’s encounter with Muddy Waters in the summer of 1941, situating both Waters and Lomax as psychagogic rhetors—this is the Downward Way, where Lomax broadens the mythic mode of the blues beyond the region so that others can encounter the people through their poetry. Finally, I examine Lomax’s encounter with James Carter in 1959, illustrating a paradigm example of how this mythology has influenced American culture. This case, I argue, reveals the fundamental importance of the mythology of the road, as an archetype, as psychagogic rhetoric, in American culture. Moreover, the potential of the ultimate order in the archetype that I have outlined,
enhances the persuasiveness of this music; hence, it demands our attention as a rhetorical device, “Even when we distrust its claims.”\textsuperscript{5} The objective, then, is to equip us as citizens and scholars with an ultimate vocabulary for confronting our living in relation with others.

3.2 Revolutionary Symbolism in American Folk Music

“The true comfort that remained for men, and that embodied and gave reality to their conquering struggle against every despair, was surely song.”\textsuperscript{6}

–Hilaire Belloc

3.2.1 Revolutionary Symbolism in America

Poetic symbolism is an important part of our national mythology. In our anthems and hymns, songs exert a powerful influence on our collective consciousness as Americans, influencing attitudes, shaping values, building beliefs, and ultimately, leading us to action. For instance, when we attend public sporting events, having been conditioned to stand and sing, we perform the mythic ritual of remembering and honoring America with the national anthem, “The Star Spangled Banner.” Similarly, when we visit national monuments or memorials, like Mt. Rushmore, anthems and hymns, like “The Battle Hymn of the Republic,” are ritually enacted and bodily performed. American folk music, then, plays a very prominent role in the formation of national identity, with people cohering around the underlying principle of nationhood promoted in the images, sounds, stories, and narratives promoted in our songs.

\textsuperscript{5} Kenneth Burke, \textit{A Rhetoric of Motives} (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969), 203.

As such, in this section, I situate the notion of myth that I have outlined in the context of Kenneth Burke’s “Revolutionary Symbolism in America” to provide a reasoned progression from which to apprehend meaning the “revolutionary symbolism” of the blues in American folk music. As I have asserted, myths are not illusions, but rather, in the organization of the mind, perform very real and necessary social functions.\textsuperscript{7}

In the spring of 1935, Kenneth Burke issued his first formal definition of myth in a speech to the League of American Writers, a Marxist organization committed to advancing politically radical literature. In “Revolutionary Symbolism in America,” Burke outlines his philosophy of myth as a social tool and psychological bridge for working together with others to promote social justice. As Coupe notes, Burke’s discussion paper was not an academic conceptualization of myth as much as it was an interest in the subtle attitudes and emotions inherent to a particular unifying principle around which people cooperate.

More specifically, with regards to the symbols or insignia that label our unifying principles, Burke makes a distinction between primal realities and secondary realities. Primary realities are those that correspond to objects that can be clearly seen and obviously performed, like food, tools, or shelter. This is comparable to Burke’s notion of a positive order, things that name experience. Differently, the communal relationships by which a group is bound function as secondary realities in that they \textit{cannot} be pointed to with such distinction. Burke likens these secondary realities to Homeric myths. Put differently, when pressed about the nature of the underlying principle that binds our

cooperation, we will not be able to point to the nature of our attachment. In searching for
them critically, we dissolve them. Burke addresses this dilemma by outlining the social
function of myth:

Myths may be wrong, or they may be used to bad ends, but they cannot be
dispensed with […] they are our basic psychological tools for working together. A
hammer is a carpenter’s tool; a wrench is a mechanic’s tool; and a ‘myth’ is the
social tool for welding the sense of interrelationships by which the carpenter and
the mechanic, though differently occupied, can work together for common social
ends. In this sense a myth that works well is as real as food, tools, and shelter are.
As compared with the reality of material objects, however, we might say that the
myth deals with a secondary order of reality. Totem, race, godhead, nationality,
class, lodge, guild—all such are the ‘myths’ that have made various ranges and
kinds of social cooperation possible. They are not ‘illusions’, since they perform a
very real and necessary social function in the organizing of the mind. But they
may look illusory when they survive as fossils from the situations for which they
were adapted into changed situations for which they were not adapted. 8

To keep Burke’s radical reorientation of myth in perspective, we should keep in
mind that Burke is using a term (myth) that would have been antithetical to the ideas of
orthodox Marxism. It is radical because Burke, in perhaps his most vivid performance of
perspective by incongruity, declares Marxism a kind of myth. That is, Marxism is a
symbolic story intended to lead a significant portion of the people to work together to
promote social justice. So, rather than using the symbol of the worker, Burke uses the
more comprehensive symbol of the people. For Burke, the people offer a more ideal
incentive than the worker by drawing on the “residual power of mythology” 9 to identify a
“universal pattern.” 10 From a different angle, because symbols embody ideas and

9 Burke, “Revolutionary Symbolism in America,” 269.
10 Kenneth Burke, Counter Statement (Chicago: University of Chicago Press,
1957), 47.
incentives, the symbol of the people seems more ideal than the worker and is a richer symbol of allegiance—considering the problem of “man, not of classes of men.”

For Burke, myth is a social tool and a psychological bridge for working together. Similarly, to this I would add a spiritual dimension in the form of psychagogic rhetoric. To substantiate, Burke notes, “As the Latin religio signifies a binding together, I take religion and Communism to be alike insofar as both are systems for binding people together.” In this sense, strictly speaking, myths may also embody a spiritual dimension that leads the souls of people just as it leads the people of society. In essence, “Revolutionary Symbolism in America” reinvigorates myth as a viable strategy for living. To be more particular, I use this framework to argue for the blues as an important mythic tool insofar as it helped bind people together, regardless of color or creed, for the purposes of coming together, to work together consubstantially for common social ends. In the sense that I intend, I argue, in the blues, the secondary reality remains the people, where there is no distinction between individual and the collective, and the road becomes a primary and revolutionary symbol.

To be more particular, I contend there are three distinct sequential stages to the formation of myth in “Revolutionary Symbolism in America.” First, our times provoke questions that need answers. Second, in such times, people turn to some underlying principle, forming mythic social tools that embody both primary and secondary realities—these are our answers to the questions posed by the times. Third, we cohere around “revolutionary symbols” within those myths, ones that enact our allegiances.

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11 Burke, “Revolutionary Symbolism in America,” 272.
12 Burke, “Revolutionary Symbolism in America,” 279.
These three hierarchic facets function as an ultimate order, enabling the people to transcend the positive and dialectical, to be consubstantial with one another.

However, as to be expected, when this process unfolds, other competing factions, each with their own underlying principles and secondary and primal realities, will rise up also. Joseph Freeman, for instance, countered, “We must not encourage such myths. We are not interested in the myth. We are interested in revealing the reality. We setup the ‘symbol’ of the worker because of the role, which the worker plays in reality.”

However, Freeman here makes a distinction between myth and reality, where Burke draws a different line:

As for my use of the word myth, I was speaking technically before a group of literary experts, hence I felt justified in using the word in a special sense. A poet’s myths, I tried to make clear, are real, in the sense they perform a necessary function. They so pattern the mind as to give it a grip upon reality. For the myth embodies a sense of relationships. But relationships cannot be pointed to, in the simple objective way in which you could point to a stone or a house. It is such a sense of relationships (I have sometimes called them ‘secondary reality’) that I had in mind when using the word myth.

What I favor most about Burke’s mythic framework is how myth “patterns the mind” to give us a “grip upon reality.” The blues function in this manner also, giving it persuasive appeal that as I have argued, demands our attention as a rhetorical device. Moreover, though I do not want to privilege any one word in Burke’s language, I am interested in the presupposition of Burke’s grip. More plainly, Burke is alluding to our mental grip; comprehensions of reality that I can only assume are slick. These are the tumultuous times that decree our primal and secondary realities. In this sense, myth is a resin. To be a bit more precise, though, I think Burke means to suggest that myth is a social toolbox.

14 Burke, “Revolutionary Symbolism,” 279.
rather than a singular social tool. Myths, in this sense, hold various social tools like particular songs, public figures, religious leaders, literary texts, poems and the like.

In essence, “The American identity crisis intensifies in contentious times.” For instance, both Burke and Lomax were living and working in the tumultuous years of the Great Depression. In such times, we cohere around an underlying principle that motivates our allegiances in order to transcend our dialectical tensions. As Clark argues:

At this fractious civic moment Burke took a step past the intellectual project of developing critical methods to the civic one that involved pressing his fellow citizens to acknowledge that yearning and to recover that motive—to adopt an attitude toward each other out of which more productive interaction might proceed [...] that must begin in self-expression [...] mature into motives that focus on addressing others. And what ought to follow from that, ideally, was an understanding shared by self and others together. That’s “consummation.” We can’t achieve that, of course, but we can interact with each other in ways that keep us at least looking toward it.

Put differently, Burke’s civic-critical approach functions as an ultimate order, developing from self-knowledge to communication to consummation. As I argue, the blues is representative of this ultimate order, beginning, in the language of Ralph Ellison, as poetry and ritual, self-knowledge, and developing into communicative encounters with others, Lomax in this instance, and upward toward consummation. In turn, the Upward Way then becomes the Downward Way, where, again, Lomax communicates that vision of the other-self, in the people and their poetry, with others both for their encounter with the people and, ultimately, for consummation. Clark substantiates my inclination, when he asserts, “If aesthetic form is a kind of journey that takes someone through a sequence of questions and answers that must be accommodated by new understanding along the

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16 Clark, Civic Jazz, 45.
way, then consummation is the culmination of that journey, arrival at a destination where in our interactions no adjustment is needed for us to understand each other. Burke’s metaphor for that journey is an ‘Upward Way’ that leads from alienation, separation and conflict, ultimately,” to consummation.17

3.2.2 The Blues in American Folk Music

To this point, I have aligned myself with Burke’s notion that myth patterns the mind so as to give the people a grip upon reality. In other words, the blues, as poetry and ritual, are myths, addressing others through primary and secondary realities, to confront their conditions and psychagogically lead their souls, and those of others, on the Upward Way. In mythic motion, the blues is a social hammer, each song a strike down upon the anvil, forging new perspectives, grips upon reality, for use in living in relation with others—the road its archetypal setting. Before I define the blues, I want to clarify what I mean by American folk music. To be clear, though, there are numerous folk collectors, methods of collection, and musical taxonomies to consider. However, I focus exclusively on the work of John and Alan Lomax, which spans nearly a century and because Alan Lomax is the entry point for my consideration of the blues.

In a recent study of “American Vernacular Music” in the nineteenth century, Kuyper expresses the difficulty in classifying American folk music, ranging from folk to traditional, oral, anonymous, or vernacular, among others. James Leisy defines it as the

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17 Clark, Civic Jazz, 46.
songs of the people, by the people, and for the people.\textsuperscript{18} John and Alan Lomax contend that folk music comes from the “heart of the people,” revealing their daily habits of speech.\textsuperscript{19} In George O. Carney’s \textit{The Sounds of People and Places}, folk song is defined as “expressing the deepest levels of a people’s culture.”\textsuperscript{20} While John Tasker Howard echoes this sentiment: “To be a true folk song it must be typical of the people who sing it […] the song itself must be more important than its composer.”\textsuperscript{21} Plainly, I define it as the music of the people, particularly that played by musicians untrained in standardized sheet music, performed mainly in fields, on porches, and in field churches, among other places—an integral part of their oral culture.

Regardless of how it may be defined, though, it is clear that one of the most defining features of American folk music is the road. For instance, in \textit{Folk Songs of North America}, a collection of three hundred and seventeen folk songs collected by John and Alan Lomax, featuring songs from three centuries of American life, Kuyper identifies ninety-five songs that include some reference to travel, noting:

\begin{displayquote}
Road music brings us to the character of the travellers and their inherent relationships to the road; to the road itself; to leave-taking and the reasons for going; to the mode of transportation or mobility (ship, walking, carriage); to the physical journey and exploration; to the social community formed along the way;
\end{displayquote}

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{19} John Lomax and Alan Lomax, \textit{American Ballads and Folk Songs} (New York: Dover, 1994), xxviii.
\end{flushright}
to the landscape and sights encountered; to the insights gathered; and to the progress of self, soul, and civilization resulting from this combination.

Alan Lomax defines that primary function of such music as to, “Remind the listener that he belongs to one certain part of the human race, comes from a certain region, belongs to a certain generation.” Broadly, then, American folk music, in the context of Alan Lomax’s fieldwork, is more concerned with the ligature of community than with self-expression. Put differently, self-expression is a means rather than an end. And the end is not commercial in nature, but communal and rhetorical. In light of this perspective, we need to rise above our commercially conditioned understanding of music. Let us call it an attitude. To help us, I stress Ted Gioia’s perspective on the African American work song, which gives further credibility to Burke’s notion of myth as a social tool:

In general, we should be wary of imposing our modern views of music, derived from experiences with professional performers and entertainers, on the much different world of the work song. But even more to the point, we cannot hear this music or listen to the stories of those who created it without sensing that it was motivated by intrinsic needs rather than by the expectations of others […] Above all, it served as a tool for the prison workers, one that was perhaps even more important than the axes and hammers they held in their hands.

For Gioia, the voices of the inmates were as, if not more, important than the tactile tools with which they worked. Imaginatively, this means that as they split wood with their axes and divided rock with the drive of their hammers, they were, at the same time, building emotional inroads with the rock they broke and building new homes with the wood they cut. Moreover, Gioia argues similarly in his study of the Delta blues, noting that the

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22 Kuyper, “Road in American Vernacular Music,” 57.
“music thrived, not as recreation or entertainment, rather as a tool for survival.”  

Arriving at a more comprehensive understanding of the implications of the mythology of the road in American culture means we learn to hear songs as social tools rather than commercial goods. More specifically, because these songs are stylized answers to the questions posed by their times, they are useful in nearly every facet of life—at work or while traveling, whether happy or sad, angry or confused. The obstacle we must overcome is, to be blunt, that most of us are privileged enough to overlook these mythic aspects of American folk song if we so choose.  

In light of this consideration, allow me to briefly demonstrate the importance of the blues in two twentieth-century folk song collections. These will give us some perspective about the scope of American folk music in which blues operates and from which the blues borrows much of its mythic imagery. First, in John and Alan Lomax’s *American Ballads and Folk Songs*, published in 1934, father and son arrange more than two hundred songs into twenty-five different categories, including: railroad, levee camp, chain gang, bad men, desperados, mountains, cocaine and whiskey, blues, creole, “reels,” minstrel, play parties, childhood, miscellany, southwest, cowboy, overlanders, miner, shanty-boy, Erie Canal, Great Lakes, sailors and sea, wars and soldiers, white spirituals, and African spirituals. Revealingly, the epigraph to the Introduction of the work reads: “The sun is sorta sinkin’, an’ the road is clear. An’ the wind is singin’ ballads that I got to hear.”  

From the outset of their work, both this specific collection and others, music

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about the road is prevalent. Their stated purpose was to present some examples of the more noteworthy types of American folk songs:

We offer a composite photograph of what we and others, in field and forest, on mountain and plain, by the roadside and in the cabin, on big cane or cotton plantations and in prison camps, have set down of the songs of the people—isolated groups, interested only in an art which they could immediately enjoy, and thus an art that reflected and made interesting their own customs, dramas, and dreams.²⁸

One example from the collection that illustrates this mythology of the road is a “Reel” song titled “Foller De Drinkin’ Gou’d,” otherwise known as the legend of “Peg-Leg Joe.” Lomax, recalling a great-uncle familiar with the railroad movement, remembered that in the records of the Anti-Slavery Society, there was a story about a peg-leg sailor that made a number of trips through the South. As he traveled to different plantations as a hired hand, he taught the young Negroes this song, a coded escape song, with this chorus:

De riva’s bank am a very good road,
De dead trees show de way;
Lef foot, peg foot goin on,
Foller de drinking’ gou’d.²⁹

Second, John W. Work’s American Negro Songs, published in 1940, presents two hundred and thirty folk songs and spirituals, religious and secular songs. Work offers a much more modest arrangement of songs, exploring the spiritual, the blues, work songs, and social and miscellaneous songs. Similar in tone to the American Ballads, Work begins his work with this epigraph: “O I’m gonna sing, gonna sing. Gonna sing all ‘long the way. O I’m gonna sing, gonna sing. Gonna sing all ‘long the way.”³⁰ Again, songs about the way continue to emerge as a prominent theme. In this collection, Work focuses

²⁸ Lomax and Lomax, American Ballads and Folk Songs, xxviii.
²⁹ Lomax and Lomax, American Ballads and Folk Songs, 227-8.
exclusively, as indicated by the title, on the folk song of the American Negro, something that is of central concern to Lomax’s work in the Mississippi Delta. Specifically, Work argues that one of the distinctive aspects of these songs is that they have not experienced the long unhindered growth common to the folk songs of other people. Historically, there were no successful attempts to collect Negro songs before 1840. Moreover, though the African was thrust into an alien land in which they had to constantly adapt, remarkably, they were able to maintain the “unique racial character” of their music. In essence, Work’s invaluable contributions are the notion that our study of such songs relies too much on words over music. Reason is, those singing such songs lacked adequate vocabulary and were too absorbed in the music to be overly concerned with the words. Some examples of songs that illustrate the mythic presence of the road include: “Lead Me to the Rock,” “You’d Better Run,” and “When the Train Comes Along.”

Providing meaningful backstories to the songs recorded by John and Alan Lomax is Stephen Wade’s *The Beautiful Music All Around Us*. In particular, Wade situates their work in relation to those of other folklorists like Charles S. Johnson, one that helps substantiate the importance of roads in American folk music. Johnson brought outcasts and commoners, cane cutters and field hands to public attention, magnifying the importance of their spirituals and folklore to American culture. “I am convinced that the road to a new freedom for us lies in the discovery of the surrounding beauties of our lives.”

Here, I am drawn to how the road is used metaphorically to reinforce the importance of actual movement and discovery. Put differently, Johnson channeled his fervor to discover the splendors of a new freedom with the musical lives of others. In

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sum, what each of these collections lucidly illustrates is that, if only by the sheer quantity of songs in these collections, music was not just a part of their lives, it was immensely integral to their everyday lives. Put differently, Americans’ musical heritage comes from a rich history of road songs, telling stories about the travelers, the roads they travelled, the stories they told, and the many modes of transport they used, from horses to boats to stagecoaches to the patter of feet—all of which have become a significant part of the trope of the road.\textsuperscript{33} These collections give us an indication of where the mythic imagery in the blues comes from.

The Blues

In Jeffrey Carroll’s \textit{When Your Way Gets Dark}, he provides two important cues for how I define the blues in this project. First, he defines the blues Carroll recognizes that any rhetorical analysis, particular one concerned with poetic form and truth, derives from “a Platonic rhetoric, especially the \textit{Phaedrus}.”\textsuperscript{34} Uniquely, Carroll also identifies Kenneth Burke as a contemporary figure of importance in the study of rhetorical issues pertaining to ethics and community. Both are rhetorical resources that I draw from significantly. Second, Carroll approaches a definition of the blues as outlined by Ralph Ellison, one that frames the blues as, foremost, aesthetic and ritual, and subsequently, as an imposing of values upon the world. As Carroll notes, “Thus, I understand Ellison to be arguing for the blues as a rhetorical act, one of beauty and force.”\textsuperscript{35} Similarly, Ellison’s conceptual framework frames my rhetorical understanding and approach to the blues.

\textsuperscript{33} Kuyper, “Road in American Vernacular Music,” 55.
\textsuperscript{35} Carroll, \textit{When Your Way Gets Dark}, 22.
However, though I align with Carroll’s interest in “blues encounters,” where he is primarily interested in performance and the rhetoric of the blues critic, I am interested in situating the archetype in relation to the blues. Be that as it may, I still find value in Carroll’s attention to the poetic, expressive, and transactional modal terms, for they reflect the mythic progression that I have outlined. That is, the blues begins in the inner universe of self-expression and self-knowledge. Then, it is expressed in language that reflects the feelings and experiences of African American people. Finally, that communicative context culminates in a transaction that seeks to lead, psychagogically, both the soul of the performer, or bluesman rhetor in this instance, and the listener.

As such, reaching beyond the bounds of its confinement as a particular style or genre, I define the blues broadly, in such a way that also encompasses other styles of songs such as work and prison songs. Depending on the situation, the blues can be defined in cultural, emotional, musical, or commercial terms, with these moods overlapping at times and diverging at others.36 Being selective, then, I turn to Ralph Ellison’s definition:

The blues speak to us, simultaneously, of the tragic and the comic aspects of the human condition and they express a profound sense of life shared by many Negro Americans precisely because their lives have combined these modes. This has been the heritage of a people who for hundreds of years could not celebrate birth or dignify death and whose need to live despite the dehumanizing pressures of slavery developed an endless capacity for laughing at their painful experiences. This is a group experience shared by many Negroes and any effective study of the blues would treat them first as poetry and as ritual.37

In context, Ellison is responding to LeRoi Jones’ *Blues People*. In particular, Ellison is troubled by Jones’ lack of attention to blues as a lyric, a form of poetry. More importantly, Ellison identifies a tendency in criticism to list in the direction of defining the blues sociologically. Specifically, for Jones, the path the slave has taken to citizenship can be situated in the slave’s music, the blues in particular. The blues are the aesthetic record of an ultimate order in which the slave has become an American citizen. However, Ellison disagrees, offering this memorable quip: “The tremendous burden of sociology which Jones would place upon this body of music is enough to give even the blues the blues.” For Jones, the blues is representative of the *American Negroes* beginning. For Ellison, the Negro has always influenced American mainstream art; he did not just finally arrive or begin. Regardless, Ellison applauds Jones’ attention to the “stubborn confusion” of American identity, which still persists, in which we fight continuously with one another about who and what we are as Americans.

More pointedly, though, Ellison argues: “For Jones has stumbled over that ironic obstacle which lies in the path of any who would fashion a theory of American Negro culture while ignoring the intricate network of connection which binds Negroes to the larger society. To do so is to attempt a delicate brain surgery with a switchblade. And it is possible that any viable theory of Negro American culture—which I agree exists—obligates us to fashion a more adequate theory of American culture as a whole.” For Ellison, to be more clear, as a musician, the slave was one who expressed the self in music, who “realized himself” in the realms of sound. As such, his attitude as musician led him to sing by any means necessary, in ways that cultural or literary analyses, or even

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38 Ellison, “The Blues.”
39 Ellison, “The Blues.”
social and political freedom could never justify, because the art of the African American, from the spirituals to the bleus, was what they possessed in place of freedom. Put differently, “Negro musicians have never, as a group, felt alienated from any music sounded within their hearing, and its my theory that it would be impossible to pinpoint the time when they were no shaping what Jones calls the mainstream of American music. Indeed, what group of musicians has made more of the sound of the American experience?” What I wish to avoid is manifesting Ellison’s critique of Jones, that is, placing an ideology upon the cultural complexity of the blues, which “lacks a sense of the excitement and surprise of men living in the world—of enslaved and politically weak [people] successfully imposing their values upon a powerful society through song.”

Reason is, the blues were a “total way of life,” and a fundamental expression of an attitude toward life, one that spoke to tragedy and comedy at the same time, expressing a profound sense of life shared by many. In line with Ellison, then, I argue that the blues functions psychagogically as an ultimate order, one that moves from self-expression of poetry and ritual to communication and toward consummation.

To that end, the road was essential not only in the music, but also in the acquisition of that music. This enacts the process of the ultimate order. Otherwise, the bluesman merely linger in self-expression. For instance, Marybeth Hamilton situates the origins of the blues as a “foundation myth,” one that gives the early blues a certain aura that foregrounds my contention that actual roads are integral in the acquisition, interpretation, and dissemination of analogically poetic roads. To demonstrate, Hamilton gives a brief but telling account of early folklorist Howard Odum, who in 1907, “saddled

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40 Ellison, “Blues People.
41 Ellison, “Blues People.”
his horse and set out from Oxford, forty miles east of the Mississippi Delta in Lafayette County” with a cylinder recorder graphophone, where he made what may have been the first field recordings of African American song.\(^{42}\) Similarly, Gary Burnett recognizes that John and Alan Lomax’s blues-collecting road trips in the 1930s enabled them to uncover the people and the music—culture that was being housed in prisons, a great storehouse of music.\(^{43}\) For Burnett, the blues, much like the Christian gospel, is about mending broken people, directing us to Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount, where those in need of forgiveness are encouraged to travel the road that leads to life.\(^{44}\) Stephen Nichols captures this same idea, that is, what is true of the spirituals is true of the blues, there is a better place somewhere “down the road.”\(^{45}\)

But what gives my argument salience is Michael Taft’s formulaic analysis of the blues, which conveys how certain aspects of African American society take on special significance in blues lyrics by identifying the twenty most recurrent themes in the blues.\(^{46}\) Taft’s analysis not only reveals something about early twentieth-century African American society, but also hints at why the blues became popular among African Americans of the era. For instance, though the blues are fundamentally a love lyric, love alone does not necessarily make the blues popular or reveal their full significance, for there are obviously many other song forms, across a broad spectrum of cultures that are concerned with love. As it relates to my project, Taft provides an important insight.

\(^{44}\) Burnett, *The Gospel According to the Blues*, 154; See also Matthew 7:14.
Alluding to the non-love recurrent themes in the blues, Taft notes that the largest proportion of them deal with some aspect of travel. Specifically, of the twenty recurrent themes that Taft identifies, six address some element of travel: (2) I come to some place; (3) I go away from some place; (14) Everywhere I go; (15) I will be gone; (16) I’m going back home; and (20) I’m leaving town.\(^{47}\) In part, this travel motif reflects the state of African American society in the first part of the twentieth century.

From the turn of the century to World War I, traveling was on the minds of African Americans, and this is reflected in the high frequency of “traveling” formulas in the blues. If a theme of a particular song was love or love troubles, there was a good chance that its underlying theme was movement: leaving town, going to some place, not having a place to go, going back home.\(^{48}\)

The importance of movement in the blues is such that the formula *go to some place* is the most frequently recurring formula in the corpus. For instance, in “John Henry,” a song about a steel driving man, he leaves his hammer beside the road where he worked. Similarly, Son House’s “Death Letter Blues” declares, “Grabbed up my suitcase, took off down the road.” And according to Stephen J. Nichols, Muddy Waters personifies the transmigration of the blues. Samuel Charters’ *Walking a Blues Road* is a clear indication of the relationship of the blues and the road. All together, with the distinct tones of the road, Charters contends that blues is a reflection of the life in segregated slums and on the isolated farms at the end of “lonely dirt roads” where African Americans were forced to live. From there, the blues language has made its “journey to the language of popular music in every society.”\(^{49}\)

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\(^{47}\) Taft, *The Blues Lyric Formula*, 194.

\(^{48}\) Taft, *The Blues Lyric Formula*, 194.

In sum, the blues is an ideal example of the mythology of the road in American folk music. It is the music of the African American people. The same people whom Lomax alludes to in a 1940 radio address, declaring: “The essence of America lies not in the headlined heroes […] but in the everyday folks who live and die unknown, yet leave their dreams as legacies.”

3.3 Alan Lomax: An American Odyssey

In this section, I explore Alan Lomax’s relationship to the road, how his encounters with others on the road influenced his work, and the mythology of the road in the music of the people he encountered—all of which serve as an intellectual foundation for our understanding of American folk music. More specifically, I focus on Lomax’s southern recordings through three particular trips in one specific region—the Mississippi Delta, which Ferris argues will perhaps always be his great contribution to folk music and American culture. To be direct, my objective is not to aggrandize or sentimentalize the work of Alan Lomax. Simply put, if one wants to understand, broadly, the mythology of the road in twentieth-century American culture, and more particularly, in American folk music, one must consider, if not begin with, Alan Lomax and the people he encountered on the road in the 1933, 1941, and 1959. To those ends, I look at each of Lomax’s encounters in the contextual framework of period, place, people, and poetry, each an

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integral side in the construction of a portraiture of the mythology of the road in twentieth-century American culture.

To be clear, my substantive point of focus in the notion of the “road as a rhetorical encounter with the other” is on encounters. To apprehend meaning from these encounters, I use the language of rhetorical transaction, making distinct the rhetor audience relationship and how psychagogia works in the blues. As I argue, the archetypal road within the blues functioned rhetorically on Alan Lomax. Through his encounters with the people, both literally while on the road and in the music, he was transformed by the psychagogic rhetorical poetry of the bluesman rhetors, which ritually performed their poetic self-expression with Lomax the listener. In essence, Lomax encounters the “other self and is transformed on his own Damascus Road—this is the Upward Way. Lomax, then, becomes rhetor, or St. Paul, traveling and carrying the message of the people to the masses—this is the Downward Way. In this way, the blues were/are answers to questions posed by our times, or more specifically, “strategic answers, stylized answers.”\(^5\) Put differently, just as Burke is concerned essentially with living, so too, this perspective will be essential to our understanding of the mythology of the road as equipment for living. To those ends, there are three particular aspects of Alan Lomax’s life that will help us get a better sense of his extensive work as a folklorist of American folk music. The first influence is his father John Lomax, the second is Alan’s educational experiences, and the final consideration is Alan’s encounters with others on the road and in the poetry of the people he recorded and collected.

Before I situate Lomax’s encounters, I want to provide some context to his work as a folklorist, namely his father John Lomax. John Avery Lomax was born in Goodman, Mississippi, two years after the Civil War ended. Soon after, John and his family left Mississippi by covered wagon and moved to Texas, settling in Meridian, on the Bosque River near the Chisholm Trail. As a boy, John was reared in the world of working cowhands and worked on the family farm clearing brush and chopping cotton. As John’s parents wanted all of their children to receive some formal education, at the age of twenty-one, he sold his horse, borrowed some money, and took a part-time job to enroll at nearby Grandbury College. At twenty-eight, John arrived in Austin to begin his bachelor’s degree at the University of Texas, graduating just two years later with an English literature degree. At the age of thirty-six, John accepted an instructor position in English at Texas A&M University and shortly thereafter, married Bess Baumann Brown. That summer, John attended summer school at Harvard. After welcoming their first child, Shirley, in 1905, John was granted administrative leave from Texas A&M to attend Harvard full-time where he was a part of the premier English department in America with students like T.S. Eliot. There, John studied with George Lyman Kittredge, the foremost student of the ballad in the country. Having already assembled a collection of cowboy songs from his youth, he began writing letters in search of more cowboy songs and, after receiving his Master’s degree from Harvard, he received further postgraduate financial support to do research for the book he published in 1910 called *Cowboy Songs and Other Frontier Ballads*.

After moving back to Austin, John and Bess welcomed their third child, Alan James Lomax, born on January 31, 1915. Alan was an intelligent boy but sickly, from
constant ear and nose infections that kept him underweight. According to Hamilton, Alan was his father’s favorite, “bright and quick-witted, gregarious and charming, prickly and pugnacious.”

Academically, he was enrolled in the prestigious Terrill School for Boys in line with his father’s aspirations for him to go to Harvard just as he had. But John wanted Alan to be more than a scholar, so during the next several summers he sent him off to a ranch owned by some old family friends near Comanche, Texas, on the Brazos River. In his youth, they lived in a neighborhood adjacent to the black community and he cultivated his cultural tastes in urban sections of Austin. At thirteen, he completed his junior year at Terrill Prep School before transferring to the Choate School in Connecticut for his senior year, arriving just a few years before John F. Kennedy would begin his studies there. Once there, Alan was encouraged with his writing and served on the board of the Choate Literary Magazine. After graduation, at the age of fifteen, Alan enrolled at the University of Texas to be close to home, both for financial reasons, amidst the Great Depression, but more importantly, because his mother had fallen ill. Once there, Alan began to discover those people and things that interested him most.

“Music was Alan’s entrée into the lives of black people, as it was for many likeminded people his age at the start of the 1930s.”

Alan familiarized himself with some of Austin’s black-owned record shops and began buying religious and blues records, particularly those of Blind Willie Johnson—a blind Texas bluesman and street preacher. He liked Johnson so much he carried the album around with him, indicating it was the most passionately intense singing he had ever heard. Lomax felt how Johnson

54 Hamilton, In Search of the Blues, 144.
sang. Though as a boy he had been strictly forbidden from interacting with the black community, by his mother, after an encounter with a housemaid, in college, Alan took his dates to the black section of town and visited the home of Ruby, a woman who played the blues: “I was risking expulsion, but in that I was no different from a whole generation of southerners who have gone across the tracks for adventure and for friendly contact with the race they do not wish at all to shun. I was part of a generation of college students who furtively called at Ruby’s little unpainted three room house, and heard the real blues.”

After the sudden death of his mother, and some lobbying from his father, Alan transferred to Harvard in the fall of 1931, where he studied philosophy. He made only a half-hearted attempt at campus life, slowly withdrawing from the unimpressive aura of Harvard, finding his classmates shallow and detached, the faculty warped by their erudition. Progressively, Alan’s letters home dwindled and his father had stopped writing as well after he lost his job with Republic National Bank and Trust Company. With the seriousness of the situation becoming clearer, in a letter home to his father, around Christmas, Alan planted an intellectual seed that would eventually produce a substantial cultural harvest:

For your own good and happiness I believe that your ballad-collecting and distributing per the lecture platform is the best way to earn money. With your uncanny ability to make friends with anything and anybody and your quiet, friendly way with folk less prosperous in life, and your own intense enjoyment of people and what they’ve go to say it seems to me that you are made before you start in ballad-collecting [...] If you think I could help you with it, let me lay off Harvard for a year and help you get it done. We would both enjoy it and I might be able to be of some use to you.

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56 Szwed, Alan Lomax, 21.
57 Szwed, Alan Lomax, 24.
When he wrote his father in the spring, in a telling passage that vividly illustrates Alan’s desire to travel and encounter the other, he again reiterated his desire to go collecting with his father:

I feel the desire to do something with my hands. As I look at these sheltered Harvard professors and the doubly-sheltered Harvard students, I think their life is very warped, that it lacks the exuberance and sharp brief pain that comes from laboring with other men to move a ship or build a ship or somehow fit parts of the world together to be useful […] I have learned this year at Harvard to converse with apparent learning on any deep subject; I have learned [of the game of philosophy] to be obscurely witty and superficially profound in company; I have even learned to act like a perfect ass on occasion […] But all these things only serve to repress all that is animal and frank in me. These things teach me little about how one can live with the people the world is made up of; I only earn to despise such things. I turn into a pale shadow lively only when intellectual winds blow down the plane of learning. I satisfy none of man’s primary needs.58

Lomax had become more and more troubled with the ways in which those around him were building a comfortable wall around themselves and the world, to the point that he began to distance himself emotionally from his father in preparation to tell his father that he was going to drop out of Harvard. John was equally burdened by the financial hardships of the Great Depression, the loss of his wife, and constant separation from his children. Adding to this tension, on May 10, in an event that would complicate and intensify his relationship with his father for years to come, Alan participated in a political demonstration protesting the threatened deportation of labor organizer Edith Berkman, where Alan was among those students who refused to disband and was arrested. “It distressed my father very, very much […] I had to defend my righteous position, and he couldn’t understand me and I couldn’t understand him. It made a lot of unhappiness for the two of us because he loved Harvard and wanted me to be a great success there.”59

59 Hamilton, *In Search of the Blues*, 145
And in a peculiar twist, officials, assuming Lomax’s bail had been paid by a classmate who had come for him, though he had not, released Lomax, leading to a mistaken radio announcement that a radical had escaped from prison in a brilliant plot. A Dean at Harvard quickly explained the situation, paid the bail, and there was little made of the situation at Harvard—though, years later the incident was cited as the reason the FBI’s interest in Alan’s political activities, leading to his self-exile from the United States for eight years in the 1950s.

With no money coming in, John’s sons continued to plead with him to return to folk song collecting and in June of 1932, John traveled to New York City to persuade the editors at Macmillan to give him an advance to edit an anthology of American folk songs, with a particular focus on African American folk songs, for very few people outside the South were familiar with such music. Around this same time, John was also coordinating work with the Archive of American Folk Song at the Library of Congress, formed in 1928, on a nonpaying relationship with the library that would grant him the status essential for raising funds from scholarly organizations for collecting recordings for the archive. After John delivered a lecture at Brown University, they drove through Cambridge to pick-up Alan at Harvard, spending the next few months traveling across the country to the Pacific Northwest and back to Texas from mid-June to mid-August, sleeping outdoors and camping along rivers and lakes, covering more than four thousand miles—arguing their varied principles of politics along the way.

Following his year at Harvard, Alan moved back to Austin and resumed his studies in philosophy at the University of Texas. Alan longed to travel and continued to kindle the flame of folklore in his father, and himself, writing in a letter to his father:
I should like to look at the folk-songs of this country along with you and do some research in that field from the point of view of sociology and anthropology. You and I are peculiarly well fitted for a partnership in this task, it seems to me. You have the practical experience [and] the instinct for what is genuine and whatnot. That experience I believe I can soon begin to supplement by making correlations between the ideas in the songs and their social implications.  

It was actually the younger Lomax who initially encouraged his father to return to song collecting, which had languished during the Great Depression, culminating in their first collecting trip together in the summer of 1933. With new recording equipment, they traveled throughout the South to record prison songs in various penitentiaries. “It is only by making field recordings of the singing of southern Negros that the tonal, rhythmic, and melodic characteristics of Afro-American folk music can be accurately preserved.” But perhaps more so than either the influence of his father and his formal education, Lomax received his more formidable education on the road and through his encounters with others.

### 3.3.1 Myth and the Art of Recorder Maintenance

This past summer I spent traveling through the South with my father collecting secular songs of the Negroes, work songs, “barrelhouse” ditties, bad-man ballads, and corn songs.

More than thirty-five years before Robert Pirsig embarked on a motorcycle odyssey through Minnesota and the Dakotas with his son Chris, leading to the renowned

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Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance, John Lomax and his son Alan set out on the road with their sound recorder in search of the folk songs of America. For a period of months, they traveled sixteen thousand miles throughout the South, across Texas, Louisiana, Mississippi, Tennessee, and Kentucky to record and collect African American folk songs, including chants, work songs, hollers, spirituals, blues, and ballads. They journeyed in a Model A Ford, traveling with only a few changes of clothes, two army cots and some camping gear, with the back seat removed to store all of their recording equipment. John and Alan Lomax were ballad hunters, driving all across America preserving the past before it disappeared forever. “Equipped with their machine, Lomax and his son set out on the road, by day speeding down rutted highways, by night camping on beaches, washed over by birdsong and the cool Gulf breezes.” Along the way, using nothing more than a “pile of iron and wire and steel,” they found little interest or sympathy for their project outside of Negro convicts. But nonetheless, they encountered many moving individual singers and an abundance of overwhelming music. In the section that follows, I account for five specific encounters, and various performances, from on the road in the summer of 1933 that contributed to Lomax’s self-alleged cultural conversion. In effect, these had the effect of psychagogia, encountering not just the cultural expressions of the people, but more importantly, the people themselves, having the effect of revelation.

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64 Gioia, Delta Blues, 87-8.
66 Hamilton, In Search of the Blues, 98.
67 Gioia, Work Songs, 206.
68 Piazza, Southern Journey, 32.
For their first leg of the journey, they stopped in Dallas to purchase a windup Ediphone for recording to replace an old hand-wound cylinder recorder, on loan from the widow of Thomas Edison. Fascinated by the technology of recording, Alan and his father worked with a portable recording rig that engraved a sound groove on aluminum discs and weighed over three hundred pounds. Given the incredible technological conveniences of our time, it is difficult to imagine the immense inconveniences that must have beset their recordings and travels. They did not have the intricate and well-developed roads that we have now and the dangers of traveling through the South are not today what they were then. With their new recorder in hand, they stopped in Terrell, outside of Dallas, and made their first recording. In this first of many encounters on the road, we will begin to see the semblance of a multi-faceted conversion experience in the cultural life of Alan Lomax. As Alan listened to the black woman’s passionate expression, while washing clothes, he had what would be the first of many personal and cultural revelations: “She started slow and sweet […] she sang faster and with more and more drive […] and as the song ended, she was weeping and saying over and over, ‘O Lord have mercy, O Lord have mercy’ […] I was seventeen [and] embarrassed. But beneath […] I wondered what made her voice soar so beautifully […] what sorrow lay behind her tears.”

It was during that moment the Lomax became convinced that collecting folk music must be done, at any cost. This is our first indication of how the mythic archetype of the road functions rhetorically, leading Lomax along the Upward Way.

At the Smithers Plantation near Huntsville, Texas along the Trinity River, Lomax had his second encounter with a man named Blue and a song titled, “Po’ Former.”

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69 Szwed, Alan Lomax, 36.
Having inquired from the plantation manager about “made-up” songs, the manager, that evening, summoned an array of families and tenant farmers to a schoolhouse. Alan addresses the gathering with a request for that bad man ballad, “Stagolee.” Having been volunteered, a man named Blue emerged from the darkness, literally, as the schoolhouse was lit only by a singular kerosene lamp, people moving in and out of the darkness, giving the moment an eerily mythic quality. Blue asked if he might sing another song first, and with an eye on Alan and the other on the manger, he sang:

Poor farmer, poor farmer, poor farmer
They get all the farmer makes,
His clothes is full of patches,
And his hat is full of holes,
Stoppin’ down, pullin’ cotton,
From the bottom bolls,
Poor farmer, poor farmer, poor farmer,
They git all the farmer makes…  

With the manager watching, and the assembly nervously snickering, Blue begins to address President Roosevelt: “Now, Mr. President, you just don’t know how bad they’re treating us folks down here. I’m singing to you and I’m talking to you so I hope you will come down here and [do] something for us poor folks in Texas.” It was at this point, that Lomax had his second revelation, that is, that he could help carry the messages of a voiceless people to the public—he was more than a folk song collector: “That experience totally changed my life. I saw what I had to do. My job was to try and get as much of these views, these feelings, this unheard majority onto the center of the stage.” Here, we have an even more refined sense of how the mythology of the blues, and the road,

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70 Szwed, *Alan Lomax*, 37; See also Lomax and Lomax, *Our Singing Country*, 280-1.
functions rhetorically as *psychagogia*, providing Lomax with a vision that transcended the dialectical tensions of the self and the other, black and white.

After being refused admittance to their first prison in Huntsville, Texas, they then proceeded to Prairie View State Normal College, an African American school, where they were received with suspicion. This was to be expected, with two white men inquiring about secular songs from often quite religious communities where such music was widely considered the “devil’s music.” After an encounter with Burn-Down under a persimmon tree at Sunnyside, a Brazos Bottoms community, father and son traveled to the Imperial State Prison Farm in Sugarland, Texas, where they encountered two of the most impressive performers that they would ever encountered on their travels, in James “Iron Head” Baker, otherwise known as the black Homer, who sang “Old Hannah,” and Mose Platt, known as Clear Rock, whom Lomax noted was the one who stood largest in his memory from all the singers in the penitentiary.\(^{73}\) This third encounter was important because it would begin to produce personal experiences with the people and the miseries of their work. In Baker’s rendition of “Old Hannah,” for instance, who had initially refused his friends request to sing the song because “You know it bad fer me to sing it. Make me want to run away, which ends with the words, “Ain’t it hard to see you, mama, in dis lonesome place.”\(^{74}\)

During their visit to the Central Convict Sugar Plantation, known as Angola, in Louisiana, Lomax met Huddie Ledbeter, the fourth encounter I focus on, who would come to be known simply as Leadbelly. It was here that Lomax would be introduced to a song that would become important in American musical history, which I address in

\(^{73}\) Lomax, “‘Sinful’ Songs of the Southern Negro,” 22.
\(^{74}\) Lomax, “‘Sinful’ Songs of the Southern Negro,” 25.
Lomax’s Southern Journey section, titled “Po’ Lazarus.” “When I was in Dallas, walkin’ de streets an’ makin’ my livin’ wid dis box o’mine,” Leadbelly would say, he learned the “ballit I like bes, ‘bout po’ Laz-us.”\textsuperscript{75} In the description of Leadbelly, he tells the story of a man tired of his job, had a mean boss, bad food, stinking horses, and measly pay, and decided he’d had enough. So he pulled a hidden forty-four Colt from his bunk, knocked the clerk senseless, took the money, and ran. And this is where the ballad takes up:

High Sherriff tole de deputy, “Go out an’ bring me Laz’us, Bring him dead or alive, Lawd, Lawd, bring him dead or alive.” De deputy ‘gin to wonder Where dey could fin’ po’ Laz’us. “Well, I don’ know, Lawd, Lawd, I jes’ don’ know.” Well, dey fou’ po’ Laz-us Way out between two mountains, an’ dey blowed him down, Lawd, Lawd, an’ dey blowed him down. Dey taken po’ Laz’us An’ dey walk away. Po’ Laz’us mother, She come a-screamin’ an’ a-cryin’, “Dat’s my onlies’ son, Lawd, Lawd, dat’s my onlies’ son.”\textsuperscript{76}

In this instance, the encounter with Leadbelly is significant both in the history of American vernacular music and the career of the Lomaxes. Though it is not my intent to imply “discovery,” it would be careless to ignore the influence of John and Alan Lomax in contributing to the transformation of a convict into a commercially successful performer of African American folk songs.\textsuperscript{77}

Fifth, and finally, the Lomaxes song-collecting expedition through remote communities, plantations, lumber camps, and city streets would lead them to the oldest prison system in Mississippi, Parchman Farm. On August 10, 1933, the Lomaxes encountered the source of some of the most their most important and interesting work. Lomax considered the southern penitentiaries invaluable for African American folk songs, from which those who might never experience the men firsthand would encounter

\textsuperscript{75} Lomax, “‘Sinful’ Songs of the Southern Negro,” 26-7.
\textsuperscript{76} Lomax, “‘Sinful’ Songs of the Southern Negro,” 27.
\textsuperscript{77} Gioia, \textit{Work Songs}, 207.
them through their poetry—on the road. In a letter, Alan recalls the significance of the moment:

The people who sang for us were in stripes and there were guards there with shotguns. They were singing there under the red hot sun […] But when they opened their mouths, out come this flame of beauty. This sound which matched anything I’d ever heard from Beethoven, Brahms, or Dvorak. They sang with beautiful harmony, with enormous volume, with total affection. And this was the second stage of my conversion to my profession. I had to face that here were the people that everyone else regarded as the dregs of society, dangerous human beings, brutalized, and from them came the music which I thought was the finest thing I’d ever hear come out of my country. They made Walt Whitman look like a child.78

Gioia argues for the importance of Parchman, and in so doing inflects the substance of my argument about music as myth, when he writes about the “shifting particulars” of these stories as cues to the “essence of myth,” noting:

Myths almost always survive in numerous and often contradictory forms, finding strength in this mutability. The flexibility that allows each user to recast some details of the story helps it achieve what all great art aspires to: a universality that rises above the particulars of place and date, evoking timeless elements of the human condition.79

Lomax even went as far as suggesting that such poetry could hardly be considered music in the traditional sense of the word, but rather, group labor that expressed the pain of men deprived of human dignity.

At the end of the summer of 1933, John and Alan Lomax returned to Washington D.C. with a collection of more than one hundred songs on twenty-five aluminum and fifteen celluloid discs. In the winter of 1934, Alan published his account of the trip in the Southwest Review, titled, “Sinful Songs of the Southern Negro.” Ferris contends that Alan Lomax’s passion for folk music is part of an ongoing American tradition with the
likes of Walt Whitman, who in *Leaves of Grass*, also celebrated the road as a rhetorical encounter with the other when he wrote (or sang) about gathering “the minds of men out of their brains as you encounter them, to gather the love out of their hearts [...] to know the universe itself as a road, as many roads, as roads for traveling souls.” Similar, then, to Whitman, Lomax, with, certainly, some of the romanticism that contemporary critics distrust, though still a vision worthy of hope, envisioned the “procession of souls along the grand roads of the universe,” as a place where others might experience and sing for themselves the “Song of the Open Road.”

Toward the end of his life, Lomax indicating that that particular trip was the occasion when he heard the music that first allied him with the people and made him “forget Beethoven and all that […] where black men, driven ‘from can’t to can’t’ under the shotgun had the glorious humanity to make great music.” Here, we have a fixed and reasoned image of consummation, where in Burke’s language, Lomax encountered the poetic self-expression of the bluesman rhetors, who in ritually performing or communicating or expressing, had the effect of *psychagogia* on Lomax. Having what was essentially a recording studio in the back of their car, they confronted more than the stifling summer heat, with no air conditioning, in the Deep South, but much more importantly, they encountered the relentless repression of a poetic people who have given us one of our most important living mythologies—a “life changing experience.” The road was not easy, however, as Hamilton notes:

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From early on, his sharp mind and winning manner made him the focus of his father’s sense of thwarted ambition. On the road in 1933, as they battled heat, mosquitoes, recurrent malaria, and a disk recorder that continually broke down, Lomax watched with pride and satisfaction as Alan threw himself into the work. That trek convinced him that, if nothing else, his son was a natural folklorist.

Each of these encounters, by his own admission, were encounters that transformed him, possessing the same revelation of spiritual sight that the Apostle Paul received on Straight Street after his encounter on the Damascus Road. More than a collection of recordings, Lomax’s fieldwork attempted to preserve both the culture of song and the context of style and performance, believing that a collector with a pen and notebook could only capture an outline. In the people, and within their music, there was a mythic dignity, passed from generation to generation—lore that possessed a degree of artfulness that made living more possible. For the remainder of his life as a folklorist, Lomax would be concerned with that mythic image beyond ideas that transcends the dialectical, by sharing this vision of the “other self” on the Downward Way. For instance, in a proposal written to the Carnegie foundation, Alan Lomax wrote, “These songs are, more often than not, epic summaries of the attitudes, mores, institutions, and situations of the great proletarian population who have helped to make the South culturally and economically.” Throughout this first odyssey, Lomax, by automobile and foot, even a horse at one point, in fields and forests, dives and joints, on long walks through the city and driving down the bumpy roads for miles through back alleys and country roads encountered the other—his soul moved by the people and their poetry. In sum, the mythology of the psychagogic road is not concerned with leisurely travel, the politics of

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mobility, but in encountering others and being moved toward a more just society. In this sense, the road is a distinct form of psychagogic rhetoric, a mythic means of leading American souls toward a realization of their democratic ideals.

3.3.2 Muddy in Mississippi

According to filmmaker Martin Scorsese, the Delta region, its people, and their music represent a special caste of musical storytellers—a poor people rich in culture. Scorsese notes, “Alan Lomax traveled all over the world and he found and recorded music everywhere he went. It was always there, close to the heart of every culture, he came to realize that music was as essential as human speech and just as precious.” In the Delta, music is all around you—in the wind blown trees, the rustling waters of the Mississippi, and in the tenant farmer’s plow. But more importantly, the music comes from the people and the blues one of the most prevalent of mythic social tools. In the previous section, I outlined the psychagogic dimensions of the road in the early work of Alan Lomax. In this section, I offer additional considerations of the psychagogic road in Lomax’s work in a collecting trip to Coahoma County, Mississippi in August of 1941.

In April 1941, a partnership between Fisk University and the Library of Congress was formed to conduct a sociological study about the relation between music and society focusing on African American communities in Coahoma Country, Mississippi, in the Mississippi Delta region, which Lomax believed would revolutionize the study of folk songs. The project was especially appealing to the Archive of Folk-Song, a section of the

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86 Scorsese, “Feel Like Going Home.”
87 Gioia, Delta Blues, 87.
Library of Congress’ Music Division, because of its singular focus on region and
ethnicity. In a project proposal from 1941, Lomax indicated the following goals:

To record Negro revivals in the region of the Northwestern Mississippi in
company with various members of the faculty of Fisk University. This survey-
recording trip is preliminary to an intensive field study of Negro folk song in a
Mississippi Delta County, to be carried out during the fall and winter by the Fisk
University Sociological Department in collaboration with the Archive of
American Folk Song.88

The plan was to have the Library of Congress furnish equipment and supplies while Fisk
University would supply the field works and further studies. On August 25, 1941, Lomax
and his wife Elizabeth traveled to Nashville for a consultation with the Fisk University
team, led by Lewis Jones, Charles Johnson, and John Work III. Shortly thereafter, an
exploratory field trip through the region would result in twenty-five disc recordings,
documenting primarily religious expression. Along with Lomax’s wife Elizabeth, Alan
and John Work worked as an interracial team in the region, which was quite a contrast
from the work of other folklorists such as Allison Davis, Burleigh Gardner, and Mary
Gardner’s sociological research in *Deep South*, which, ironically, makes no mention of
the blues. However, this trip also produced two now legendary recording sessions with
McKinley “Muddy Waters” Morganfield and Eddie “Son” House.89 In the following
year, Lomax and other researchers would return to Coahoma County, from mid-July to
mid-August, to record more religious expression, with the blues dominating once again,

88 Lomax, *Alan Lomax Collection*, American Folklife Center, Library of
Congress, 07.03.53.
89 According to records in the Library of Congress, Lomax and John Work first
recorded Muddy Waters on August 31, 1941. While on September 3, 1941, Lomax, wife
Elizabeth, and Lewis Jones first recorded Son House in Lake Cormorant, in Desoto
County, Mississippi.
resulting in additional recording sessions with Muddy Waters and Son House in July of 1942.

However, in late August 1941, Alan and Elizabeth went on the road for a three-week trip to Mississippi to record revival sessions for the Fisk Project. However, when they reached Mississippi on August 29, they learned the revival season was winding down and had missed their chance to record. Undeterred, though, they traveled to Coahoma County for a week to look over the area, where Alan Lomax and John Work had aspirations of finding the legendary Robert Johnson. A difficult task given that many Delta musicians tended to drift from plantation to plantation and town to town, moving in circles. Gioia offers a good overview of this practice and its importance to American folk music:

Whatever truth there might be to these generalizations, the growing mobility of the African American workforce in the final decades of the nineteenth century ensured that a tremendous cross-fertilization of songs and singing styles would take place. Black farm laborers would follow the ripening crops, migrating from place to place to find communities where pickers were in demand. Delta bluesman Muddy Waters recalled moving from the cotton fields to the berry harvest and the sugar beet harvest, then to the pea and bean harvest. His song “Rolling Stone” was written to describe these travels, which were often made by hopping onto passing trains. And where workers traveled, music came as well, thereby providing a constant exchange of work songs throughout the South and even beyond.

As Palmer describes it, the Lomaxes and Work drove out to Coahoma County one afternoon and stopped at a crossroads, where, in Palmer’s prose, “Two thin ribbons of ...
asphalt met on the flat plane of the Delta land under skies bleached white by the sun.”

As they traveled the region, talking with black men in overalls and floppy straw hats, they received little more than noncommittal mumbles. Leaving behind the paved blacktop, though, Lomax and Work followed the dusty uneven roads into the country, driving mile after mile on the rutted roads that separated the cotton fields. As they drove, Lomax and Work could see blacks at work, hoeing and weeding in preparation for the harvest. This is where our story turns, and American folk music too, as Lomax and Work found their way to the Stovall plantation, three or four miles outside of Clarksdale, where they drove up a narrow dirt road to a cabin, where they encountered McKinley Morganfield, or more appropriately, Muddy Waters, for his apparent inability to steer clear of creeks near his family’s home. Born in the prophetically titled town of Rolling Fork, Mississippi, in April 1915, Waters spent his years picking cotton, usually for fifty cents a day, and humming on his harmonica or strumming a guitar. Looking out the back door of his home, he saw miles of cotton fields; out the front, across the dirt road, stretched the cypress swamps.

On August 31, at the Sherrod Plantation, Alan, Elizabeth, and John Work interviewed and recorded Waters. “Waters was bare-footed in raggedy overalls. He was very shy and his house was in the middle of one of those endless cotton fields.” Waters worked in the fields during the week and played for county dances on Saturday nights. Waters was then just a twenty-six-year-old tractor driver on the Stovall plantation, making about two hundred and fifty dollars a year farming sixteen acres of land, earning

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twenty-two-and-one-half cents per hour in addition to the income he acquired from his homemade moonshine whiskey at his home, which doubled as a juke joint on weekends. In actuality, Waters was more interested in having his music play on the jukebox than for a library. But he watched while Lomax set up his bulky portably recording rig, which picked up sound waves and engraved impressions of them, in the form of circular groves, directly onto aluminum discs. In Lomax’s field notes, Waters claims he learned to play with a bottleneck by watching Son House play for about a year. Similarly, Muddy played a steel-bodied guitar with a bottleneck—the neck of a glass bottle that had been melted smooth—and there, without prompting, with “murmurous tenderness, the slide guitar echoing the melancholy and sensuous syllables,” he began to play “Country Blues,” which had been previously recorded by Son House as “My Black Mama” and Robert Johnson as “Walkin’ Blues.” The song begins in an unhurried steady picking melody, as Waters begins to sing:

   It get late on in the evening  
   I feel like blowing my horn  
   I woke up this morning  
   And find my little baby gone

At this point, Waters’ song is methodical, smooth in its flow, like an afternoon stroll down a country road. But as the song progresses, Waters’ pace of play gradually intensifies, playing with what sounds (and feel) like a newfound confidence and certitude:

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Well, brooks run into the ocean
Ocean runs in, into the sea,
If I don’t find my baby
Somebody gonna, gonna bury me

Waters then begins a half-minute improvisational interlude, in which we can hear the tint and tone of Son House reverberating from the Martin guitar, before he crescendos into a forceful climactic declaration:

Well now, I’m leaving this morning
If I had a, whoa, ride the blind
I feel mistreated girl, you know
Now, I don’t mind dying

In Waters’ “Country Blues,” we get a semblance of the mythology of the road and the other. More importantly, we get a picture of Waters as rhetor moving Lomax and those present. Additionally, we get a similar and more distinct sense in Water’s second song, “I Be’s Troubled,” his favorite song at the time. At just over three minutes, Waters’ “I Be’s Troubled” moves apace more consistently than “Country Blues.” Waters begins, similarly to his previous tune, with a simple and disciplined picking style before beginning:

Well, if I feel like tomorrow,
Like I feel today,
I’m gonna pack my suitcase,
And make my getaway.
Cause I’m troubled.
I’m all worried in my mind,
And I never be satisfied,
And I just can’t keep from cryin’.\textsuperscript{97}

Standing nearby, John Work asked Waters how that particular song came about. “That’s a song I made up,” Waters replied. “The reason I come to make that record up once, I was just walking along the road, I heard a church song, kind of mind of that. And I

\textsuperscript{97} Muddy Waters, “I Be’s Troubled,” recorded in 1941, \textit{Afro-American Blues and Game Songs}, 1941, digital recording.
started playing it.” The last line, “And I just can’t keep from cryin’,” is a particular reference to Texas bluesman Blind Willie Johnson’s 1928 Columbia recording, “Lord, I Just Can’t Keep from Cryin’ Sometime.”

However, not only was Waters rhetor, but Lomax became rhetor as well. Specifically, when Lomax played back the music for Waters, it was there, on a Saturday afternoon, that Waters, hearing himself played back on a record for the first time, came to believe that he could inspire others. In a sense, Waters inspired himself, but it was Lomax’s willingness to return to the region, with the vision from his 1933 odyssey, that helped introduce us to Waters. Lomax as rhetor provided the opportunity for Waters to expressively communicate with others, and in turn, for us to encounter others on the mythic road of the blues. For Waters, that August afternoon recording session was a first step toward his musical discovery and self-discovery. Gioia contends:

Water himself has remarked how hearing his own music played back that day radically changed his conception of himself, gave him an unprecedented sense of confidence as an artist and performer, and perhaps even an awareness of how he might reach others through his playing. Listening to the Library of Congress recording, we can pick up on that same powerful vibe, and we feel that we are experiencing not just a historical audition, a soon-to-be-famous musician getting his ‘break’, but something even more magical, an instance of self-realization that is unique in the annals of American recorded music.

Lomax’s encounter with Waters is significant both as an insight into how the road mediates our encounters with others, and more importantly, for a glimpse into how the blues function rhetorically as psychagogia. And in turn, people from all over the world would be able to encounter Waters on the road, in his country and urban blues.

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98 Nichols, Getting the Blues, 39-40.
99 Gioia, Delta Blues, 204.
According to records in the Alan Lomax Collection, just a few days later, Lomax had another encounter that would also contribute to the history of the blues and American culture. On September 3, 1941, Lomax recorded Son House, whom Lomax considered to be one of the main lines in a lineage of America’s great guitar players. House is widely known for his impassioned play, being essentially possessed by the music he plays, his entire body seems to weep, and with eyes closed, “the tendons on his powerful neck standing out with the violence of his feeling and his brown face flushing.”

Lomax, recalling their first encounter, reveals a question from House:

Now, if you don’t mind, I’d like to ask you one question—why is it that white man like you would get in his car and come all the way down here to Mississippi to talk to a fellow like me about the blues? […] It’s a puzzle to me […] I’m sued to plowing so many acres a week and saying Yessuh and Nossuh to the boss on the plantation, but sittin’ down and talkin’ about my music with some man from college like you, I just never thought about it happenin’ to me. So I want to understand it better.

At this point, according to Lomax, House takes him down “dusty roads” and “along a railroad track” to the back of a Klack’s country store in Lake Coromant in Tunica County, Mississippi to record. Lomax writes of House, “Of all of my times with the blues this was the best one.”

House was a preacher turned wandering bluesman whose passionate playing style made him one of the more compelling figures of the Delta blues. By day, House was a tractor driver. But he was a bluesman all day. In the early 1930s, House had recorded with Paramount alongside Charlie Patton. Quiet and reserved by nature, House was a man possessed with a guitar in hand. Son’s whole body wept, the tendons in his powerful neck standing out with the violence of his feeling and his brown

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100 Szwed, *Alan Lomax*, 181.
face flushing.\textsuperscript{103} Many of House’s songs are enamored, as many blues are, with roads. Of the ten songs recorded in Robinsville, Mississippi on July 17, 1942, at least half use the road as a thematic focus.

In essence, I have selected these bluesman as rhetors that moved Lomax. These encounters stress the importance of the road as an active mythology in the blues, possessing a “fascination with travel” for its own sake, rooted in years of black captivity.”\textsuperscript{104} Passed down from generation to generation, these songs hold mythic meaning both for the people and our nation. More than just a prominent lyrical theme, the road in the blues possesses both archetypal and cultural myths. Myths thrive on variability, allowing them to be used by various people in a variety of circumstances, resulting in a universality that rises above the particulars of place and date, evoking timeless elements of the human condition.\textsuperscript{105} According to Mark Humphrey, in the Delta tradition, there is the “weight of myth” in the music.\textsuperscript{106} For Palmer:

Delta blues is a refined, extremely subtle, and ingeniously systematic musical language [its fine points] have to do with timing, with subtle variations in vocal timbre, and with being able to hear and execute, vocally and instrumentally, very precise gradations in pitch that are neither haphazard wavering nor mere effects.\textsuperscript{107}

Speaking about the nature of blues performance, which in its ritual expression initiates the ultimate order toward its fulfillment, Dick Waterman, one time manager of bluesman Son House, speaks of House’s blues performances this way: “With the sweat pouring off of him. He’s gone. He’s left this point and time and just gone somewhere else […] He

\textsuperscript{103} Szwed, \textit{Alan Lomax}, 181.
\textsuperscript{104} Palmer, \textit{Deep Blues}, 18.
\textsuperscript{105} Gioia, \textit{Work Songs}, 209.
\textsuperscript{106} Quoted in Gioia, \textit{Delta Blues}, 95.
\textsuperscript{107} Palmer, \textit{Deep Blues}, 18-19.
went [...] He went [...] He just went somewhere else.”

For instance, Son House’s “Death Letter Blues” is about taking off down the road. Which is essentially what House did after his recordings with Alan Lomax in 1942, disappearing from public life until he was “rediscovered” in New York in the 1960s. Palmer notes:

Blues cannot be adequately understood if we confine our analysis to phonograph records or to the music that’s sung in nightclub and concert situations by blues musicians today. We need to understand what blues came from, where it grew, how it changed, what sorts of camouflage it had to adopt in order to preserve its identity. And we need to understand the people who made and listened to blues, not just as blacks or oppressed Americans or romantic archetypes or clever technicians or successful entertainers but as particular people who made particular personal and artistic choices in a particular place at a particular time.

That last line is reminiscent of Lomax’s contention that, “the primary function of music is to remind the listener that he belongs to one certain part of the human race, comes from a certain region, belongs to a certain part of the human race, comes from a certain region, belongs to a certain generation.”

In my own language, the mythologies of the road in American folk music serve both the movement of the soul and the body, both toward some semblance of the Good. In essence, the soul of America is told through stories about people on the road. Just as we find important mythic and poetic dimensions in psychagogic rhetoric, we also find these in contemporary stories about the road, particularly in the blues, where the road seems an ever-inspiring act of invention, just as it was for Socrates and Phaedrus. For instance, Willie Borum notes:

It was working that give me my ideas. I walk around the plant at night, when it’s quiet, you know, and I can hear the men talking […] I hear all that and that’s what I put in my blues. I come back here and write down the things, rhymed up, of

108 Scorsese, “Feel Like Going Home.”
110 Piazza, Southern Journey, 38.
course. I make the verses and things right when I’m still there walking around the job.\textsuperscript{111}

Substantively, then, one cannot \textit{truly} play the blues unless they develop a fuller understanding of where the blues comes from. “To know yourself, you have to know the past. And to know where you’re going. You have to know where you’ve been.”\textsuperscript{112} Sam Carr of Freedom Creek, Alabama, son of Robert Nighthawk, put it this way:

Come out of the cotton fields. No money. Hardly just a little food at home to eat. Children crying. So the good Lord, his Spirit, had to send something down to the people to help ease their worried mind. This way the music comes in to work at what you are trying to do, what you are striving for. To help give you a vision of a brighter day way up ahead. Help you get your mind off of what you are in right now.\textsuperscript{113}

Martin Scorsese, narrating \textit{The Blues}, notes, “I drive down these roads. I visit these places and I hear the music as if it were in the air.”\textsuperscript{114} However, the old way of life was disappearing and the culture and music of the people right along with it. The jukebox had already taken over the juke joint. Music was changing. This is one of the reasons that the work of Lomax, and so many other folklorists, is important, not only to the history of American music, but more importantly, to American culture.

Lomax’s road encounter with Waters transformed them both, just as in the \textit{Phaedrus}, where both Socrates and Phaedrus were changed by their encounters with one another. In sum, the road has played an important role in the collection of American folk music. Folklorist John Howard, for instance, traveled over forty thousand miles visiting prisons in the late eighteenth century. Howard Odum and Guy Johnson brought us chain gang music. Robert Winslow Gordon brought us jailhouse songs. John Lomax recorded

\textsuperscript{111} Taft, \textit{The Blues Lyric Formula}, 308.
\textsuperscript{112} Scorsese, “Feel Like Going Home.”
\textsuperscript{113} Scorsese, “Feel Like Going Home.”
\textsuperscript{114} Scorsese, “Feel Like Going Home.”
cowboy songs. Alan Lomax introduced us to Muddy Waters. The blues, reminiscent of Ellison’s language, is act of survival, one of our great American mythologies, the music of the people, where the rhythms have been preserved and passed down from generation to generation, through slavery, through Jim Crow, and up to the present, their culture was kept alive in their music.\textsuperscript{115}

For a people who had much of their lives disrupted and taken from them, their dignity and respect, their family and possessions, music was the one-thing oppressors could not repress. As an indication of the importance of the music’s ability to mediate encounters with others, I turn again to Scorsese’s “Feel Like Going Home,” where a West African blesses an African American with these words:

[Though] distances separate, our souls, our spirits are the same. There is no difference […] I wish that you go back in peace and prosperity so that you can make a difference to those around you, so they will see the path of peace and prosperity in agreement with reality.\textsuperscript{116}

In sum, the blues provide a representative anecdote, a prototype of action that assesses the grand convergence of human relations. It is more than poetic and mythic; it is also rhetorical.

\subsection*{3.3.3 Southern Journey: Po’ Poetry}

It was during Alan Lomax’s first summer recording odyssey, as a teenager, that he experienced, perhaps for the first time, a firsthand look at the pain of the people through their songs, the closest twentieth-century folks might ever come to the sounds of

\textsuperscript{115} Scorsese, “Feel Like Going Home.”
\textsuperscript{116} Scorsese, “Feel Like Going Home.”
slavery. The prison work song, in particular, produced a deeply personal and active confrontation with real conditions, unlike the impersonal ballads of white balladeers set somewhere in the past. Lomax was “powerfully affected by what he heard and saw, and it would be a reference point for the world’s music for the rest of is life.”

So after returning home from his self-imposed exile in the British Isles, Spain, and Italy, it is not surprising, then, that Alan Lomax returned to the place, or more substantially, to the people he encountered during his trips in the summers of 1933 and 1947. In this section, I bring my analysis of the life and work of Alan Lomax full circle, back on the road in the Southern penitentiaries, continuing my account of the periods, places, people, and poetry that comprise the mythology of the road as a rhetorical encounter with the other.

Specifically, I explore Lomax’s Southern Journey, and more particularly, one recording session with James Carter and other inmates in mid-September of 1959. Drawing from the perspectives produced by the Mississippi Delta and Parchman Farm, I situate this encounter as a representative anecdote for how the mythic road in the blues has operated psychagogically, rhetorically, at a cultural level.

Upon his return to America in 1958, Lomax discovered quite a different cultural and political landscape. In just eight years, recording equipment had become much more advanced and transportable, old recordings were being reissued on LP records, leading to an older generation of bluesman like Mississippi John Hurt, Son House, Bukka White, Nehemiah “Skip” James, and others were being rediscovered, and a serious folk revival was emerging in America. It was during this period that Alan Lomax undertook his Southern Journey from August 24, 1959 to October 12, 1959, spanning more than seven

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weeks across eight states, producing eighty-five reel-to-reel tapes and more than five hundred photographs, traveling from Virginia through Kentucky, Nashville and Alabama and into Mississippi, to Parchman, where he would return for his third recording trip, having encountered the people first in the summer of 1933 and in 1947 on a separate collecting trip. During his Southern Journey, Lomax recorded eighty hours of music and conversation on an Ampex stereo reel-to-reel tape recorder. By the standards of today, the machine is a bulkily inconvenient device. But at the time, it went well beyond anything he and his father had been able to achieve on earlier trips. In his effort to capture every inspirational moment, Lomax took notes on whatever he could find. Within those eighty hours of recorded music is a four and a half minute song titled “Po’ Lazarus,” recorded on Irish High Fidelity Recording Tape number 43 in Lomax’s collection.

Discontent with simply recording the music, Lomax’s notes spilled over onto the insides and backs of tape boxes, where he recorded details about the prisoners and what they talked about that day. Lomax was concerned with capturing the entirety of the moment, the “embodiment of the people and culture that produced the music, rather than just sounds.” Lomax considered “Po’ Lazarus” one of the finest African American ballads he had ever heard or recorded: “[Po’ Lazarus] concerns the doomed attempt of an exploited and underpaid black laborer to even up the score by stealing the payroll from his bosses […] set forth in stark and unforgettable language.” Recorded at Camp B, Mississippi State Penitentiary at Lambert, “Po’ Lazarus” features James Carter leading a group of male prisoners. In this rendition, Parchman prisoners perform in the “compact,

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118 Piazza, *Southern Journey*, 44.
bluesy call-and-response style of work-camp singing” that Lomax found permeated the Mississippi penitentiary system.\textsuperscript{120} Determined never to suffer under the indignation of oppression again, Lazarus eludes authorities leading to a final confrontation with the sheriff:

O then Laz’rus, he tol’ the High Sheriff,
Says, “I’ve never been arrested,
By no one man, Lord, Lord,
By no one man.”
Oh well, the Sheriff, he shot Laz’rus, Yes, he shot him with a great big number.
With a forty-five, Lord, Lord,
With a forty-five.
O then they taken po Laz’rus,
An’ they laid him on the commissary galley.
He said, “My wounded side, Lord, Lord.”
He said, “My wounded side.”\textsuperscript{121}

In Mississippi, the Mississippi River and Parchman farm were perhaps the two most prominent features of the region. The Mississippi River region is a troublesome land of floods overshadowed only by its bosses and overseers. The Delta produces a “hard driving music.”\textsuperscript{122} It is synonymous for its production of cotton and song, where, for over a century, songs about the Mississippi have merged into the realm of myth, symbolizing the entire region and calling to mind its music.\textsuperscript{123} Harsh conditions produce weathered hands, ferocious strums, and weary voices. Many of the bluesmen came out of the cotton fields, like B.B. King, who as a field hand, picked cotton when he was a boy. B.B. King once said, “I figured as a plow boy at five miles an hour, working twelve hours a day or sixty miles a day, six days a week, I’ve walked practically around the world. Just follow

\textsuperscript{120} Kaye, \textit{Songs of Outlaws and Desperadoes}.
\textsuperscript{122} Scorsese, “Feel Like Going Home.”
\textsuperscript{123} Gioia, \textit{Work Songs}, 200-1.
the music.\textsuperscript{124} Similarly, Parchman Farm, established in 1901, is the oldest prison system in Mississippi. Like the Mississippi River, Parchman has produced a profound amount of hardship and suffering, and in turn, a storehouse of songs. Parchman was a boon for folklorists tracing the songs of a forgotten African American people.\textsuperscript{125}

Spread over fifteen thousand acres, Parchman was a modern day plantation. It embodied the same demoralization as slavery. According to Gioia, in 1972, Judge William C. Keady deemed Parchman operations violated the First, Eighth, and Fourteenth Amendments, not to mention the laws of human decency. Keady referred to it as a “backward, shabby, trusty-run plantation.”\textsuperscript{126} Parchman, named after its first warden, Jim Parchman, produced cotton and livestock, requiring ten-hour work days for six days a week. In Bruce Jackson’s \textit{Wake Up Dead Man: Hard Labor and Southern Blues}, he details the grueling nature of the prisoners’ workday. Differentiating between the ten to twelve hour workday and the eight, Jackson explains how the road was a grueling part of everyday life:

\begin{quote}
Nowadays, eight hours and you ride to work. Eight hours they spend in the field and they ride to work. We walked it when we went. Sometimes we didn’t walk, we practically trotted. Seven, eight, and ten miles to work. A lot of time we had to come back in to the building for dinner and jump right back out there and run back our seven or eight miles to work. And you hit that road, boy, you’re on the way: you don’t tarry, you don’t tarry, and that was all day. You didn’t let up.\textsuperscript{127}
\end{quote}

Still further, Jackson gives more indications of the road in prison life:

\begin{quote}
That hoe! I never seen so much work with a hoe, so many things did with a hoe, in all my life till I come in prison. Man, we’d even build roads with hoes, just
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{125} Gioia, \textit{Work Songs}, 202.
\textsuperscript{126} Gioia, \textit{Work Songs}, 201.
\textsuperscript{127} Bruce Jackson, ed., \textit{Wake Up Dead Man: Hard Labor and Southern Blues} (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1999), 25.
hoes alone and we’d build a road. A big old wooden tamper made out of a stump with a two-by-four nailed onto it, two men use it to tamp the road down and make a road.\(^{128}\)

At the time of Lomax’s visit, Parchman had more than two thousand inmates in segregated camps. Over the course of five days, Lomax recorded music in Camps 7, 11, and Camp B in Lambert. These recordings produced nine reel recordings and more than one hundred photographs. In a retrospective book titled *The Land Where the Blues Began*, Lomax writes, “The faces of the prisoners, so shadowy and fawning in repose, so fiery and powerful in song, their touching and powerful melodies, their graceful, golden voices all conspired to win our allegiance.”\(^{129}\)

One of the voices that inspired Lomax’s loyalty was that of James Carter. On that day, unbeknownst to any of them, they would make their mark on American culture. More than forty years separated the initial recording from these first sounds and images from the Coen Brothers’ 2000 film, *O’ Brother, Where Art Thou?*—which begins with this scripted note: “In black, we hear a chain-gang chant, many voices together, spaced around the unison strike of picks against rock. A title burns in.”\(^{130}\) In between hammered clanks, we hear a man call out, “Po’ Lazarus,” with each man down the line resounding the name, like an echo in a canyon. Then, nearly a full minute removed from those first sounds, our first image appears as the men begin singing: “Well the High Sheriff, he tole de deputy, won’t you go out an’ bring me Laz’us. Bring him dead or alive. Lawd, Lawd,

\(^{128}\) *Jackson, Wake Up Dead Man*, 2.
\(^{129}\) *Piazza, Southern Journey*, 78.
bring him dead or alive.” With rich cinematic detail, and substantial cultural cohesion, the Coen Brothers forge a psychagogic moment in bringing together the mid-century voices of singing convicts, singing about a convict on the run from days past, while simultaneously establishing the scene for their Depression era depiction of singing convicts in a turn of the century film about convicts on the run. “They are black men in bleached and faded stripes, chained together, working under a brutal midday sun. It is a flat delta countryside, the straight-ruled road stretches to infinity.” It is truly one of the great mythological moments of the early twenty-first century, a true representative anecdote and portrait of twentieth-century America.

What is most unique about Lomax’s encounter with James Carter is that it mediated, quite literally, millions of encounters with James Carter and his chain gang singers—while also connecting twenty-first century Americans to both their own national history and a rich mythological history about the road as an encounter with the other. With the success of the Coen Brothers film, and perhaps more so the soundtrack, which sold millions of copies, James Carter was driven, like the axe handle he swung that September day, into a newfound world of recognition and accolades. Imagine if you will, you are relaxing on your couch after a long day of work. You hear a knock at the door. Upon opening the door, you are told about a film you have never heard of, reminded about a song you do not recall recording, or the man who recorded it, and presented with a platinum album featuring a song that you sang and presented with a royalty check for twenty thousand dollars, the first installment in what would become several hundred

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132 Coen, O Brother, Where Art Thou?
thousand dollars in royalties. This is the story of James Carter.

Soon after this encounter, Carter boarded an airplane with his wife and his daughters, Hattie Tucker and Corie Macklin, and flew to Los Angeles, California for the Grammy Awards, which awarded the album of the year to the Coen Brothers’ film *O’ Brother, Where Art Thou?.* According to Weinraub, a reporter for *The New York Times,* producers had been trying to find James Carter to pay him royalties for some time:

Searching through the archives of the Mississippi penal system, Social Security files, property records and other public records and various databases, the record's producer, T-Bone Burnett and an investigative journalist for a Florida newspaper found Mr. Carter in Chicago with his wife, Rosie Lee Carter, a longtime minister of the Holy Temple Church of God.\(^\text{133}\)

While researching music for the film, Carter’s song made a deep impression on T-Bone Burnett, who recalled listening to the song for the first time while in the Lomax archives. Assuming he had likely passed away, their search for Carter began by checking Social Security death records. Then, using the Freedom of Information Act, they began looking through the files of the parole board in Mississippi and found that Mr. Carter had moved to Chicago around 1967. At the same time, Chris Grier, a reporter for The Sarasota Herald-Tribune who was working on a project about Mr. Lomax's life, using the newspaper's databases came up with a list of James Carters in the Chicago area. However, because the name was common, they concentrated on spouses, where they tracked down Mrs. Carter, who owned a storefront church, on property records.

At the Grammy Awards, the soundtrack for the Coen Brothers’ film, featuring “Po’ Lazarus,” won album of the year, winning over artists like Michael Jackson and Madonna. For Lomax, “Po’ Lazarus” had guided him from those early days with

Leadbelly in a Louisiana prison and through recordings at Parchman in 1933 on through his 1959 recording with James Carter all the way through the turn of the century, and a millennium, with the Coen Brothers’ film. I doubt he imagined during those early days of recording as a teenager, that his cultural conversion and vision would become what it has.

One final encounter that is of great significance to the work of Alan Lomax, and more importantly, to American folk music is Lomax’s Southern Journey encounter with Fred McDowell in late September of 1959, just days after recording James Carter. Similar to Carter, the story of how McDowell came to be known is mythic in nature. A sharecropper, McDowell played slide guitar in local juke joints at night and picked cotton during the day. Lomax had actually returned to the region to record Sid Hemphill, a quills (panpipe) player. Hemphill directed Lomax to nearby Como, Mississippi to record Lonnie and Ed Young. On September 24, 1959, just as the day was ending and the music winding down, McDowell, carrying a guitar, emerged from the darkened woods. “He sat down, pulled a bottleneck from his pocket, slipped it over the third finger on his left hand, and began to sing.”

Lord, the 61 Highway,
Is the only road I know.
She runs from New York City
Right down by my baby’s door.

Shirley Collins, who assisted Lomax on the Southern Journey, recalls, “I shall never forget the first sight I had of Fred in his dungarees, carrying his guitar and walking out of the woods towards us in the Mississippi night.” In his field notes next to “Highway

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134 Szwed, Alan Lomax, 318.
136 Quoted in Piazza, Southern Journeys, 95.
Lomax wrote “Perfect.” Lomax also recorded McDowell with Rosalie Hill and Fred’s sister Fanny Davis, who on “Going Down the River,” can be heard blowing her comb-and-tissue paper kazoo. Lomax’s encounter with McDowell is significant, again, not for what is suggests about Lomax but for our encounters with McDowell, whose “You Got to Move” became one of the signature songs of The Rolling Stones—and whose music would significantly influence the great American folk music revival of the 1960s. Moreover, McDowell’s music gives us yet another indication of the mythology of the road, moving to the center of our understanding of American music.137

3.3.4 You Are My Br/other

Alan Lomax’s work spans more than sixty years of American history. As I have argued, Lomax serves as a privileged access point for apprehending the rhetorical significance of the road in the blues. Today, this collection remains a valuable resource for exploring the mythic dimensions of the road in American culture. For continuity and clarity, I have been selective in my consideration of Lomax’s work, focusing only on his encounters in the Mississippi region in the summers of 1933, 1941, and 1959. Piazza notes:

His career was a tug-of-war between a profound respect for the indigenous expressions of culture and a relentless desire both to make those expressions available to as broad an audience as possible and to evolve some system, some narrative, that could lend them all a common mythos.”138

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137 Piazza, *Southern Journey*, 44.
At a minimum, even those who may find fault in the methods or attitudes of Lomax’s rhetorical work, must still recognize how his work afforded a widely unknown, unheralded, and unheard people with an opportunity to actualize their dignity, preserving aspects of their lives and culture that might otherwise have vanished.

In the waning days of the 1950s, Lomax was able to “record some of the last of a breed, musicians and singers who had been influenced only minimally by the commercialization not just of the music but of the music’s context.” Lomax’s field recordings were filled with the intrusions of everyday life, the sound of a passing train or the chatter of friends and neighbors listening to the live recording. It is one of the hallmarks of the American folk music tradition. Still today, in contemporary samplings and remixes, one can follow the folk music tradition from the spirituals to the blues on onward all the way through rock-n-roll, rhythm and blues, soul, rap, hip-hop, and remix culture. Lomax’s willingness to go out on the road is one of his greatest contributions to American culture. It is indeed difficult to imagine how our musical landscape might sound without his work.

For instance, in 1960, Atlantic Records issued the *Southern Folk Heritage* series of songs recorded in the field by Alan Lomax, with every song from the trip copyrighted in the name of the artist singing, which turned out to be rather substantial for an aging James Carter nearly forty two years after Lomax’s recording. As a product of the road, Lomax’s Southern Journey also resulted in the release of “The Southern Journey Series,” a thirteen volume series of original recordings evoking the musical world of the rural South in an era before radio, movies, and television. Throughout his life, Lomax

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tenaciously looked for music that had not been commoditized, and which “led back
toward an at least partly mythical past before everything existed to make a profit.”
One of Lomax’s most important contributions to American folk music, and the blues in
particular, is his criticism of “aesthetic imperialism.” For Lomax, aesthetic imperialism
privileges compositional notation and is culturally destructive of musical autonomy,
where the majority of federal and local funding used on music education is goes to
support one musical tradition, the symphonic fine-arts tradition. We see this as well in
the systemic privileging of the hard sciences over the arts in our schools today—yet
another indication of the challenges of our trained incapacities.

Throughout his career, Lomax maintained a disdain for “chair-bound scholars,”
and chose instead to journey in search of truth in the beauty of folk song. Alan Lomax
writes, “There is an impulsive and romantic streak in my nature that I find difficult to
control when I go song hunting.” More specifically, Lomax’s work went beyond
documenting African American music, extending his critical work to the “harsh social
conditions and racial divisions of midcentury American life” Lomax once asked,
“What path shall my feet follow? All the paths that have opened up before me so far have
been the paths of other people.” Lomax’s work reminds us that we belong to the
human race, that the ultimate benefit of music is neither “self-expression” nor “personal
vision,” but rather, “ligature with the community and with our history.” Through all his

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145 Piazza, *The Southern Journey*, 38
road encounters, Lomax learned to see the “other self” in the people he encountered, allowing us to comprehend something of the history of American folk music. For Lomax, the mythic songs of the people “can provide ten thousand bridges across which men of all nations may stride to say, ‘You are my brother.’”\footnote{Cohen, \textit{Alan Lomax: Selected Writings}, 91.}

3.4 The Blue Ethic

There is something about indigenous, rural music that invites myth telling, that demands movement and discovery [...] every good story about America is also a story about the road. I sometimes think that there is nothing more emblematic of America’s base ideology—liberty and justice for all—than its indiscriminate, empowering hopelessly communal roads. Every day, America’s populace segregates and defines; marking neighborhoods and claiming territory, share experiences, both in memory and in present tense. These highways [...] unite us in perpetual motion.\footnote{Amanda Petrusich, \textit{It Still Moves: Lost Songs, Lost Highways, and the Search for the Next American Music} (New York: Macmillan, 2008), 17.}

In this chapter, I have argued for the ethos of the road on the Upward Way as producing an ethic for the Downward Way. Specifically, then, I contend that the ethos of the blues road in American folk music produces a Blue Ethic. On one hand, I intend the language and intonation of the blues to move our souls in order to move our society. On the other hand, I can position that ethic to a particular situation, even person, harkening back to Lomax’s encounter with Blue at the Smithers Plantation near Huntsville, Texas, where he sings about the poor tenant farmer and petitions the President to “do something.” The Blue Ethic exemplifies, using the language of Carroll, the “blending of the emotional with the ethical,” a highly potent concept, “suggesting that character,
manifested in language, can itself be the source of *movere*, of the moving of the audience’s soul.”

As I outlined earlier in this chapter, by way of Carroll, the blues is a distinct form of rhetoric that is principally concerned with “ethics and community.” As Ellison notes, the blues are poetic and ritual, foremost, and subsequently a rhetorical imposing of values that has the effect of moving souls toward a more just society—toward consummation. Returning to previously suggestive attitudes, then, we must first recognize that most of us are privileged enough to overlook these considerations if we so choose. And furthermore, in denying those privileges, we must also be wary of imposing our modern views of music, derived from experiences with professional performers and entertainers.

In this chapter, I have argued that the mythology of the road in American folk music, as found in the fieldwork of Alan Lomax, demonstrates how the mythology of the road functions in American culture. To this point, I have explored the archetype of the road as *psychagogia* in the blues, arguing that this archetype reorients our understanding of the road in American culture, shifting our attention away from the cultural myths of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and toward the road as a rhetorical encounter with the other. This rhetorical shift not only alters how we understand the road, it is rhetoric itself. In conclusion, the application of Kenneth Burke’s conceptualization of myth as a social tool helps demonstrate the *psychagogic* functions of the road in American folk music. In particular, the blues give us a grip on reality through their revolutionary

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151 Dawkins, *Clearly Invisible*, xi.
symbolism of the road. It begins as self-expression and is communicated leading others, *psychagogically*, toward consummation—this is an ultimate order of the road in the blues. In the following chapter, I explore how the archetype of the road functions *psychagogically* through the marches, freedom songs, speeches, and sermons of the civil rights movement. Specifically, I focus on Martin Luther King Jr.’s sermonic use of the parable of the Good Samaritan. Throughout the chapter, using Burke’s ultimate order, I argue that King’s “mountaintop” language is indicative of the Upward Way, and show how his use of the Samaritan Ethic embodies the Downward Way, culminating in an assessment of his final public oration, “I’ve Been to the Mountaintop.”
CHAPTER FOUR

King’s Highway: Civil Roots/Routes/Rights and the Samaritan Ethic

“Keep this movement going. Keep this movement rolling. In spite of the difficulties, and we’re going to have a few more difficulties, keep climbing. Keep moving. If you can’t fly, run! If you can’t run, walk. If you can’t walk, crawl. But by all means, keep moving.”

4.1 King’s Highway

“My eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord.” These words have the distinction of being renowned as first words and last words. As first words, they refer to Julia Ward Howe’s lyrical adaptation of the tune from “John Brown’s Body,” otherwise known as “The Battle Hymn of the Republic,” a marching song in both a literal and eschatological sense. In the manner that I have outlined myth’s function, its rich apocalyptic imagery and historical narration makes it one of America’s most poignant and prominent myths—framing the need for spiritual vision and dreams that imagine a Democratic Good beyond the dialectical tensions of our national racial unrest. As last words, they are the final public utterances of Martin Luther King Jr. in “I’ve Been to the Mountaintop,” a speech delivered at the [Bishop Charles] Mason Temple, the national headquarters of the Church of God in Christ, the largest black Pentecostal denomination, on a stormy night in Memphis, Tennessee in April 1968. It has become one of the most iconic speeches in King’s civic discourse.

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2 It is also important to note that both Julia Ward Howe and her husband, Samuel Gridley Howe, who founded the Perkins Institute for the Blind, devoted much of their lives to the blind. This gives us an important insight on Howe’s first words.
However, the address almost never happened. Instead, King, who was fatigued and sick, sent his closest friend Ralph Abernathy in his place. But when Abernathy saw the crowd, he phoned King and reiterated, “They didn’t come tonight just to hear Abernathy. They came tonight in this storm to hear King.” More than three thousand people had braved the storm, which included tornado warnings, driving rain, and rumbling thunder. When King stepped to the pulpit, he was greeted with thunderous applause, matched only by the thunder of his sermonic discourse; the Temple hall lit by flashes of lighting and moved by the rumble of King’s words. Abernathy took nearly thirty minutes to introduce his friend, recounting his life story up to the present moment. Unique to the themes of this study, King begin his address with a journey through history, a “mental flight,” accounting for some of the most important moments in world history up to the civil rights movement. King’s language, having been to the mountaintop, embodies visionary imagery and symbolism. Put differently, King’s work is indicative of psychagogic rhetorical experience—one acquired on the Upward Way. In turn, King’s civic and sermonic discourse is a paradigm, a representative anecdote, of the Downward Way.

King’s vision is intricate and complex, poetic and pointed. In this chapter, I examine King’s rhetorical vision for America. To be more specific, I explore this vision in the context of the archetype that I have formulated, tracing it from the Exodus myth through select moments in the history of segregated travel followed by particular examples of the road in human history and American culture. Then, I position this vision mid-century in the twentieth century, in the marches, freedom songs, speeches, and

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sermons of the civil rights movement. Finally, I give concerted attention to this vision, acquired on the Jericho Road, in the parable of the Good Samaritan, following this particular mythic story through King’s sermonic discourse. Specifically, I show how King’s vision equips us with an ultimate vocabulary of race, on the road, using King’s final public oration, “I’ve Been to the Mountaintop,” to illustrate the Samaritan Ethic that King rhetorically enacts on the Downward Way of the American civil rights movement. I argue that the Samaritan Ethic is one of the most pervasive and unifying themes of King’s civic discourse, stretching from his earliest days as a civil rights leader to his final public address, the consummation of the Exodus, essential in the actualization of the long lonesome Exodus road to freedom—to the Democratic Good. I conclude with an implication for how this psychagogic rhetorical road continues still today.

4.2 Stride Toward Freedom

“This life [is] not being but becoming; we are not yet what we shall be, but we are growing toward it; the process is not yet finished, but it is going on; this is not the end, but it is the road.”

4.2.1 Civil Roots

Life is a becoming, a road. These words from the German theologian Martin Luther, King’s namesake, are consistent with the orientations of King’s civic and sermonic discourse, rich in the transcendent imagery of movement on both the actual

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5 Though, here, I make a distinction between King’s civic and sermonic discourse, I stress that I see no substantive distinction. First and foremost, King was a preacher,
and analogical roads of life. In this section, I intend to personify the sentiments of King’s introduction in “I’ve Been to the Mountaintop,” taking us on a grand journey, a “mental flight,” through African American cultural experience, illustrated by the mythology of the road. Similar to King, I begin this adventure in the ancient world of the Hebrew Exodus with the objective of framing the civil rights movement as a continuation of a long and lonesome, but rhetorically transcendent, road. Here, then, I explore visceral upward and downward moments along the Jericho Road of the American civil rights movement.

The Exodus

The Exodus is a powerful myth. For millennia, not just centuries, people from all over the world have turned, and still turn, to its imagery and poetic symbolism for perspective and comfort, hope and guidance. In *Martin Luther King and the Rhetoric of Freedom*, Gary Selby outlines a detailed vision for how King uses the Exodus myth to lead and guide others toward their sense of the Good—the Mountaintop. Consistent with the argumentative tone of this project, Selby argues that the Exodus myth can be distilled to “one dominant metaphor, that of the journey.” Notice the similarity of this claim with that of Werner with regards to the dominant theme of the journey in the *Phaedrus*, and also, that of Taft in asserting that the pervasiveness of movement in the blues. Here, I continue this assertion in the expansive realms of African American discourse, in oral culture, songs, speeches, sermons, and in the march.

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meaning, all his speeches and sermons confronted civic concerns and living. As such, King’s discourse does not make such distinctions though our humanistic language does. I ask we consider this.

To be more specific, though, I argue that more than the journey, the people derived their most visceral sense of meaning and purpose from their encounters with others while on the journey. This is Luther’s “becoming.” As I have argued, the road is useful for conceptualizing rhetorical possibility, for evaluating rhetoric as a road, in particular its spiritual and ethical implications—psychagogia. As rhetor, King embodies this rhetorical spirit. He is an ambassador, one in a long line of sacred rhetoricians from the Apostle Paul through Augustine, who uses rhetoric in inventively mythic ways to lead souls and society. Specifically, Selby positions King as one of our great twentieth-century diplomats by demonstrating the relationship between rhetoric and social movements. Tracing the themes of redemption and freedom in the Exodus through African American cultural history, Selby brings King into discursive relation with human and theological history. More particularly, Selby bridges the Exodus with the American civil rights movement, and its emerging leader:

This shift in the use of the Exodus coincided with the emergence of the march as the movement’s principal mode of collective action. The march and the Exodus were thus deeply intertwined. The Exodus myth provided the symbolic context out of which the march became the movement’s most important means of protest, imbuing the act of marching with significance as a concrete enactment of the story [becoming more than] simply a medium for demanding equal treatment [and instead] a ritual through which protesters could, by means of a bodily performance, act out their most deeply held cultural narrative.⁷

Here, just as the blues purposefully functioned as both a poetic form of identification and ritual, the march is a mythic social tool useful for the leading of self and others toward a more just society.

Furthermore, Selby contends that this narrative shift, both in the movement and for King as leader, occurs in and around the Birmingham marches. Selby asserts that far

more striking and significant is the way that the use of the Exodus became drastically compressed into a cluster of words centered on the theme of movement—words like going, moving, rolling, climbing and walking, path and highway, and follow and lead. Moreover, as I will discuss later in this chapter, substantiating themes developed in chapter three, Selby further extends my claims with his emphasis upon the important role that freedom songs and sermons had in the march and the movement, essentially ritualizing the march as the principal mode of collective action. Using the mythical imagery of the Exodus, the people, the secondary reality implied by the marches, songs, and sermons, turned to the revolutionary symbolism of the road to propel their allegiances. This is comparable to the way in which the people cohered around the spirituals and the blues, sacred and secular manifestations of the same vision, using the mythology of the Upward road to give bodily form to the Exodus in a way that made the story truly their own.

4.2.2 Civil Routes

Segregated Travel

Building upon the civil roots of the Exodus myth, the civil rights movement can also be traced along many of its civic routes. In particular, we can find fixed moments in history where people have used the road as a means of escape from oppression. Here, I focus on three particular moments. First, in December 1848, Ellen and William Craft used their racial distinctions to plot their escape from slavery. In the United States, at that

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time, road travel was most assuredly harsh and dangerous for slaves. Along with the emergence of the northern abolition movement came thousands of successful escapes to the northern territories, one of the most notable being Frederick Douglass. In turn, the political and economic powers in the South, those who relied on slave labor for their livelihood, demanded harsher laws for runaways and any who would help exact their escape, resulting in the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850. In this lethal context, Ellen and William schemed their plan. As it went, when William and Ellen realized that “slaveholders have the privilege of taking their slaves to any part of the country they think proper,” Ellen, who was “nearly white,” believed she could disguise herself as a gentleman and assume to be William’s master, effectually securing their escape.10 Just as moving as their compelling escape, is how their account of the experience implicates the sentiments of this project: Running a Thousand Miles for Freedom; Or, the Escape of William and Ellen Craft.

My second example occurs forty-six years after the Crafts boarded a train in Georgia, when Homer A. Plessy boarded a train in Louisiana. The objective was simple, to challenge section 2 of Act 111 of the 1890 Louisiana legislature, An Act to Promote the Comfort of Passengers, or the Separate Car Act. In other words: pass as white; purchase the ticket; board the train; pass as black; and ensure arrest. On June 7, 1892, Plessy executed the first five parts of the plan, and was arrested. In the next phase, the charges were contested in the United States Supreme Court, where in 1896, Plessy lost the case, effectively institutionalizing racial segregation, something that has reverberated

through the decades of the late nineteenth century, throughout the twentieth century, and into the twenty-first century.\textsuperscript{11} Since that time, “separate but equal” doctrine has been the law of the land. As King recounts the decision, “Through this decision segregation gained legal and moral sanction. The end result of the Plessy doctrine was that it led to a strict enforcement of the ‘separate,’ with hardly the slightest attempt to abide by the ‘equal.’ So the Plessy doctrine ended up making for tragic inequalities and ungodly exploitation.”\textsuperscript{12}

My third and final example comes directly from the life of King, who as a teenager, experienced firsthand the vitriol of the Plessy doctrine. In an interview, when asked about the first time he became personally and painfully aware of racial prejudice, King answered:

Very clearly. When I was fourteen, I had traveled from Atlanta to Dublin, Georgia, with a dear teacher of mine, Mrs. Bradley [...] I had participated there in an oratorical contest sponsored by the Negro Elks. It turned out to be a memorable day, for I had succeeded in winning the contest. My subject, I recall, ironically enough, was ‘The Negro and the Constitution.’ Anyway, that night, Mrs. Bradley and I were on a bus returning to Atlanta, and at a small town along the way, some white passengers boarded the bus, and the white driver ordered us to get up and give the whites our seats. We didn’t move quickly enough to suit him, so he began cursing us, calling us ‘black sons of bitches.’ I intended to stay right in that seat, but Mrs. Bradley finally urged me up, saying we had to obey the law. And so we stood up in the aisle for the ninety miles to Atlanta. That night will never leave my memory. It was the angriest I have ever been in my life.”\textsuperscript{13}

\textsuperscript{11} Dawkins indicates that, “While discrimination and segregation were practiced in the United States prior to 1890, only three states had approved similar legislation prior to the Louisiana statute. After the 1896 Supreme Court ruling in Plessy v. Ferguson, other states soon followed. By 1920, nearly every southern state had enacted Jim and Jane Crow legislation that required “separate but equal” facilities for black and white people.


Here, we get an unheralded look into the young life of King, one that anticipates and foreshadows one of the most important moments and marches of the movement, the Montgomery Bus Boycotts in 1955 and 1956.

As important as these moments are, they are significant more as a road, a continuation of a long and lonesome road that did not actually begin with any one march in the civil rights movement. In fact, Montgomery was merely a manifestation of other less successful attempts at desegregation and integration. For instance, on July 16, 1944, Irene Morgan boarded a Greyhound bus in Hayes Store, Virginia and violated a 1930 Virginia statute prohibiting racially mixed seating on public transportation. When asked to give up her seat for a white passenger, similar to King, similar to Rosa Parks, she refused. Irene Morgan’s “impulsive act—like Rosa Parks’ more celebrated refusal to give up a seat on a Montgomery bus eleven years later—placed her in a difficult and dangerous position.”

Morgan had challenged the sanctity of segregation, disturbing the delicate balance of Southern racial etiquette. The fact that she was a woman and in ill health mattered little to the driver and Middlesex County sheriff, who dragged her off of the bus. Charged with resisting arrest and violating Virginia’s Jim Crow transit law, she spent the next seven hours in jail. On June 6, 1945, seven justices of the Virginia Supreme Court unanimously affirmed Morgan’s conviction and upheld the constitutionality of the 1930 Jim Crow transit law. Almost a year later, on June 3, 1946, Supreme Court Associate Justice Stanley Reed wrote, “It seems clear to us that seating arrangements for the different races in interstate motor travel requires a single uniform

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rule to promote and protect national travel.”¹⁵ But more than two months after Morgan’s arrest, it was all but forgotten. Until the autumn of 1946, when a plan known as the “Journey of Reconciliation” developed, carried out in 1947, one of the first “freedom rides.” For organizations such as the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) and its parent organization, the Fellowship of Reconciliation (FOR), the Freedom Ride was born in these groups. Despite these movements, CORE and other nonviolent movements began a period of steady decline in the 1950s, discouraged by both the degradation of progress and the infectious paranoia of McCarthyism.¹⁶ But that would soon change.

Great/Salt March

Though these examples of segregated travel give us some tangible perspective regarding the dangers of the road for African Americans, it has not yet given us an indication of the manner in which one should conduct themselves when faced with that most assured arrival of opposition and oppression. These civil routes we find in the early twentieth century examples of Mohandas Gandhi in India. In Richard Attenborough’s Academy Award winning film Gandhi, a perplexed official of the British government effectively sums the man, the movement, and my argument when he notes: “One lone man marching dusty roads armed only with honesty and a bamboo staff doing battle with the British Empire.”¹⁷ Most assuredly, though, Gandhi, nor King, were alone. But both of these public and religious figures used the road as a way to transcend the dialectical tensions inherent in worlds afire with racist flames. Gandhi and King, as am I, were (are)

¹⁵ Arsenault, Freedom Riders, 16-17.
¹⁶ Arsenault, Freedom Riders, 43.
¹⁷ Richard Attenborough, Gandhi, directed by Richard Attenborough (1982; Los Angeles: Columbia Pictures, 1982), DVD.
concerned with the spiritual and ethical implications of the road. Here, we find two additional examples of how civil rights was strengthened by its civil routes, serving as momentous markers of public memory, global and national.

Of all the important marches carried out in India, I am most concerned, at this juncture, with Gandhi’s “Satyagraha,” or mass civil disobedience. And even more selectively, I will focus on only two of these marches. The first is the Great March. In South Africa, the laws taxed indentured servants and decreed that non-Christian marriages were illegal. In protest, a Satyagraha of women marched from Transvaal into Natal without registration cards, while another crossed from Natal into Transvaal. They then proceeded to march to the coalmines of Newcastle, where they urged the indentured workers to protest the new laws by refusing to work. And on November 6, 1913, Gandhi set off with more than two thousand striking miners and their families on a march to Transvaal. The Great March Satyagraha served as a paradigm for the civil rights movement, exemplified by the people’s willingness to endure arrest and beatings while conducting themselves with dignity, restraint, and ethical fortitude. Continuing to the town of Balfour, nearly one hundred miles from where they began, the marchers were shipped back by train to the coalmines, where the owners had converted the mines into prisons. And in response, many more indentured servants went on strike.\(^\text{18}\)

Similarly, in India, between March and April 1930, Mohandas Gandhi and thousands of followers marched across India to the Arabian Sea coast in the Salt March. Covering a distance of two hundred and forty miles, this act of civil disobedience against British rule resulted in the arrest of nearly sixty thousand people, including Gandhi. For

perspective, Britain’s Salt Act prohibited the people of India from collecting or selling salt, meaning citizens were required to get their salt from the Brits who not only levied hefty taxes on the people, but also exercised a monopoly on the manufacture and sale of salt. By violating the Salt Act in a nonviolent way, Gandhi offered a blueprint for the American civil rights movement’s approach to opposing the standards of unjust laws through nonviolent direct action. The march began on March 12, 1930, when Gandhi set out on foot from his ashram near Ahmedabad with dozens of followers, beginning a trek of two hundred and forty miles to the coastal town of Dandi on the Arabian Sea.

Defying British law, Gandhi and his followers would make salt from seawater, with Gandhi addressing the crowds along the way. As they marched, the people who joined the salt Satyagraha increased, where on April 5, they reached Dandi. Early the next morning they walked down to the sea to make salt from the salt flats on the beach, encrusted with crystallized sea salt at every high tide. But the police had forestalled him by crushing the salt deposits into the mud. Nevertheless, Gandhi reached down and picked up a small lump of natural salt out of the mud and defied British law. On May 21, the poet Sarojini Naidu led twenty-five-hundred marchers on to the Dhār asana Salt Works, one hundred and fifty miles north of Bombay where the peaceful demonstrators were beaten by British-led Indian police. The incident, recorded by American journalist Webb Miller, prompted an international outcry against British policy in India—a similar uproar as was caused by the visible images of armed officers beating nonviolent activists in the Birmingham marches of 1963 at the hand of Bull Connor’s hoses and dogs and on Edmund Pettus Bridge in the Selma marches in Alabama in 1965.
4.2.3 Civil Rights: March as Movement

In the twentieth-century, millions of African Americans were actively moving, geographically and substantively, along the Upward Way, migrating from the South to the North looking for better opportunities and living conditions. In light of the important civil roots and routes, we have the perspective necessary to situate the mythic archetype of the road as a rhetorical encounter with the other in the American civil rights movement. As blacks migrated to northern cities looking for work, not only were they met with limited opportunities, but what ones they had were reduced, in Detroit for instance, to the foundry, the dirtiest place at the Ford motor company. After Pearl Harbor, for a further instance, when assembly lines were integrated, racial tensions continued to swell resulting in the Detroit race riots of 1943, eerily similar to the Tulsa race riots of 1921.

Moreover, many African Americans pressed their cause for freedom by serving in the war, where such men had fought on the front lines since the Civil War, but to no avail. One visceral example of the hardships of travel in mid-century America comes in the story of Army Sergeant Isaac Woodard, who in February 1946, asked if he could use the bathroom on a bus but was denied. At the next stop, two officers beat Woodard and blinded him, driving the end of their nightsticks into his eyes. At age twenty-seven, having returned from service to his country, he was blind for the rest of his life. In his political radio broadcast, Orson Wells asked, “What does it cost to be a Negro? In Macon, South Carolina, it cost a man his eyes. Officer X. All America is ashamed of you.

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If there is room for pity you can have it for you are far more blind than he."²⁰ For many African Americans, given all of the progress they had witnessed in the twentieth century, from fame on the stage and screen to the baseball diamond, they still could not sit at the front of a bus or eat at a lunch counter.²¹ But in January of 1954, a young King visited Montgomery, Alabama to preach for Dexter Avenue Baptist Church, who was without a pastor. In his Sunday morning sermon, titled, “The Three Dimensions of a Complete Life,” drawing upon his adaptation of the sermon in 1960, King instructs the Dexter congregants about the Jericho Road and the parable of the Good Samaritan—a vision he would return to repeatedly throughout his public life. Though there are a number of marches worth considering, I focus only on two marches, Montgomery, as the initiatory moment in the movement, and Birmingham, where Selby argues that the movement coincided with the march as its preeminent mode of collective action.

Montgomery

A few months after King arrived in Montgomery, after accepting the call to become Dexter Avenue Baptist Church’s pastor, a fifteen-year-old high school girl named Claudette Colvin, was pulled off a bus, handcuffed, and jailed for refusing to give up her seat for a white passenger.²² Months later, Mary Louise Smith, eighteen years old, was subjected to similar treatment. Continually troubled by these atrocities, the African American community began talk of boycotting the buses in protest. In response, a citizens committee was formed to discuss possible action, which King served on. An action that became even more probable on December 1, 1955, when Rosa Parks, a forty-

²¹ Bertelsen, “Rise!”
²² King, Stride Toward Freedom, 41.
two year old seamstress, weary from a day’s work, boarded the Cleveland Avenue Bus in
downtown Montgomery and sat in the front row of the colored section. Moving along
Montgomery Street, white passengers began filling the front section of the bus. As was
customary, when the bus became full, blacks were expected to give up their seats for
white passengers. “Are you going to stand up?” the driver demanded. “No” Park replied.
Flustered, Blake responded, “Well, I’m going to have you arrested.” “You may do that,”
Parks softly replies. The driver, J.F. Blake, instructs Parks and other black passengers to
move to the back so the white passengers could sit down. Three blacks got up and went to
the back. Rosa Parks did not. The driver got off the bus, walked to a pay telephone, and
called police for help. Parks was arrested. The arrest of Parks, though now considered a
pinnacle moment, was then just a four-paragraph story on the bottom of page 9A. Four
days later, Parks is convicted and fined in a Montgomery city court. In response, a one-
day boycott of the city buses is staged. The Montgomery Improvement Association
(MIA) is formed and a young twenty-seven year old pastor new to the community is
elected as its leader. After some deliberation, it was decided that they should hold a
citywide mass meeting on Monday, December 5 to express their support of the bus
boycott at Holt Street Baptist Church. The leaflet succinctly stated the purpose of the
meeting and the protest:

Don’t ride the bus to work, to town, to school, or any place Monday, December 5.

Another Negro woman has been arrested and put in jail because she refused to
give up her bus seat.

Don’t ride the buses to work, to town, to school, or anywhere on Monday. If you
work, take a cab, or share a ride, or walk.

Come to a mass meeting, Monday at 7:00 P.M., at the Holt Street Baptist Church for further instructions.\footnote{King, \textit{Stride Toward Freedom}, 48.}

Throughout December, the MIA and black citizens of Montgomery negotiate with the city on a proposal that would enact a more reasonable seating policy. On December 13, the MIA begins to operate a car pool using stations wagons and the like to transport the black citizens of Montgomery to work. Now into January, the negotiations continue and come to a halt on January 23, 1956, when Mayor W.A. Gayle announces there would be no further negotiations with the MIA. Several days later, King is charged and jailed for speeding by Montgomery police. Later the next week, King’s house is bombed with his wife and infant daughter inside, though they are unharmed. On February 10, 1956, the White Citizens Council rallies in Montgomery to express its support of city officials’ opposition to bus desegregation.

For three hundred and eighty one days, citizens of Montgomery stood their ground, walking to work. More than a year after the first protest, on December 21, 1956, black citizens desegregate Montgomery buses after a thirteen-month boycott and the local busses resumed their full services. Of course, though policies may have been changed, attitudes had not. And on Christmas Eve, five white men attacked a fifteen-year-old girl at a Montgomery bus stop. In the ensuing days, Rosa Jordan, a black woman riding a Montgomery bus, is shot in both legs while riding the bus; a sniper fires into a city bus just a week later; and various churches and homes are bombed, including a bundle of dynamite found on King’s porch that failed to explode. King used that moment to share a vision with his congregation that he had received a year earlier, in January 1956, after the Montgomery Bus Boycott had just begun. Selby identifies these moments, culminating in
a Sunday sermon in January 1957, as the defining moment of King’s public life as a civil rights leader. In this sermon, King delivers nearly the exact final statement that we hear in his final public oration, “I’ve Been to the Mountaintop,” more than eleven years before the Memphis sanitation strikes.

It is important to remember that Montgomery was a local movement. King was new to the community and merely one of many public figures in Montgomery, amongst whom there were cliques and resentment over roles in the emerging movement. But the movement was part of a much more extensive and troubling history of segregated travel in America. The Montgomery bus boycott prepared the way for modern civil rights movement but it did not eliminate the difficulties of bridging long-standing divisions and struggles. By the 1960s, local buses had been desegregated in 47 Southern cities but more than half of the region’s local bus lines remained legally segregated. In the Deep South, Jim Crow transit prevailed. In early 1957, King and others predicted that the Montgomery experience would serve as a catalyst for a region-wide movement of nonviolent direct action. Strategically, then, in the 1960s, civil rights leaders were able to use the Cold War to their advantage by drawing attention to the “international vulnerability of a nation that failed to practice what it preached on matters of race and democracy.”

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Birmingham

In the years that followed the Montgomery Bus Boycotts, King’s public persona and role as the movement’s central voice became more distinct. Addressing the annual Institute on Nonviolence and Social Change in Montgomery, King noted, “The road from the Egypt of slavery to the Canaan of freedom is an often lonely and meandering road surrounded by prodigious hilltops of opposition and gigantic mountains of evil.”28 In an address delivered on September 23, 1959, King further accentuates this idea when he notes “the flight from the Egypt of slavery to the glorious promised land is always temporarily interrupted by a bleak and desolate wilderness with its prodigious mountains of opposition and gigantic hilltops of evil.”29 “Keep moving,” King urged students at Spelman College in Atlanta on April 10, 1960, “Move out of these mountains that impede our progress […] we must keep moving.”30 Building on the momentum of the Montgomery Bus Boycotts, the people of the civil rights movement staged Sit-Ins in Greensboro and the Freedom Rides in 1961. And in April and May of 1963, the Birmingham marches became the “climactic moment in the history of the civil rights movement.”31


31 Selby, Rhetoric of Freedom, 137.
The marches challenged the city’s economic interests and its political leadership, provoking the city’s racist commissioner of public safety, Theophilus Eugene “Bull” Connor, and in turn, the moral outrage of the nation, as they watched Connor’s police force use water canons and dogs on nonviolent protestors. King brings these tensions into perspective, particularly in the movement’s relation to the Exodus, by equating their experiences of opposition with the wilderness experience of ancient Israel: “You don’t get to the Promised Land without going through the wilderness.”32 In particular, the Birmingham campaign demonstrated the nonviolent strategy of the movement. As I argued earlier in this chapter, Selby positions the significance of Birmingham around the theme of the journey, built around a collection of words like climbing, walking, rolling, moving, and going

Initially, the demonstrations were part of a larger boycott of the city’s segregated department stores. In stages, small groups of protestors staged sit-ins and picketed and were promptly arrested by Connor’s police force. Progressively, the march came to define the movement. The first official march occurred on Saturday, April 6, and included around thirty volunteers, all of whom were arrested. On April 7, leaders led a second march to the downtown section, where Connor’s police dogs met them, resulting in a violent confrontation that received substantial television coverage and national attention. One of the defining marches of the campaign occurred on May 2, 1963, when hundreds of children, some as young as elementary school children, joined the marches, resulting in the arrest of more than a thousand people. The overcrowded jails forced

Connor into desperate measures, using water canons and more police dogs to turn back protestors. Selby succinctly, and aptly, defines that fortitude of the people, “All told, the protestors managed to stage a march every day from the beginning of the campaign until the city leaders finally capitulated to their demands just over one month later.” More importantly, for Selby, the Birmingham campaign represented the defining moment in the movement’s rhetorical history. Likewise, I come alongside Selby in arguing that the march, the road, was the most defining feature of the movement. More particularly, though, I extend Selby’s rhetorical analysis of the Exodus to an equally compelling mythic vision, one that would be essential in actualizing the freedom struggle as defined by the Exodus, the rhetoric of the Samaritan on the Jericho Road.

4.2.4 Let Freedom Ring

In addition to the marches, the soul of the movement might also be located in the freedom songs. Building on claims I established briefly in chapter two and more substantially in chapter three, here, I illustrate how the theme of movement and the road were prominent rhetorical features of the freedom songs in a manner similar to the spirituals. In the spirituals, which were powerful mythic tools for the slaves, deeply connected to themes of bondage and deliverance, the theme of movement became a ubiquitous theme:

When slaves sang of movement, tentative or bold, they sang of moving away from the place of their slavery. The essential message was one of determination and inevitability. They sang, ‘I can’t stay behind,’ asked ‘who will rise and go with me,’ warned ‘no man can hinder me,’ promised ‘I ain’t got long to stay

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33 Selby, Rhetoric of Freedom, 142.
34 Selby, Rhetoric of Freedom, 138.
here,’ and ‘I don’t expect to stay much longer here.’ The message was ‘I’m bound to go.’ Slaves proclaimed themselves willing, according to their songs, to travel under difficult conditions.\(^{35}\)

Like the spirituals, the freedom songs became a form of rhetorical resistance, the songs functioning both as individual poetic and ritual expressions of mythic meaning and at the same time, communal expressions of their collective identity. The marches and the freedom songs were synecdochic, more than a metaphor or a causal ritual of passing time. Similar to the mythic nature of the blues, the freedom songs were social tools, myths around which the people cohered and acted, with the road serving as one of its most revolutionary symbols. In an interview with King, he attributes the success of the movement to its music:

> In a sense the freedom songs are the soul of the movement. Consider, in World War II, *Praise the Lord and Pass the Ammunition*, and in World War I, *Over There* and *Tipperary*, and during the Civil War, *Battle Hymn of the Republic* and *John Brown’s Body*. A Negro song anthology would include sorrow songs, shouts for joy, battle hymns, and anthems. Since slavery, the Negro has sung through his struggle in America. *Steal Away* and *Go Down, Moses* were the songs of faith and inspiration, which were sung on the plantations. For the same reasons the slaves sang, Negroes today sing freedom songs, for we, too, are in bondage. We sing out our determination that “We shall overcome, black and white together, we shall overcome someday.”\(^{36}\)

There is a hint of an ultimate order in King’s reference to overcoming. That being, a move from the dialectic of white and black toward together. Along this route, the freedom songs functioned *psychagogically* to lead the soul toward the Good—the Mountaintop. In a similar tone but with different words, King further substantiates the importance of song:

> In a sense the freedom songs are the soul of the movement. […] I have stood in a meeting with hundreds of youngsters and joined in while they sang, “Ain’t Gonna

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\(^{35}\) Quoted in Selby, *Rhetoric of Freedom*, 37. See also \(^{36}\) King, “Playboy Interview,” 348.
Let Nobody Turn Me Round.” It is not just a song; it is a resolve. A few minutes later, I have seen those same youngsters refuse to turn around before a pugnacious Bull Connor in command of men armed with power hoses. These songs bind us together, give us courage together, and help us to march together.37

King’s language reflects the tone of my own argument when he says, “These songs bind us together, giving us courage together, and help us march together.” Here, King gives clear indication of the mythic role, in the Burkean sense that I have set forth, of the marches and freedom songs. Additionally, thinking back on Burke’s “Revolutionary Symbolism in America,” King’s language gives further credence to the freedom songs as myth through the secondary reality or symbol of “the people,” along with the march or the road as its primal reality. King notes, “They can stop the leaders, but they can’t stop the people.”38

To be more specific, here, I demonstrate the rhetorical significance of the road in the freedom songs, and as such, to the movement and the marches. “Stand up and rejoice! A great day is here! We’re fighting Jim Crow and the victory is near! Hallelujah! I’m-a-travelin’, Hallelujah, ain’t it fine. Hallelujah! I’m-a-travelin’ down freedom’s main line!”39 During the Sit-Ins in Greensboro, songs like “Moving On” made it clear that, “Old Jim Crow’s moving on down the track, he’s got his bags and he won’t be back.”40 On the Freedom Rides, songs like “Freedom’s Comin’ And It Won’t Be Long,” declare, “On to Mississippi with speed we go, Freedom’s comin’ and it won’t be long.”41 In Albany, Georgia they sang “Come and Go With Me to That Land” and “Ain’t Gonna Let

38 Morris, Origins of the Civil Rights Movements, 258.
40 Carawan and Carawan, Sing for Freedom, 36.
41 Carawan and Carawan, Sing for Freedom, 41.
Nobody Turn Me Around.” In Birmingham, a turning point for the movement and the nation, they sang “Guide My Feet While I Run This Race,” “Hard Travelin’,” and “Ballad for Bill Moore,” based on the tune, “You’ve Got To Walk That Lonesome Valley,” in honor of Moore, a native Mississippian who was journeying on Highway 11 to present his personal plea for civil rights to Governor Ross Barnett, when he was gunned down. Other freedom road songs included “Traveling Shoes,” “Freedom Train A-Comin,” and “Murder on the Road in Alabama.” In perhaps the most prominent anthem of the civil rights movement, “We Shall Overcome,” they sang, “We’ll walk hand in hand.”

Moreover, as Selby argues, the language of the Exodus pervaded the movement’s music, providing a framework of meaning for the movement’s primary modes of collective action, the march.

Complementing this use of the journey motif to frame events in the protest was the music that played a central role in the campaign’s daily mass meetings. The ‘freedom songs,’ as they were called, powerfully heightened participants’ sense of emotional involvement in the movement’s symbolic world of ideas, participation reinforced by the interactive character of traditional African American preaching and worship.

What each of these songs reveals are not only the central importance of the march and the freedom songs, but also more importantly, how the theme of the road, actual and anagogical, rhetorical and mythical, was its ultimate inspiration. Put differently, in more theoretical language, just as the Hebrews turned to the “Songs of Ascents” en route, quite literally, upward toward Jerusalem, the Upward Way, where their encounter with the

42 Carawan and Carawan, Sing for Freedom, 8-9.
43 Selby, Rhetoric of Freedom, 15.
44 Selby, Rhetoric of Freedom, 153.
divine other inspired the mythic ideal beyond ideas, so too the people of the civil rights movement turned to freedom songs on their Upward Way toward the Promised Land.

4.2.5 Making A Way Out of No Way

As I conclude my “mental flight” through the history of African American civil rights experience, I turn our attention to the rhetorical veracity of King’s civic and sermonic discourse, which will occupy my attention for the remainder of this chapter. However, I conclude this extensive section by focusing on how the road functioned rhetorically in King’s civil rights orality, particularly in his speeches and sermons. Similar to the way in which the freedom songs are synecdochic to the march, the marches and songs are synecdochic with public oration. In essence, these three elements function as one collective discourse. Here, I focus on how orality worked in conjunction with song, spirituals and freedom songs, for instance, and the rhetorical significance of the road in/to both.

One of the challenges we face as rhetorical critics is how we account for oral discourse, something Walter Ong elucidates in *Orality and Literacy*:

> Formulas help implement rhythmic discourse […] as set expressions circulating through the mouths and ears of all […] Fixed, often rhythmically balanced, expressions of this sort and of other sorts can be found occasionally in print, indeed can be ‘looked up’ in books of saying, but in oral cultures they are not occasional. They are incessant. They form the substance of thought itself.  

More than an individual address, however, African American orality is defined by its communal nature in call-response exchanges. Robert and Linda Harrison argue that a

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failure to recognize the importance of call-response results in, “A failure to account fully for the way in which King’s presence as an orator animated his listeners to participate in his message as active performers and thus to become one with the message he presented.” According to Harrison and Harrison: [The] power of music is enhanced by interaction between group members and the audience. A lead singer provides the calls, while the group members’ responses are repetitive and supportive, often reflecting the tone and intensity of the lead singer. The power or impact of the communication is affected by this interchange.

The congregants, then, on both physical and emotional levels, are prepared through song, serving to make the congregation more cohesive. The preacher sets the process in motion and directs its progress, while the congregation provides the energy to sustain the process. This tradition had a significant impact on the style of Martin Luther King, Jr. within the tradition of Southern Baptist ministers, with timing and cadences, which he learned from his father and other ministers. Coretta Scott King writes, that the “feeling they had of oneness and unity was complete.” They experienced it in their churches. They sang songs together while marching together in the streets. They used call-response in everyday communication. The congregants were creating with King.

“The occasion marked a kind of cultural sharing with people from other cultures

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47 Harrison and Harrison, “The Call from the Mountaintop,” 165.
49 King, My Life with Martin Luther King, Jr., 240.
participating in the experience.” In other words, call-response required a give-and-take language that positioned the rhetor and the audience as one. In the *Land Where the Blues Began*, Alan Lomax writes:

During the last two hundred years, these black ministers created a highly dramatic order of service and a style of oratory of unmatched eloquence. Its beauty sheltered and consoled its hearers. Their orally composed folk sermons, which far outdo those of Reverend King, likened their oppressed congregations to the children of Israel and to the heroes of the Old Testament, thus thrilling and heartening their listeners, particularly the women. The art of the black sermon flourished especially during revival services.

To illustrate the relationship between call-response orality and the songs of the movement, Miller argues that King, like other folk preachers, traditionally ended his oral sermons (and almost every major speech) by merging his voice with the lyrics of a spiritual, hymn, or gospel song. More substantively, though, one of the most persistent themes in both is the road. For instance, consider how each of these speeches concludes with some reference to the poetic form and uses the underlying imagery of the road. In King’s “Our God is Marching On!,” and “I’ve Been to the Mountaintop,” King recites “The Battle Hymn of the Republic,” a marching song. In both King’s “If the Negro Wins, Labor Wins,” “American Dream,” and “I Have a Dream,” he punctuates the address

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50 Harrison and Harrison, “The Call from the Mountaintop,” 177.
51 Wolfgang Mieder, ‘Making a Way Out of No Way’: Martin Luther King’s Sermonic Proverbial Rhetoric (New York: Peter Lang, 2010), 6.
with the spiritual “Free at Last,” where: “Way down yonder in the graveyard walk, Me
and my Jesus going to meet and talk. [For] Tho’t my soul would rise and fly.” In “Give
Us the Ballot—We Will Transform the South,” King recites James Weldon Johnson’s
poem: “Though who has brought us thus far on the way; […] Keep us forever in the path,
we pray.” And in “Where Do We Go From Here?,” King sings “We Shall Overcome.”
As Mieder argues, this “blending” of song and sermon helps give discursive power to
King’s discourse. Subsequently, when we consider that by 1957, King delivered more
than two hundred speeches and sermons a year, and even more as the movement
progressed, and in light of the aforementioned importance of the mythology of the road in
the marches and freedom songs, it is no wonder then that King’s sermonic discourse was
preeminently concerned with the archetype of the road.

On their own merit, though, King’s speeches and sermons were enamored with
the road, which King used rhetorically in the traditional sense of persuasion, but more
importantly, psychagogically, to lead souls toward a more just society along the Upward
Way. To demonstrate this, I look to Wolfgang Mieder’s *Making A Way Out of No Way*,
which examines King’s proverbial rhetoric and aptly frames the central theme of the

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56 King, “American Dream,” in *A Testament of Hope: The Essential Writings and
57 King, “I Have a Dream,” in *A Testament of Hope: The Essential Writings and
58 Carl F. Ellis, Jr., *Free at Last? The Gospel in the African-American Experience*
(Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 44.
59 The verses are from Johnson’s famous poem set to music, “Life Every Voice
and Sing, otherwise known as the Negro national anthem. See Martin Luther King, Jr.,
“Give Us the Ballot—We Will Transform the South,” in *A Testament of Hope: The
Essential Writings and Speeches of Martin Luther King Jr.*, ed. James M. Washington
movement’s discourse—making a way out of no way. In fact, one can apprehend this clarity by looking at the many book titles written about momentous moments and figures in the movement, King’s Stride Toward Freedom and Where Do We Go from Here, along with Stewart Burns’ To the Mountaintop, being examples.

In Mieder’s analysis of King’s six thousand pages of published texts, proverbs about the road and the other are quite prevalent: “love your enemies” (53 times); “all men are created equal” (36); “have a long way to go” (14); “have come a long way” (14); “am I my brother’s keeper?” (8); “on the move” (8); “join hands” (7); “love your neighbor as yourself” (7); “making a way out of now way” (5); and “to go down the line” (3) are just some of the instances. It is important to acknowledge that though King draws upon the past for many of these images, he is explicitly focused on the future: “Realizing that the end of the road towards racial justice is still far off. King exhibits an incredible faith in the future, with his strong belief in a benevolent God giving him the strength to continue on the long and treacherous way that lies ahead.”

Mieder notes that King’s repeated use of “way” phrases makes clear that he was ever on the lookout for metaphors to add to imagery in his messages, suggestive of Burke’s “way in” methodology. Moreover, Rosenberg argues that repetitious words and phrases from Biblical stories enhance both the effectiveness and credibility of orally delivered sermons. In turn, the pervasive use and reference to the mythology of the road becomes a distinct and important element in King’s discourse, imbuing it with psychagogic character. For King, “We have come a long, long way in the struggle to make justice and freedom a reality in

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60 Mieder, Making a Way Out of No Way, 174.
our nation, but we still have a long, long way to go. And it is this realistic position that I would like to use as a basis for our thinking together,” implicating the essentialism of movement in actualizing their ultimate aims.62 In all, King’s repertoire of proverbial rhetoric derives from more than four hundred and thirty different texts, with a proverbial statement almost every five pages. As a preacher, naturally, proverbs comprise a large portion of King’s discourse. Mieder makes a significant contribution to our understanding of King’s rhetoric. In the following section, I attempt to fill an additional gap in our understanding of King’s sermonic rhetoric, and in the civil rights movement, more broadly, by exploring the psychagogic dimensions of the parable of the Good Samaritan—a representative anecdote of the mythic ideal envisioned at the highest echelon of the Upward Way along the Jericho Road, and enacted by King throughout the civil rights movement, on the Downward Way.

4.3 The Jericho Road

But a Samaritan, as he journeyed, came to where he was, and when he saw him, he had compassion. He went to him and bound up his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he set him on his own animal and brought him to an inn and took care of him. And the next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper, saying, ‘Take care of him, and whatever more you spend, I will repay you when I come back.’ Which of these three, do you think, proved to be a neighbor?63

Up to this point, I have narrated a “mental flight” through African American history in relation to the road, situating the archetype of the road along the Upward Way of the civil rights movement. I am now in a position to articulate the vision that King acquired on the “mountaintop.” As such, in the remainder of this chapter I ruminate on

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the importance of the Downward Way. More specifically, I detail the form and function of King’s Samaritan Ethic. To that end, taking a cue from both Mieder’s analysis of proverbial rhetoric and Selby’s rhetorical assessment of the Exodus, I provide an analysis of King’s parabolic rhetoric and a rhetorical assessment of the Good Samaritan. Specifically, in his essay, “Literature as Equipment for Living,” Burke highlights the active role that proverbs play in our living, “admonition, solace, vengeance, foretelling, instruction, charting, all for the direct bearing that such acts have upon matters of welfare.” Parables function with a similar rhetorical purpose. Derived from the Greek work *parabolē*, which means to place side by side—from *para*, meaning beside, and *bole*, meaning to throw (from the verb *ballein*), parables were the foremost pedagogical tool of Jesus, and as such, found prominent placement in King’s rhetoric. In essence, I argue the Good Samaritan parable is more than some occasional sermon filler or anecdote in King’s sermonic discourse. Rather, it is King’s vision for how to enact the ethos of the Upward Way. It is, in short, a representative anecdote for psychagogic rhetoric, while at the same time, working to establish an ultimate vocabulary of the road and of race.

4.3.1 The Samaritan in the Biblical Narrative

Martin Luther King, Jr. is one of the most notable, memorable, and important orators of the twentieth century, and certainly in American history. As to be expected, then, there has been considerable critical attention given to his public and private life. In particular, the discourse around King is almost exclusively imbued with the Exodus

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myth, with King as the Black Moses. To be pointed, as enriching as this discourse is, it also operates as a trained incapacity, orienting our understanding of King around one dominant discourse. In response, I situate the parable in the context of the biblical narrative of Luke, then trace it through King’s discourse, and finally, demonstrate its rhetorical function in an examination of his final public oration, “I’ve Been to the Mountaintop.” To be more specific, not only is the parable an ideal representative of the grand convergence of human relations, it is also an ideal summation of King’s acts, his psychagogic discourse. It is also a perspective by incongruity that guides us through the fixed and reasoned progression of a move from the self to the other toward the “other self.”

First and foremost, the parable should be interpreted with caution. Because it is so widely understood in the popular imagination, it is prone to presumption and over simplification. As such, it should not be over allegorized, as it was by the early church, or seen as being simplistic in meaning, thus rendering it unworthy of Jesus’ attention. Additionally, the parable should be read as part of a collection of parables that comprise an extensive travel section65 that is found only in the book of Luke.66 The central focus of both, the parable and the travel section, is the journey to Jerusalem. It is, literally, the Upward Way that leads toward the divine Good for Jews. In this section, Luke focuses exclusively on Jesus’ travels to Jerusalem67 and other journeys as well.68 Moreover, the section is also a collection of road encounters with the other—the Samaritan parable

being my focal point. Though most scholars agree there is some theological significance related to the journey motif, there is no consensus as to what that is. For further clarification, though, the parable is peculiar to Luke. For instance, in both Matthew and Mark there are clear parallels to the conversation with the lawyer that introduce the parable in Luke, and in particular in relation to the summation of the Law as a love for God and neighbor. However, in both Matthew and Mark, it is Jesus who gives the summary of the Law, whereas in Luke, it is the lawyer who sums the Law. Regardless of the source, Luke’s account is the only instance of the Good Samaritan parable.

In order to understand the full implications of this parable and its significance to King’s discourse, and my claims, we must understand both the geographical and theological significance of the Jericho Road. Geographically, the route stretches more than seventeen miles from Jerusalem, descending more than three thousand two hundred feet in elevation, to Jericho. Jerusalem was the highest city in Palestine. The Jericho Road moved upward, both literally and metaphorically, indicative of the life “lived upward.”

For perspective, this is the same road I outlined in chapter one, that is, the *shiray hammaloth*, or “Songs of Ascents.” These were the poetic songs that the Hebrew pilgrims sang on their ascent to the Passover, Pentecost, and Tabernacle festivals—myths in the sense that I have intended them, socio-theological tools of comfort and perspective that function *psychagogically*, leading the soul toward the Good/God, a divine encounter with the other. Similar to the way in which Selby roots the movement in the myth of the Exodus, I reiterate that Jewish identity was forged on the road, on the road out of Egypt.

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69 See Matthew 22:34-40.
and in forty years of wilderness wandering. As such, this parable is set against an important mythic backdrop. Theologically, Luke’s travel section accentuates the importance of both Jerusalem, as the destination of the journey, and the Jericho Road, as an inevitable and important element in that journey. More specifically, one should know that Jericho is significant as a point of entry for “taking the promised land.” More specifically, Joshua, which is the Hebrew spelling and pronunciation of the name “Jesus,” a thousand years before Jesus, and Jesus, both use Jericho to “provide a visible demonstration of the glory of God and the imminence of salvation (the collapse of the walls for Joshua, giving sight to Bartimaeus for Jesus). And each of them rescues a ‘lost’ soul in Jericho.73

To begin, specifically, the parable should be interpreted as being told in direct response to a series of five questions exchanged between a Torah lawyer and Jesus. The story begins with a question from the lawyer, is followed by two counter questions from Jesus, then a fourth question from the lawyer, and a concluding question from Jesus. The parable begins in verse twenty-five:

And behold, a lawyer stood up to put him to the test, saying, “Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?”

To be clear, in this sense, the term lawyer does not mean secular law, as we might understand it, but in the Jewish sense, that is, the first five books of the Old Testament—the Pentateuch. As such, the lawyer would have been a man interested in and knowledgeable about religious matters. It should also be noted that questions pertaining to the essence of the Law and eternal life were common in ancient Judaism. In this

parable, in particular, the lawyer stands up, which implies that the people were seated, meaning that Jesus was teaching. Thematically, the lawyer is clearly more interested in what kind of answer Jesus will give more so than in a genuine inquiry into truth. And moreover, the lawyer seems to place special emphasis upon human responsibility in the attainment of eternal life. In response, then, given that Jesus’ interlocutor is a lawyer, it is not surprising that Jesus refers him back to the Law for his answer with two particular counter questions in verses twenty-six through twenty-eight:

He said to him, “What is written in the Law? How do you read it?” And he answered, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself.” And he said to him, “You have answered correctly; do this, and you will live.

Uniquely, Jesus commends the lawyer’s reply, summatng the Law through the four faculties of the heart, soul, strength, and mind, one in which the whole of human nature is implied, as a love for God and neighbor, which Jesus also used to sum up the Law. However, neighbor, in this instance, means more than a person who lives nearby. In both content and tone, the thought is community. Jesus’ response is, “Do this, and you will live.” Though this could be construed as a commendation of works, it is actually a rejection of works. In other words, it is not what we do that matters, rather, it is our attitude. Put differently, the lawyer simply wanted a set of rules to comply with. That is not Jesus’ meaning. According to the Law, the soul should be in alignment with the attitude we have toward God, and as such, toward our neighbor too. Here, we come to the

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74 We also see this emphasis in the parable of The Rich Ruler toward the conclusion of this travel section in Luke: 18:18-34.
75 See Deuteronomy 6:5; Leviticus 19:18; and Mark 12:30.
parable in question, which is a direct response to the fourth question, asked by the lawyer, beginning in verses twenty-nine through thirty-two:

But he, desiring to justify himself, said to Jesus, ‘And who is my neighbor?’ Jesus replied, ‘A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and he fell among robbers, who stripped him and beat him and departed, leaving him half dead. Now by chance a priest was going down that road, and when he saw him he passed by on the other side. So, likewise, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side.’

We have arrived at the turning point and the essence of the parable. To be clear, the parable is often interpreted as an address to the lawyer’s first question, as to what one must do to inherit eternal life. But this is inaccurate. The parable is told in response to the question about who is neighbor. Plainly, the lawyer wanted to know how far neighborliness went, perhaps applying it only to the nation of Israel alone; the idea of love towards all humanity had not yet reached them. According to Morris, the traveler in the story is clearly a Jew, but the stress is simply placed upon the fact that he is a man. More importantly, it is the need of the man that is important, not his nationality. Also, Jesus’ focus centers not on the robbers but on the serious ill treatment of the man who has been left half dead. As the characters approach, note also the direction that the characters are moving, downward, which means they would be coming from Jerusalem. This is crucially important, for if they had been traveling upward toward Jerusalem, we might be more understanding of their strict observance of the Law.

As the priest approaches, not only does he not assist, but he passes by on the other side of the road, perhaps fearing that if he touched the man he would incur ceremonial defilement, which the Law forbade. Likewise, the Levite sees the man and also passes

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77 See Leviticus 21.
by on the other side. In both instances, the rule of Law superseded the need of the individual in need. This clearly demonstrates, to the lawyer in particular, that though he may have understood the word of Law, through his attitude and his actions he demonstrated that he did not truly know the Law. In response, Jesus offers a third character into the parable in verses thirty-three through thirty-five:

    But a Samaritan, as he journeyed, came to where he was, and when he saw him, he had compassion. He went to him and bound up his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he set him on his own animal and brought him to an inn and took care of him. And the next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper, saying, ‘Take care of him, and whatever more you spend, I will repay you when I come back.’

Most assuredly, the audience in this instance would have been expecting an Israelite layman to follow the examples of the clerics. And it is here where the substantive meaning of the parable becomes most apparent. Jesus’ introduction of the Samaritan was devastating.78 Traditionally, there was deep animosity between Jews and Samaritans. In context, Samaritans were a racially mixed group of partly Jewish and partly Gentile people, disdained by both Jews and non-Jews. In the even more ancient world of Assyria, which brought foreign people to settle in Samaria in 722 B.C., the Samaritans intermarried in Mesopotamian colonies with some Jews and remained in the area after the Babylonian exile. In short, Jews and Samaritans were enemies. For perspective, though, if an African American had to enact the Samaritan Ethic, it would mean giving considerable care, and at great cost, to a half dead Bull Connor, of the infamous Birmingham march. For the lawyer, this must have been vexing.

    To be most explicit, it was not simply that the Samaritan had compassion, but rather, it was the extravagant demonstration of his compassion that warrants attention.

Also, the details surrounding the care offered to the wounded man should be read as realistic rather than allegorical. For instance, he attended to the need of the half dead man on the spot, using his own wine, his own oil, likely his own clothes for bandages, setting the man on his own beast, which means that the Samaritan had to walk, and brought him to an inn to be taken care of. Moreover, the Samaritan not only bore the cost of the care but also gave enough money for a considerable length of time, even offering to reimburse the innkeeper for additional costs he might incur. To be clear, then, the significance of the Samaritan as an ethic should not be interpreted simply or only as helping someone in need, but rather, the prodigal nature of that compassion, and this, in defiance of traditional dialectical hostility, revealing the workings of an ultimate vocabulary of race that transcends the tensions between self and other.

In other words, the parable is centrally concerned with the Samaritan’s compassion rather than the clericals lack of compassion. Jesus wants us to look first to the subject of neighborly love (Samaritan) rather than the object (half dead man). In conclusion to the parable, Jesus ends the sequence by asking the lawyer a final parting question in verses thirty-six and thirty-seven:

Which of these three, do you think, proved to be a neighbor to the man who fell among the robbers?” He said, “The one who showed him mercy.” And Jesus said to him, “You go, and do likewise.”

For Blomberg: “Specifying the road helps the audience to identify with the acute danger of the Judean wilderness and with the plight of the man left for dead. The direction of travel also highlights the guilt of the clerics. Whatever ritual purity they might have wanted to protect en route to Jerusalem, priestly service there (presuming they thought the man dead and thus unclean) afforded them no excuse for their neglect when they were
heading in the other direction.” Additionally, because Jesus redirects the lawyer’s question about neighbor back to the lawyer, “Who proved neighbor to the man,” one common complaint centers on the idea that Jesus does not actually answer the lawyer’s question, “Who is my neighbor?” So what is the answer? The answer lies in the parable as a whole. As possibilities go, Jesus is either trying to instruct the mutuality of neighborliness or believes the lawyer has asked the wrong question. I contend that the parable as a whole defines neighborliness based only on needs, nothing more. So much so, that even someone as vile as a Samaritan, in the eyes of a Jew, would be neighbor.

Craig L. Blomberg contends that similar Old Testament stories about mercy and considerate Samaritans may have inspired some of the imagery in this parable. However, as a thematic reference, much of the book of Luke is concerned with the relationship between rich and poor. For Luke, Jesus came to preach the good news to the poor and to give account for the dangers of riches. The parable of the Good Samaritan embodies this theme. Of note, though, is that the central character is not lifted above either of the other characters. The man left half dead can simply speak to which of the passers-by proved neighborly. What we learn from this parable is that one may in fact uphold the letter of the Law and actually break the spirit of the Law. Religious affections

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do not guarantee anything. With this vision of radical neighborliness, King rhetorically, *psychagogically*, provides a prototype for collective action.

**4.3.2 The Samaritan in King’s Sermonic Discourse**

Having outlined elements of the meaning and significance of the parable of the Good Samaritan, I now place King’s “mountaintop” vision on the Jericho Road within King’s civic and sermonic discourse. To be clear, my objective is to demonstrate, explicitly, through a fixed and reasoned progression, those speeches and sermons that carry out this vision. Put differently, these select discourses are indicative of *psychagogia*, King leading the souls of the people, not white and black so much as, the people, Americans of all creeds and colors. To these ends, and to maintain a clear line of sight toward my final analysis of King’s “I’ve Been to the Mountaintop,” I focus on seven uses of the parable of the Good Samaritan, arguing that the Samaritan Ethic is crucial to the movement, from the earliest days of the movement on through his final public oration.

First, on a Sunday morning in November of 1955, King delivered “The One-Sided Approach of the Good Samaritan” to his Dexter congregants, just weeks before the Montgomery Bus Boycotts ensued. In this sermon, King offers a critical look at the Samaritan that we do not see nearly as much, hardly at all, in his other uses of the parable. On one hand, King charges his listeners to be like the Samaritan, compassionate for victims of injustice. That is, without a doubt, social responsibility includes the sort of action that the Samaritan embodies. On the other hand, though, King criticizes the Samaritan both for his inability and unwillingness to confront the social *causes* of
injustice that would lead to more substantial social change. In other words, King uses the parable to argue that the Samaritan does not quite attain true neighborliness. In essence, then, King argues for the exemplariness of social responsibility in the Samaritan while also criticizing the Samaritan for not seeking to “tear down unjust conditions and build anew instead of patching things up. It seeks to clear the Jericho road of its robbers and caring for the victims of robbery.”

Second, King likely delivered this sermon titled “It’s Hard to Be a Christian” to his Dexter congregation on February 5, 1956. I suggest likely, because we have only the sermon outline and allusions to particular events. For instance, we know that on the evening of January 30, 1956, while King was addressing a mass meeting at First Baptist Church, his home was bombed. In this sermon outline, as the title suggests, King clearly connects such circumstances to the Christian life. Specifically, King argues that we learn to put ourselves at the service of God and others, whatever the cost. For King, meaningful self-denial leads us to “subordinate our clamoring egos to the pressing concerns of God’s Kingdom.” In words that anticipate those in “On Being a Good Neighbor,” from his book Strength to Love, King stresses that the life of the Christian include dangerous and costly altruism, that the “I” be immersed in deep relationship with the “we.”

Acknowledging the difficulty of this task, King turns to the parable of the Good

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Samaritan, introducing us to King’s essential contribution to the parable. As I indicated previously, the parable is structured around a sequence of five questions. Here, King adds two additional questions for consideration to their particular cultural moment, asking what will happen to this man if I do not stop to help, rather than, what will happen to me if I stop to help this man. Throughout his civic and sermonic discourse, King returns to this parable and these two questions, forming the basis upon which King’s Upward Way toward justice can be actualized.

Third, I consider King’s “Pilgrimage to Nonviolence,” chapter in his September 1958 book *Stride Toward Freedom*, an account of the Montgomery Bus Boycott, which is also excerpted as “An Experiment in Love” in *A Testament of Hope*. In this chapter, King diagnoses the sickness facing American communities and prescribes its medicine.

> The nonviolent resister would contend that in the struggle for human dignity the oppressed people of the world must not succumb to the temptation of becoming bitter [...] Along the way of life, someone must have sense enough and morality enough to cut off the chain of hate. This can only be done by projecting the ethic of love to the center of our lives.\(^87\)

Adding to this, King makes more distinct what he intends by “ethic of love,” by distinguishing between *eros*, *philia*, and *agape* love, focusing on the latter. Drawing from his theological studies, King defines *agape* as a disinterested love that seeks not one’s own good, but the good of his neighbor.\(^88\) “It is an entirely ‘neighbor-regarding concern for others’, which discovers the neighbor in every man it meets, [making] no distinction between friends and enemy; it is directed toward both.”\(^89\) In other words, neighborly love, as I outlined in the biblical narrative, does not distinguish between worthy and unworthy

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\(^87\) King, *Stride Toward Freedom*, 104.  
\(^88\) See 1 Corinthians 10:24.  
\(^89\) King, *Stride Toward Freedom*, 105.
people—it responds to the need, often times at great cost to the lover. In essence, though, King gives this love ethic a specific mythic face—the Good Samaritan.

Fourth, in an Easter sermon delivered on March 29, 1959, titled “A Walk Through the Holy Land,” King concentrates on two particular themes relevant to this project—the road as a means of encountering others, and in particular, the Jericho Road upon which the parable of the Good Samaritan is based. Straightaway, in relation to his own journey to Jerusalem, and upon seeing important roads like the Damascus Road where Saul of Tarsus was blinded and the Jericho Road of the Samaritan parable, King stresses the importance of the road as an encounter with others:

This is always one of the interesting things about traveling, that you learn to know people. You meet people of all races and of all cultures and you tend to be lifted above provincialism, and chauvinism, and what the sociologists call ethnocentrism. You come to see a unity in mankind. If I had my way, I would recommend that all of the students who can afford it to go to college five years. They would study in that college four years, and they would use their tuition one year and their board and what have you to travel abroad. I think this is the greatest education that can ever come to an individual. I think if more of our white brothers in the South had traveled a little more, many of our problems would be solved today. So often we live in our little shells because we’ve never risen above the province. We’ve never risen above sectionalism. And so it was a great pleasure to meet people, various sections of the world, various sections of our own nation.90

Alongside King, as I outlined in the epigraph and prologue of this dissertation, we find distinctly similar elements at critical points in history. In the ancient world, Homer’s Odyssey begins with singing of the many peoples encountered. In the modern period, Rene Descartes’s Discourse on Method accounts for both people encountered and roads traversed. During the days of early Reconstruction, upon his own trip to the Holy Land,

Mark Twain wrote, “Travel is fatal to prejudice, bigotry, and narrow-mindedness. And many of our people need it sorely on these accounts. Broad wholesome, charitable views of men and things cannot be had from vegetating in one little corner of the earth all one’s lifetime.”

In turning back to King, he then recalls his journey to Samaria, reflecting on the days when Jews had no dealings with the Samaritans, perhaps eerily so in relation to race relations in America. He then gives specific detail to the road: “And to think of the Jericho road that Jesus had talked about, that winding road. And when you travel on that road you can see why a man could easily be robbed on that road. Jesus told a parable about it one day.” King even briefly alludes to perhaps one of the earliest examples of nonviolent road protest, mentioning how the walls of Jericho fell after the people encircled it for seven days. Then King turns to the Mount of Olives and the Garden of Gethsemane, where he gives some poetic detail to the civil rights struggle:

Isn’t it tragic and dark in life when even those people that we have confidence in and that we believe in and we call our friends, fail to understand us? And in the most difficult moments of life they leave us going the road alone. This is the story of life, though. So Gethsemane is not only a spot on the map. Gethsemane is an experience in the heart and the soul. Gethsemane is something that we go through every day. For whenever our friends deceive us, we face Gethsemane. Whenever we face great moral decisions in life and we find that we must stand there and people turn their backs on us and they think we are crazy, we are facing Gethsemane. Gethsemane is a story that comes to all of us in life. We looked at this garden, and all of these thoughts came back.

Comparably, the Jericho road is not merely a place either, but rather, an experience in the heart and soul. Jericho is something that the African American endured every day during

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91 Mark Twain, *The Innocents Abroad or the New Pilgrim’s Progress* (London: Wordsworth, 2010), 427.
92 King, “A Walk Through the Holy Land,” 166.
93 See Joshua 6.
the civil rights movement, with two distinctions. First, in the parable, the half dead victim would become a marginalized black man rather than a dominant (likely Jewish) man, with no apparent Samaritan equal in sight. And second, in all of these instances of King’s use of the parable, he is confronting the African American audience, charging that they be the one who embody the ethic of love—that should even the racist Bull Connor of Birmingham be lying half dead in the road, to live out the Samaritan Ethic.

In reflecting upon his encounters with actual and mythic others on his own journey, and those of others, King makes distinct that being obedient to the unenforceable law of love is not something that an enforceable law could ever produce. For King, these are the people who propel history, like Jesus of Nazareth, who embodied the unenforceable by reminding us that we should: “Go the second mile. If they compel you to go the first, go the second.”95 This Jesus who had no place to lay his head96 and was buried in a borrowed tomb.97 In sum, King uses the road, particular roads, as a method of action for moving the minds, bodies, and souls of others, psychagogically, toward a better life—embodied in their march toward the doctrine of righteousness that was crucified in 1896 (Plessy v. Ferguson) and resurrected in 1954 (Brown v. Board of Education): “And this is the hope that can keep us going and keep us from getting frustrated as we walk along the way of life.”98

Fifth, in “A Tough Mind and a Tender Heart,” from August 30, 1959, King urges his congregation to consider the various characteristics of the hardhearted, who only engage in a crude utilitarian love. That person only loves him or herself, has no genuine

95 King, “A Walk Through the Holy Land,” 171. See also Matthew 5:41.
96 See Matthew 8:20.
97 See John 19:38-42.
98 King, “A Walk Through the Holy Land,” 175.
compassion, and is unconcerned about the misfortunes of others, passing by individual’s everyday without ever really seeing them. The hardhearted individual never sees people as people. Instead, they become “objects and impersonal cogs in some ever turning wheel.” It is here that King binds his exhortations about a concern for others with Jesus’s parabolic instruction. He gives the people an illustration of the dialectical tension between the hardhearted and the tenderhearted. But King also gives them a mythic image that goes beyond these tensions—an ultimate order. He gives them an image of a person on a dangerous road, a Samaritan (the racial other), transcending those tensions. King asserts: “The Good Samaritan was good because he was [...] tender hearted enough to have compassion for a wounded brother on life’s highway.” For King, life is a highway or road on which we will most likely find ourselves in need. When we do, if we see the person rather than the need, we will pass by on the other side. But if we see the need as ultimate, following the sequence of the self to the other toward the other-self as neighbor, then the Samaritan Ethic on the Jericho Road leads us toward the Good—the Upward Way. Taking a cue from the sermon title, King charges his congregants to be tough minded but tender hearted, as if to resound: “Behold, I am sending you out as sheep in the midst of wolves, so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves.”

Sixth, on February 28, 1960, King delivered “The Three Dimensions of a Complete Life” to the congregants of Friendship Baptist Church as part of a Southern


100 King, “A Tough Mind and a Tender Heart,” 376.

101 See Matthew 10:16.
Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) fundraising trip to California, expanding upon a sermon he delivered as a candidate for Dexter’s pastorate in 1954, which was then subsequently published in 1959 as *The Measure of a Man*. About midway through the speech, King focuses his attention on the “breadth of life.” That is, that “dimension in which we are concerned about others […] outward concern for the welfare of others. And I submit to you this morning that an individual hasn’t begun to live until he can rise above the narrow confines of his individualistic concerns to the broader concerns of all humanity.” Then, King proceeds along the Upward Way once more, telling us how and why the Samaritan embodied the “breadth of life.” Specifically, King indicates he was good because he rose above the length of life to incorporate its breadth, and further, that he was great because he possessed the “mental equipment for a dangerous altruism,” moving above self-concern toward a broader concern for his brother—that’s the power of the breadth of life. In a way, King is engaging in simple humanitarian mathematics, we must add breadth to length, the other to the self, and in so doing, we might be able to actually address and overcome our problems rather than perpetuating them. When viewed in relation to King’s broader discursive presence, this also gives us an insight on the way King embodies this idea, in various sermons and speeches, in which he emphasizes his lack of concern for the length of his life. Additionally, in this speech-sermon, uttered more than eight years before King’s final speech, we begin to see the outline for the Samaritan section of “I’ve Been to the Mountaintop.” Similarly, we also get a sense of

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his awareness of the dangers along life’s roadside, that he does not know what the future holds and that he may not see his “three score years and ten.” For this reason, we cannot put our ultimate faith in a long life, or economic security, or America, or even Western Civilization. But rather, in the understanding that the basis of our race relation problems, as a nation and in the South, must produce the Samaritan Ethic on the Jericho Road of life: “And all I’m saying this morning is that all life is interrelated. We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, whatever affects one individual directly, it affects all indirectly.”  

Seventh, I consider the “Goodness of the Good Samaritan,” which is based on a one-page hand written sermon outline, dated November 28, 1960, exploring George Buttrick’s *The Parables of Jesus*, and which was developed into a book chapter dated between July 1962 and March 1963, in King’s *Strength to Love*. Atop the margins of his handwritten outline, King writes, “The story begins in a theological controversy and ends in a description of first aid at a roadside. It arises in a question about eternal life and works out to a payment for room and board at a hotel.”  

However, the book is where we find King’s most detailed consideration of the Good Samaritan. In the opening paragraph, King makes it clear that the goodness of the Samaritan was *not* found in either his passive commitment to an impersonal creed or a moral pilgrimage that reached its end, but rather, in his active participation of a life-saving deed and in the “love ethic by which he

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journeyed life’s highway.” Using the Samaritan parable as a thematic backdrop, King refers to life as a road or highway eight different times: “life’s highway,” “life’s roadside,” “Jericho roads of life,” “long trek up the highway of history,” “displaced on some Jericho road,” “needy at life’s roadside,” and “life’s Jericho road” twice more. And on two other occasions, King speaks of those “displaced on some Jericho road” and those “left dying on some wayside road.” Moreover, mentioning only briefly his earlier emphasis on the importance of changing the conditions that make robbery possible, perhaps more implied, King lauds the Samaritan for his altruism, framing the sermon around universal, dangerous, and excessive altruism.

Here again, King focuses on the difference between the enforceable and unenforceable laws of love in society, noting that unenforceable obligations are beyond the reach of the enforceable. King might well have turned to Paul’s letter to the church at Galatia, emphasizing the fruits of the Spirit against which there is no law—love, joy, peace, patience kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. But instead, he uses the parable of the Good Samaritan to frame the issue at hand: “The ultimate relation to the race problem lies in the willingness [of mankind] to obey the unenforceable,” noting:

No code of conduct ever persuaded a father to love his children or a husband to show affection to his wife. The law court may force him to provide bread for the family, but it cannot make him provide the bread of love. A good father is obedient to the unenforceable. The Good Samaritan represents the conscience of mankind because he also was obedient to that which could not be enforced. No law in the world could have produced such unalloyed compassion, such genuine love, and such thorough altruism.

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105 Martin Luther King, Jr., *Strength to Love* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2010), 21.


For King, the Samaritan is the embodiment of the mythic ideal—the Upward Way, transcending the dialectical tension inherent to self and other, culminating in the self/other as a way into one another: “More than ever before, my friends, men of all races and nations are today challenged to be neighborly. The call for a worldwide good-neighbor policy is more than an ephemeral shibboleth; it is the call to a way of life that will transform our imminent cosmic elegy into a psalm of creative fulfillment.”

Unique to the earlier portions of this chapter, notice how King renders his global charge for worldwide neighborliness into a song. And in his final paragraph, King frames this charge with one more road metaphor:

In our quest to make neighborly love a reality, we have, in addition to the inspiring example of the Good Samaritan, the magnanimous life of our Christ to guide us. His altruism was universal, for he thought of all [...] even publicans and sinners, as brothers. His altruism was dangerous; for he willingly traveled hazardous roads [...] His altruism was excessive, for he chose to die [...] history’s most magnificent expression of obedience to the unenforceable.

In line with my consideration of psychagogia, King recognizes that something must happen to touch both the hearts and souls of people—highlighting in a passage omitted from the published version that we all “go out with the conviction that all men are brothers, tied in a single garment of destiny.”

In bringing my exploration of King’s sermonic use of the parable of the Good Samaritan to its end, I turn to another sermon, delivered on June 3, 1958, to the

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108 King, Strength to Love, 30.
109 King, Strength to Love, 30.
Commission on Ecumenical Missions and Relations, United Presbyterian Church, U.S.A., titled “Paul’s Letter to American Christians.” In this sermon, spoken as if from the mouth (or hand) of the Apostle Paul, King urges those involved in the struggle for justice to remain nonviolent and to grow in their capacity for love, even for the oppressor, using the tension between America’s scientific and spiritual progress to accentuate his point. King notes, you have been able to carve highways through the stratosphere and build skyscrapers with prodigious towers—traveling distances in one day that it took me three months to travel. That is wonderful, however:

But America […] I wonder whether your moral and spiritual progress has been commensurate with your scientific progress. Your poet Thoreau used to talk about improved means to an unimproved end. […] You have allowed the material means by which you live to outdistance the spiritual ends for which you live. You have allowed your mentality to outrun your morality. You have allowed your civilization to outdistance your culture […] you have made the world a neighborhood, but you have failed to make of it a brotherhood. And so, America, I would urge you to bring your moral advances in line with your scientific progress.111

Furthering this charge, Paul/King urges Americans to “bridge the gulf between abject poverty and superfluous wealth112 and to “plead patiently with your brothers and tell them that this isn’t the way.”113 We still need the prophet Amos to cry out, “Let judgment roll down as waters, and righteousness as a mighty stream.”114 In moving toward this end, this better life, Paul/King reminds America that they will face hardships and persecutions for standing up for a great principle: “I can say this with some authority because my life

113 King, “Paul’s Letter to American Christians,” 343.
114 See Amos 5:24
was a continual round of persecutions. After my conversion, I was rejected [...] I was tried for heresy [...] I was jailed [...] mobbed [...] depressed [...] But yet, I am still going."

All this to say: on the grounds that both traveled hundreds of thousands of miles, enduring a great number of trials and persecutions directly related to enacting the unenforceable law of love, King can be likened to the Apostle Paul; on the grounds that both served an integral role in the liberation of their respective peoples from aspects of bondage, King can be likened to Moses; and on the grounds that both were considered outcasts by their respective hierarchical societies but radically exemplified both the attitude and actions of neighbor, King can be likened to the Samaritan. In all of these sermons, King is outlining the Samaritan Ethic, acknowledging that:

You must come to see that it is possible for a man to be self-centered in his self-denial and self-righteous in his self-sacrifice. He may be generous in order to feed his ego and pious in order to feed his pride [that] man has a tragic capacity to relegate a heightening virtue to a tragic vice. Without love, benevolence becomes egotism and martyrdom becomes spiritual pride.116

In essence, all of these thinkers recognize that despite our imperfections and the ineffectiveness of our language, often times, we must still be identified, epistemologically and ethically, with a hope for change in moving toward a better life, something King accentuates through the Samaritan Ethic.

115 King, “Paul’s Letter to American Christians,” 345. See also 2 Corinthians 11:22-30.
4.3.3 An Ultimate Vocabulary of Race

As I outlined in chapter one, throughout this dissertation, I rely on the methodological language of Burke’s Upward/Downward Way to make the phases of the ultimate order explicit. In this sequence, I argue, we move from self-knowledge to knowledge of the other toward, ultimately, the “other self,” in whom there is essentially no distinction between the other and the self. In the parable of the Good Samaritan, for example, while the self and the other engage in the parliamentary jangle of their principles and l/Laws, the mythic ideal of the neighbor fulfills and transcends the dialectical order. Moreover, King demonstrates Burkean character with his varied uses of perspective by incongruity. For instance, the rhetorical substance and force of the civil rights movement, King’s contribution in particular, is actually based on a perspective by incongruity:

I’ve always tried to be what I call militantly nonviolent […] I mean to say that a strong man must be militant as well as moderate. He must be a realist as well as an idealist. If I am to merit the trust invested in me by some of my race, I must be both of these things. This is why nonviolence is a powerful as well as a just weapon.\(^{117}\)

To be more specific, I turn to the Rhetoric of Burke to reiterate and deepen my consideration of an ultimate vocabulary for addressing the issues of race in America. In this approach, I follow an inroad paved by Bryan Crable’s look at the racial divide in America through the relationship of Ralph Ellison and Kenneth Burke, and also, having stumbled upon important mythic ideas in Ellison, turn to those as well—in particular, his “attitude of antagonistic cooperation.”\(^{118}\)

\(^{117}\) King, “Playboy Interview,” 348.
To these ends, I make explicit the ultimate order in the mythic image of the Upward Way in the sermonic and civic discourse of King. In chapter one, I outlined some of the basic interworking of these particular terms of order. In the dialectical order of race, for instance, we have two competing voices—white and black, self and other. Demoralized by the compromise, each is left “in a jangling relation with one another.” In the ultimate order, there is a guiding principal behind the diversity of voices that moves toward a design, a glimpse, whereby a “contemplative effect,” for working together, antagonistically if necessary—this is King’s Samaritan Ethic in action.

More specifically, I argue King’s use of the Samaritan Ethic is indicative of the mythic image of the Upward/Downward Way. The Samaritan Ethic in King’s discourse embodies this potential, moving along a developmental sequence of self-concern to other concern to becoming a neighborhood of brotherhood. Bearing this in mind, as I have argued in this chapter, the Downward Way is as equally important in the mythic image as the Upward. In fact, I argue that King’s sermonic discourse is a paradigm of the Downward Way, having acquired his mythic archetype of the Samaritan from the “mountaintop.” Collectively, then, the mythic image as the “principle of principles,” includes both the Upward and Downward Way, transcending the previous dialectical order. As it pertains to an ultimate order of race, we should not expect to find an antithesis between white and black, but rather, each should be treated as a way into one another. This is precisely how the Samaritan Ethic works. As I outlined in chapter one, this ultimate vocabulary moves toward the perfection of the ultimate design. In the fullest

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understanding, one gets the “immediacy of participation in a local act, yet sees in and through this act an over-all design, sees and feels the local act itself as but the partial expression of the total development.”

I contend this local act is most often exemplified by the march and substantiated through song and sermonic orality.

In conclusion, to state the matter differently, Clark argues that Burke’s Upward Way moves from self-knowledge to communication toward consummation. In this sense, King’s “mountaintop” experience enacts the Samaritan Ethic as a means of attaining and sustaining consummation, or the Beloved Community. At stake here, referring back to the language of Niebuhr, Hughes, Emerson/Ellison, and Burke/Clark, outlined in chapter one, I linger on Burke’s in particular:

True, there are mean places. Each day the news assiduously hunts them out […] But there is also the humanity of our people, the fountain of good will that keeps swelling up anew […] with this we must be identified, for otherwise the supersonic this or that, the moon shots, the great new realms of knowledge, the sheer genius of all such accomplishments, the whole thing becomes a damned lie.”

4.4 “I’ve Been to the Mountaintop”

In this section, building on my considerations of the archetype of the road in the American civil rights movement through the marches, freedom songs, call-response orality, I explore the Samaritan Ethic in King’s final public oration, “I’ve Been to the Mountaintop.” As a historical document, it gives us privileged access into the vision King acquired upon the “mountaintop,” set dramatically on a stormy night in Memphis, Tennessee, on the eve of what would become his assassination. King delivered this

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121 Burke, A Rhetoric of Motives, 195.
122 Clark, Civic Jazz, 44-5. See also Burke, “Responsibilities of National Greatness,” 50.
address at [the Bishop Circle] Mason Temple on April 3, 1968. For the sake of clarity, I focus on three particular facets of the sermon. First, I examine the “mental flight” that King journeys to begin his speech, which straightway establishes the thematic sentiments of the archetype. Second, drawing on themes from Kenneth Burke’s “Responsibilities of National Greatness,” I inspect King’s call to come together in relation to the marches and songs of the movement. Third, and finally, I consider the Samaritan Ethic in the sermon’s conclusion, focusing on two complementary questions that King adds to the original parable. In essence, I argue that the Samaritan Ethic animates all of King’s civic-sermonic discourse, giving the movement a mythic ideal upon which to transcend the dialectical tensions inherent to the conditions and circumstances of the civil rights movement. It is both an integral and complementary partner with the Exodus myth, one that has been given surprisingly little critical attention.

4.4.1 Something Is Happening

It had been more than two months since the sanitation workers strike in Memphis had begun, involving more than thirteen hundred people. It was a dire moment for an already poor people, now two months without a salary and no preexisting strike fund to assist them in their cause. Moreover, the Memphis strike had been plagued by poor organization from the beginning, including a disastrous first march, which ended with the demonstrators fleeing police. Likewise, it was also a difficult time for King as well, both personally and for the movement. Against the advice of his inner circle, King made an announcement in late March that he would be traveling to Memphis, Tennessee in support of a sanitation worker’s strike. As for the movement, nonviolence as a method
had begun to wane in the swell of the Black Power movement and they had made little
ground in Chicago where they had hoped to see results in their attempts to confront slum
conditions and economic exploitation. Moreover, on the morning of the speech, April 3,
King’s Eastern Airlines flight in Atlanta had been delayed due to a bomb threat. That
afternoon, after checking in at the Lorraine Motel, they attended a meeting with black
ministers where they received news that a local federal judge had blocked their march
and issued an injunction. As Osborn notes, “All these furies were swarming about King’s
head as he stepped onto the stage at Mason Temple.”123 In fact, King had been
considering not speaking that night, sending his most trusted friend, Ralph Abernathy, in
his place. But after Abernathy phoned King at the Lorraine Motel to urge him to
reconsider, King obliged, giving us one final public address: “I’m delighted to see each of
you here tonight in spite of a storm warning. You reveal that you are determined to go on
anyhow. Something is happening in Memphis, something is happening in our world.”124
These opening lines introduce us to a peculiar, given the troubling circumstances for all
involved, but important insight into the address. Plainly, King’s tone throughout the
speech is one of delight, using the term “happy” on nine different occasions to describe
being in their midst, a part of what God is doing.

To help situate the “happening,” King guides the people on a journey, a “mental
flight,” through eight different periods of human history, using the refrain, “I wouldn’t

123 Michael Osborn, “The Last Mountaintop of Martin Luther King, Jr.,” in
Sermonic Power of Public Discourse, ed. Carolyn Calloway-Thomas and John Lucaites
(Tuscaloosa, AL: University of Alabama Press, 1993), 150
124 Martin Luther King, Jr., “I’ve Been to the Mountaintop.” In A Testament of
Hope: The Essential Writings and Speeches of Martin Luther King Jr., ed. James M.
stop there. I would go on…” with each new period. He establishes the scene through an encounter with the Almighty, whom King proposes asks him about what age he would like to live in amongst the whole of human history. Consistent with the archetype of the road, King begins with the most prevalent mythic theme of the civil rights movement, the Exodus. Alongside the Hebrews, King traverses the paths out of Egypt and across the Red Sea into the wilderness toward the Promised Land. In his second visit, King moves us through the ancient origins of rhetoric in Greece, to Mount Olympus, where Plato, Aristotle, and Socrates are assembled in the Parthenon discussing eternal issues of reality. From there, King moves us swiftly through the Roman Empire, the Renaissance, and onto the Reformation, where his namesake, Martin Luther, nails the ninety-five theses to the doors of All Saints’ Church in Wittenberg, Germany.

On King’s sixth stop, he guides us through the Emancipation Proclamation, orchestrated by a man in whose cultural and political shadow he stood in while recounting his “Dream” in August of 1963, Abraham Lincoln. On King’s seventh stop, he moves us into the twentieth century with the First Inaugural Speech of President Franklin Roosevelt, who on March 4, 1933, delivered the line, “The only thing we have to fear, is fear itself.” From there, King proceeds through the Great Depression and brings us to his present moment, where he accounts for the conditions and circumstances of his own day. “Strangely enough,” King replies to the Almighty, if you allow me to live in the second half of the twentieth century, I’ll be happy:

Now that’s a strange statement to make, because the world is all messed up. The nation is sick. Trouble is in the land. Confusion all around. That’s a strange statement. But I know, somehow, that only when it is dark enough, can you see the stars. And I see God working in this period of the twentieth century in a way

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125 King, “I’ve Been to the Mountaintop,” 279.
that men, in some strange way, are responding—something is happening in our world.\textsuperscript{126}

With panoramic scope, King indicates the significance of the “happening,” by noting that on both an international and domestic scale, people from all walks of life are standing up for the cause in South Africa, Kenya, Ghana, New York City, Atlanta, Jackson, and Memphis. Then, King transitions from the “happening,” to what has to happen to actualize their goals—to attain the ultimate order that transcends the dialectical tensions of race in American culture and human history.

\textbf{4.4.2 Coming Together/Antagonistic Cooperation}

In the middle section of the speech, King emphasizes two important themes. The first is the need to come together centered on marches and songs. Second, in this effort to come together, King urges them to follow through to the end of the line. I focus on an essential benefit and one dilemma associated with these two themes. To begin, just as King concludes his “mental fight,” he outlines an additional reason for his strange happiness. “I’m happy,” he indicates, because we are being put into a place where we are going to have to address the problems that we have been trying to face throughout our history as a people, which our times have not forced us to deal with. But now, we can no longer simply talk about it, something more is needed, reminiscent of the parable of the Good Samaritan where Jesus’ focus is on the attitude and action of the Samaritan over the lawyer’s ability to adequately talk about the Law. King says, “It is no longer a choice between violence and nonviolence in this world; it’s nonviolence or nonexistence. That is

\textsuperscript{126} King, “I’ve Been to the Mountaintop,” 280.
where we are today.”

There are two things to note about this statement. First, just three days prior, King delivered his “Remaining Awake Through a Great Revolution” sermon, delivered on Passion Sunday at the National Cathedral (Episcopal) in Washington, D.C., where he uttered these exact words about nonviolence and nonexistence in relation to the need for a “world perspective” toward developing an ethical commitment to make the neighborhood of the world into a brotherhood:

But somehow, and in some way, we have got to do this. We must all learn to live together as brothers. Or we will perish together as fools. We are tied together in the single garment of destiny, caught in an inescapable network of mutuality. And whatever affects one directly affects all indirectly. For some strange reason I can never be what I ought to be until you are what you ought to be. And you can never be what you ought to be until I am what I ought to be. This is the way God’s universe is made.

Second, and furthermore, King also answers one of his own questions, delivered in his presidential address to the Southern Christian Leadership Council, titled, “Where Do We Go from Here?” In this address, King indicates that we must “first honestly recognize where we are now” to consider where we go from here. But where is here? Notice the connection between this and the introduction of King’s “I’ve Been to the Mountaintop” address, in theme, tone, and language, where after he indicates the dialectical tension between nonviolence and nonexistence, he emphasizes, “[This] is where we are today.” In both addresses, we find an urgency and determination in his

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language that we have “got to do this,” for the destiny of the United States is tied up with the destiny of every other nation.\footnote{King, “Remaining Awake Through a Great Revolution,” 272-3.}

At this crossroad, King turns his attention to what has to happen for the “happening” to continue on towards its local and ultimate aims. “Now, what does all of this mean in this great period of history? It means that we’ve got to stay together. We’ve got to stay together and maintain unity.”\footnote{King, “I’ve Been to the Mountaintop,” 280.} At this point, King shifts his focus to the march and the power of song in the movement, with an emphasis on action: [we] “went,” “go,” “move,” and “march.” “Now we’re going to march again, and we’ve got to march again in order to put the issue where it is supposed to be. And force everybody to see that there are thirteen hundred of God’s children here suffering.”\footnote{King, “Remaining Awake Through a Great Revolution,” 274-5.} More specifically, King makes it clear that he intends to “make the invisible visible,” which can only be done by putting our bodies and souls in motion.\footnote{King, “Remaining Awake Through a Great Revolution,” 274-5.} Of particular note, King recalls the Birmingham march, how they would move out of the 16\textsuperscript{th} Street Baptist Church everyday by the hundreds, marching, as Bull Connor sent dogs forth. And they went before the dogs singing, “Ain’t gonna let nobody turn me round.”\footnote{King, “I’ve Been to the Mountaintop,” 281.} When Bull Connor turned the water hoses on them, they went on singing, “Over my head I see freedom in the air.”\footnote{King, “I’ve Been to the Mountaintop,” 281.} When Bull Connor stacked them into the paddy wagons, they went on singing, “We Shall Overcome.” And even when they were in jail, they went on singing, the jailers being moved by their prayers and songs.\footnote{King, “I’ve Been to the Mountaintop,” 281.} \footnote{This jail scene is identical to an account of Paul and Silas in Acts 16:25.} It is at this point, having situated the need for unity
and reminding the people about the importance of marching and song, that King notes, “Now we’ve got to go on to Memphis just like that.”

But how does one come together in the midst of the “parliamentary conflict” of racial tensions inherent to white and black America? For an answer, I look to a short essay written in response to the turmoil of this same period in which King is addressing, Kenneth Burke’s “Responsibilities of National Greatness.” As Gregory Clark asserts:

> In a nation of displaced people where roots are often not deep, culture and identity are both in perpetual process. That gives Americans trouble. Haunted as we are with calls to collective mission, we share an insistent need to identify ourselves around a stable set of ‘national values, ideals, and expectancies’. But that is difficult to do for people who are always in the process of inventing themselves […] The American identity crisis intensifies in contentious times.\(^{137}\)

These were the conditions that animated the times in which both Burke and King were living. For Clark, Burke’s essay was a strategy for antagonistic people to cooperate just long enough to see oneself in the other’s actions and the other’s actions in one’s self. For Burke, as much for King, Americans needed an attitude that would help them come together. For Burke, this alternative American identity is directed toward “consummation,” that is, a move from self-expression toward a focus on others that would, ideally, lead to an understanding shared by both self and others together. Though we can never fully achieve this in its fullness, we may encounter one another in ways that motivate our pursuit of the ideal. In looking beyond ourselves, to this function of sociality, we “encounter” one another by “acting-together,” becoming consubstantial, with each identity merging one into the other. Put differently, using Ralph Ellison’s language, both Burke and King’s civic project seeks to guide people into productive rather than destructive encounters, toward “antagonistic cooperation.” By giving attention

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\(^{137}\) Clark, *Civic Jazz*, 43.
to our need to come together, Clark further underscores the importance of the archetype in our sequential move toward the ultimate order:

> If aesthetic form is a kind of journey that takes someone through a sequence of questions and answers that must be accommodated by new understanding along the way, then consummation is the culmination of that journey, arrival at a destination where in our interactions no adjustment is needed for us to understand each other. Burke’s metaphor for that journey is an ‘Upward Way’ that leads from alienation, separation and conflict to, ultimately, ‘unification, promise, and freedom.’ [where] minds and bodies are bound together as one by their very differences, in an experience so fully shared that it seems as if there were no separation of people at all.\(^{138}\)

In “Responsibilities of National Greatness,” Burke was mindful of the “notable risks and dangers which must be recognized if democracy is to function at its best.”\(^{139}\) According to Clark, “It requires considerable effort for us to assess in every experience we encounter, however innocuous it might seem, which values, ideals, and expectancies it brings to life, and who they bind together as well as who they push away.”\(^{140}\)

However, the dilemma of coming together is that we do not always do so successfully. It is for this reason, then, that Burke urges each one of us to subject both our corporate and unconscious identifications to careful scrutiny to reflect on these puzzling identifications in relation to our sense of citizenship. Though we recognize the unlikelihood that we will always come together meaningfully, we still want things to be better. Clark contends, “So Burke readily acknowledge the practical constraints that contain such aspirations, but he still claimed them. While he didn’t expect them to be realized, he still urged us on in the effort of trying.”\(^{141}\) with this we “must be

\(^{138}\) Clark, *Civic Jazz*, 46.

\(^{139}\) Burke, “Responsibilities of National Greatness,” 47.

\(^{140}\) Clark, *Civic Jazz*, 70.

\(^{141}\) Clark, *Civic Jazz*, 133.
identified.”

This “abiding sense of search,” as John Coltrane called it, that moves, in Burke’s language, toward the “end of the line,” aligns seamlessly with King’s own exhortation:

I ask you to follow through here. […] As I move to my conclusion […] to give ourselves to this struggle until the end. Nothing would be more tragic than to stop at this point in Memphis. We’ve got to see it through. And when we have our march, you need to be there. Be concerned about your brother.143

In this “abiding sense of search,” there will be uncertainty and conflict. Though we cannot come together with all, we may become consubstantial with a select few, in a “mythic” experience that takes us beyond our expectations. That, despite the fact that we can only make connections with one another from “unreliable concepts and terms,” life goes on. And so must we, toward a better life, whatever the cost.144

4.4.3 Samaritan Way

In the body of the speech, King, the rhetor leading souls, instructs his listeners in exactly what they must do and how they must do it. First, they should go out in unity, respectfully but with determination. Then, they must anchor their direct action in economic withdrawal while also building economic strength in the black community. And finally, they need to invest personally in the desperate plight of the sanitation workers by marching on a “dangerous road.”145 After King calls the people to see these aspects of the movement through to the end of the line, he gives them a perspective by

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142 Burke, “Responsibilities of National Greatness,” 50.
143 King, “I’ve Been to the Mountaintop,” 284.
144 Clark, Civic Jazz, 137.
incongruity and then introduces a mythic ideal that embodies that perspective. The incongruity, “dangerous unselfishness,” refers back to a theme in King’s “On Being a Good Neighbor.” Here, I argue, King is not simply using the parable of the Good Samaritan as a conclusion or as some circumstantial theme for his address. Rather, more importantly, and substantively, King is again directing the people’s attention, and ours, to the perfection of this mythic ideal of the Upward and Downward Way. Specifically, King introduces two new questions to those discussed by Jesus and the lawyer that both his audience, and we, must answer if we hope to obtain a vocabulary of the ultimate order. The first question asks, “If I stop to help this man, what will happen to me?” This question is concerned mostly with the self. It is suggestive of the priest and Levite from the parable and presupposes a cost that the individual is unwilling to bear. The second question asks, “If I do not stop to help this man, what will happen to him?” This question places the emphasis upon the other rather than the self, on need over nationality. It is redolent of the practical questions that some of must face as we attempt to enact the Samaritan Ethic, ones King outlined in “On Being A Good Neighbor,” “We so often ask, ‘What will happen to my job, my prestige, or my status if I take a stand on this issue? Will my home be bombed, will my life be threatened, or will I be jailed?’ The good man always reverses the question.”¹⁴⁶ King makes it clear which question is most important:

That’s the question before you tonight. Not, ‘If I stop to help the sanitation workers, what will happen to all of the hours that I usually spend in my office every day and every week as a pastor?’ The question is not, ‘If I stop to help this man in need, what will happen to me?’ ‘If I do not stop to help the sanitation workers, what will happen to them?’ That’s the question.¹⁴⁷

¹⁴⁷ King, “I’ve Been to the Mountaintop,” 285.
As King approached his final words, he returned to his “mental flight” from the opening of the speech. This time, though, King focused on important moments and marches of the movement. Once again emphasizing his happiness at being a witness to the movement, he remembers the Greensboro Sit-Ins of 1960, the events of Albany, Georgia in 1962, the marches in Birmingham, Washington, and Selma, and finally, Memphis. In King’s ascent to the “mountaintop,” his climb toward freedom was about more than civil rights, it was also a battle for his and the nation’s soul.148

Furthermore, I contend that the Samaritan parable is an important counterpart to the Exodus myth, which plays such a significant role in the civil rights movement. More explicitly, the Exodus myth and the Samaritan work together through the entirety of King’s civic and sermonic discourse as a moral compass, guiding them toward their future aims through both memory and aspiration. Osborn argues that the Good Samaritan is a “kind of balance” to the Exodus narrative. Where the Exodus supplied them with collective identity, the Good Samaritan provided a model of action to emulate. And more importantly, given the Samaritan’s social status as a racial other, the parable reminds the audience of their own need to embody the Samaritan Ethic. On one hand, given the volatile treatment of African Americans, the parable is most obviously interpreted as being intended for a white audience. This is not inaccurate. But it is also not the primary objective of King the psychagogic rhetor. That is, the parable is directed at his primary audience, the people—Americans. King embodies an ultimate order and vocabulary of race, with a focus on need over nationality at all times.

148 Burs, To the Mountaintop, x.
Importantly, after King contributes these two new questions to the parable of the Good Samaritan, he turns, as Osborn notes, to a “vertical metaphor.” “Let us rise up tonight with a greater readiness. Let us stand with a greater determination. And let us move on, in these powerful days, these days of challenge, to make America what it ought to be. We have an opportunity to make America a better nation.” This vertical orientation is indicative of the Upward Way, guiding us toward the ultimate order. It is also, however, revealing of the Downward Way, where the vision of the mythic image acquired can be enacted ethically. For instance, Michael Osborn argues that while the Exodus offered the hope of America as the Promised Land, an actualization could only be had by way of action, best exemplified in the parable of the Good Samaritan. Osborn notes:

[The Exodus] offers cultural, collective identity for black people, while the [Good Samaritan] deals with personal moral obligation. But more than just the counterpart of the Exodus narrative, the Good Samaritan story functions as its enabling condition. The Exodus myth will become reality; will carry listeners to the Promised Land, if they are willing to follow with full-hearted commitment the moral example of the Good Samaritan.

In essence, the entirety of King’s civic and sermonic discourse, not merely this speech, based on the collective identity of the Exodus myth, progresses developmentally, just as Osborn argued, on the Upward Way. In turn, the Samaritan Ethic becomes a mythic image of the ultimate order. Most importantly, note that in the parable the directional focus is down, from Jerusalem. When en route to Jerusalem, on the Upward Way, this is where one encounters the divine other and acquires the mythic image beyond ideas, which the Law embodies, and which the Samaritan enacts paradigmatically. In other

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149 King, “I’ve Been to the Mountaintop,” 285.
150 Osborn, “The Last Mountaintop,” 158.
words, King’s use of the Samaritan Ethic is the “grand concluding image” of his public life. Having been to the “mountaintop” and seen the Promised Land, King acquired a vision along the Upward Way. In turn, on the Downward Way, King enacts that vision with a new language of the ultimate order in the Samaritan Ethic.

In concluding my focus on the Samaritan in King’s discourse, I return to those renowned first and last words that I opened the dissertation with:

Well, I don’t know what will happen now. We’ve got some difficult days ahead. But it doesn’t matter with me now. Because I’ve been to the mountaintop. And I don’t mind. Like anybody, I would like to live a long life. Longevity has its place. But I’m not concerned about that now. I just want to do God’s will. And He’s allowed me to go up to the mountain. And I’ve looked over. But I want you to know tonight, that we, as a people will get to the Promised Land. And I’m happy, tonight. I’m not worried about anything. I’m not fearing any man. Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord.151

As prophetic, or eerie, as these words may seem, they actually reach back to the origins of the movement, where on Sunday, January 27, 1957, a bundle of twelve sticks of dynamite was found on the porch of King’s home, but because of an apparent defective fuse, the bomb did not explode, though it was still smoldering when it was found. During his Sunday sermon that same morning, more than ten years prior to those final moments in “I’ve Been to the Mountaintop,” King uses his near death experience to recall an even earlier moment, crucial to the movement’s development. In an article titled “King Says Vision Told Him to Lead Integration Forces,” in the Montgomery Advertiser, our only record of the sermon, King recalls a sleepless night in January 1956, when just as rationality had almost left him, “Almost out of nowhere […] I heard a voice that morning saying to me: ‘Preach the Gospel, stand up for the truth, stand up for righteousness.’”152

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151 King, “I’ve Been to the Mountaintop,” 286.
152 Quoted in Selby, Rhetoric of Freedom, 124.
Almost a year after that vision, King uses that memory, and the near death experience from earlier that morning, to give a vision for the movement:

Since that morning I can stand up without fear. So I’m not afraid of anybody this morning […] Tell Montgomery they can keep shooting and I’m going to stand up to them; tell Montgomery they can keep bombing and I’m going to stand up to them […] If I had to die tomorrow morning I would die happy, because I’ve been to the mountain top and I’ve seen the promised land and it’s going to be here in Montgomery.  

For Selby, this sermon is the “defining moment” of King’s public role as civil rights leader, framing the movement in the language of the Exodus with King as the Moses figure. The point here, is that in giving attention to isolated speeches or marches we can miss the underlying connective threads that hold the movement together and propel its rhetorical meaning and significance. In the same manner that Selby has argued for the Exodus, I have argued that the Good Samaritan parable. In fact, I contend, alongside Osborn, that without the Samaritan Ethic, the entire movement, to use Burke’s sentiment, becomes a “damned lie.” Beyond a mere application point, or some mere delightfully momentary epiphany, however, the aim is to acquire a glimpse of the design that would lead us toward a mythic image along the Upward Way. Having acquired this vision, we must now descend on the Downward Way, where we will most assuredly encounter others on life’s roadside. When that day comes, perhaps we will share in the same delight that King possessed at the “mountaintop,” before descending into the arms of his dear friend Ralph Abernathy, “Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord.”

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154 Burke, “Responsibilities of National Greatness,” 50. See also Clark, *Civic Jazz*, 44-5.
155 King, “I’ve Been to the Mountaintop,” 286.
4.5 The Samaritan Ethic

Throughout this dissertation, I have argued that the ethos of the road as a rhetorical encounter with the other produces a particular ethic. That is, in progressing developmentally along the Upward Way, we develop an ultimate order—an archetypal image or vision. Then, along the Downward Way, we enact the ethic produced from the ethos of the road. In chapter three, for example, I explored the archetype of the road in the blues, using Alan Lomax’s fieldwork in the Mississippi Delta to argue for the Blues Ethic. In this chapter, I examined the road as a rhetorical encounter with the other in American civil rights, using Martin Luther King Jr.’s civic and sermonic discourse to argue for the Samaritan Ethic.

Collectively, then, these two ethics are indicative of the archetype that I situated on the road in Plato’s *Phaedrus*, in chapter one, where Socrates and Phaedrus go for a walk on the roads outside of Athens, and there, contemplate the nature of the soul. Both of these ethics are designed to be representative in the sense that they adequately capture the clarity and complexity of the grand convergence of human relations. Using Plato’s notion of *psychagogia*, I have argued that the archetype helps reorient our trained incapacities toward the road in American culture, shifting our attention away from the cultural myths of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and toward the road as a rhetorical encounter with the other. This rhetorical shift not only alters how we understand the road, but also, rhetoric itself, by tracing the connection from its historical antecedents to the crossroads of rhetoric in Plato’s *Phaedrus* and through distinct periods of American history.
In sum, the civil rights movement was a march towards a better life, addressing how the cultures of “unequal power jostle for fairness, economic freedom, and respect for its million individual voices.”\textsuperscript{156} Returning to previously suggestive attitudes, then, we must recognize that most of us are privileged enough to overlook these considerations if we so choose.\textsuperscript{157} In both of these case studies, I have utilized Burke’s conceptualization of myth as a social tool to demonstrate what an ultimate vocabulary might do for our ethical encounters with others, particularly, and especially, in times of great change and crisis. In listening to the blues, we are encountering more than minor pentatonic tones of entertainment. Rather, we are faced with the Blues Ethic, that is, recognizing and responding to the issues that the road in American culture makes explicit. Setting aside our privilege, though we are inevitably bound by the limitations of our language, we see black as a way into white and white as a way into black—and we hear the “other self.” Similarly, when listening, watching, or reading the sermonic discourse of King, we are encountering more than individual texts of historical eloquence. Rather, we are faced with the Samaritan Ethic, that is, recognizing and responding to the issues that the road in the civil rights makes distinct. We transcend the dialectical jangle of white and black and focus on the commonality of our humanity.

4.6 The Aftermath: Beloved Community

In the aftermath of King’s assassination on April 4, 1968, skylines of big cities across the United States from Chicago to Philadelphia to New York and Washington

\textsuperscript{156} Carroll, \textit{When Your Way Gets Dark}, xx-xi.
\textsuperscript{157} Dawkins, \textit{Clearly Invisible}, xi.
D.C., were aglow with the fires of anguish and rioting. In more than twenty-eight states across the nation, in more than one hundred twenty-five cities, thousands were injured and arrested with property damage estimated at forty-five million dollars.\footnote{Kuettner, March to a Promised Land, 173.} In light of the considerations of this chapter, and this dissertation, more specifically, what does this notion of psychagogia actually do for us? Is there a reasonable correlation between the racial tensions of yesteryear and our current year? Put differently, to reuse a question from the title of King’s last book: *Where Do We Go From Here: Chaos or Community*?

For an answer, I turn to King’s “The Birth of a New Nation,” sermon, delivered at Dexter Avenue Baptist Church on April 7, 1957.

In this sermon, King uses the Exodus story to offer perspective on the freedom movement of Ghana. For King, within the soul of every human being there is an internal desire for freedom and the Exodus embodies every person’s quest for freedom and the inevitable stages that follow that pursuit. To take or deprive someone of their freedom is, at a minimum, to deny them a basic human right. Indeed, despite great strides toward freedom, to reference King’s first book, America today still faces many challenges related to that freedom struggle. For an indication of where we go, to chaos or community, I return to the two points that King repurposed from Ghana’s freedom struggle for American culture. First, “The oppressor never voluntarily gives freedom to the oppressed. You have to work for it.” We see this ethical principal in motion whenever people protest, in King’s language, for right, on city streets. King used this idea to frame the movement after the Montgomery Bus Boycott:

So don’t go out this morning with any illusions. Don’t go back into your homes and around Montgomery thinking that the it’s going to work out, it’s going to roll...
in on the wheels of inevitability. If we wait for it to work itself out, it will never be worked out. Freedom only comes through persistent revolt, through persistent agitation, through persistently rising up against the system of evil [...] For, if we stop now, we will be in the dungeons of segregation and discrimination for another hundred years. And our children and our children’s children will suffer all of the bondage that we have lived under for years. It never comes voluntarily. We’ve got to keep on keeping on in order to gain freedom.159

In other words, freedom and change come through pressure exerted by the people who are oppressed. And the road is one of our most psychagogic resources. As such, for King, the Montgomery But Boycott was just the beginning; integration was just the beginning. This spirited message is true for us today.

The second point of emphasis from the Ghana freedom struggle that was pertinent to King and still today, is that people, and even a nation, can apprehend their freedom without violence, without rising up in arms. And here, we come to the foundation of the Samaritan Ethic in King’s philosophy:

The aftermath of nonviolence is the creation of the beloved community. The aftermath of nonviolence is redemption. The aftermath of nonviolence is reconciliation. The aftermaths of violence are emptiness and bitterness. This is the thing I’m concerned about. Let us fight passionately and unrelentingly for the goals of justice and peace. But let’s be sure that our hands are clean in this struggle. Let us never fight with falsehood and violence and hate and malice, but always fight with love, so that when they day comes that the walls of segregation have completely crumbled [...] we will be able to live with people as their brothers and sisters.160

For our times, as it was for King’s, the aim is not to defeat people so much as to confront the oppressive and hateful attitudes that possess such people. Clearly, then, “We must come to the point of seeing that our ultimate aim is to live with all men as brothers and sisters under God, and not be their enemies or anything that goes with that type of

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160 King, “The Birth of a New Nation,” 162.
relationship.” To do so, we need to rise above the dialectical tensions of our attitudes and language. We need an ultimate vocabulary to transcend our jangling relations. The key, we remember, is embracing our “splendid otherness” rather than trying to overcome our division. In Burke’s language, we move from self-knowledge to communication to consummation. Indeed, as Burke indicated, if we are not identified with this struggle, then we are faced with the possibility that all our work may be a lie.

And with both of these messages in mind, King turns our attention to the inevitable challenges of the mythic and psychagogic road: “The road to freedom is a difficult, hard road. It always makes for temporary setbacks.”¹⁶¹ In essence, then, I am arguing that the Samaritan Ethic was one of King’s essential tools in constituting the Beloved Community. It was not only a counterpart and consummation with the Exodus, it was also the essential ethic he acquired from the “mountaintop.” As such, because obstacles along the road to freedom are beset on all sides with hardship and holdup, keeping in mind that oppressors do not voluntarily relinquish their holds, a nonviolent attitude and action is necessary to actualize such freedom. This is how and why King’s Samaritan Ethic is useful today, in pursuit of a more just society—of that Beloved Community.

We see this theme in King’s “I’ve Been to the Mountaintop” address, particularly in his language of seeing the road through, in that Burkean sense, to the end of the line. Undoubtedly, the challenge we face is that even when we keep these attitudes and actions close we are still faced with the “spiritual myopia” of others, who continue to see others as others, as Jews or Gentiles, black or white, rather than as fellow human beings.

Recalling a sermon by Dr. Elam Davies on Sunday, April 7 at Chicago’s 4th Presbyterian Church, Al Kuettner recalls the question:

> Why are we so blind to the lessons of history? Why are we so stupid as to think that we can get away with oppression or injustice, or plain indifference? We can’t stop the march of events. We’re not going to silence the cry of God’s excluded ones […] You don’t have to wait for America to be attacked by the enemies without. It will fail, unless we wake up, by the hand of enemies within.\(^{162}\)

King provides a model of how to confront such people and circumstances continue our pursuit of the Beloved Community: “But the Good Samaritan will always remind us to remove the cataracts of provincialism from our spiritual eyes” to see the “other self.”\(^{163}\)

Today, as then, many people consider the nonviolent approach to meaningful change as naïve idealism. What are our alternatives? In essence, this project has been a return to the rhetorical idealism of Plato—resisting, in many ways, the more dominant disciplinary orientation of Aristotelian rhetoric. In turn, what we are faced with today is more of the same dialectical opposition. What is needed is pursuit rather than cynicism regarding attainment. When political conservatives, as Burns notes, use King’s dream of a “color-blind society” to justify how affirmative action violates this code and results in “reverse discrimination,”\(^{164}\) we need to develop a language for rising above such provincialism. In King’s “Pursuit of a Just Society,” people are more important than profits in the beloved community.\(^{165}\) Regardless of how the times have and will continue to change, Burns reminds us that while the goals of the movement from Montgomery to


Memphis may have changed, the long-term goals and the moral and spiritual base of King’s thinking stayed essentially the same. “That is to say, it took a decade of movement leadership, in the most trying of circumstances, for his strategic vision to catch up to his spiritual and moral framework.”

Giving King’s thought more of an ultimate order, Burns argues that this deeper view of King viewed rights as more than private possessions, and instead, as transcending individual needs. This is one of the most vexing and pressing issues of politics today, exacerbated by the perpetual cycle of the information age. For King, right is a noun, a moral or legal claim, something that all people are bound by, “required for all people by the higher laws of justice and love, those entitlements that constituted the moral foundation of the beloved community,” echoing those tones of American democracy of the right to protest for right. But in times of great crisis and need, there is a presumption that we need an uncommon common person. But we should remember, despite the aura that comes with a national holiday and the apotheosis of his memory, King was an ordinary man, by his own admission, transformed by his faith in God. For Franklin, King’s civic and moral achievements are within reach of ordinary persons.

In sum, in the midst of my research for this project, I was walking the streets of New York City when I came upon an electric advertisement board featuring this quote from King:

The ultimate measure of a man is not where he stands in moments of comfort and moments of convenience, but where we stand in moments of challenge and moments of controversy. The true neighbor is the man who will risk his position, his prestige, and even his life for the welfare of others.

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166 Burns, “From the Mountaintop,” 8.
167 Burns, “From the Mountaintop,” 12.
As I came to discover, this inscription is featured in King’s “On Being A Good Neighbor,” in *Strength to Love*, where he lays out the particulars of his Samaritan Ethic of universal altruism, dangerous altruism, and excessive altruism. It occurs to me, still today, we answer the question by way of the march. King’s road still courses through American history. The march continues today, making the Samaritan Ethic ever more important for acquiring an ultimate vocabulary of the road and race in the twenty-first century. For instance, in the recent Oscar winning song “Glory,” written by John Legend and Common, from the soundtrack of the 2015 film *Selma*, we find yet another example of song narrating our ascents and descents toward the ultimate order:

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The movement is a rhythm to us.
Freedom is like a religion to us.
Justice is juxtaposition in us.
Justice for all just ain’t specific enough.
One son died, his spirit is revisitin’ us.
That’s why Rosa sat on the bus.
That’s why we walk through Ferguson with our hands up.
When it go down we woman and man up.
They say, “Stay down,” and we stand up.
Shots, we on the ground, the camera panned up,
King pointed to the mountaintop and we ran up […]
Now the war is not over. Victory isn’t won.
And we’ll fight on to the finish.
Then when it’s all done, we’ll cry glory, oh glory.169
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“Glory” tells the story of a road that is still moving, through Ferguson, Missouri, and other cities, toward King’s “mountaintop.” The song makes it clear that “victory” is not yet won, and so, they continue on, in the spirit of King’s exhortation, “to the finish.”

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More specifically, the song gives further indication of what that road should, or will entail:

They marched with the torch, we gon’ run with it now.
Never look back, we done gone hundreds of miles.
From dark roads he rose, to become a hero.
Facin’ the league of justice, his power was the people.
Enemy is lethal; a king became regal,
Saw the face of Jim Crow under a bald eagle.
The biggest weapon is to stay peaceful.
We sing our music is the cuts that we bleed through.
Somewhere in the dream we had an epiphany.
Now we right the wrongs of history.
No one can win the war individually.
It takes the wisdom of the elders and young people’s energy.
Welcome to the story we call victory.
Comin’ of the Lord, my eyes have seen the glory.\textsuperscript{170}

The song is part of a centuries old tradition that accounts for the struggle of the African American people through the mythology of the road. Just as in King’s final words, the song also turns to “The Battle Hymn of the Republic.” Just as King’s life demonstrated, the enactment of the Samaritan Ethic should not be conditioned upon arrival so much as the “abiding sense of search.” This search is fundamentally rhetorical, \textit{psychagogic}. King’s civic and sermonic discourse foregrounds the road as a rhetorical encounter with the “other self,” creating neighbors of us all:

Neighbors to men and women we never had any idea were our neighbors. We had no idea they were our neighbors because we used language to stereotype them into bloodless cardboard caricatures—‘Samaritan,” for instance, or some other ethnic or racial, moral or religious term of dismissal. Once we have dehumanized them by a simple trick of language, it doesn’t even occur to us to love them. How can you love a piece of cardboard? Obeying God’s command to love our neighbors is made far more manageable when most of the people we don’t know or like are excluded from the command. Jesus’ story re-humanizes, re-personalizes, re-\textit{neighbors} us and everyone we meet. Having become a neighbor through Jesus’ story, we find another neighbor to love at every turn of the road.\textsuperscript{171}

\textsuperscript{170} Legend, “Glory.”
\textsuperscript{171} Peterson, \textit{Tell It Slant}, 45.
CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION: O’ Other, Where Art Thou?

“Our fate is to become one, and yet many. This is not prophecy, but description.”

5.1 Rhetoric as Road

This dissertation has been an exploration of the mythology of the road in rhetorical history, broadly, and American culture, focally. Throughout this project, I have examined the relationship between the road and rhetoric, revealing other prominent features of that association, such as the mythic and poetic. In this theoretical expedition, I have employed the road, foremost, as a conceptual tool for reorienting rhetoric, and in turn, applied this reconfiguration to the road in American culture. This reveals one of this dissertation’s most salient contributions to rhetorical theory. That is, my framework of the road at the root of the rhetorical tradition, as psychagogic rhetoric, an encounter with the other, makes its connections to the rhetorical tradition most explicit, while also giving a broader indication of the form and function of the road as a mythic archetype. In using one to examine the other, multi-directionally, both the road and rhetoric become more distinct.

Consequently, this dissertation, also provides a number of scholarly contributions across a range of seemingly disparate subjects, using the road to coalesce elements from rhetoric, myth, music, public discourse, democracy, nationality, and race, among others. It is an intellectual crossroad. At the onset of this dissertation, I positioned this study in relation to four specific research questions, literally, a framework. I first asked whether

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there are rhetorical dimensions to the road. I situated my answer on a country road in ancient Athens where Socrates encounters Phaedrus. There, they share in mythic and poetic ruminations about the nature of the soul as they journey to the heavens in a horse led chariot. In essence, I have argued that the road, as situated in the classical rhetorical tradition, explicitly in the Phaedrus, functions psychagogically, as a rhetorical encounter with the other, as an archetype and living myth, one that attempts to lead the soul (or souls) toward the Good, along what Burke refers to as the Upward Way. In this way, rhetoric is a road.

In turn, this blends into my next research question, where I inquired as to how a rhetorical perspective on the road might make the form and function of the road more distinct. In response, I have read Plato’s Phaedrus beyond its dialectical nature, arguing for an ultimate order, a fixed and reasoned progression that develops sequentially across a hierarchic arrangement, moving from sensory images to dialectical ideas and upward toward a mythic ideal beyond ideas. In the Phaedrus, the chariot becomes the mythic image beyond ideas, ones not present in the dialectical reduction of pure ideas expounded by philosophy. Then, addressing the problematic realization that such an image would, as an archetype, not truly represent something “beyond the description of all human experience,” I asserted nonetheless, following the critical lead of Burke and Frentz, “we have only idea and image to choose from.” It is for this reason that Burke describes the ultimate order of terms as mythic, as an archetype origin of dialectical ideas and positive

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sensory images. In other words, Plato’s Absolute Good, the “absolutizing of the concept of purpose,” a process whereby the particulars of the world are generalized in terms of a universal purpose, becomes Burke’s Upward Way. Most importantly, in the final stages of this transcendent journey, on the Downward Way, through ethical and intellectual development, by way of a process of initiation and discipline, the persuasiveness of the discourse is enhanced; hence it requires our utmost “attention as a rhetorical device even where we distrust its claims.” From this perspective, I have outlined the form of the road as the interplay of rhetorical, mythical, and poetic dimensions, alongside its function, that is, leading souls from self-knowledge toward the Good through a series of encounters.

Relatively, I also pondered the implications of what a rhetorical perspective on these forms and functions would mean for revealing the historical and cultural significance of the road. Admittedly, the scope of this inquiry is immensely vast, and as such, naturally limited, though nonetheless important. To be specific, though, I have situated the significance of the road in two different ways. First, I have positioned the archetype of the road at the crossroads of rhetoric while also implicating its historical antecedents in the Hebraic and Homeric traditions, and then extended those considerations to contemporary rhetorical theory. In other words, I have given a scant but substantive sketch of the intellectual history of the road in relation to rhetoric. Second, I have taken this archetype and traced its forms and functions in American history to make its cultural salience more evident. Specifically, mindful of the interplay of its forms, its psychagogic essence, I have located this archetype, and delineated its functions, in

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5 Burke, A Grammar of Motives, 294-5.
6 Burke, A Rhetoric of Motives, 203.
American folk music and American civil rights. Along the Upward/Downward Way, the archetype, through its sequential development of rhetorical encounters, leads Americans toward the Democratic Good. Or to use Burke’s language, *Toward a Better Life*, with the emphasis being placed upon the direction, suggesting “movement from and toward, rather than arrival at or achievement of ‘the better life.’” In all of this, I have sought to provide an alternative framework for seeing, understanding, and responding to the synecdochic character of the road in America through the critical lens of this mythic archetype. I have done so by confronting a particular orientation or interpretation of the road in contemporary American discourse, as socio-cultural and individualistic rebellion, as a trained incapacity in need of a new orientation. I have provided one, using the language of the ultimate order, placing the road at the highest point of the hierarchal sequence along the Upward Way, and enacting particular ethics on the Downward Way.

Subsequently, then, with regards to this language of the ultimate order, I also asked whether a vocabulary to address these dimensions could be developed. I have answered, most assuredly, yes. To be specific, though, an ultimate vocabulary of the road means fulfilling both the positive order of terms, which names the things of experience, and the dialectical order of terms, which refers to ideas rather than things, and transcends those orders by placing the competing voices in an evaluative series in order to proceed by a “fixed and reasoned progression” from one to another—“successive positions or moments in a single process.” An ultimate vocabulary of the road, then, differs

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essentially from the dialectical by way of a “guiding idea,” where the voices work together. In this way, we get a “glimpse” into a possible alternative, whereby an ultimate vocabulary, transcending the “demoralization” of “horse-trading” “compromise,” can produce a “contemplative effect.”11 Most explicitly, I order the road as a developmental progression from self-knowledge to an encounter with the other toward the “other self,” a perspective by incongruity necessary for reorientation. To be clear, in an ultimate vocabulary of the road, there is no antithesis between self and other, but rather, each should be treated as a way into the other, culminating with the “other self.”12 For instance, in chapter four, I argued that the Samaritan parable richly demonstrates this notion of the “other self.” Consistent with the need for reorientation, it is a representative anecdote, a summation of the grand convergence of human relations on the Downward Way. This downward trajectory is conveniently significant, for the parable frames the story as a descent from holy Jerusalem, the Upward Way.

More specifically, for Burke, this process is best understood as the movement from “self expression,” through “communication,” toward “consummation.”13 In moving toward consummation, the expressed purpose of the Upward Way moves toward a higher principle of unity, not for the mere sake of acquisition, but in order to reverse direction, proceeding on the Downward Way, to use the language of Burke, “wherein human relations grandly converge.”14 In this convergence, we move toward one another, even

11 Burke, A Rhetoric of Motives, 188.
12 Burke, A Rhetoric of Motives, 189.
14 Burke, A Grammar of Motives, 324.
in, to use the language of Ellison, “antagonistic cooperation.” And this brings me to my final query about what an ultimate vocabulary of the road can do for confronting the grand convergence of human relations. To be most explicit, with regards to the application of the archetype to American culture, I have located and examined one particular set of dialectical relations, race relations. Both for assistance and guidance on this unsteady terrain of race, I have relied on the dialectical encounters of Kenneth Burke and Ralph Ellison, as narrated by Bryan Crable, to negotiate an ultimate order in the poetic folklore of Alan Lomax and the sermonic discourse of Martin Luther King Jr. In this endeavor, my objective was/is to account for how an ultimate vocabulary of the road might also contribute to the development of an ultimate vocabulary of race through song and sermon. I have delineated two distinct, related in substance, ethics—the Blues Ethic and the Samaritan Ethic.

In essence, then, I have argued that rhetoric is a r/Road, a psychagogic encounter with the other progressing toward the Absolute/Democratic Good along the Upward/Downward Way. In this elaborate framework, I have advanced ideas about the spiritual and ethical dimensions of the road. This, I argue, is not an attempt at a religious or moral crusade on my part. Rather, it is consistent with the observable realms of the fixed and reasoned progression of the form and function of the road within the Phaedrus. Moreover, the mythic archetype within the Phaedrus initiates our intellectual and ethical development, enhancing its persuasiveness and warranting our “attention as a rhetorical device even where we distrust its claims.”

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15 Burke, A Rhetoric of Motives, 203.
5.2 Road as Rhetoric

Beyond its usefulness as a theoretical lens for reorienting rhetoric, the road is also an interesting phenomenon of study. Usually, in the rhetorical discipline, this is defined in terms of the “rhetoric of the road.” Indeed, the road embodies rich persuasive appeal, captures and holds our imagination and attention, and is full of identification potential as both an actual place and poetic space. However, as I have argued, the road helps us conceive of rhetoric with more spiritual nuance and intrigue. I have followed Frentz’ contention at this juncture:

An increasing number of contemporary rhetorical scholars are reconsidering the relationship between rhetoric and the unconscious. And whether the unconscious is viewed as the repository of repressed drives, the fantastic realm of some preconscious imaginary, or even the seat of hard-wired spiritual potentials, the possibility that rhetoric might touch our souls as well as our societies seems to be an idea whose time has come around—once again.16

Put differently, using the anastrophe of John F. Kennedy, I have not merely asked what rhetoric can do for the road, but what the road can do for rhetoric. For, confining the meaning and implications of the road to only what rhetoric can do inevitably, and carelessly misses much of its meaning. As such, reorienting rhetoric has not only proven useful for apprehending the mythic and spiritual meanings within the *Phaedrus*, it has also contributed to our understanding and application of the road more broadly.

To that end, my rhetorical reorientation bridges the classical rhetorical world with contemporary American culture, using the mythic archetype of the road to show how the same tools we use to understand rhetoric can also be implemented to negotiate meaning about the road. I have positioned a particular perspective of the road in both the ancient

16 Thomas Frentz, “Memory, Myth, and Rhetoric in Plato’s *Phaedrus*,” *Rhetoric Society Quarterly* 36, no. 3 (Summer 2006): 259-60.
and contemporary world. In each chapter of this dissertation, I have progressively fashioned, as with clay for sculpture, the form and function of rhetoric and the road, synecdochically. As such, insights pertaining to rhetoric as road also implicate the road as rhetoric. To be more specific, though, each case study explores psychagogic rhetoric in select periods, places, people, and poetry in American culture as a way of providing a “fixed and reasoned progression” from which to contemplate the road as a rhetorical encounter with the other. My objective was to proceed by stages through some level of generalization whereupon the particulars of American culture take the form of a mythic image, an Upward and Downward Way.¹⁷

In chapter three, for instance, I explored how Alan Lomax’s encounters with racial others, at both actual places and poetic spaces, had the effect of psychagogia. In fact, these encounters with the people and their poetry consumed and transformed much of Lomax’s work. After having been rhetorically transformed on the Delta/Damascus Road, Lomax became a poetic St. Paul of sorts, mediating the mythic meaning of the road and its people to the broader American public. In turn, using Burke’s conceptualization of myth as a social tool, I demonstrated how American folk music, and the blues in particular, functioned rhetorically, as well as mythically and poetically, to transcend musical imperialism and the dialectical tensions of race in America. In this case, “the people,” through their poetry, constituted a mythic image in the road through which they could transcend their emotional and relational jangles. In moments of great crisis and change, the music gave them a grip upon reality and set forth the road as a revolutionary symbol. In this case, the rhetoric of the road becomes tangible through an analysis of the

archetype through particular encounters with people and poetic forms. It can be further enhanced through our continued hearing of the people through their music.

In chapter four, I examined how the marches, freedom songs, speeches, and sermons, King’s civic and sermonic discourse, embody the road as a form of psychagogia, leading American souls toward the Democratic Good. Toward that, I demonstrated how King’s “mountaintop” vision on the Upward Way gets enacted on the Downward Way through the mythic archetype of the road in the Samaritan Ethic and through bodily and ritual enactments in the march, using Burke’s notion of an ultimate order of the road. Just as the Phaedrus and Lomax’s Mississippi Delta fieldwork were based on an ultimate hierarchic sequence of encounters, so too were the marches. In fact, the Samaritan Ethic is set against a similar cultural and rhetorical backdrop, where an encounter between a lawyer and Jesus leads to a parable about an actual road. On this Jericho Road, Jesus contemplates the nature of the true neighbor, transcending race and nationality. King, using the parabolic prototype, constructs an ultimate order of race and the road. In essence, the civil rights movement was a mythic march toward a destination, moving through the lower realms of unequal power to respect for its million individual voices through civic freedoms toward the Promised Land. In essence, I sought to show how the American civil rights movement, as a social movement predicated on marches, demonstrates the psychagogic character of the road as a rhetorical encounter with the other.

In each of these case studies, I relied on the classical rhetorical insight drawn from Plato’s notion of psychagogia to enhance not only our understanding of rhetoric and

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the road, but also to equip us with an ultimate and critical vocabulary for confronting the trained incapacities of our orientations regarding both. As such, it is incumbent upon rhetorical scholars to consider how psychagogia, as a legitimate rhetorical attitude and practice, might elucidate meaning in specific periods, places, people, and poetry that we are privileged enough to overlook if we so choose. The objective has been to redirect, rather than subvert, our attentions from the cultural myths of progress in the nineteenth century and the road as rebellion in the late twentieth century, toward its psychagogic form and function. This rhetorical shift not only alters how we understand the road, but also, rhetoric itself, by bridging the archetype from the crossroads of rhetoric in Plato’s *Phaedrus*, and its historical antecedents, to American culture.

Based on these considerations of the rhetorical nature of the road, I offer five implications. First, as I already indicated in the previous section, my rhetorical contribution to rhetoric comes by way of the road. In elucidating the dimensions of the one I have mutually enhanced the other. In particular, I have tried to be rhetorical in indicating rhetoric’s spiritual and ethical, mythical and poetic, possibilities. As such, I have extended Frentz’ consideration of rhetoric in relation to myth in the *Phaedrus* to a contemporary American context. Second, I have drawn-out Hughes’ critical considerations of America and myth, particularly as it bears upon African American experience, by providing a new mythological possibility and situating it in a specific period of American history in two related but distinct settings. Subsequently, and third, based on those two advances, I have given more critical attention to the rhetorical dimensions of American music as a mythology. On one hand, I have opened up Lomax’s

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fieldwork to *psychagogic* prospects through his self-admitted cultural conversion. On the other hand, I have prolonged Kuyper’s delineation of the road song in nineteenth-century American culture to the twentieth century. Relatedly, and fourth, I have offered a companion work to Selby’s analysis of the Exodus in the civil rights movement by focusing on its consummation with the parable of the Good Samaritan. To be more specific, in light of the extensive discourse that exists on the American civil rights movement and its foremost figure, it is quite remarkable that no extended study on the parable of the Samaritan in relation to either King or the movement exists. In turn, I have provided a starting point. Fifth, and finally, similar to the way in which I used the road as a conceptual tool for rhetoric, I also applied the road as a tool for understanding the collective work of Kenneth Burke—the Wandering Scholar. To be more specific, leaning on Coupe’s work, which contends that the essence of Burke’s work centered on myth, and Gregory Clark’s work, which looks extensively at Burke’s poetry, and Crable’s work, which gives attention to Burke’s letters and relationship with Ralph Ellison, I have used the road to bind all of these considerations into one collective tome. More plainly, Burke’s work was most concerned about living in relation with one another, and with nature and the cosmos, and as such, the permanence of change. In that, Burke’s letters, poetry, fiction, and criticism could be read as one cohesive ultimate order that constitutes the mythic image of the road as a master method.

Each of these implications works together for a rhetorical purpose. That is, to equip us with a critical and ultimate vocabulary for confronting the orientations of our trained incapacities, which demand Ellison’s consciousness and antagonistic cooperation, along with Burke’s unrelenting critical attention on consummation, with which we must
be identified, lest all the brilliance and benevolence of our supersonic this-and-that, the whole thing, “becomes a damned lie.”

Moreover, to be more specific, this new vocabulary has its own rhetorical purpose. That is, to confront what seems to be a grand mobility crisis of an ironic order. Ironic because in a nation so fascinated, obsessed even, with the road for its reliability as a mythic source for equating the nation with socio-economic and socio-cultural progress, gross income inequality problematizes that mythic character. Comparably, as I argued in chapter two, the history of the road in America is dualistic, predicated on abhorrent racism and exploitation. For many, this is something the nation has overcome, given its post-racial discourse with the election of an African American president. But have we overcome the dialectical tensions of racism? Or can we find a way into these tensions?

5.3 A Return to Rhetorical Idealism

In light of this mutually beneficial theoretical approach—rhetoric as road, road as rhetoric—here, I propose one particular implication. Generally speaking, as a discipline, rhetoric is anti-Platonic, more Aristotelian. In turn, this project has been a return to rhetorical idealism, which finds its fullest expression in Plato. As I argue, psychagogic rhetoric, historically, has found its greatest traction in Judeo-Christian culture in the works of the Apostle Paul and Augustine. Indeed, one can follow this particular sacred rhetorical thread in other periods of rhetorical history. For instance, in chapter one, I outlined a critical consideration related to spiritual attitudes in which I demonstrated how Carol Poster’s rereading of Richard Whately problematizes a secularizing tendency in

rhetorical scholarship. In other words, any potential spiritual or sacred dimensions of rhetoric tend to be overwhelmed by dominant anti-Platonic discourses. In returning to such a consideration, I have attempted to reorient the possibilities of rhetoric by confronting a particularly dominant orientation—a trained incapacity.

Put differently, what I am arguing for is the notion that without such a return to rhetorical idealism, particularly the idea of telos and human purpose, we should not expect to comprehend the full implications or rhetorical significance of the thoughts of individuals like Martin Luther King Jr. and others. As I argued in chapter one, by way of Peter Simonson, an understanding of religious texts, perspectives, and vocabularies, from Ralph Waldo Emerson to Walt Whitman, William James, Kenneth Burke, James W. Carey, and John Durham Peters, has been effective in helping us make sense of “communication and social life.”21 For instance, for King, just as for Pascal, “True religion teaches us our duties, our weakness, pride and concupiscence, and the remedies, humility, mortification,”22 in recognition that: “The heart has its reasons which reason itself does not know: we know that through countless things.”23

In other words, without the vision and aspirations of individuals like King, who use religious motifs to frame human purpose and possibility, we will likely miss important rhetorical meaning. This is the case, as Burke reminds us, even when we “distrust its claims.”24 As such, to use the language of King’s beloved community, in the

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23 Pascal, Pensees, 158.
aftermath of such a return, as we progress developmentally from self-knowledge to communication to consummation, we subject our ideas, indeed our very selves, to careful scrutiny before claiming an identity, this is our civic responsibility. In an American context, as it pertains to this project’s notion of the In(di)visible Dream, I liken this to the Bounderby Complex in Charles Dickens’ *Hard Times*. Specifically, Mr. Josiah Bounderby represents the myth of American progress, a rich man, banker, merchant, and manufacturer who was born in a ditch: “How I fought through it, I don’t know […] I was determined, I suppose. […] Here I am […] and nobody to thank for being here but myself.” Tellingly, Dickens refers to Bounderby as the “Bully of humility.” The only problem is, it is not true. As we discover, Josiah Bounderby comes from “humble parents that loved him as dear as the best could.” In other words, it is our civic responsibility to acknowledge the bullishness of our progress while also problematizing such in order to work together.

For perspective, when Burke was asked in a 1970s interview whether his work was propelled by a utopian motive, Burke responded: “You do have an idea of wanting things to be better.” In other words, even though we recognize the practical constraints of coming together with others, we still claim them—we strive for the rhetorical idealism of consummation. The big picture is this: a return to rhetorical idealism does not merely exist, it is prominent in rhetorical history, and more specifically, in American culture. It invigorates the great American struggle for democracy. More importantly, it sheds light on particular tendencies in our dialectical struggles. This helps clarify why I have focused

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my attention on the civic and critical work of Burke, myth/road as equipment for living; why I have sought to develop an ultimate vocabulary of the road and race; and why I have selected my specific case studies.

5.4 Ultimate Vocabularies: “Onward, Outward, and Up.”

In this dissertation, for sake of purposeful argument, though there are many other orientations, I have positioned the orientation about the road as rebellion in contrast to my own position. I have done so to provide parameters for study. Related to this project, for instance, Burke offers an example of an orientation gone awry:

Consider, for instance, what conquest over the environment we have attained through our powers of abstraction, of generalization; and then consider the stupid national or racial wars, which have been fought precisely because these abstractions were mistaken for realities. No slight critical ability is required for one to hate as his deepest enemy a people thousands of miles away.

For this reason, it is important to examine, and reexamine, our orientations. I have provided one particular outlet for doing so related to the road in American culture. At their worst, orientations often become so dominant that “one’s very abilities can function as blindness,” becoming so enamored with the ambitions about our own schemes that it becomes seriously difficult to see other possibilities. Burke refers to this as a trained incapacity. In order to confront these divisions, we need a new orientation and a vocabulary at that. In this manner, Burke’s collected works can be read as calling for

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30 Burke, Permanence and Change, 7.
perpetual cycles of consciousness, conscientiousness, and vigilance to broaden our discourse beyond our dominant ways of conceiving subjects.

To those ends, in *Permanence and Change*, for instance, Burke moves from an assessment of orientation, interpretation, and trained incapacities toward a transitional phase, where one emerges transformed with a new orientation through a perspective by incongruity. Burke defines that term as “methodical misnaming,” a “planned incongruity,” “stylistic mercuriality,” “gargoyle,” and elsewhere as, “A method for gauging situations by verbal ‘atom cracking’. I have provided several throughout this project. For instance, in using the road to conceptualize rhetoric I have demonstrated a “planned incongruity.” In framing the road as a mythology rather than a literary or cinematic genre, I have participated in “stylistic mercuriality.” In delineating the American experience through the critical lens and public experience of African Americans, I have sought to gauge a particular twentieth-century situation and crack the atoms of indivisibility by accentuating its invisibility. And finally, I have conceived of the dialectical tensions between the self and the other as the “other self.”

Moreover, in *Attitudes Toward History*, Burke opens our critical eyes by developing a vocabulary, including a dictionary of pivotal terms, for confronting these dialectical tensions and orientations. In the *Philosophy of Literary Form*, Burke outlines a method (and the need for a methodology) in patterning human experience as “equipment for living.” In *A Grammar of Motives*, Burke introduces us to the representative anecdote and the Upward Way, where he contends, “One should seek to select as

representative anecdote, something sufficiently demarcated in character to make analysis possible, yet sufficiently complex in character to prevent the use of too few terms in one’s description.”^34 For an anecdote to be representative, then, it must have scope but possess simplicity. It is a conclusive summation. Indeed, in working toward developing a systematic terminology, out of the anecdote, a paradigm or prototype emerges. This paradigm or prototype “sums up” action and is an “ultimate or consummate act.”^35 A representative anecdote, then, is sufficiently clear and complex, wherein “human relations grandly converge.” Subsequently, Burke clarifies that it also must be truly representative, synecdochic rather than metonymic, where the part stands for the whole and the whole for the part; a place where “everything flows,” and we can characterize the permanence of change.”^36

To that end, toward an ultimate vocabulary, I have situated an overarching representative anecdote and a very particular one as well. Specifically, I outlined my principal anecdote in chapter two, using the Coen Brothers’ Depression era movie to pattern the possibilities of the archetype in twentieth-century American culture through the film’s use of road imagery, music, and political discourse. More particularly, I outlined an anecdote that sums up the prototype of action in the civil rights movement in King’s use of parable of the Good Samaritan. An ultimate vocabulary, then, is composed of myths that move toward “another plane” that push through dialectical pursuits. As Crable argues, “A vocabulary melding Burkean and Ellisonian insights thus redefines race as a primary means by which we grapple with our thoroughly and radically symbolic

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As I have argued, King’s use of the Samaritan Ethic likewise equips us with language to transcend the dialectical tensions of race, when we see the “other self” or the neighbor in the need. In developing an ultimate vocabulary of the road, however, I have also advanced possibilities for an ultimate vocabulary of song and race, by way of Lomax and King, respectively.

This is possible, conceptually, through the use of language of Burke in *A Rhetoric of Motives*, where he introduces us to the Downward Way, when after having transcended the Platonic dialectic of conflict, having glimpsed some higher principle, we can maneuver back into the “opposition and contradiction in which we live […] equipped with a perspective that lets us locate common ground to share what we hadn’t been able to recognize before.” In light of this critical progression toward an ultimate vocabulary, I have provided hints, at worst, a readily available critical language, at best, some varieties of ultimate vocabulary to consider. I have identified one dominant discourse, the road as a symbol of socio-cultural rebellion. To be clear, though, I am not opposed to the discourse of rebellion. Rather, I am concerned about the narrowly defined nature of that rebellion in contemporary discourse and its implications, or limitations, for enabling us to both understand and respond to its historical significance and cultural salience. Put differently, a more reasonable way of conceptualizing rebellion, I think, particularly as it pertains to an ultimate order, is to embrace the “other self” embodied in the dialectical tensions that we have constituted. If we must rebel, do so against our symbolically instituted nature to make distinctions between the self and the other. For instance, to

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38 Clark, *Civic Jazz*, 127.
make it plain, and applicable to the themes of my case studies, using the language of Ralph Ellison: “[All] blacks are part white, and all whites part black. If we can deal with that dilemma, and it is a dilemma—then we can begin to deal with the problem of defining the American experience as we create it. You cannot have an American experience without having a black experience.”39 Here, positioning that matter if/then, Ellison contends that only when we acknowledge our otherness, or embrace such, can we begin the hard work of living. To be even more explicit, Ellison writes, “In order to orient myself I [have learned] that the American [experience has] long concerned itself with the puzzle of the one-and-the-many; the mystery of how each of us, despite his origin in diverse regions, with our diverse racial, cultural, religious backgrounds, [is] nevertheless, American.”40 Rhetoric, then, must be principally concerned with the “puzzle of the one-and-the-many.”

5.5 The Open Road: Limitations to the Study of the Road

In seeking to find faithful reflections of reality, we make selections. In turn, these selections are also deflections. Given the vastness and complexity of the road in human history and American culture, no dissertation about the road can apprehend its fullness. As a result, there are limitations to my study of the road, some that were only marginally addressed and others omitted entirely. For instance, my study of the archetype in classical rhetoric is based on only one primary text while my reflections on its antecedents is equally scant. In my pursuit of understanding the rhetorical dimensions of the road, I

40 Ellison, The Collected Essays of Ralph Ellison, 207.
have also abandoned much of its material, commercial, and ideological meaning.
Likewise, giving attention to its fundamental role in the discursive realms of song and
orality, I have neglected some of the more pervasive elements of the road in American
culture, namely, the cinema. In my estimation, then, each of these areas is deserving of
more critical attention.

To be more specific, given the limitations of my intellectual history of the road, a
more thorough discussion of the archetype in Plato’s *Phaedrus* in relation to its
antecedents, could have been explored more fully. For instance, more attention could be
given to Plato’s use of and reliance upon the Greek world of Homer with regards to
journeys. Likewise, more time could have been spent on the theological and spiritual
elements of the archetype in the Hebraic world, and furthermore, in the realms of the
New Testament. For example, an extended study of the archetype could be traced through
the life and work of the Apostle Paul—something Peter Simonson initiated in his study of
mass communication theory. There is also much to consider about the archetype in the
modern world in relation to Descartes’ method, whose extensive travels in both bodily
form and discursively offer further indications of the archetype:

As regards languages, I believed that I had already devoted sufficient time to them,
and even also to the writings of the ancients, to their histories and mythical stories. To
hold converse with those of other ages is almost, as it were, to travel abroad; and
travel, by making us acquainted with the customs of other nations, enables us to judge
more justly of our own, and not to regards as ridiculous and irrational whatever is at
variance with them, as those ordinarily do who have never seen anything different.41

As ancestors to the archetype of the postmodern world, a more thorough study of their
influential ideas could shed further light on the rhetorical, mythical, and poetic

41 Rene Descartes, *Descartes’ Philosophical Writings, Volume 1*, trans. Norman
dimensions of the road. Furthermore, given my attention to the poetic or aesthetic realms of rhetoric, a more thorough study of the relationship between song and rhetoric could be undertaken. In line with Scott Church’s exploration of remix, I would argue that such a study is sorely needed in rhetorical studies. Methodologically, the road is subject both to the traditional methods of rhetoric, while also resisting traditional methods. The most obvious traditional study of the road in American culture comes in literary and cinema studies. In this dissertation, though, I have resisted generic study in part because of its disciplinary limitations, while also recognizing these exist in part because of the nascent nature of scholarship related to the road.

Additionally, in the light of my case studies, the life and work of Alan Lomax afforded me a unique inroad to the study of American folk music in the twentieth century, and in particular to distinct styles such as prison songs, work songs, and the blues. However, though it was my intention to neither aggrandize nor sentimentalize Lomax’s contributions to American folk music, by way of “discovery” language, reducing the people he encountered and the poetry he documented as some culmination of the great white man recording well, I may have inadvertently wandered into those realms by not providing a counter voice to Lomax’s work. For instance, in both tone and argument, Stephen Calt takes a more critical angle to the work of Alan Lomax, arguing that the prevailing perception of blues as being simply an expression of racial feeling have relegated most thoughts concerning the blues to individual performances and made the blues a kind of non-entertainment. Calt’s tone is telling: “As late as 1960, a folklorist, Alan Lomax, would sound this patronizing note in a preposterous explanation of the
evolution of the blues.” For Calt, as long as the blues are perceived in this manner, they are at best a “dreary social or racial document, and not a medium of art or entertainment.” Furthermore, Calt argues against Lomax’s apparent specious interpretation of the blues as bearing African rhythms and instead argues that it was actually 78-rpm record collectors who first applied artistic standards of any sort to blues music, and impressed the notion of blues as an art form. Additionally, Calt criticizes the practice of many folklorists, including Lomax, in listing themselves alongside performers in matters of intellectual copyright. Though I consider this a valid point for consideration, I might also contend that it is a revisionist interpretation of what was then only a developing commercial music scene similar but not quite like our own. Admittedly, then, many of my applications of the road are necessarily incomplete. Regardless, as I have outlined in this chapter, I have provided one possible avenue for understanding the road as a mythic archetype, through both the rhetoric as road and the road as rhetoric, with an ultimate vocabulary that holds potential for transcending dialectical tensions.

5.6 Counter-Gridlock: The Road Ahead

One of the many useful Burkean attitudes and concepts that I have relied on in this dissertation is a perspective by incongruity, particularly as a strategy for counteracting trained incapacities. Otherwise the incapacities of our training might render

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43 Calt, *I’d Rather Be the Devil*, 216.
44 Calt, *I’d Rather Be the Devil*, 216.
us incapable of ascertaining new perspectives.45 Here, I use Burke’s notion of “counter-gridlock” to accentuate the various possibilities for the future study of the road. For Burke, gridlock means that you cannot go anyway, “The traffic is so jammed it can’t go forward, backwards, or sideways. What I had was counter-gridlock. I went every which way.”46 This is applicable in two ways. On one hand, Burke meant to imply that our trained incapacities might be outpacing our ability to keep up with and effectively address pertinent issues. This is one of the reasons I have taken up this study. On the other hand, in its simplest form, it is merely an indication of the multiple directions the study of the road can go. I offer four potential directions.

First, the most obvious omission from this study is a study of the road in the cinema, particularly in light of its substantial influence in twentieth-century American culture. However, I believe this deflection was necessary, a sort of structural perspective by incongruity, to better attend to the foundational and fundamental influences of American folk music and public discourse. But for the sake of consideration, I will propose two possible trajectories. First, a unique application of the archetype could be applied to post-apocalyptic road films after September 11, 2001. Specifically, one could problematize the psychagogic road I have theorized in relation to films like The Road, The Book of Eli, Children of Men, WALL-E, and the reemergence of the Mad Max franchise, Fury Road. As a second example, and more relevant to this project, one could focus on the Coen Brothers’ “cultural mythology” of the South in O’ Brother, Where Art

In chapter two, I outlined a representative anecdote for the entire project, a summation of twentieth-century American culture, wherein human relations grandly converge, quite literally. I delineated three distinct features of the film in relation to America in order to provide a fixed and reasoned progression from which to assess both the clarity and complexity of its meaning. More specifically, the film adequately “sums up” American life through the mythic imagery of the road in cohesion with American folk music and political discourse through a series of encounters with the other. It is an embodiment of the Upward Way in its cinematically mythic construction of the road through a coalescence of the image, sound, period, and characterization. Just as the film began, with the Old Man slowly moving down the railroad track: “But first, first you must travel a long and difficult road—a road fraught with peril, uh-huh, and pregnant with adventure.” So too, the film concludes with the Old Man, slowly moving down the track into the distance as “Angel Band” plays over top, singing about resting beside the weary road and hearing the angels sing.

The film is interesting both as an individual cinematic work and in relation to its rich cinematic intertext in reference to a long line of similar prison road films, like I’m a Fugitive From a Chain Gang, Sullivan’s Travels, and Cool Hand Luke. For instance, from the screenplay to the cinematic form to the soundtrack and the Homeric source material, the film has much to offer about our understanding of the archetype of the road. As I argued in chapter two, from the opening sounds and images of the film to its final sounds and images, the mythology of the road is preeminent and pervasive. For instance,
the vast majority of all the songs featured on the soundtrack focus on the road, from the opening song, “Po’ Lazarus,” about a convict on the run; to “Big Rock Candy Mountain,” which narrates the convicts coming down the tracks; to Skip James’ “Hard Time Killing Floor Blues,” a Depression era song about wandering from door to door; to one of the signature songs of the Soggy Bottom Boys, “I Am A Man of Constant Sorrow,” which sings of being bound to ramble and transcending the pain of constant sorrow by meeting others on God’s golden shore. The film is, in sum, a meditation of the Old Man’s notion of a “long and difficult road.”

Second, there is significant potential in studying the road as an act of invention. To use two contemporary examples, I first turn to the opening lines of Debra Hawhee’s *Moving Bodies*, where she references a short story by Kenneth Burke, uniquely, titled “The Excursion,” about a narrator on a “meandering walk.”

Having nothing to do, and having searched in vain among the notes of a piano for something to think on, I started off on a walk, trusting that I might scent a scandal on the breeze, or see God’s toe peep through the sky […]. All this distance I had walked under God’s blue sky, and still without a thought. But at last, after trudging on for hours, I came upon a thought. Miles upon miles I had walked for a thought, and at last I came upon an anthill.

As an additional example, I turn to Burke’s childhood friend Malcolm Cowley, who, in a letter to Yvor Winters from 26 June 1958, writes:

I wish you could have a look some time at all the sentences, paragraphs, and pages that I reject in the course of making something sound as if it flowed from the tip of my tongue. Or watch me as I moon around the house and grounds and wander blindly down the road in the weeklong or month-long effort to outline something so that it sounds like a natural, logical, and at the same time associational progress from the first sentence to the last … I think I must write

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more than sixty thousand words, sometimes much more than that, in the course of completing a six-thousand-word essay.”

Third, with regards to my analysis of American folk music, for example, there are two particular areas one could explore in greater detail. On one hand, there is the cultural significance of the American folk revival of the 1950s and 1960s. In part, any appreciation of contemporary music, from rock-and-roll to rhythm and blues to soul, funk, rap, hip-hop, and remix, among others, should account for the relationship between early American folk music and its mid-century resurgence. The fieldwork and recordings of Alan Lomax help mediate this realm. On the other hand, one could also explore the cultural salience of American folk music—the blues in particular—in relation to contemporary remix culture. For instance, musical artist Moby’s “Play the B Sides” album, released in 2000, features an array of songs sampled or remixed from recordings by Alan Lomax, including “Find My Baby,” a sample of Joe Lee’s “Rock” by Boy Blue, “Flower,” a sample of Mattie and Mary Gardner’s “Bring Sally Up,” “Honey,” a sample of Bessie Jones’ “Sometimes,” and “Natural Blues,” a sample of Vera Ward Hall’s “Trouble So Hard.” Alan Lomax recorded this last example, for reference, on October 10, 1959, at her home in Livingston, Alabama, whom John Lomax had recorded in 1937.52

Fourth, and finally, one could further explore how the archetype, and an ultimate vocabulary of the road, assist us in confronting the politics of mobility in the twenty first century, specifically as it relates to issues such as income inequality, human trafficking, and post-racial discourse. More specifically, what might an ultimate vocabulary of the

road do for transcending the dialectical tensions inherent between gross income
inequality and the cultural myths of socio-economic progress; or emerging post-racial
discourse in relation to an extensive history and cultural persistence of blatant racism in
America? Or how might an ultimate order equip us to confront human trafficking? In all
these encounters, our convergences produce questions. It is similar to a question that
emerged after Cain struck down Abel: Am I my brother’s keeper?\textsuperscript{53} A question emerged
when Socrates encountered Phaedrus on a country road outside of Athens: Where have
you come from and where are you going?\textsuperscript{54} A question emerged during the Great
Depression from a wandering bluesman named Blind Willie Johnson: What is the soul of
a man?\textsuperscript{55} A question emerged in rumination upon the hero’s quest: What does the soul
truly want?\textsuperscript{56} A question emerged on a motorcycle odyssey between father and son: Well
[...] we can stop here, or we can go ahead, or we can go back. Which do you want to
do?\textsuperscript{57} A question emerged from a civil rights leader crisscrossing the country speaking
about justice and freedom: Where do we go from here?\textsuperscript{58} And a story emerged when a
Jewish lawyer asked Jesus: Who is my neighbor?\textsuperscript{59} In conclusion, the road is significant
in part because it mediates the grand convergence of human relations. It is with this idea

\textsuperscript{53} See Genesis 4:9
\textsuperscript{55} Blind Willie Johnson, “What is the Soul of a Man?” recorded 1930, \textit{Dark Was
\textsuperscript{56} Clarissa Pinkola Estes, “Introduction to the 2004 Commemorative Edition” in
\textsuperscript{57} Robert Pirsig, \textit{Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance} (New York: William
Morrow, 1999), 209.
\textsuperscript{58} Martin Luther King Jr., \textit{Stride Toward Freedom: The Montgomery Story} (San
\textsuperscript{59} See Luke 10:29
in mind that I have conducted this study. And so, “We keep our eyes on the road but with glances in the rearview mirror.”

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