Cars, Postcards, and Patriotism: Tourism and National Politics in the United States, 1893-1929

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In 1915 Theodore Dreiser drove from New York City to his childhood home in Warsaw, Indiana with his friend Franklin Booth, illustrator of the *Masses*, in Booth's new car, a sixty-horsepower Pathfinder. Neither Dreiser nor Booth could drive, so they had to rely on chauffeurs. Another difficulty was the lack of adequate maps or guides; the most recent guidebook was the Baedeker's published in 1893 for the World's Columbia Exposition and only partially revised, without automobiles in mind, in 1909. To learn what was worth visiting along the way, the tourists made a practice of first patronizing the postcard racks at local drugstores, then venturing out to the "sights." The prevalence of postcards leads Dreiser to contrast small towns of 1915 with those of his youth in the 1880s:

> No small American town of that date would have presumed to suppose that it had anything of interest to photograph, yet on this trip there was scarcely a village that did not contain a rack somewhere of local views, if no more than of clouds and rills and cattle standing in water near an old bridge. By hunting out the leading drug store first, we could almost invariably discover all there was to know about a town in a scenic way, or nearly all. It was most gratifying. (217)[1]

What Dreiser lists as sites of interest – clouds, cows, old bridges – suggests wishful thinking on the part of local photographers and entrepreneurs. Nevertheless, Dreiser does feel that postcards reveal the "scenic" aspects of the landscape he would otherwise have missed. The tourist attraction here clearly conforms to the semantic structure identified by Dean MacCannell: signs produce sites. Dreiser's narrative foregrounds the historical significance of production by linking the semantic structure of tourism to the socio-economic process of modernization. After eulogizing postcards, Dreiser goes on to locate them in a timeline of the other technologies that marked, in his own biography, the transition from small-town provincialism to metropolitan modernity: his first picture postcard in Chicago in 1896, his first telephone in 1880, his first trolley car, roller skate, and bicycle around 1884-85, and his first ice cream soda fountain about the same year (217-20).

Modern technology plays a double role for Dreiser, marking his flight from the provinces and enabling his subsequent return home, with pauses to enjoy the "scenic" along the way. This double role perhaps explains why Dreiser is

ambivalent about the way technology changes the places of his childhood. He argues that the spread of metropolitan innovations and styles is blotting out "village culture" (Lippmann), noting in particular thatyoung people in a small town are wearing New York fashions (Lippmann 87; Dreiser 163). This tension between the local and the transregional, the traditional and the new, is at the heart of tourism. The technologies enabling tourism play a double role – and not just for Dreiser – simultaneously constituting sites as attractions and threatening what we often call the "authenticity" of those sites by integrating them into national – and even international? networks of transportation and communication. Tourism produces its object as a vanishing ideal, a perpetually receding goal that can never be reached. It is an example of what Anthony Giddens calls a "disembedding mechanism": a social structure detaching identity from its traditional locus – the community – and dispersing it throughout a standardized and universalized signifying system. The tourist's quest for an "intense" or "authentic" experience is at once a reaction to and a driving force behind touristic "disembedding," and could be understood as related to those antimodern sentiments driving modernization identified by T. J. Jackson Lears. "Throughout the twentieth century, a recoil from the artificial, overcivilized qualities of modern existence has sparked a wide variety of quests for more intense experience, ranging from the fascist fascination with violence and death, to the cults of emotional spontaneity of avant-garde artists to popular therapies stressing instinctual liberation. Antimodern impulses, too, were rooted in longings to recapture an elusive 'real life' in a culture evaporating into unreality" (32). The economic and symbolic structure of tourism is thus nostalgic, if we understand nostalgia as the search for a stable locus of tradition or identity that is produced through the structure of its own loss.

This essay will analyze constructions of nostalgia in postcards printed between 1893 and the 1930s, and in travel narratives from roughly the same period, focusing on Dreiser's *Hoosier Holiday* (1916), Emily Post's *By Motor to the Golden Gate* (1916), and Sinclair Lewis's *Free Air* (1919) and *Main Street* (1920). My aim is to locate touristic nostalgia within the context of modernization in order to link technological change and consumer culture to fin-de-siecle formations of American patriotism. My argument follows these steps:

First, I will locate postcard and automobile technologies at the dividing line between modernization, defined as "incorporation" and "standardization," and the longing for its opposite: the authentic location. Here my arguments draw on Alan Trachtenberg's accounts of corporate expansion and more explicidy on John Jakle and Keith Sculle's geographical studies of the spread of standardized roadside architecture.

Second, I argue that tourists are the prototypical consumers of the twentieth century, seeking the "authenticity" they help to destroy and responding to

this contradiction by buying further into the system, purchasing another car or more postcards, or taking another trip. Gender is an important factor in this argument, since some of the major marketing innovations of the early twentieth century explicitly targeted women. These gendered marketing strategies served a double function, producing demand in an already saturated market and distinguishing feminine "consumption" from masculine "production," so that the transition to a consumer-oriented economy could be blamed, as it were, on women. Here my arguments are indebted to Virginia Scharff's work on early women drivers in *Taking the Wheel* (1991).

Third, I will examine the links between emerging consumerism and twentieth-century forms of citizenship. After examining how women's growing independence was in significant respects the result of their growing importance as consumers, I investigate the redefinition of political freedom as free market, the representation of citizen as consumer. Here I draw on Marguerite Schaffer's *See America First*, which understands tourism as "a ritual of citizen ship" in a culture devoted to consumption (4-6).

Finally, I will argue that mass tourism produced a new image of the nation grounded in the scenic. Here I am indebted to Benedict Anderson's definition of the nation as an "imagined community" and to Ernest Gellner's argument that the nation is not a pre-modern atavism, but a response to specific economic and cultural conflicts of modernity. Tourist attractions and postcard images differ from print forms of "imagined community" in the way they respond to modernity. Tourism formulates the local as scene and synecdoche, substituting an idealized version of place for the national whole. Scene and synecdoche are also the primary idioms of early twentieth-century advertising, so it is hardly surprising that the images of the nation appearing on postcards become increasingly indistinguishable from corporate logos. The patriotism emerging at the turn of the century should be understood as a form of brand-name identification. This early "brand loyalty" set the pattern for our own day and age, when U.S. companies sell commodities – often produced elsewhere – through patriotic images, and when national attachment is solidified through patterns of consumption.

I. Standardization, Advertising, and Modernity

There is a convention in literature and criticism, already a cliché by the time the automobile was invented, depicting the road as a symbol of freedom and a means of escape. The earliest American accounts of driving represent tourists as rugged adventurers. Horatio Nelson Jackson's "From Ocean to Ocean in a Winton" (1903), a pamphlet describing the first transcontinental automobile trip, uses the freedom-of-the-road convention to market the early

two-cylinder car named in the tide. Most road books of the time, including those considered in this study, follow Jackson in depicting the car as an antimodern technology, allowing driver and passengers to escape the noisy, crowded city into the "frontier."

Some contemporary literary critics still take these frontier fantasies at face value, treating driving as an expression of independence, the car as a symbol of freedom.[2] This is, however, only half the picture. If driving is personally liberating, it is also one of the primary forces behind commercial standardization. In 1913 Ford shifted to assembly line production, bringing the average price of the Model T down from $850 to $525 (Lewis 33). By 1916 there were over three-and-a-half-million automobiles and a quarter million trucks on the road, inducing Woodrow Wilson to sign into law the first Federal-Aid Road Act (Lewis 11). The geographer John Jakle argues that "with improved highways and the rise of roadside commerce, regional differences were obscured beneath a veneer of roadside homogeneity" (Jakle 199). Coincident with the emergence of the assembly line, Standard Oil, Gulf, and Shell started building look-alike filling stations in cities and along rural roads (Jakle and Sculle, *Gas Station* 132), and billboards forBurma Shave and a host of other products plastered the roadside with nationally recognizable brand names. The most recognizable brands were those of the cars themselves, which were among the first products to display their make on the *outside*. If personal freedom was an authentic part of the driving experience, it was also the alibi of a new regime of consumption. The early drivers, who enjoyed a degree of mobility unimaginable a few years before, found themselves confronted by the standardized land scape their own mobility helped create.

John Jakle and Keith Sculle call the principle governing the standardized landscape *place-product-packaging*, a term which "describes commercial places formed through coordination of architecture, decor, product, service, and operating routine across multiple locations – the chain of stores that conforms to a set business system" (Jakle and Sculle, *Fast Food x*).[3] Their work identifies two intertwined marketing innovations of the driving age: the emergence of rationalized patterns of consumption increasingly aligned with rationalized production, and the reproduction of place as advertisement at the same time that advertisements are dispersed in space. By the time of the U.S. entry into World War I, the assembly line and the road already constituted a continuous trajectory of production and consumption. The rationalized workstations along the conveyor belt mirrored the standardized restaurants, motels, gas stations, and other points of consumption growing up alongside the highway. There is no doubt that place-product-packaging opened up the countryside to drivers who knew they would be able to find gas, food, and lodging almost anywhere, but it also reduced regional variation. Hence the typical touristic nostalgia for

the vanishing object, located at the juncture between standardization and mobility This confluence of personal mobility and standardization marks the birth of modern consumer culture, which might be defined as that combination of overproduction and advertising necessary for the widespread distribution of standardized goods in a homogenized landscape.
The tension between standardization and freedom is at the heart of the road narrative as literary genre. If road books borrow from the traditional travel narrative, they also constitute a new form of advertising. From the very beginning road books were deeply involved in the proliferation of brand names. Many of them were actually advertisements published for – and often by – auto companies. Again, Horatio Nelson Jackson's "From Ocean to Ocean in a Winton" – with its emphasis on an early brand of automobile – is the first in a long list.Carey S. Bliss' useful annotated bibliography, *Autos Across America: A Bibliography of Transcontinental Automobile Travel: 1903-1940*, provides the following examples of automobile manufacturers who have published road books: Oldsmobile and the Weed Chain Tire Grip Co. in 1905, the H. H. Franklin Co. in 1906, Brush Runabout in 1908, the Overland Automobile Co. in 1910, Pathfinder in 1912, Packard in 1913, Ford in 1914, and so on. Major magazines of the day ran countless stories about driving, intercalating advertisements for cars and automotive products in an early example of "synergy" or product placement. The automotive section in the *Sunset Magazine* of April 1915 is a case in point. The sixteen-page story by L. W. Peck about driving "Over the Lincoln Highway to the Coast" contains eleven automotive ads, many of them full-page. Peck's cheerful tale of driving across the country reads like a puff for a road that, according to Emily Post, who drove it the same year, was in some sections all but impassable (67). The narrative provides the setting necessary for the advertisements sandwiched into its pages. One Oldsmobile ad shows a scene that might as well be taken from Peck's trip: a group crossing a fast stream, complete with captioned dialogue attesting to the ability of the car to meet any task.

In the early days of motoring, personal and advertising narratives overlapped in the same way that assembly lines overlapped with standardized roadside architecture: the settings, themes, and characters all borrowed from and complemented one another, resulting in a rigid economy of forms – or standardized package – aimed at the distribution of the central product – the automobile. Road narratives should be understood as an innovation in advertising. They mobilize the myths and symbols of the frontier, the conventions of travel writing, and the thematic of self-discovery in order to represent the car as a commodity.

Postcards, like road narratives, began as advertisements for products before becoming established as representations of place. The first postcards were

purchased as prestamped stock from post offices, then printed with advertising messages and drawings (Miller 2). Postcard historians George and Dorothy Miller hold that" [t]he development of the American view card is related ... to the advertising postcard and to the exposition souvenir. It can be argued that the first American view cards appear as advertising postcards on government postals" (3). According to the Millers, true picture postcards began in the United States with the private and government souvenir cards sold at World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago in 1893. Both the privately and the federally printed cards combined money-making with advertising; the cards were a source of revenue and a source of interest. This conflation of the product and its representation can be seen as the beginning of a brand-name economy, in which the symbols used to market commodities themselves become commodities. The Exposition made postcards so popular that people began collecting them, and soon local photographers and printers were selling images of local scenes. By the time Dreiser saw his first postcard in 1896, the trend was already well on its way to becoming national. In 1897 American Souvenir Card Company, the first of many national firms, registered a trademark for their new "patriographic" collection, featuring cards from all over the country. As the Millers recount, these were sold not only for travelers but for collectors, so it was possible to buy a postcard, for instance, of Alaska in New York (4). An Act of Congress in May 1898 allowed privately printed cards to be mailed at the government rate of one cent (2). The result was an astonishing circulation increase: In 1906, 770,500,000 cards were mailed in the United States; in 1913 the number increased to 968,000,000. It would be difficult to overestimate the pervasiveness and significance of these images. In Germany, where the trend was most popular, well over a billion cards were mailed in 1906 (22). Indeed, until a protective tariff was established in 1909,most high-quality American post cards were actually printed in Germany, with patriotic and historical scenes designed by artists who never set foot in the United States (26, 234).[4]

The early postcard industry developed in tandem with mass tourism. The reproduction of place as a tourist attraction depends on its apprehension as the scenic. Of course, the scenic antedates both the tourist and the postcard industries. In 1872, for instance, William Cullen Bryant edited a two-volume folio of landscape drawings (deliberately not photographs) and essays called Picturesque America, which celebrates a landscape opened up as scenery by the transcontinental railway and holds up American nature as an equivalent to European culture, advocating the type of "see America first" tourism that would become standard advertising copy around the turn of the century. Bryant writes in the introduction:

> By means of the overland communications lately opened between the Atlantic coast and that of the Pacific, we have now easy access to a scenery of the

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Caption: Postcard from the author's private collection: Image by the Curt Teich Company of Chicago. The author would like to express his gratitude to the Curt Teich Postcard Archives, Lake County Discovery Museum for advice on reproduction rights.

> most remarkable character. For those who would see Nature in her grandest forms of snow-clad mountain, deep valley, rocky pinnacle, precipice, and chasm, there is no longer any occasion to cross the ocean. A rapid journey by railway over the plains that stretch westward from the Mississippi, brings the tourist into a region of the Rocky Mountains rivaling Switzerland in its scenery of rock piled on rock, up to the region of the clouds.

By the 1890s, however, the scenic was not only standard but also mass produced. In 1893, the western painter Frederic Remington was complaining that Yellowstone was overrun with cameras: "as the stages of the Park Company run over this road, every tourist sees its grandeur, and bangs away with his kodak [sic]" (qtd. in Schullery 236). By 1906 Kodak began marketing special postcard cameras that allowed tourists to scratch captions directiy on the negatives, which were then printed on postcard backs. In a landscape saturated with postcards, visiting sites became synonymous with representing them. Hence this joke in a 1906 *Columbus Dispatch*: "I wonder what will be the first thing they sight at the north pole? [sic]" Reply: "Why, Eskimos selling souvenir post cards, of course" (qtd. in Miller 16).

It is not only mass production and consumption that distinguish postcards from earlier representations of the scenic. Technical means of reproduction become increasingly preoccupied with technology itself, so that many postcard views feature not only the scenery but what brings the viewers to it: first trains, then automobiles. This practice is also visible in Booth's sketches of his trip with Dreiser, which give a prominent place to the car in spite of Dreiser's objection that *photographs* of driving tours tend to feature machines at the expense of the landscape (160). This practice of representing the commodity in the landscape is connected to representing the commodity through the landscape – a substitutive logic that is likely behind the development of many corporate logos. The Harvey Hotel Chain, for instance, distributed postcards of natural wonders stamped with the Harvey brand name (Schaffer). The postcard is the template of the company logo, which not only represents a commodity but itself becomes a commodity, something desirable or collectible for its own sake. Hence, another joke from 1906, this one appearing in the *Woman's Home Companion*. A woman asks a realtor, "Has this house all the modern improvements?" The answer: "Everything, here's a special closet for post cards" (quoted in Miller 16).

II. Tourism, Consumers, Women

If postcards are prototypes of company logos, road narratives are instruction manuals in consumption. To grasp this it is important to study how these narratives represent women, the great marketing" discovery" of the early twentieth century. In 1915, Herbert L. Towle wrote an article for *Scribner's* entitled "Women at the Wheel," in which he asked the question: "Have the women

suddenly gained courage [to drive cars], or have motor-cars altogether lost their formidable mien?" The answer: "Something of both, no doubt, but especially something of the latter" (*Scribner's* 214).

The car played an undeniable if ambiguous role in women's liberation. The first American woman obtained a registered driver's license in 1899; by 1906, 100 women applied for driver's licenses in the state of New Jersey alone (Scharff 25, 23). Historians have pointed to numerous examples of liberated drivers. During World War I, many American women, including Gertrude Stein, challenged gender stereotypes by volunteering as ambulance drivers and mechanics in France (Scharff 89-96). At the same time on the home front, Sara Bard Field undertook well-publicized cross-country journeys to demonstrate independence and stir-up rallies in cities and towns all across the U S., reaching even small towns otherwise cut off from the national movement (Fry 16).Hollywood was quick to pattern publicity stunts after the suffragists. In 1915, the silent film star Anita King drove her own car from Los Angeles to New York – with an entire press corps in tow (Scharff 77). This marketing stunt should serve as a cautionary tale, however. When pointing to the political importance of cars, we should avoid the reductive formula that equates freedom with personal mobility. While it is clear that the car afforded at least some women an unprecedented amount of freedom, these benefits were largely restricted to the middle- and upper-class white women who could afford cars and were targeted as consumers. When Zora Neale Hurston refers to cars in her autobiography, *Dust Tracks on a Road* (1942), for instance, she is either watching white tourists pass by her childhood house on their way to Orlando (33), or acting as an unofficial chauffeur to her wealthy employer, Fanny Hurst (227). African-Americans who owned automobiles found it difficult to secure lodging in both the South and the North, even though several travel guides listed restaurants and hotels that did not practice discrimination.[5]

That most common trope of driving – "the freedom of the road" – should be considered in conjunction with the marketing strategies that began to target and redefine women as an important consumer group in the early part of the century. If, as I argued in the previous section, the road book was the inaugural text of consumer culture, the woman driver quickly became the central figure of consumerism. Gender, in fact, turns out to be an important strategy for mediating some of the conflicts and anxieties attending the transition to a consumer-oriented economy. The journey of Alice Huyler Ramsey, the first woman to drive across the country in 1909, exemplifies the early commercial significance of women drivers. Ramsey undertook her journey as a publicity stunt for the Maxwell car company – that is, after her husband gave his approval. An "advance agent" stirred up attention in towns before her arrival; she even delayed her entry into San Francisco to give the press corps an op

portunity to photograph her in broad daylight. The novelty of a woman driver attracted a great deal of attention in the press and took on a particular significance in the rhetoric of advertising. Ramsey's achievement did not prove that she was better than most drivers, including most men, but that the Maxwell was manageable enough to be driven by a woman. In 1960 the Automobile Manufacturers Association recognized Ramsey as "Woman Motorist of the Century." The letter accompanying her award summarized her contribution in this way: "That trip through an all but trackless land helped mightily to convince the skeptics that automobiles were here to stay – rugged and dependable enough to command any man's respect, gentle enough for any lady" (Ramsey 103). The prose, which reads like the advertising copy that is undoubtedly its model, breaks down the automobile into gendered components: performance is masculine, ease of operation feminine. In her history of women driving, *Taking the Wheel* (1991), Virginia Scharff points out that many of the technological innovations that made cars easier to drive – like the self-starter – were marketed as concessions to women (60, 119).

The so-called shift to "feminine" standards constituted a major market shift from Ford to GM after the first-time buyers market became saturated with Model T's.[6] The industry realized that it needed to improve on existing models to spur new sales, and planned obsolescence – the strategy developed to encourage market turnover – depended heavily on stylistic variations. Style, according to experts like Alfred Sloan, the CEO of GM, was supposed to appeal to women more than men, so in a very real way the rise of GM also marked the rise of women as an important consumer force. To become consumer friendly, cars had to offer not only convenience but choice. Although an innovator in rationalized production methods, Ford resisted finance plans, used car trade-ins, design variations and other staples of modern marketing. Sloan, who was responsible for overhauling that company's marketing strategy, took the opposite approach, running his company according to the slogan "a car for every person and purpose" (Scharff 113). In 1921 he created product "lines" and founded the first design center dedicated exclusively to automobile appearance (Chandler 150). Significantly, he called the design center "the beauty parlor" and bragged that it employed women where they were most effective: in the department of taste (Scharff 113-14). This was certainly the analysis of business writer Mrs. Christine Frederick – as she conspicuously signed her self – in *Selling Mrs. Consumer* (1929). Frederick attributes the transition from Ford's motto – "you can have it in any color as long as it's black" – to Sloan's – "a car for every purpose and every person" – to the rise of women consumers. In a section titled "The Consumer in Control," Frederick writes:

> It has always been charged, in past years, that automobiles were bought, not sold, and few have been able to deny it. A different day is here. … The Consumer now sits in the driver's seat, and auto manufacturers are busy seek-

> ing to predict her fancies, rather than trying to dictate as of yore. Henry Ford, making a wry face, since he was one of the most arbitrary of dictators in the past, said to newspapermen some time ago, we are no longer in the automobile, but in the millinery business.' This was Henry's grudging way of paying a tribute to Mrs. Consumer, who was, I think, chiefly responsible for the rise of Chrysler and General Motors at the expense of Ford's model [sic] T, because while Ford arrogantly said 'you can have any color so long as it is black,' Chrysler and General Motors supplied color and feminine luxury and comfort until Mrs. Consumer disdained to step into a Ford Model T. (Frederick 6-7)

The counternarrative to Frederick's celebratory text is evident in *Men, Money and Motors* (1929), a self-congratulatory history of the automobile industry written by the advertisers Theodore F. MacManus and Norman Beasley who lament the passing of the tough, red-blooded garage innovators, identified as "pioneers" and "pirates."[7] The protagonist in Sinclair Lewis's *Dodsworth* (1929) sounds a similar lament when his company is bought out by the larger automobile conglomerate U.A.C. – like GM, known primarily by its initials. Having made his fortune, Dodsworth complains that he has been demoted from a pioneer to a clerk; after this demotion, his wife abandons him to have affairs in Europe. What Frederick sees as a significant gain in consumer power, especially that of women, MacManus and Beasley and the character Dodsworth see as a decrease in the independence and masculinity of the inventor.

The sociological work of the day tended to patronize women because of their supposed status as "leisure innovators of culture." In his first book, *Drift and Mastery* (1914), Walter Lippmann claimed that "The mere withdrawal of industries from the home has drawn millions of women out of the home, and left millions idle within it" (123). In *Midddletown in Transition* (1937), Robert Lynd and Helen Merrell Lynd echoed Lippmann's claim: "As the business class woman's role in the family has come to include less of the earlier unremitting dawn-to-dark toil, she has been forced, with less housework and fewer children to bear and rear, to find a socially and personally self-justifying role" (282). According to the Lynds, the middle-class women faced with this identity crisis became the "leisure innovators of the culture," mainly because businessmen had no time for anything but work (244). "Leisure," however, was actually the code word for an entirely new form of labor. While women in the consumer age doubtless had more free time than their predecessors, much of it went towards what is now recognized as the very time-consuming work of consumption, including driving around to buy the products that were no longer manufactured at home and transporting children to an increasing number of activities. What Lippmann identifies as idleness and the Lynds present as personal crisis was actually a new kind of work at once displaced into a wider economic sphere and discredited as self-indulgence. Consumer products may have facilitated a feminist revolution, but they also reterritorialized femininity in a wider landscape, turning women into mobile consumers.

It was not only women, of course, who were "leisure innovators" (that is, consumers), but women who were blamed for consumption. The wave of corporate expansion in the 1920s curtailed older entrepreneurial models of production, so that an increasing number of people at all levels worked for large concerns, and an increasing number had the time and resources to "innovate" in terms of "leisure." This transition to a consumer economy is thematized in two earlier books by Sinclair Lewis, *Free Air* (1919) and *Main Street* (1920). Based on Lewis's own honeymoon trip in a Model T in 1916, *Free Air* documents the western journey of Claire Boltwood, a wealthy socialite from New York City, her neurasthenic father, who consents to the trip for his health, and her persistent young admirer, Milt Dagwood, who trails behind father and daughter in a cheap, battered car, despite their early (and in the father's case repeated) protests. When Claire Boltwood awakes from an uncomfortable sleep in a hotel in Gopher Prairie, the fictional town that would later serve as the setting of *Main Street*, she experiences the democratic epiphany typical of most road narratives:

> Thus Claire Boltwood's first voyage into democracy. ... She discovered that she again longed to go on – keep going on – see new places, conquer new roads. She didn't want all good road. She wanted something to struggle against. … [S]he was a woman, not a dependent girl. (45)

Claire discovers what Milt already knows. The two figures embody the gendered split between production and consumption: he is an auto mechanic who dreams of becoming an engineer, she is a polished social performer whose veil "was as delicately adjusted as an aeroplane engine" (59). Their paths cross in a fairly conventional parlor romance set on the open road: Milt teaches Claire how to be more self-reliant, and she teaches him to be more polished. Their marriage presents an ideal solution not only to class conflict, but to the conflicted role of the consumer in a corporate economy. Claire's other suitor – a high-ranking manager in a large corporation – is ultimately too much of a "company man" to compete with Milt, who at the end of the novel is planning on enlisting in the Army Engineering Corps and fighting in World War I, before starting his own business. His willingness to drive off the beaten path with Claire is a metonymy for their ability to carve out a private space in the corporate landscape – a space where masculine production is still possible, especially when fueled by feminine taste and a hefty dowry

Main Street, a much more pessimistic book, suggests there is no escape in the corporate landscape. Carol Kennicott's "voyage into democracy" involves a struggle against a small town, not bad roads. Yet the two are related. Carol's fight is more stationary because it takes place in a standardized landscape where one "... Main Street is the continuation of Main Streets everywhere" (i). If the street in the second novel is a location rather than a thoroughfare, a

setting rather than an itinerary, it is because movement in the standardized landscape has already become socially and even geographically inconsequential. In the standardized landscape, there is simply no place to go. All towns look like Gopher Prairie, which Lewis is careful to establish as the archetype of a new kind of American town, homogenized, as in Dreiser, by national fashions, commodities, and building designs. The staunchly middle-class Carol is, in a sense, the child of Milt and Claire – a prototype of the typical consumer, slightly dissatisfied with life, who rebels against standardization and boredom only to return, ultimately reconciled to her limited role. Freedom in this novel is no longer some imagined "pioneer" quality, but "free choice" among a range of interchangeable products and lifestyles. Gopher Prairie is both a way station and the terminal point of Claire Boltwood's "voyage into democracy." The trajectory leading from the road trip back to the town inscribes the path through which political freedom is disembedded from its mythical "pioneer" origins and reterritorialized, through "feminine" consumption, as consumer choice.

The threat posed by Main Street is standardization:

> But a village in a country which is taking pains to become altogether standardized and pure, which aspires to succeed Victorian England as the chief mediocrity of the world, is no longer merely provincial, no longer downy and restful in its leaf-shadowed ignorance. It is a force seeking to dominate the earth, to drain the hills and sea of color, to set Dante at boosting Gopher Prairie, and to dress the high gods in Klassy Kollege Klothes. … Such a society functions admirably in the large production of cheap automobiles, dollar watches, and safety razors. But it is not satisfied until the entire world also admits that the end and joyous purpose of living is to ride in flivvers, to make advertising-pictures of dollar watches, and in the twilight to sit talking not of love and courage but of the convenience of safety razors. (267)

The threat of standardization is a common theme in Lewis. In *Dodsworth* (1929), he puts a similar speech in the mouth of a German professor, who gives it a sinister ring on the eve of Hitler's rise to power: "Europe! The last refuge, in this Fordized world, of personal dignity. And we believe that is worth fighting for! We are menaced by the whole world. Yet perhaps we shall endure … perhaps!" (*Dodsworth* 250).

III. Standardization, Frontier Nostalgia, and Patriotism

What Lewis calls the "voyage into democracy" is a standard trope in road books, combining touristic consumption with what Marguerite Schaffer calls "rituals of democratic citizenship." Tourism, especially in the years immediately preceding World War I, was represented by advertisers as a patriotic duty under the motto "see America first." Emily Post's *By Motor to the Golden Gate*,

her record of a transcontinental auto trip taken in 1915, demonstrates this conflation of consumerism and patriotism, offering a general answer to Lewis's skepticism about the possibility of freedom in consumer society: consumption is not only the greatest adventure, but a quintessentially American one.

Post, a New York socialite who later became famous as a syndicated etiquette writer, her nephew, and a female traveling companion set out from New York in 1915 to drive as far west as *luxuriously* possible (3). They abjured the greater luxury of the train because Post felt it would be impossible to open the "book" of her own country from the back of a Pullman (3). This dialectic between luxury and independence is a variation of the conflict which, I have already suggested, lies at the heart of modern tourism. The tourist wants to cross boundaries, to strike out on her own, to do something uncommon, to see something new – but not at the expense of certain creature comforts. What Post discovers is that the creature comforts actually interfere with her encounter of difference. Cheyenne, Colorado, for instance, is no longer a frontier town, but a modern city with paved streets and hotels (116).What remains of the past is an annual Wild West Show (118); another western town exhibits a few stuffed buffaloes as a memorial to absent herds (91). Post finds that most small towns follow the standard decorating and architectural trends (24), often sacrificing their uniqueness to look like little New Yorks (88). In a landscape designed to be comfortable, Post is confined to the standard.

Like Claire Boltwood, Post quickly discovers that what she needs is trouble to keep her, and her readers, going (148). While she always remains the white gloved tourist, interested in the comfort and cleanliness of hotels and restaurants above all else, she begins, almost against her will, to look for difficulties to punctuate her narrative. She articulates the following premise as her "motor philosophy": "in motoring, as in life, since trouble gives character, obstacles and misadventures are really necessary to give the *trip* character" (44). Thus Post discovers the West only after she has to suffer for it: "like the Sleeping Beauty in the fairy-tale," she says, "the beauty sleeping in the Southwest is surrounded by a thorn hedge of hardships and discomfort that presents its most impenetrable thicket and sharpest spines to the motorist" (175).

Post's allusion to the fairy tale is revealing. The hardships in her narrative are fabulous inventions – the pastime of a tourist with an expensive English racer and time to use it. Suffering, for Post, is a kind of slumming; it "stages authenticity," to borrow another concept from Dean MacCannell. In many places Post's book admits its own staging. For instance, Post and her party "discover" the West at precisely the moment they begin to feel like stars in their own film. The movie scene is no more authentic than the Wild West shows and stuffed buffalos Post derides elsewhere in the narrative. Schnapp argues that the cinema analogy is convincing to drivers because it embodies a touris-

tic relation of subjectivity to space. The way landscape moves across a film screen mimics the way it slides pass the windshield: in both cases it appears that "*the landscape ... is in motion and not the traveler; or, rather, that the landscape is in motion for the traveler*" (22, italics in original).[8] However, Post is so convinced by her own filmic version of the West that she ends up rediscovering the difference she originally despaired of finding: "Everyone who had taken the trip assured us that our impressions in the end would be of an unending sameness. Sameness! Was there ever such variety?" (238).

The framing of the "authentic experience" is similar to the framing of the "authentic location" in postcards. Post's photographs could be seen as postcards, interchangeable with any she might have purchased along the way, serving as the background or occasion of her text and targeting readers in communities other than those she visits. In a sense, the narrative, interspersed with photographs, could be seen as a low-tech version of the filmic representation she praises, combining narrative and images in a journey-narrative. The filmic manner in which the narrative and images work together in Post conforms to the manner in which road books and postcards work together generally: scripting a performance, both patriotic and consumeristic, by targeting a nostalgic object that disappears as soon as it is reached. These multiple framings of narrative and image are the precondition to both the enjoyment of "America" and the discovery of its patriotic significance.

Patriotism, in Post, makes its presence felt through democratic technology. Post concludes that, while driving through the United States is not as easy as driving through Europe, "with the right kind of machine" the trip becomes a pleasure (240). In fact, the narrative becomes an advertisement for precisely this "right machine" (2). The car turns out to be a Ford – the cheap product her wealthy party decidedly does not drive (11, 139, 184). Cheap technology, in Post, is the complement to hardship: both serving as simultaneous markers of local variety and national identity. When Post says the rugged American landscape is made for a Ford, she is expressing a sense of community with the locals – a community based on the pervasiveness of technology, not regional similarities and differences. She is also expressing the fact that in this newly standardized landscape, regional differences tend to collapse into technological ones. The west might have the same hotels as the east, but a whole landscape of adventure unfolds between those who tour in an expensive car and those who work in a Ford.

If technology replaces the region as the primary marker of variety, it also obscures real difference – class and ethnic – behind the relatively harmless façade of the tourist attraction. In her position as tourist, Post is able to ignore or explain away inequalities because her trip translates the economic and ethnic into the scenic. In fact, it translates all conflict – including World War I –

into a touristic encounter governed by the relatively harmless and containable logic of the attraction or site. Post uncovers the political bias of German farmers, for instance, by gauging their response to the British hood ornament on her car (85). Then she leaves them behind, along with the threat of war, in her search for another attraction.

Post treats not only places as attractions but people as well, reducing them to a purely scenic or economic status. Since she has no interaction with the Navajos she passes in the Arizona desert, they are barely human, mere figures in the landscape ("Except while still in the Reservation where we passed occasional Navajos we saw no living person or thing the rest of the day" [183]). Similarly, she describes Hopi women selling souvenirs in a train station in Santa Fe as actors in a pageant for tourists and later complains that they are not wearing their traditional garments the right way (160). She objects when another Native American asks to be paid for two photos when he hears the shutter of her camera click twice. Tourists are, of course, the greatest traditionalists because they want to visit (and collect) a static culture: a culture that is commemorative or elegiac and can be carried away as a souvenir. Entrepreneurial natives do not correspond to the myth of the "vanishing Indian" perpetuated by the Harvey hotel chain and other cultural institutions (Schaffer 59). Post is not happy when the Indians stage their own authenticity because it does not fit her staged version of the West (162).

Authenticity is a suspect category in a narrative that only discovers the "West" when it begins to look like a film. The real issue is not whether or not the West is staged, but *who* gets to stage it. The answer is those who have access to the technology of tourism, which in the road book is the technology of representation. In Post, as in many other writers of the period, technology constitutes a differentially permeable border, superimposed on a landscape where regional differences are beginning to disappear. The same technology that supposedly corrupts Native Americans offers tourists and consumers the chance to become independent, self-actualizing agents. Technology, in other words, becomes a training ground for the management of the self. In an afterword, Post's nephew, the actual driver on the trip, argues that maintaining an automobile turns a man into a problem-solver (250). A problem-solver might not be a pioneer, but he or she is the next best thing.[9] The road book is above all a guide to modern living. Just as the narrative stages authenticity, the maps, lists, and daily expense accounts included at the end of the book script subjectivity as a kind of performance.

Post's road book is not about the search for difference; it is a narrative of exclusion disguised as a celebration of hardship, individualism, technology, and other things supposedly "Western." The America she "discovers" is one

in which class and ethnic differences have been transposed into the decorative or the scenic. This becomes obvious in Post's description of San Francisco, where all things "Chinese" become exotic markers of difference. Post is fascinated by one servant in a San Francisco home who "moved about in his costume of dull green brocade like some lovely animate figure of purely decorative value." She asks her eastern readers, "Why have we nothing in our houses that are such a delight to the eye?" (218). A page later she says, "he behaves exactly as a chow or a Persian cat, or any other purely decorative independent household belonging" (219). The whole city is organized according to this logic of display and decoration. Thus Post points out that houses in San Francisco are priced by view, not location (212). This is the ultimate expression of the postcard landscape.

IV. Patriotism as Brand-Name Identification

The links between touring the country and "loving" it are multiple and complicated, but they were cemented through the tandem development of two commodities: the automobile and the picture postcard. Both were exhibited in the World's Columbian Exposition in 1893, and they proliferated rapidly after Ford developed the assembly line and Congress made it possible to mail privately printed postcards at the government rate. Automobile tourism and postcards map the landscape in complementary ways, celebrating the *local* through national networks of transportation and communication. This national redefinition of the local is at the heart of modern tourism, which is nostalgic for the places it threatens. It is not a far jump from nostalgic tourism to nostalgic nationalism, especially as it is articulated through Turner's "frontier thesis" (also unveiled at the 1893 Exposition).

The nation is *imagined* through road books and postcards as much as through political theories, perhaps even more so given the pervasiveness of consumerism and commodities. Turn-of-the-century patriotism, understood as an "expression" of national pride or belonging, is forged through the citizen consumer's identification with these two representational forms. Significantly, postcard images, including patriotic ones, often originated outside the geographical borders of the nation before 1909; one writer for *Scribner's*, for instance, expressed his satisfaction at seeing postcards of President McKinley for sale in Paris.[10] The origin of the image, however, does not determine its meaning. What is determinate is the circulation of the image as a commodity and sign.

In a consumer economy, brand name and national identification dovetail with one another through road narratives and postcards, two of the major innovations of twentieth-century advertising. The road book inscribes a nar-

rative of consumption along the itinerary of the journey, and the postcard represents the image of its disappearing object, the perpetually receding goal, the location (or commodity) whose "authenticity" is simultaneously constituted and compromised by the economic-symbolic structure responsible for its staging. Following the itinerary of the road narrative is a ritual of citizenship, newly open to women through consumerism at the beginning of the twentieth century; and the postcard image represents the untenable object of the patriotic ideal: the homogeneous country where diversity is regulated in terms of the "scenic."

I have already mentioned the American Souvenir Card Company's "patriographic" collection, which combines patriotism with local "scenes" (Miller 4). Shortly after this, another American company published a "Greetings from Picturesque America" series, which included pictures of U.S. war ships (6). Another set often warships by E. C. Kropp of Milwaukee exists in two versions: one bearing a shield emblem with the phrase "Remember The Maine!'" and the other, with the identical images, the Schlitz Beer trademark with the phrase "Drink Schlitz the Beer that Made Milwaukee Famous." The beer advertisement is fixed to an official government back and the patriotic slogan on a private back (7). The interchangeability of the slogans demonstrates the link between patriotism and advertising in a consumer economy.

Most road books are deeply invested in the patriotic ideal of consumption, but Dreiser's is the exception. Dreiser is ambivalent about the costs of so-called "progress." Unlike Post, he recognizes ethnic integration as one of the benefits of corporate expansion, denouncing "the menace of immigration" thesis as dime store sociology (48). He is concerned, however, that the corporate structures responsible for commercial and social standardization will eventually destroy the principles of freedom and individualism necessary for democracy. *Hoosier Holiday* is an anti-road narrative insofar as it is nostalgic not for an authentic locus of freedom but for freedom as a universal principle. Dreiser does not believe that in the long run big business is compatible with democracy, and his final reflections are elegiac in tone: "... I would have this tremendous, bubbling Republic live on, as a protest perhaps against the apparently too unbreakable rule that democracy, equality, or the illusion of it, is destined to end in disaster. It cannot survive ultimately, I think ... but until then ?" (512).

Notes

1. See also Dreiser 448-49.
2. See Ronald Primeau's *Romance of the Road* (1996) and Kris Lackey's *RoadFrames* (1997).
3. John Jakle and Keith Sculle have analyzed several aspects of roadside architecture in *The Gas Station in America* (1994), *The Motel in America* (1996), and *Fast Food* (1999).

4. After 1909, the Federal government stepped in not only to protect local production, but to regulate images on postcards, forbidding lynching scenes, for instance, in 1912, along with images deemed unacceptable by the Society for the Suppression of Vice (Miller 22).
5. *Travelguide* was the one recommended by the famous *American Guide*, published in 1949. For other guides targeting African American drivers see Lewis 269.
6. In 1925, industry analysts predicted that only about 8% of families buying a new car between 1926 and 1930 would be "first time buyers" (Chandler 107). Robert Lynd and Alice Hanson's study "The People as Consumers," included in the Hoover administration's two volume series *Recent Social Trends in the United States* (not published until 1933), argues that" If the automobile industry guessed badly in the 1920's [by overproduction], the result is an intensification of the campaign on the consumer" (870).
7. MacManus and Beasley: "This book is of men who have pioneered in automobiles. It is something that must be told now because the pioneers are passing. … There was a rugged picturesqueness to these pursuers of fortunes. They had about them something of the tang and flavor of piracy. The stuff from which men are made heroic was not altogether lacking in them" (vii-viii).
8. The motion-picture metaphor is common in road narratives. In a 1915 article in *Scribner's* called "Motoring in the High Sierras," Charles J. Belden presciently observes that California provides the perfect scenery for filming (202).
9. Winifred Hawkridge Dixon's *Westward Hoboes* (1924) provides another example of equating problem-solving and pioneering. The women drivers make a point of repairing their own car without the help of men.
10. Miller and Miller note that an early image of President Roosevelt was printed and distributed abroad, and they refer to other patriotic themes found in Europe at turn of the century (15). They also mention a series of six scenes from American history designed by a German artist (234).

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