

Commentary by
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Kulturkampf, Now and Then

The dust jacket to *The Human Stain* announces the basic premise of Philip Roth's salvo fired "in a time of cultural warfare, with 'the persecuting spirit' on the rise, a president is hounded over a sexual affair, a professor loses his job over a single word, and the nation succumbs to an 'ecstasy of sanctimony.'" While Roth does not actually use the phrase "cultural warfare" at any point in the novel, he doesn't need to. As I write, in the summer of 2000, we are so immersed in the war, reminded of it daily in the run-up to the presidential election, that there's no need to call overt attention to it. Not only do we hear the black flak erupting to traumatize us, but we are engulfed by the constant white noise of competing forces in this current war; indeed, we can't imagine the 1990s without it. What's more, we can't imagine the cultural warfare of the decade without its political counterpart (shutting down the Federal government, impeaching the President).

Roth's book is a great novel for our times; it's an angered response to the moral crusade of forces arrayed on the political and religious right engaged in a counterrevolutionary coup against the 1960s, symbolized by Bill Clinton and his multifarious betrayals. Most importantly, Roth's novel engages with the domestic wars convulsing America since the end of the Cold War. *The Human Stain's* contorted narrative interfuses the historical and cultural conflicts swirling around America's end of the millennium which, for the sake of convenience, the book's publishers can readily shorthand as "the culture wars." Coleman Silk, Roth's beleaguered protagonist, is caught up in—and fatally victimized by—a time of cultural warfare, the terrain of which is a shelled battleground created by Vietnam's unhealed scars; the unfulfilled promises of 60s progressive

ideologies; the debasement of those same ideologies to the “political correctness” controversies on American campuses; a continuing legacy of racism and anti-Semitism; second wave feminism and its discontents; and the enduring pain of America’s suppressed class conflict. All come together in Roth’s despairing vision of a country whose aggressive tendencies are turned inward, destroying good men like Silk, in a frenzy of destructive “rituals of purification” (2).

Roth’s novel is the perfect *Zeitgeist* book for an America unable to let go of its puritanical heritage after 400 long years, consumed by its own self-annihilating impulses, which are acted upon in particular historical moments when perceived threats from within (and within the American national character) are more dangerous than threats from without. We are in another one of those moments, just as we were in the 1930s. As Nathan Zuckerman, the novel’s narrator tells us, post-cold war America is in the throes of “an enormous piety binge, a purity binge, when terrorism—which had replaced communism as the prevailing threat to the country’s security—was succeeded by” a national obsession with the Commander-in-Chief’s sexual peccadillos (2). Moreover, Roth insists on historicizing the current culture war, seeing it as just the latest manifestation of “what Hawthorne. [. . .] identified in the incipient country of long ago as ‘the persecuting spirit’ ” achieving its first full flowering at Salem. Thus the essential conflict—in both the American individual and at large in the American body politic, between a censorious, theocratic impulse and a secular, democratic streak of independence from any external policing action—erupts at moments in American life with almost predictable frequency. And what’s interesting is the degree to which this essential conflict has been intensified rhetorically, since the end of the Cold War, by metaphorizing it as warfare. If, as Clausewitz so famously declared, war is the continuation of politics by other means, the ferocity of political contention and debate in turn of the millennium America is such that the body politic is not merely in conflict with itself, as in previous historical periods, but is at war. As Roth’s novel so tellingly makes clear, Jeffersonian political ideals have been KIA. Politics in America isn’t a matter of attaining consensus through informed and rational debate and reflection, but is now all-out warfare, the uglier the better. And not just one war, either. It’s a proliferation of wars: the war on drugs; the gender wars; the race wars; the culture wars. I’ll trace the evolution of the rhetoric of cultural conflict in terms of “the culture war” to a plurality of “the culture wars” and explore that evolution as it has

occurred in the absence of “real” war after the fall of the Berlin Wall. I’ll end by raising the specter of the culture wars marking the decade before America’s entry into the Second World War, suggesting that maybe the more things change on the front lines of the culture wars, the more they remain the same.

Actually, the phrase “culture war” is nothing new, nor is the concept of a culture at war with itself. In the modern era, we can go all the way back to Germany in the period after the Franco-Prussian War, when (as the OED informs us) the word *kulturkampf* (literally, culture struggle) entered the lexicon to describe the convulsive conflict between the Bismarck’s government and the Papacy for control of schools and Church appointments (1872-87). The bitterly contested effort to secularize the nascent German empire wasn’t unique in the 19th century, but it was this particular one that articulated it as something more than just a debate or even a conflict. The opposing forces of church and state, if not considered *krieg* (war), was a “struggle,” according to the phrase’s maker Rudolf Virchow, the scientist and Prussian liberal statesman, who declared in 1873 that the battle with Roman Catholicism assumed “the character of a great struggle in the interest of humanity.” Note that Virchow universalized the conflict in terms larger than the German people, inflating the rhetoric circulating around the controversy, to argue that it had import for all of mankind. As in all struggles, there are wins and losses; in this first *kulturkampf*, most of the anti-Catholic legislation had been repealed, moderated by Bismarck, or fell by the wayside from a lack of enforcement and public resistance to it. Fast forward to discourse around the American election of 2000, when the phrase “kulturkampf” is invoked by the neoconservative public intellectual Gertrude Himmelfarb in the recent pages of *Commentary*:

This, in short, has been a more instructive primary season than most, for it has obliged us once again to take the measure of our country. What we witness is not a political war in the usual sense—a war waged first among the several factions within each party and then between the two parties. Nor is it, more ominously, a *Kulturkampf*, a religious war that threatens to alter the longstanding relations of church and state. It is something more than the first and less than the second—a new episode in the culture wars that, contrary to the predictions of some, continue to engage us as they have for almost a half-century. (Himmelfarb 23)

Here she imports, from a momentous conflict in German history, the compound word to suggest that contemporary secular America, however challenged by the “dissident culture” of social and religious conservatism, will be spared all-out war only if politicians and religious leaders “recogniz[e] and respon[d] to the serious issues at stake in these culture wars.” Approving, from the political right, of those “dissidents,” whose “traditional customs and beliefs” must be respected by politicians, Himmelfarb enjoins the candidates from “exacerbat[ing] conflict into open warfare.” Her deployment of such rhetoric is just one example of the sheer ubiquity of metaphorizing cultural conflict in terms of war in contemporary America.

Yet the word *kampf* only suggests cultural conflicts in terms of struggle, of contestation in the form of politics by means other than all-out violent war. If any single individual is responsible for ratcheting up the rhetoric to invoke *kulturkrieg* it would be Patrick Buchanan. Almost exactly contemporary with the fall of the Berlin Wall, Buchanan’s magnetic demagoguery articulated for the right a more aggressive and combative rhetoric that transferred the suppressed violence inherent in the Cold War (only unrepressed and enacted by proxy in Vietnam, El Salvador, and so forth) to the domestic realm of cultural production. A key moment in this rhetorical transformation was the headline for an editorial by Buchanan in the *Washington Times* on May 22, 1989: “Losing the War for America’s Culture?” The question he posed was answered in the affirmative by a slashing condemnation of the National Endowment for the Arts for funding such provocatively offensive cultural production as Andres Serrano’s and such institutions as the Southeastern Center for Contemporary Arts (of Winston-Salem, North Carolina) for exhibiting Serrano’s work. While Buchanan was pleased to pronounce America the victor of the Cold War, he thundered that “America’s art and culture are, more and more, openly anti-Christian, anti-American, nihilistic” (32). Moreover, the cultural transgressors were sneaky and subversive, having taken advantage of America’s victorious battles in the Cold War to worm their way into the body politic, weakening its integrity. “While the right has been busy winning primaries and elections, cutting taxes and funding anti-communist guerrillas abroad, the left has been quietly seizing all the commanding heights of American art and culture” (32). Buchanan could not resist elaborating the figure of the American cultural scene as a battlefield, castigating the enemy for successfully “taking that hill.” Buchanan drew the battle lines

in stark and simple terms: right versus left, flattening the complex landscape with what he knew would be the popular, but polarizing, appeal of his Manichaeic world view.

Buchanan ended his *Washington Times* editorial with an overt linking of the end of one war, directed outwards, with another war, directed inwardly. "Political leaders in Washington believe that the battle against communism is being fought in the jungles of Asia and Central America, while failing to realize the war is also raging on the battlefield of the arts within our own borders" (33). His call, in 1989, for "conservatives and the religious community that comprise the vast middle-American population" to take arms and "do what the liberals did long ago—capture the culture," reached even more soldiers at the 1992 Republican National Convention. At Houston, Buchanan seized the delegates' rapt attention as he called for the right to reject the call to turn swords into ploughshares and instead take up the fight against a domestic enemy contaminating and corrupting the nation's Judeo-Christian values. It was such a defining moment in contemporary politics that Buchanan savored the moment again at the Texas GOP convention in San Antonio in 1996. "What did we say? I said there was a cultural war going on in this country for the soul of America, and that war is about who we are, what we believe, and what we stand for as people" ("Speech"). Of course, Buchanan didn't singlehandedly invent the battalions of this war. He was merely crystallizing for the right a strong impulse to take up arms evolving since the early 1980s, when such elite palace guards as the Reverend Donald Wildmon's National Federation for Decency and the Reverend Jerry Falwell's Moral Majority joined forces with almost 400 other fundamentalist Christian organizations (the Eagle Forum, Concerned Women for America, et al.) to form the Coalition for Better Television in February 1981 (Bolton 334). The CBT began organized boycotts of objectionable TV programs, as well as targeting corporate advertisers of such programming. In that same year President Ronald Reagan's Task Force on the Arts and Humanities, packed with religious conservatives, reported a "Mandate for Leadership" and advocated slashing the budgets of both the National Endowment for the Humanities and that pernicious JFK invention, the National Endowment for the Arts. But there's no question that by the time of the 1992 GOP convention, a decade of combat could be conceptualized conveniently by Buchanan as a "war," and, at that, an unspoken war against the 1960s and a war of revenge for Watergate.

If Buchanan popularized the metaphor of war to get our minds around the debate between the forces of right and left, few refused it. Forces on the left readily embraced it as well. For example, *The Revolutionary Worker*, the newspaper of the Revolutionary Communist Party, opined in an editorial in its August 14, 1989 issue (“Down with the Senate Art Police!”) that the Senate’s “fascistic” move to abolish the NEA, inspired by Buchanan’s Nazi-like condemnation of so-called “degenerate art” (*entartete kunst*), was a manifestation of social control to “tur[n] back the clock and revers[e] social progress made since the 1960s. “Cultural war,” in the words of the *Revolutionary Worker*, “is very sharp right now because it concentrates big questions that are up in society as a whole.” Here the RCP marshals forth the figures of speech of the military campaign (and in all caps for that propagandistic flair): “AND NOW IS NOT THE TIME FOR REBEL ARTISTS TO BE ON THE DEFENSIVE. NOW IS THE TIME TO TAKE THE POLITICAL OFFENSIVE,” as yet again the right and left, het up by the extremist rhetoric of their most extreme spokesmen, prepare to engage in hand-to-hand combat. It is worth noting how quickly, at the end of the 1980s, the metaphorization of perennial cultural conflict as all-out war, became entrenched in the American imagination—so much so, that by the end of the following decade, Roth’s novel *The Human Stain* doesn’t have to express it directly (only for the dust jacket writer to more overtly remind us of it). It becomes an ever-present backdrop, engulfing us so that we can’t remember a time when controversy wasn’t a matter of destructive war, scarring the national psyche so that “healing” (to invoke another popular metaphor at large in a therapy-obsessed culture of continual self-reinvention) can’t ever seem to “begin.”

In the summer of 2000, when Dick Cheney (a former Secretary of Defense) was announced as the GOP Vice Presidential nominee, much discourse swirled around Lynne Cheney’s public identity as a “cultural warrior” in the 1990s as head of the NEH during the Reagan and Bush administrations (1986-1993). It was Reagan speechwriter-turned star TV pundit Peggy Noonan who used exactly that phrase on MSNBC to praise Lynne Cheney’s value to the Bush-Cheney ticket in the election. Matt Bai of *Newsweek* asserted that “it is Lynne Cheney who has been the true right-wing warrior in the family,” fighting the good fight at both the NEA and then, predictably enough, as a TV pundit on *Crossfire* during the Clinton-Gore years (Bai). Indeed, we probably shouldn’t underestimate the degree to which the rise and proliferation of network

and cable TV political analysts in the 1990s have helped the public discourse around cultural conflicts (from public funding for the Arts to controversial art exhibits) become increasingly “hot.” While such programs are hardly big ratings winners, their very titles—*Firing Line* and *Crossfire*—announce themselves as productions where “sparks fly” and competitive media force up the vituperation factor as opposing pundits vie for attention. It has been easy for such staged antagonism to revel in all the metaphors of violent combat, as portentous, doom-laden music chords accompany the talking heads in the shows’ intros. It is therefore completely fitting that Lynne Cheney continue the battle, with the bully pulpit of the White House unavailable to the GOP during the wilderness years of Clinton-Gore, in the electronic town square, forming and fomenting outraged public opinion against the kind of cultural production that does nothing to uplift and enlighten, but rather threatens to unravel the moral fiber of the American body politic’s uniform.

One of the problems that moralizing cultural warriors like Lynne Cheney and Tipper Gore and Patrick Buchanan and Michael Medved and Donald Wildmon and William Bennett and Joseph Lieberman (and the names of dozens of prominent figures in the post-Cold War era could be reeled off here) have is that in a much-vaunted capitalist free enterprise market economy dominated by giant American media corporations, the targets of attack actually sell. Consumers exercise freedom of choice at the box office for gore-filled action flicks, send Niensens sky-high for nightly sniggering sexual innuendo, and sustain a multibillion-dollar porn industry because, presumably, they know what they like. The 1990s witnessed an enormously contentious period of public debate, organizational boycotting, and critical vilification over not just offensive Art with a capital A, the unspeakably vile objects in museums (works by Serrano, Mapplethorpe, Ofili, et al.), but also over a countless number of popcult artifacts, even as seemingly anodyne as Disney’s feature-length cartoons (which were presumed to conceal satanic and sexual imagery read subliminally by zombified tots). It was also the Internet Decade, exacerbating alarmist fears of cultural pollution by a seemingly fungal new medium capable of evading any political boundaries or parental oversight and control. V-chips, “Nannyblockers” on the internet, parental advisories on rap CDs: all are inventions of a decade which marshaled technology away from outer space and foreign enemies and towards the new war for the hearts and minds of America’s children and to protect the easily outraged

sensibilities of their increasingly helpless parents, who risked losing the fight right on the doorstep of America's hearth and home. Of course, that metaphoric doorstep has disappeared, since the now-porous threshold of the middle-class American suburban home has multiplied to every electrical, cable, and telephone outlet in it.

The religious right continued to metaphorsize all these bewildering social and cultural developments in the easily familiar terms of war. As Robert Knight did very recently in a statement issued by his influential Family Research Council: "The ex-gay movement is a way out of this plague [of homosexuality] that has hit our families. It's time to let faith take over. This is the Normandy landing in the larger cultural wars" (Knight). This could make a lot of sense to Knight's audience in the wake of the baby boomers' guilt-ridden rediscovery in the late 1990s of the World War II generation's heroism (capped by the overwhelming success of Steven Spielberg's *Saving Private Ryan* and Tom Brokaw's *The Greatest Generation*). Overt reference to the actuality of the Second World War ups the rhetorical ante from earlier in the decade when Beverly LaHaye, in a 1992 Concerned Women for America fundraising appeal, simply referred to the war in generic terms: "We are at war in America today. [. . .] We don't want our children taught that the sin of homosexuality is an acceptable lifestyle 'choice.'" Knight masterfully invokes a crucial offensive in the war against a bad enemy (so bad as to be medicalized as "plague," which in turn plants a field of associations pertaining to AIDS) to suggest the paramount importance of expunging homosexuality from the home front. For Knight and his fellow congregants, the enemy in the current war is one that launches its attack from within, yet the rhetoric also powerfully externalizes that enemy, insisting on its essential foreignness or Otherness.

Perhaps the most scabrous critique of this fundamentally xenophobic streak in the American national character, now directed towards enemies of a vaunted (if mythical) "traditional Judeo-Christian morality," came in the guise of a crude cartoon movie, the kind of nasty popcult artifact that would earn one of Bennett and Lieberman's "Silver Sewer" Awards. Actually, Matt Stone's and Trey Parker's *South Park: Bigger, Longer & Uncut* has been unjustly overlooked by the Award, which ironically, as ever, calls increased attention to the effluent of popular culture (winners like Marilyn Manson, Howard Stern, *Ally McBeal*, and Jerry Springer) and its producers (Fox, CBS, Seagram Inc.), thus ensuring continuing masscult fascination with what is condemned by moral arbiters. Bennett

has, in his own compelling rhetoric, turned the American hearth and home into a besieged space that has become an imperfectly run police state at war with its own citizens. "You can't keep" sexual and violent imagery "away from the kids. It's a siege. If you turn it off at your house, they'll see it at somebody else's house," Bennett averred (qtd. in "Fox TV"), inadvertently pointing up the terrifying dispersal of popcult artifacts over increasingly multiple media outlets when the era of Three Network dominance of the airwaves is well and truly over. The media are uncontrollable, and so are the kids. The movie version of the Comedy Central show audaciously suggests that the only meaningful war, in the post-Cold War era, is not even the kind of humanitarian police-keeping actions over Northern Iraq or Kosovo that have marked Bill Clinton's controversial watch as Commander-in-Chief, but is, rather, the all-out full-scale traditional land invasion of a scapegoat nation irrationally singled out by outraged mothers for corrupting their children.

In *South Park: Bigger, Longer & Uncut* America declares war on its neighbor to the north when the Canadian import *Asses of Fire*, itself a crude feature-length spinoff of a massively popular and scatological TV cartoon, incites the kids of South Park (led by Kyle, Cartman, Stanley, and Kenny) to emulate their foul-mouthed, farting cartoon heroes, Terrance and Phillip. Local protests against the film soon become a national movement by the concerned mothers of America, determined to "form a full assault/It's Canada's fault." Actually, it's at least the theater manager's fault, too, since the South Park kids snuck into the R-rated movie which is, as Kyle's Mom insists, "nothing but foul language and toilet humor." But Stone and Parker cannily show that Americans will always externalize the blame whenever and wherever possible. Stan's mother sings, "Don't blame me for my son Stan;" rather, as the Oscar-nominated song has it, "Blame Canada," because "It seems everything's gone wrong/since Canada came along." The most demonized external enemy of the early 1990s, Saddam Hussein, gets relegated in *South Park* to the depths of hell as Satan's insatiable lover (he's been killed by a pack of wild boars); once he's disposed of, Canada takes pride of place as the number one threat to an embattled nation directing its militaristic impulses towards the producers of movies that, to paraphrase Cartman, warp the fragile little minds of American youth. As the Mothers Against Canada watch the horrific carnage from afar, Kyle's Mom remarks, blind to the irony of America's culture wars: "This what we wanted. We wanted

our children brought up in a smut-free environment.”

Stone and Parker’s movie, for all its provocative crudity, struck a chord with many moviegoers in the summer of 1999 seeking a satiric expression of protest against the barking watchdogs of public morality; certainly, the movie was both popular at the nation’s multiplexes (where 16 year-old ticket-takers allowed 13 year-old cinemagoers to sneak from theater to theater) and became a critics’ darling. Rita Kempley in the *Washington Post* praised it for its “surprising smarts” and for being a “sharp, wildly funny social satire.” Richard Corliss in *Time* told his readers that he laughed himself sick. Even Roger Ebert, who’s as mainstream a critical voice as one can imagine, admitting laughing, however guiltily. His sententious review in the *Chicago Sun-Times* fussed about how important a statement it was: “it serves as a signpost for our troubled times. Just for the information it contains about the way we live now, thoughtful and concerned people should see it,” if only to inoculate themselves against its “depraved” content. And as the Clinton-era combat film *par excellence*, it was the perfect expression of the entertainment’s industry refusal to toe the Bennett-Lieberman line. Indeed, Bill Clinton’s overly enthusiastic, and requited, embrace of Hollywood was yet another reason for the right’s disdain for him, and the two were associated inextricably in the minds of many who credited both with sapping American moral and military strength. In the absence of any other enemy in the post-Cold War era, the whole idea of war as a heroic enterprise gets parodied by Parker and Stone. For instance, Kyle’s Mom, in a Mothers Against Canada uniform, stands alone in long shot in front of a huge American flag, an irreverent riff on George C. Scott’s *Patton*. She pumps up the troops: “Horrific, deplorable violence is OK, as long as people don’t say any naughty words; that’s what this war is all about.” Her war spins apocalyptically out of control when she inadvertently unleashes Satan’s visitation on the earth with a resurrected Saddam Hussein at his side to begin two million years of darkness.

Stone and Parker’s kinetic satire of the Culture Wars, refreshing as it is to many, though, prompts a thought or two about how easy it might be to mock parents’ concern for their children, maybe too easy. They are easy targets, and they justifiably resent it, accurately confirming their own impression that the forces of media capitalism hold them in pitiable contempt. Certainly, popular entertainment like *South Park* doesn’t alleviate those concerns, especially since Parker and Stone have their

cake and eat it, too, by making a movie filled with “naughty words” which satirizes those who are upset by those “naughty words.” But this perhaps only exemplifies how vast the divisions are in American culture at the turn of the third millennium, when there seems to be little cultural consensus over what expression best expresses the nation’s ideals. Indeed, there seems to be even less desire for such consensus. For sure, the extent to which opposing forces in the culture wars depend on hyperbolic rhetoric, each side either demonizing or ridiculing the other, suggests that the metaphorization, in militaristic terms, of a lack of consensus over artistic expression may well be completely futile. But one might despair less when one understands that America’s *kulturkampf* is nothing new. The fundamental impulse to get exercised about provocative forms of cultural expression doesn’t have much inherently to do with Bill Clinton or Comedy Central or trash talk shows or white rapper Eminem. Rather, it has much to do with the degree to which America is satisfied with its own salvation, and then becomes preoccupied with salvific missions overseas. Distracted by real war, all becomes more quiet on the domestic cultural front. National consensus over cultural production was an easier matter during the first half of the 1940s, for instance, when even New Deal leftists like Aaron Copland or Marc Blitzstein composed music unequivocally dedicated to the Allied war effort and an uncomplicated vision of America as a good, pastoral place where ordinary heroes were born and raised. But the socially and economically turbulent early 1930s, by contrast, when American military commitments overseas were correspondingly minimal, marked another cycle in American history, much like the 1990s, when a vocal and volatile battle was fought over the content of the most pervasive form of popular entertainment: the movies.

Film historians like Lea Jacobs, Thomas Doherty, Gregory Black, and Mark Vieira have recently done much important work reminding us that another culture war occurred almost immediately after the Stock Market crash in 1929, a war between the Catholic Church (and its allies) and Hollywood that culminated in a crisis in the summer of 1934, when the U.S. Senate was poised to pass legislation regulating the content of Hollywood’s studio productions. Interestingly enough, this war got especially hot, when America finally confessed to itself that the *first* national war on drugs (Prohibition) was a dismal failure, a cure much worse than the disease it was designed to eradicate. In the nick of time, the Motion Picture Producers and Distributors Association finally

acknowledged that the industry would have to call a halt to a profitable trend toward more graphic representations of sex, drugs, and violence in its ribald comedies (like the Marx Brothers' *Monkey Business* and Mae West's *I'm No Angel*), gangster flicks (such as *Scarface* and *The Beast of the City*) and women's melodramas (*Red-Headed Woman* and *Call Her Savage*, to name only two examples of a particularly notorious genre). Threats of boycotts and legislation from high, which would have amounted to a governmental system of censorship, were averted when the MPPDA agreed finally to revise, strengthen, and enforce a 1930 Production Code that had been virtually ignored. Thus the industry was permitted to get serious about censoring itself. The moral arbiters of the Depression era railed against the cultural pollutants manufactured by the Dream Factory in terms absolutely familiar to us 70 years later.

In 1933, the immensely influential Catholic National Legion of Decency enjoined the flock to chant an oath to avoid objectionable movies as "occasions for sin" with words like these: "I condemn absolutely those salacious motion pictures which, with other degrading agencies, are corrupting public morals and promoting a sex mania in our land" (qtd in Doherty 320-1). On June 8, 1934, Denis Cardinal Dougherty of Philadelphia went so far as to consider *all* movies the occasion for sin: "A vicious and insidious attack is being made on the very foundation of our Christian civilization" (qtd in Doherty 321). Protestant and Jewish protest groups, as well as over 40 secular organizations, also joined the Legion throughout the 1933-4 run-up to the threat of government legislation, upping the rhetorical ante (Vieira 152). Politicians had a field day bloviating at length. Here, for example, is Francis D. Culkin, Republican Congressman of New York: "Steadily the stream of pollution which has flowed forth from Hollywood has become wilder and more turbulent" (qtd. in Doherty 324). Sociologists like Henry James Forman and Herbert Blumer also entered the fray, beating the drums for iron-hand oversight of movie content. Forman's best-selling tract *Our Movie-Made Children* argued that children were empty vessels, incapable of resisting direct character (mal)formation and corruption by Hollywood's producers and writers, who were "subversive to the best interests of society [. . .] nothing less than an *agent provocateur*, a treacherous and costly enemy let loose at the public expense" (qtd. in Doherty 321). The net result was the industry's capitulation to the forces of conservative morality, very effective self-policing of the industry under the aegis of Fightin' Irishman Joseph Ignatius Breen, and the survival of

the Code until 1967, when the first rating system came into effect. A measure of how quickly the film industry both adjusted and adhered to its own new moral standards was the replacement of the top-grossing female star of 1933 (Mae West) by 1935's top female money-earner, Shirley Temple. Culture was, at the end of this particular culture war, made safe for children and their parents.

The culture wars that periodically erupt in American history, and take a formidably divisive form, are not trivial outbursts. They're important manifestations of America's contradictory impulses to conform to conventional moral precepts rooted in Leviticus or St. Augustine or Calvin and to rebel against those very same moral dictates. The overheated dramatic rhetoric inhering in metaphorizing cultural debate as "war," as "attack," as "struggle" reminds us that, for all participants—artists, corporations, consumers, politicians, kids and their parents—it's almost as if life itself were at stake. And, in a way, it is. Creative expression is essential to the life of a culture and to the life of the individual, embodying the desire for the truth of the human condition as each of us sees it. That we see it differently inevitably leads to outbreaks of *kulturkampf*. However traumatic and even destructive culture wars are in a time of withdrawal from military conflicts outside our national borders, they at least suggest a lively culture of consent and dissent that energizes both cultural producers and those who refuse their visions. Say what you will, however moribund America's military-industrial complexes may be in the post-Cold War world we won for ourselves, the public response to the production from America's studios is far from quiet.

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