



Johann Wolfgang Goethe-Universität Frankfurt am Main

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Andrew Gross

**California Automobile Tourism and Consumer
Culture in American Literature, 1916 to 1939**

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Center for North American Studies

Johann Wolfgang Goethe-Universität
Robert-Mayer-Strasse 1
60054 Frankfurt / Main

Tel.: (069) 798 28521 / 22
e-mail: zenafdir@em.uni-frankfurt.de
homepage: <http://www.uni-frankfurt.de/zenaf>
Federal Republic of Germany

Zusammenfassung / Abstract:

This paper studies one of the earliest forms of modern consumer culture—the road book—in relation to one of the early utopias of modern consumption—California. Criticism has traditionally treated the road book as an extension of a loosely defined transcendentalist project, where drivers take to the open road to “discover” themselves in nature. The determinate context, however, is corporate rather than literary-historical. The earliest road books were advertisements. Their itineraries linked up with other spatial technologies (e.g. the conveyor belts in automobile plants and modern highways), transforming space into a vast production and distribution network. Production and distribution intersected in California, the state with the most automobiles per capita and the destination of most early road trips.

The first section of the paper considers the journey to California from the perspective of Emily Post, who would later become a famous writer on etiquette. Post’s book is the narrative equivalent to the standardized roadside architecture, converting local difference into a tourist attraction, and local (especially ethnic) identity into a commodity. The next section considers the effects of commercial homogenization on gender, focusing on the moment when some women, taking the steering wheel, assumed agency as consumers. The primary texts here are some of the early novels of Sinclair Lewis, along with examples of sociology and advertising copy from the 1920s and 1930s. The final section analyzes the WPA Guidebook to California as a federal attempt to re-map corporate space—the space of tourist attractions and consumers—according to a progressive ideal. All three sections treat the tour form as a spatial and literary structure—a privileged topos, at once geographical and symbolic, where complex relations between identity and place are negotiated in the form of a journey.

There is a convention in literature and criticism, already a cliché by the invention of the automobile, 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 title. "Log of an Auto Prairie Schooner," an article appearing in Sunset Magazine nine years later, depicts 18 tourists, each of whom paid \$875 to take a guided tour, as a band of rugged pioneers.¹ Theodore Dreiser, Edith Wharton, and Henry James depict the car as an anti-modern technology, allowing driver and passengers to escape the noisy, crowded city. Even Emily Post's By Motor to Golden Gate (1916), a book explicit about the importance of good hotels, good restaurants, and good etiquette, indulges in an occasional fantasy about horse-drawn wagons and cowboys.²

Contemporary literary critics tend to take these frontier fantasies at face value, treating driving as an expression of independence, the car as a symbol of freedom.³ This is, however, only half the picture. If driving is personally liberating, it is also one of the primary forces behind commercial standardization. As the geographer John Jakle points out in The Tourist: Travel in Twentieth-Century North America (1985), "with improved highways and the rise of roadside commerce, regional differences were obscured beneath a veneer of roadside homogeneity" (199). Early highways gave birth to the first business franchises, which pioneered the use of standardized architecture and packaging. Gas stations came first with their functional design and easily recognizable logos (Lewis 283). Next came restaurant chains like Howard Johnsons, then the hotels and motels (Lewis 284). At the same time, billboards for Burma 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 landscape their own mobility helped create.

This confluence of personal mobility and standardization marked the birth of consumer culture, which might be defined as that combination of overproduction and advertising necessary for the widespread distribution of standardized goods. Consumer culture

¹"We were motorists as far west as Chicago. Then we became pioneers" (191). Since I have been unable to locate copies of this book or Across the Continent in a Winton, this information comes from the most comprehensive bibliography of early road books, Autos Across America by Carey S. Bliss.

²"We might have been taking an unconscious part in some vast moving picture production, or, more easily still, if we overlooked the fact of our own motor car, we could have supposed ourselves crossing the plains in the days of the caravans and the stage coaches, when roads were trails, and bridges were not!" (135).

³ See Ronald Primeau's Romance of the Road (1996) and Kris Lackey's Road Frames (1997).

emerged when personal mobility, once a sign of luxury, began to colonize the “needs” of everyday life. By 1910 Herbert L. Towle, a writer for Harper’s Weekly, was already discussing the distinct needs of “a new class of owners...who depend on their automobiles for necessary daily transportation.” (The article was then included in The Locomobile Book of 1911 as an endorsement for that brand of car [Locomobile 251]).⁴ In 1913 Ford responded to this “need” with the assembly line, bringing the average price of the Model T down from \$850 to \$525 (Lewis 33). That same year or the year after, Standard Oil, Gulf, and Shell started building look-alike filling stations in cities and along rural roads (Jakle and Sculle 1984, 132). 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).⁵

Private enterprise did not wait for the government to build roads on its own initiative. Carl Graham Fisher, the owner of a headlight manufacturing company, proposed the transcontinental road that would soon be named the Lincoln Highway the same year that Henry Ford invented the assembly line. By WWI, the assembly line and the road already constituted a continuous trajectory of production and consumption.⁶ The standardized workstations along the conveyor belt mirrored the restaurants, motels, gas stations, and other points of consumption growing up alongside the highway. John Jakle and Keith Sculle⁷ call the principle governing this hyper-efficient terrain of consumption *place-product-packaging*. Place-product-packaging “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 1999, x). 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 and consumer choice. In By Motor to the Golden Gate (1916), Emily Post complained that towns were all beginning to look the same (88). The same year, Theodore Dreiser complained that even small town kids were wearing New York style clothes (163). This tension between standardization and freedom is at the heart of the driving experience.

This tension is also at the heart of the road book 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

⁴ In 1915 Towle wrote an article for Scribner’s entitled “Women at the Wheel” in which he asked the essential 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 women at the wheel, and those who do not have access to it, will be the subject of my next chapter.

In “Echoes of the Jazz Age” F. Scott Fitzgerald points out another aspect of the growing importance of the car in everyday life: “As far back as 1915 the unchaperoned young people of the smaller cities had discovered the mobile privacy of that automobile given to young Bill at sixteen to make him ‘self-reliant’” (14-15).

⁵ While president of Princeton, Wilson had famously decried the car as an incitement to class hatred.

⁶ In Drift and Mastery (1914), Walter Lippmann observed that “By the time goods are ready for the ultimate consumer they have traveled hundreds of miles, passed through any number of wholesalers, jobbers, middlemen and what not. The simple act of buying has become a vast, impersonal thing which the ordinary man is quite incapable of performing without all sorts of organized aid” (53).

⁷ 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).

names. Many of them were actually advertisements published for—and often by—auto companies. After Horatio Nelson Jackson’s From Ocean to Ocean in a Winton was published by the Winton Motor Carriage Co. in 1903, Oldsmobile and the Weed Chain Tire Grip Co. printed their own accounts in 1905, followed by 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, Stutz, Saxon, and Pathfinder, etc. The advertisements were effective.⁸ Emily Post, among others, claimed she decided to drive across country in 1915 because of the advertisements (Post 2).

Many automobile brochures were longer than traditional advertisements, some of them extending to over 250 pages in length. The expanded format, much longer than the typical billboard, newspaper, and catalogue advertisements of the day, provided ample space to both *list* and *narrate* the qualities of the product. The narratives overlap in the same way that commercial territories overlap in the corporate landscape: the settings, themes, and characters all borrow from and complement one another, resulting in a rigid economy of forms—or standardized package—aimed at the distribution of the central product—the automobile. The automotive section in the Sunset Magazine of April 1915 is a case in point. The 16-page story by L. W. Peck about driving “Over the Lincoln Highway to the Coast” contains eleven automotive ads, many of them full-page. Taken together they are an early example of what media professionals now call “synergy”—a deliberate blending of content and advertising designed to achieve the total presentation of a product.⁹ Peak’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.¹⁰ The narrative does, however, provide the setting necessary for the advertisements sandwiched into its pages. One Oldsmobile ad shows a scene that might as well be taken from Peak’s trip: a group crossing a fast stream, complete with captioned dialogue attesting to the ability of the car to meet any task. The magazine itself functions as a retail catalogue, listing advertisements in a separate index. The automotive section offers the textual equivalent of standardization and place-product-packaging.

Road books 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.¹¹ The object is not simply to sell a

⁸ This information comes from Carey S. Bliss’ useful annotated bibliography, Autos Across America: A Bibliography of Transcontinental Automobile Travel: 1903-1940 (1972).

⁹ “Synergy” is not a new concept in the media. In his 1924 book The Ethics of Journalism, Nelson Crawford claims that in the early part of the century “advertisers were inserting in their contracts with publishers a clause making the contracts voidable if any laws restricting the sale of patent medicines were passed, or if any matter prejudicial to the interests of the medicine manufacturer appeared in the paper” (14). It is unlikely that anything so blatant occurred with automotive advertising, but it was undoubtedly in the best interest of publications like Sunset Magazine, which relied heavily on advertising revenues, to run stories favorable to the automotive industry, even if that meant exaggerating the quality of roads.

¹⁰ “Thirty-six miles out of Chicago we met the Lincoln Highway and from the first found it a disappointment. As the most important, advertised and lauded road in our country, its first appearance was not engaging...[Y]ou dream of a wide straight road like the Route Nationale of France, or state roads in the East, and you wake rather unhappily to the actuality of a meandering dirt road that becomes mud half a foot deep after a day or two of rain!” (Post 67).

¹¹ Baudrillard argues that consumer culture is born when signs become commodified and commodities take on the function of signs: “Today consumption—if this term as [*sic*] a meaning other than that given it by vulgar economics—defines precisely *the stage where the*

particular kind of car; many of the more highbrow road books refrain from mentioning brand names at all. Rather, it is to sell a new lifestyle based on personal mobility and consumer choice.¹² In early road books, California is both the symbol for this kind of consumer freedom and the space in which it operates.

There is a long tradition of road books treating California as a theme and a destination, from Steinbeck to Henry Miller to Kerouac. The tradition goes back to the Spanish Conquistadors searching for El Dorado, amplified, of course, during the years of the Gold Rush. By the time rail and then auto travel made long-distance tourism relatively easy, California had become one of the most popular tourist destinations in the United States. However, California was not only an ideal destination but an ideal space for the use of cars. California led the nation in the ratio of car registration to population in both 1910 and 1929 (Ling 13). In America the average ratio for 1929 was one car for every five people; in LA it was one for every three. No European country approximated these figures until the 1960s (Ling 75).

This paper will concentrate on a few early road books, all heading west, to map out California as the new terrain of consumer culture. It will follow three roughly chronological phases:

- 1) The representation of California as the “frontier” in an increasingly standardized landscape.
- 2) The representation of the West as a site of liberation, especially for women, and as the field of consumer choice.
- 3) The representation of California as a utopian ideal, a place where social tensions are bureaucratically managed, and where local difference, already diminished in the standardized landscape, is reproduced as a tourist attraction.

I. Standardization and the Frontier

I begin with the road book by Emily Post, the New York socialite who later became famous as a syndicated etiquette writer. Post, her nephew, and another 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 at the heart of much 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).

commodity is immediately produced as a sign, as sign value, and where signs (culture) are produced as commodities” (Baudrillard 147, italics in original). This confluence of sign and commodity begins with automobile advertising.

¹² For accounts of the role of advertising in the production of new lifestyles, see Stuart Ewen’s *Captains of Consciousness* (1976) and Alan Trachtenberg’s *The Incorporation of America* (1982).

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.

Post quickly discovers that what she needs is *trouble* to keep her, and her readers, engaged (148). While she always remains the white-glove 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 only discovers the West 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 the phrase Dean MacCannell uses in The Tourist (1976). In many places Post’s book admits its own staging. In the following passage, Post and her party “discover” the West at precisely the moment they begin to feel like stars in their own film:

We might have been taking an unconscious part in some vast moving picture production, or, more easily still, if we overlooked the fact of our own motor car, we could have supposed ourselves crossing the plains in the days of the caravans and stage coaches, when roads were trails, and bridges were not!
(135)

The movie scene is no more authentic than the Wild West shows and stuffed buffalos Post derides elsewhere in the narrative. It is more convincing, however, because it embodies a touristic relation of subjectivity to space. One critic argues that the way the 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*” (Schnapp 22, italics in original). The motion-picture metaphor is very 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). 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).

Post concludes that while driving through the United States is not so easy as driving through Europe, “with the right kind of machine” the trip becomes a pleasure (240). In fact, the narrative, despite protestations to the contrary, 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 serve as markers of authenticity, the one regional, the other national (and nationalistic). When Post says the rugged American landscape is made for a Ford, she is expressing a sense of community with the poor farmers—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 difference, 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 into the scenic. In fact, it translates all conflict—including WWI—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 English hood ornament on her car (85). Then she leaves them behind along with the realities 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: “The hotel people, curio sellers, and Indians are the actors, the travelers on the incoming trains are the audience. Other people don’t count” (160). She is not happy at this example of staged authenticity because it does not fit *her* staged version of the West. Post is hardly cognizant of her own complicity in the performance. The Hopi women, it should be noted, are only acting for the *rail* tourists. Even when Post literally stumbles into them, she reduces them to a purely economic status, attributing them with a vocabulary that makes them adjunctive to their products:

“Tain cent!” “Tain cent!” The words sometimes sound like a question, sometimes a statement, but generally a monotonous drone. There is a nice old squaw—although I believe the Hopis don’t call their women squaws—sitting at the end. I tripped and almost fell into her lap. She looked up, smiled, and by her inflection conveyed, “Oh, my dear, did you hurt yourself?” but what she said was, “Tain cent!” (162)

Monotony is the sign of a practice staged for tourists. Thus from Post's perspective, a traditional dance exhibition sounds just like the sales pitch ("To our Anglo-Saxon ears and eyes it seemed very *monotonous* even after a little sample" [163, italics added]). Monotony is the social and cultural correlative of the homogenized landscape. Just as tourism dissolves the uniqueness of towns, which all begin to look like New York, it dissolves the authenticity of ritual, which begins to sound like a sales pitch.

Authenticity, of course, 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 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 borders are beginning to disappear. According to Post, technology threatens the traditions of Native Americans. For Post and those who have access to cars, however, technology becomes a training ground for the management of the self. In an afterward Post's nephew, the actual driver on the trip, argues that maintaining an automobile turns a man into a problem-solver (250). 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. The irony is that the consumer is supposed to become self-reliant by following what amounts to a guided tour. The political reality is that only those who have the means to travel are able to assume the rights and privileges of subjectivity.

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." This is the logic of consumer culture, which transforms difference into the decorative or the scenic. The logic of consumer culture is obvious in Post's description of San Francisco, where all things "Chinese" become the exotic markers of difference. Since she encounters Asian Americans as servants, she tends to treat them as household decorations as opposed to landscape figures. 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 are priced by view, not location (212). In this landscape of display, those who have access to technology are free. Thus Post points out, with some amazement, that Western girls drive cars (225).

II. “Mrs. Consumer” at the Wheel: Gender, Planned Obsolescence and Consumer Culture

In the early part of the century, the car played an undeniable if ambiguous role in women’s liberation.¹³ 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, suffragists like Sara Bard Field undertook well-publicized cross-country journeys to stir-up rallies in cities and towns all across the U.S. (Fry 16). Hollywood was quick to seize on the publicity the suffragists were using for political purposes. 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). As these isolated examples indicate, driving was a way for women to challenge stereotypes, organize political support, break out of the confines of home, and even promote themselves in new careers. In the fight for women’s liberation, the car offered not only symbolic freedom but opportunities for concrete change.

In making this claim, however, 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, it also reinscribed old inequities in new spaces. Whatever the benefits of driving, they were largely restricted to the middle- and upper-class white women who could afford cars and count on a cordial if somewhat bemused welcome at roadside restaurants and inns. 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).¹⁴ Cars do not necessarily liberate their drivers, or for that matter their passengers, because moving through a cultural terrain is not the same as challenging it. If driving sometimes transforms ethnic and gender relations, it also reterritorializes them, or rearranges them in a new space.

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. As women drivers, specifically a white, middle-class women, began to get out of the house, they were simultaneously domesticated in the much wider landscape of consumer goods. If, as I argue in the previous section, the road book was the inaugural text of consumer culture, the woman driver quickly became the central figure of consumerism.

¹³ 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).

¹⁴ African-Americans who owned automobiles found it difficult to secure lodging in both the South and the North. Several travel guides listed restaurants and hotels that did not practice discrimination. Travelguide was the one recommended by the famous American Guide, published in 1949. Other popular titles included The Negro Motorist Green Book and The Traveler’s Guide, which the NAACP began to publish in 1929 (Lewis 269).

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 opportunity 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. If the automobile industry had anything to do with liberating women after WWI, it also reterritorialized gender stereotypes in the new space of consumer goods (Scharff 112).

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. Form and appearance, ease of operation, and unnecessary doodads were understood to be “feminine”; power and performance were “masculine” (Scharff 119). Scharff argues: “Instead of acknowledging that men might desire increased comfort in motoring, many agreed that gas cars had begun to adapt to ‘feminine’ standards” (60). In a Scribner’s article in 1915 entitled “The Woman at the Wheel,” automotive writer Herbert Ladd Towle, considering the sudden increase in women drivers, asked: “Have the women suddenly gained courage, or have motor-cars altogether lost their formidable mien?” His answer: “Something of both, no doubt, but especially something of the latter” (214).

To lose their formidable mien, or become consumer-friendly, cars had to offer not only convenience but choice. Henry Ford was famous for saying the customer could have the Model T “in any color so long as it is black.” Though a great innovator in rationalized production methods (he invented the assembly line in 1913), he resisted finance plans, used car trade-ins, design variations and other staples of modern marketing. Alfred Sloan, the GM company president 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 led the industry in creating 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).

GM's marketing strategies catapulted the company to market dominance after automobiles had saturated the first-time buyers market. An industrial analyst writing for Motor Magazine in 1925 predicted that only about 8% of families that would buy a new car from 1926 to 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). 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 the experts, 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. This is the analysis that the business writer Mrs. Christine Frederick—as she conspicuously signed herself—provides in Selling Mrs. Consumer (1929), one of the early how-to books on marketing, and certainly the earliest dealing specifically with women consumers. Under the section title "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. As Merryle Stanley Rukeyser, financial writer says: "The Consumer now sits in the driver's seat, and auto manufacturers are busy seeking 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)

Frederick's account of the rise of consumer power is most revealing in its elisions: she equates the commodity with the car, the consumer with women. GM's shift in corporate marketing strategies created a new role for women, who were simultaneously brought to center stage as the quintessential consumers and derided for their frivolity. Frederick, who advocates recognizing and exploiting "Mrs. Consumer's" economic power, is also dismissive of her intellectual capacities.¹⁵ In fact, she is constantly on the defensive about both women

¹⁵ "One reason why so many women have failed to get a thrill out of scientific training in home economics or budget-keeping is because it is too strictly logical. It is mechanistic, and women have never felt much in common with mechanics. They live emotionally on a pulsating rhythm, not on a flat plateau, such as is more characteristic of men. Their moods are of shifting hues, not of one set color. The emotional consideration is to them always the vital consideration" (Frederick 22-23).

and advertising because she realizes that their close association, which she advocates, is in a significant way embarrassing to both.¹⁶ Women were important as consumers because they were supposed to be more concerned with appearance than performance and therefore more susceptible to modern marketing strategies, especially variations in style. While it is not inaccurate to say that women gained a certain amount of independence through driving, that independence was recognized by the industry as being profitable but socially irrelevant. To consider the “freedom” of driving abstractly, or even as an index of geographical mobility, is to miss the point. Freedom in the corporate context—surely the determinate context for any consideration of automobile culture—was the range of options available in a field of consumer products. The products, as such, did not pose a significant threat to established social practices.

For evidence of the car’s ineffectualness in the face of established practices we need only turn to Emily Post’s Motor Manners: The Bluebooklet of Traffic Etiquette, published in 1949 under the auspices of the National Highway Users Conference. (Not accidentally, the chairman emeritus of the group was Alfred Sloan, the CEO responsible for revolutionizing GM’s marketing strategy.) Between the publication of Post’s first book, By Motor to the Golden Gate (1916) and Motor Manners, Post had become the most popular etiquette writer in the country, with Etiquette running into several editions. Post felt that the car deserved separate treatment because driving marked the “Beginning of an entirely new era of social behavior” (7). At first glance, the new era seems to require a break from traditional manners, especially those relative to gendered behavior: “While gallantry is expected of all gentlemen, on the highway women drivers lose the ready identity of their sex and simply become ‘another driver’” (19-20). However, while men and women are ungendered behind the wheel, their actions have a very distinct, and gendered, significance in a wider social context: “a gentleman will no more cheat a red light or stop sign than he would cheat in a game of cards. A courteous lady will not ‘scold’ others raucously with her automobile horn any more than she would act like a ‘fishwife’ at a party!” (9). Post’s comparisons reveal her class bias and her commitment to traditional categories: the book is obviously targeted at a middle-class audience who wants to be taken as ladies and gentlemen. In advocating the “consistency...between traffic laws, safety rules and good manners,” Post updates traditional class and gender stereotypes for the automotive age—not in spite of but because of the car’s tendency, at least in Post’s mind, to desexualize the identity of its driver. In By Motor to the Golden Gate Post was surprised, and even a little dubious, of the willingness of Western women to drive their own cars. Presumably in the interim Post had learned to drive her own. The tone of the advice, however, seems to correlate with the pamphlet’s illustrations, which reinforce the stereotypes by consistently depicting women “in distress” and men in positions of chivalrous authority. Post’s own transformation from auto adventurer to “Miss Manners” is emblematic of the role she envisions for women. If driving for men is an opportunity for action, for women it is a matter of propriety or luxury.

¹⁶ “We women simply adapt ourselves to an advertising age as men adapt themselves to a machine age—because it is an important element of modern life, and far more vital to it than casual criticism makes out” (Frederick 337).

This gendered division of labor was not only endorsed by books of etiquette; Post's contemporaries in journalism and sociology argued that while machines—including the car—would increase the productivity of men, they would lead to idleness in women. 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 *Middletown in Transition* (1937), the sequel to the classic 1929 sociological study *Middletown*, 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 of 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 the ideal mobile consumers.

The men who, according to the Lynds, had no time for anything but business, also found themselves assigned to new roles in a new space. This becomes especially evident in the elegies to automobile inventors that began to appear in the late 1920s—at precisely the point that large corporations like GM began to buy-out smaller companies and remarket their products as models as opposed to brands. (In 1926 GM already included under its umbrella Chevrolet, Pontiac, Oldsmobile, Oakland, Buick, and Cadillac models; with the exception of Chevrolet, these had all started out as separate brands.) *Men, Money, and Motors* (1929), a self-congratulatory history of the automobile industry written by the advertisement copy writers Theodore F. MacManus and Norman Beasley, laments the passing of the tough, red-blooded garage innovators:

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)

This is the counter-narrative to Frederick's version of the transition from Henry Ford to the more impersonal corporations like GM. What Frederick sees as a significant gain in consumer power, especially that of women, MacManus and Beasley see as a decrease in the

independence and masculinity of the inventor. By the 1920s there were no frontiers left to conquer because the entire landscape had been domesticated by consumer goods. This is the sociological premise of Dodsworth (1929), Sinclair Lewis's novel about a retired automobile company president who travels to Europe, where he loses his wife and discovers himself. When Dodsworth's company is bought out by the larger automobile conglomerate U.A.C.—like GM known primarily by its initials—the main character laments,

What did they [his business reports] matter, now that he was turned from a bandit captain to a clerk? ...For the first time he admitted that if he went to the U.A.C. even as first vice president, he would be nothing more than an office boy. He could make no daring decisions by himself. They had taken from him the pride in pioneering which was one of his props in life.... (16)

Dodsworth's loss is the consumer's gain. U.A.C. is able to produce his car more quickly and at a much lower price. Comparing the production narratives of Lewis and MacManus and Beasley to the consumption narratives of Frederick and Ramsey is instructive. Freedom for Sam Dodsworth is the ability to create without taking orders from anyone else; for a driver like Alice Ramsey, it is the ability to operate the product; for Christine Frederick, the ability to choose between colors and options.

The transformation of women's freedom into consumer choice is evident in two books by Sinclair Lewis, Free Air published in 1919 and Main Street in 1920. When Claire Boltwood, the heroine of Free Air, 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 awakening that is central to both stories:

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)

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 overworked 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 to the contrary. Claire and Milt 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. At the end of the novel, when they begin a new journey as a couple, the entire landscape becomes their parlor or domestic space. They can travel anywhere because they are at home everywhere; they no longer have "stations" in life, or

assigned places in an economic geography (e.g. “a woman’s place”), but roles that are predicated on the universal distribution of commodities and are therefore reproducible anywhere.

It only took a year for Lewis to fully domesticate the wandering woman. In Main Street Carol Kennicott’s “voyage into democracy” involves a struggle against a small town, not bad roads. Yet the two are not unrelated. 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, especially for women, has already become socially and even geographically inconsequential. This is because in the standardized landscape, there is 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 town¹⁷:

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)¹⁸

This critique gives another perspective on the space of Claire Boltwood’s democratic transformation. The frontier town is not a space of freedom, but a place where the provincialism of the frontier has given way to the boredom of standardization without the delay necessary to develop any saving traditions.

In the 1920s, industrial standardization impacts everything. Thus, the narrator points out that “Carol recognized in Washington as she had in California [during her trip] a transplanted and guarded Main Street” (426). This standardized landscape does offer Carol possibilities for liberation she would have lacked before, but it also isolates her in a boring landscape. Main Street is in many ways an anti-road book because it sets itself in opposition

¹⁷ In his famously caustic introduction he calls Gopher Prairie’s Main Street “the continuation of Main Streets everywhere” and “the climax of civilization” (i).

¹⁸ The threat of standardization is a common theme in Lewis. In Dodsworth (1929), he puts almost the identical speech in the mouth of a German professor, where it sounds sinister 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).

to such developments by treating the street as a setting, not as a trajectory. Even Carol's ideas for reform stem from the factories, most particularly the auto industry: "Hundreds of factories trying to make attractive motor cars, but these towns—left to chance" (23).

III. Local Tourism and the Federal Government

Carol is incapable of reforming the landscape on her own, but in the 1930s the U.S. government steps in precisely where her plans peter out. Federal Project Number One, or "Federal One" for short, was the Roosevelt administration's response to the estimated 26,000 artists put out of work by the depression, 6,000 of whom were writers.¹⁹ Though Federal One remains, to date, the most extensive public arts project undertaken in U.S. history, it was originally conceived as a means of providing work relief. Harry Hopkins, the head of the Works Progress Administration (WPA), the federal agency responsible for organizing all national relief efforts, said in reference to artists, "Hell, they have to eat like other people" (Cowley 23).²⁰ Many down-and-out painters, dramatists, and musicians worked for Federal One; some were already famous, others became famous in later years. The better-known writers on the relief rolls included Nathan Asch, Maxwell Bodenheim, Lionel Abel, Harry Roskolenko, Edward Dahlberg, Saul Bellow, Vincent McHugh, Kenneth Fearing, Norman McLeod, Claude McKay, Philip Rahv, John Cheever, Anzia Yezierska, Ralph Ellison, Miriam Allen de Ford, Loren Eiseley, Margaret Walker, Stuart Engstrand, Arna Bontemps, Richard Wright, Nelson Algren, Jack Conroy, Zora Neale Hurston, Arna Bontemps, and Kenneth Rexroth, among others (Penkower 160; Mangione 20). Of course, many of the people hired on as writers had dubious credentials.²¹ One story that gets repeated in much of the literature involves a mailman who thought himself qualified for the job because he was "a man of letters" (Bold 20). Whatever the qualifications of the writers, the critical response to the American Guide Series was positive.²²

Federal One was comprised of the Art Project, directed by Holger Cahill, the Music Project, directed by Nicolai Sokoloff, the Theater Project, directed by Hallie Flanagan, and the Writers Project, later including the Historical Records Survey, directed by Henry Alsberg (McDonald 129). From the moment its inception in 1935 until its slow death at the hands of Congressman Dies's House Committee on Un-American Activities in 1939, Federal One

¹⁹ These numbers are imprecise. McDonald gives the following figures: "actors numbered 3,709; artists, sculptors, and teachers of art, 2,900; and musicians and teachers of music, 14,922. He adds in a footnote: "It is impossible to arrive at any statistics with regard to writers, employed or unemployed. The number of authors, occupationally speaking (i.e., those who make their living at writing and engage in no other gainful occupation), is infinitesimal. Beyond this group, practically every one who is literate "writes" or thinks that he can, as the WPA Writers' Project was to discover" (85). Penkower says 6,000 was the highest number employed by the Federal Writers' Project (in 1936). "On the average, 4,500-5,200 people worked constantly on the FWP during its four-year existence" (62).

²⁰ Jerre Mangione and Monty Penkower discuss the difficulty of determining who, exactly, qualified as a writer and which writers qualified for relief; Michael Szalay analyzes some of the cultural implications of defining writing as a profession as opposed to a craft or an art (24-74).

²¹ Harold Rosenberg, a former project employee, makes this argument in an article he wrote for the *New Yorker* entitled "Anyone who could Write English."

²² For an analysis of the critical response to the guides, see Mangione's chapter "The Legacy."

was surrounded by a firestorm of controversy (McDonald 305).²³ Even those generally supportive of relief projects were skeptical of the federal government's ability to act as patron of the arts; others, concerned with big government budgets or communist plots, were suspicious of what artists would produce on the taxpayer's dollar.²⁴ Alsberg and his staff hit upon the idea of an American Guide Series as a way of deflecting some of these criticisms; guidebooks did not pretend to be high art and they avoided the obvious pitfalls of paying writers to work on their own material. The Guide Series could be defended against critics on the left and right because not only did it put unemployed writers to work, it put them to work on "the first attempt, on a comprehensive scale, to make the country itself worthily known to Americans," as Lewis Mumford put in The New Republic (quoted in Mangione 216). The Guide could also be shown to answer a real need, since "The last published comprehensive guide to the United States, the Baedeker book, had been first issued in 1893 and revised in 1909" (Mangione 46).

We will open The Guide to California at the point where most tourists reached their destination: the end of the Lincoln Highway. The Guide gives a brief description of a graveyard that is ironically located at the terminal point of this oldest cross-country road in the US:

LINCOLN PARK, entrance 33rd Ave. and Clement St., extends northwest almost to the ocean. A flagpole in the park marks the western terminus of the Lincoln Highway (US 30-40). Here at one time were the city's cemeteries, each segregated according to nationality. The old Chinese Cemetery is now the Municipal Golf Links, on which the first hazard is the sacrifice stone, a stone oven used for roasting pigs to propitiate the gods. Near the 15th green is a 25-foot bronze monument to Mrs. Rebecca H. Lambert, founder of the Ladies' Seamen's Friend Society. (293)

The nonchalant sacrilege of converting graveyards into a golf course is apt to shock contemporary readers, but apparently the city planners of the 1930s were more concerned with recreational than with sacred spaces. The new monument erected near the 15th hole suggests they were also more interested in commemorating class than race. The bare-bones prose in this passage makes it difficult to decipher the guide's attitude towards the cultural priorities reflected in the landscape. On the one hand, the passage resonates with the guide's somewhat critical of presentation of the anti-Chinese sentiment so prevalent in California's history (57, 97). On the other hand, it could be an ironic gloss on the guide's contention that progress is "Yankee" in character (7). This studied neutrality is an effect of the guide's spatial composition, which works through metonymy, juxtaposition, and contradiction,

²³ There was no definitive break in the WPA Arts Project, since it became the WPA Arts Program and continued under state control into the 1940s. McDonald argues that the demise of the program cannot be completely pinned on congressional critics: "Although Federal One officially came to an end as a result of a statutory prohibition in the ERA Act of 1939, the sentence of death had been passed well before that not by Congress but by the administration" (305).

²⁴ Penkower gives a detailed account of the controversy surrounding the guide in the chapter of his book entitled "A 'Red Nest'?" One Hearst editorial called the guide a "red Baedeker" (186).

making it difficult to determine questions of tone. The guide doesn't seem to privilege the cemetery or the golf course, or for that matter the monument to Mrs. Lambert, over the other elements that make up the scene. However, its decision to highlight this site as a tourist attraction reveals something about its priorities.

The guide represents California as a terminal point, the goal and the graveyard of a series of journeys both historical and touristic. The first paragraph of the guide sums up California history in successive waves of immigration, starting with the Spanish conquistadors and ending with the Dust Bowl refugees. Each wave of immigrants deposits another layer of cultural sediment on the landscape, creating a stratified geography of overlapping and sometimes contradictory spaces. What these various groups have in common is the dream of "El Dorado," which fades only to be reborn with the next wave of immigrants (3). In her introduction to the 1984 reprint of the guide, Gwendolyn Wright, an architectural historian now at Columbia University, points out that the guide begins and ends with this vision of El Dorado (xv). The last entry is devoted to the Golden Gate International Exposition of 1939, described as a "'travel fair,' assembling the vast recreational resources of the Pacific Basin and displaying them as spectacular background for industrial progress" (681). Between these disparate utopias—the one legendary, the other industrial and touristic—unfolds the multi-layered geography of California.

Though the guidebook positions itself between two utopias, it self-consciously avoids the sanguine tone of much utopian writing. Poverty, it points out, is as recurrent as the dream of El Dorado; the run-down cars of Dust Bowl refugees, for instance, are "[I]like the covered wagons of earlier days" (64). The guide is also careful to avoid a rhetorical device characteristic of both utopian writing and more conventional travel narratives: hyperbole. Held up repeatedly as an example to be avoided is the first recorded description of Monterey Bay: "When the first white men came by foot into California in 1796, they failed to recognize the Bay of Monterey, so overenthusiastically described by the chronicler of Sebastian Vizcaino's expedition, and passed by" (4). The guide's alternative to overenthusiastic description is to focus on the contrasts in the state: California is "an exciting clash of opposites" (6) with "people...as diverse as their environment" (5). This positive view of diversity is no less utopian than a hyperbolic description of the landscape; a California of extreme oppositions is more apt to be "all things to all men" (4). However, by playing up the contrasts of the state, the guide foregrounds the need for government regulation: "The dramatic influx of fortune seekers, following in successive waves as boom succeeded boom, has subsided. What lies ahead is an intensive struggle to solve the social and economic problems which are the inevitable heritage of California's four centuries of development" (65). Solving problems depends on rational management, centralization, and, the guide suggests, government programs. The guide's description of the Exposition, for instance, is a ringing endorsement of centralized planning and the WPA (683). The distance between the utopia of legend and the utopia of the future can be measured in terms of work projects—the kind of project, for instance, that reclaimed Treasure Island from the sea (681). Much of the

tour copy reads like a justification or a blueprint, mapping out where these projects have already worked and where they need to be instated.

The guide does not make its case for centralized control and rational management through direct argumentation; rather, it scatters positive examples throughout its essays, descriptions, and tours. An essay on “The Movies,” for instance, claims that studios are able to respond to the exigencies of the Depression by rationalizing their production methods: “The movies that reach the first-run houses today are produced by a streamlined system in which all efforts are organized and specialized” (127). Labor unions get a similar compliment in another essay: “Organized labor in California shows a growing tendency to welcome the help of technical experts in dealing with the complex problems of negotiation with employers, arbitration cases, and presenting the union point of view to the public” (108). These endorsements of technical specialization show how the production techniques pioneered by the auto industry were, by the 1930s, already colonizing other industries and labor.

The Guide to California endorses a society structured along industrial lines. Its description of the “Vacationland pavilion” at the Golden Gate Exposition could be a synopsis of the guide itself:

Among the Gayway’s features are a three-quarter-mile miniature railroad; the open-air pageantry of the Cavalcade of the Golden West; reproductions of Hollywood Boulevard, Barbary Coast, and Streets of the World; and a Chinese City with temples, tea gardens, huts and pagodas, markets, shops, and theaters. (682)

The Golden Gate Exposition functions like a guidebook, reproducing cultural difference as a “Vacationland” commodity. It is also a model of what centralized planning can accomplish with Federal support. There is excruciating irony in the fact that a Chinese City could be erected as a tourist attraction in a state where less than 20 years earlier what was called “Coolie labor” was forbidden on any “state, county, municipal, or other public work.”²⁵

Of course, the fact that the guide describes the Exposition does not necessarily mean it endorses “Vacationland” as a model. “Vacationland” is simply there, like the golf course/graveyard at the end of the Lincoln Highway; the guide merely tells tourists how to find it. The guide does, however, discuss the issue of regionalism in the context of its lengthy essay on California art. There we find that as the region disappears as a “source of inspiration,” it is replaced by a more general “social consciousness”:

Increased facility of communication and increased centralization of cultural activities on the eastern seaboard had finally broken down the old

²⁵ Article XIX, Section 3 of the State Constitution reads: “No Chinese shall be employed on any state, county, municipal, or other public work, except in punishment for a crime.” The next article contains provisions discouraging immigration and segregating Chinese immigrants within “prescribed portions” of cities towns. These articles are cited as contemporary law by the State of California’s Bureau of Labor Statistics in Labor Laws of California (1919).

regionalism. The local scene was no longer the chief source of inspiration. Many young Westerners, dreaming of a career in literature, yearned to reverse Horace Greeley's dictum and go East in search of fame and fortune. The work of some of these writers bespoke an awakening social consciousness. (146)

This passage doesn't waste any tears for the demise of regionalism. On the contrary, it suggests that local pride is a fair price to pay for a more global social consciousness. Implicit in the argument is the claim that, as a source of ideas, the region is reactionary. The role of the Federal government is to sponsor a broader, more inclusive, progressive kind of art, whatever this means for local style:

Art in California today, attentive to new creative impulses from every part of the word, is striving to overcome passive imitation and to make a contribution of its own to the progress of art. Whether it will be possible, or even desirable, to distinguish in the future a distinct "California style" no one can state with assurance. In the meantime, art in the State has discovered in such essentially public genres as mural painting and reliefs, sculptured monuments, and government-sponsored exhibitions a deeper orientation with respect to the social life of the community. (160)

This passage is a strong endorsement of all the art projects sponsored by Federal One, including the American Guide Series. (The "State" referred to in the passage is the Federal government.) The guide brackets the question of regional style in order to talk about the public purpose of art. The art sponsored by Federal One, and endorsed by the guide, might use a particular community as a location or a setting, but its purpose and its form are resolutely national.

The national approach is progressive, which at that time meant a politics of class, not ethnicity. For all its balance, the guide tends to approach racial issues from the perspective of economics; for instance, "The anti-Chinese movement, although accompanied by racial discrimination which gave rise to outbreaks of brutal violence, was primarily based on economic interest." This has a tendency of lumping the struggle against racism into class struggle. Also, there is no identifiable minority voice in the guide. Native Americans and Chinese immigrants are talked about, but they do not occupy a viable subject position.

This is not surprising. The guide's dominant economic and racial narratives coincide in a way that excludes any real diversity of voice. The Guide to California characterizes progress as "Yankee" in character. This applies not only to the construction of dams and highways and power lines, but to social reform as well. The essay on "California's Last Four Centuries" presents California history as a conflict between progressive and reactionary forces. The progressive forces win out in 1938 with the election of a Democratic Governor in (65), and with an alliance between A. F. of L. and C. I. O. unions intended to correct earlier

policies of racial discrimination (108). Racial issues are not ignored in this history, but they are subsumed in a larger reform movement whose primary goals are economic.

Tour 3 is a good example of how The California Guide tends to structure its itineraries in terms of economic progress. Proceeding from Ashland, Oregon to Mexicali, Mexico, it traces the route of US 99, which “presents a complete cross section of California” (427). The tour begins near Humbug Creek, which Joaquin Miller characterized as “a savage Eden, with many Adams walking up and down and plucking of every tree, nothing forbidden here...” (430). The Eden has its own resident Eve in the person of an Indian woman who saved white settlers from an attack planned by her tribe (*ibid.*). From this mythical point of origin, the tour traces the history of industrial development, from gold mining and hunting through factory farming (441). The tour ends near an icon of progress: “Through fields of grain, vegetables, and cotton, vast melon patches, and endless rows of winter lettuce, runs a network of irrigation canals....Dates, grapes, grapefruit, and oranges grow now, where only a quarter of a century ago the bleached bones of travelers lay in the burning sand” (461). However, economic development has its own casualties: “Shacks occupied by the migrant workers straggle along the irrigation ditches...” (462). These shacks are the terminus of a parallel trajectory, running past the site of the Mussell Slough feud, memorialized in Frank Norris’s The Octopus (446), and past the site of an old socialist community (447). This parallel trajectory foregrounds the inequities arising from economic development, lending credence to a claim, made earlier in the guide, that “This great mass of landless field and shed workers constitutes a major social problem in the State.” In the same essay we learn that “An effective approach to the migrant problem is now being made, for the first time in California history, by the Federal Government” (69). Tour 3 uses the itinerary as a strategy to map out where the Federal Government needs to intervene to make up for the deficiencies of industry.

The American Guides were not the first to use the tour form to talk about social issues. They come at the end of a long line of road books, which, by World War II, had developed into a distinct genre, with its own publishers (usually advertising companies), writers (usually commissioned by automobile companies), and audience (often people in the market for a car). The American Guides, however, transformed the tour form into a tool for managing social conflict. The tour aims at preserving communities threatened from above by corporate standardization, and from below by social and cultural conflict, by norming the tourist as a citizen (read “Yankee”) while reproducing difference—cultural, social, and geographical—as a tourist attraction. The American Guides also foreground the role of the Federal Government in preserving and managing this diversity: thus all tours go from North-East to South-West, mapping lines of observation, and of power, radiating out from Washington DC at their center. Conceived as a way of putting thousands of writers to work, and used by thousands of tourists, the guides provided relief by managing some of the inequities of corporate space.

The road book is one of the earliest forms of modern consumer culture. Criticism has traditionally treated the road book as an extension of a loosely defined transcendentalist project, where drivers take to the open road to discover themselves in nature. The determinate

context, however, is corporate rather than literary-historical. The earliest road books were advertisements. Their itineraries linked up with other contemporary spatial technologies (e.g. the conveyor belts in automobile plants and modern highways), transforming space into a vast production and distribution network designed to accelerate the circulation of people and commodities. Early road books figure California, or more broadly the West, as the ideal destination and space of this accelerated movement. In early road books the West is the locus of frontier virtues, and later a space of women's liberation. Finally, the WPA Guide figures California as a place of managed social conflict, where the Federal Government steps in as manager. The concept of management is central here because the "frontier," as it is still euphemistically called, is an industrialized landscape, and the freedom of movement a commodity like any other. If the old transcendentalist vocabulary applies here, it is primarily as an advertising jingle. This paper is an attempt to analyze how that jingle became a literary genre.

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About the Author / Über den Autor

Andrew Gross is currently a Fulbright guest lecturer at the John F. Kennedy-Institut für Nordamerikastudien in Berlin. His home institution is the University of California at Davis, where he received his PhD and where he lectures as a faculty fellow. His research interests include travel literature, prison literature, and representations of the Holocaust in film, literature, museums, and memorials. He is currently working on a book on Holocaust tourism; his most recent publications include “Terror und Konsens,” co-authored by Ingrid Stapf, and appearing in the volume *Medien und Terrorismus* (Hrsg. Christian Schicha und Carsten Brosda, 2002), and an article on academic collective bargaining, soon to be released in a collection by the Modern Languages Association.