“I Understand”: An Analysis of Humour, O.J. Simpson and the Contemporary Crisis of Masculinity

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ABSTRACT

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This thesis investigates the contemporary crisis of masculinity as it pertains to power, control, misogyny, violence, and multiplicities in identity. It examines the current cultural anxieties and paradoxes that circulate in popular culture with respect to what it means to be a man. Employing O.J. Simpson's mediated representations, this work identifies and deconstructs the discourse surrounding Simpson's fetishized male body along with his status as an American cultural male icon, a celebrated football star, and a violent murderer. By way of an analysis of diverse popular texts, in particular stand-up comedy, the thesis examines how the issue of O.J. and the issue of manhood have been broached by humour from the nineties to now, revealing the contradictory forces that constitute dominant forms of masculinity.

DEDICATION

To my late maternal grandfather for showing me how a real man lives and loves.

And to my mother for her strength and unwavering faith in me.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

When I was fourteen years old, my English teacher walked into class more chipper than usual, with a look of sly delight I would later understand profoundly. She turned off the overhead lights and rolled the television into the room, for we were watching a film that day based on a play we'd been reading by Tennessee Williams. The showing started off a little slow, but I didn't mind; I'd always had an affinity for black and white pictures with lush soundtracks, for the old movie actors with their Transatlantic accents, for costumes and the contrived, showy glamour of Hollywood's Golden Age, as well as the posturing and stagedness others my age usually resented old flicks for. I had watched many of those movies on my own time, and so I was pretty certain I knew the score for the next hour and a half, but then something amazing happened. Marlon Brando appeared onscreen, swaggering into frame as the hunky, brutish Stanley Kowalski, all id and nothing else, and... I was mesmerized. Stanley's flailing, weeping, wailing, his childlike desperation for Stella, his macho, utilitarian frame, his unpredictable and terrifying demonstrations of dominance and physical strength, his tender expressions of affection and his outrageous outbursts establishing supremacy were all perfectly concocted to completely and overwhelmingly captivate the audience of adolescent girls I sat amidst that day, all of whom couldn't pry their doe eyes away from the screen. To describe this moment as a sexual awakening for many in that classroom would be an understatement. Brando as Kowalski took us on a roller coaster ride that afternoon, and a memorable one at that, and the question I was left asking myself as a wee babe was why.

It's safe to say that kind of masculinity - Kowalski's particular brand of what would contemporarily be called "toxic" manhood - has been seriously questioned and criticized today. Even in the early 2000's when I had watched *A Streetcar Named Desire* (1951) for the very first time, smacking your woman around and then crying for her desperately while all the neighbors looked on would have been considered abhorrent by anyone's standards. This is inappropriate, abusive behavior, and should not be tolerated; laws are in place preventing it, resources are available should it occur, and women are told to never return should a man strike you but once. Stanley is hardly an aspirational icon as a romantic partner: the man both figuratively and literally destroys everything in his path. He is reckless, impulsive, and grunts, barks and meows like an animal. He gets his rocks off almost exclusively by intimidating everyone around him. His

catchphrase, one he shouts loudly mid-way through the film before completely obliterating everything in his kitchen, goes a little something like this: "Every Man is a King! And I'm the King around here" (Williams 195) (Figure 1). Stanley Kowalski is the kind of man any sane, level-headed person who knows what's best should theoretically run from, and yet every single girl in my class would have given all the money in her piggy bank to be Mrs. Stella Kowalski for just a couple of hours.

I've since shown the film to many of my friends, both male and female, over the course of my young adult life. Even the most politically correct among them are always ultimately in agreement. Brando is hot, sure, but the jury repeatedly comes in with the same verdict no matter who's watching: Brando as Kowalski is out-of-this-stratosphere sexy. And so I began asking questions, because said verdict rang true with me, too, and as an educated female, I pride myself on my critical thinking: I trade upon it, I utilize it, I evaluate, I analyze. I try to make decisions in my own best interest, and I empower myself by doing so. I work full time and study full time; I am, in almost every way, independent. I wait for and depend upon no man, and see them more as luxuries than something I should be hitching my wagon to at the end of the day. And yet my adoration for, even worship of, throwback, classic, old school masculinity is something I proclaim proudly to anyone who will entertain me.

I often find myself surrounded by girl friends who scoff at the idea of a man paying the whole bar bill, or opening the car door for them as they get into the shotgun seat. They insist on going dutch, insist on dating 'evolved' males, ones who would sooner call a handyman to fix a problem round the house than do it themselves (mostly because these dudes wouldn't know what to do with a toolbox if their life depended on it). This is the kind of man who would slink away quietly if he saw his girlfriend getting hit on at a bar, or who, at most, would try to 'work things out' with his competition by way of a little constructive, productive (read: boring) dialogue. One of my girl friends recently recounted an episode to me in which her boyfriend (now-ex), a young lad of 25, actually *hid* behind her when a threatening drunk man approached them on one of their evening strolls in downtown Copenhagen. This, by all definitions, is what many (not all) post-modern men look like, and this is certainly the kind of man many of my girl friends have romantic relationships with.

On the other hand, I am often teased about the kind of men I date. Sure, there have been a few outliers, but given how educated I am, my affinity for brawn over brains has always been a

point of conversation, debate and contention among my inner circle. I sooner look for strength of character than a graduate degree, and I'm more likely to consider a gorgeous physical specimen with a perfect body and a razor sharp jaw over zeros at the end of a cheque. The influential men in my life with whom I've had romantic relationships (both successful and unsuccessful, sometimes terrifyingly so) can inarguably be categorized as ultimate Alpha males. They have gotten into fights for me, they have provided for me, they have protected me. I have dated men who insisted on walking on the outside of the sidewalk so a car would hit them and not me just in case one should so happen to swerve in our direction. I have also dated men who have been physically aggressive towards me. This is sometimes the tail's end of the coin, so to speak; the down- and dark-side of dating men who are literally capable of almost anything. I often wonder what attracted me to them in the first place. Was it that very capability?

Perhaps my retro tendencies in attraction have to do with my old school upbringing. I was raised in my infancy in part by my grandparents; two Europeans fresh off the boat from a small Ionian island (population: 35,000), and by my mother who, when my sister's first boyfriend didn't stand up to shake her hand upon meeting her, crossed the young man off her list then and there. To this day, her first question when we come home from dates is still; "did he pay?" "A man should be a *man*," she would say, and I agreed. I still agree. But what does that really *mean*? Growing up, I somehow intuitively knew that my mother's preoccupation had nothing to do with finance. Her real inquiry was regarding whether her daughters' potential suitors were men in the figurative sense of the word: she wanted to know if they were performing masculinity properly and successfully, and certainly she was predisposed. The most positive male influence in my life, *her* father, was the epitome of successful masculinity. He left the Greek Army to be with my grandmother in Canada; one day he just got on a boat and never looked back. He never came home to her without a gift, no matter how small, and this trend is one that continued with his granddaughters until his dementia worsened. The day he learned of my own father's infidelity, abuse and betrayal of my mother, my grandpa packed a giant steaknife from his kitchen and set out to find his son-in-law (please understand; to Southern Europeans, this is love. It should also be noted that he was unsuccessful in his search). My grandfather *provided*; he was generous, giving, strong, protective, stoic, funny, a light in the darkness, the kind of man everyone loved, looked up to, wanted to be like, and wanted to be around. There was nothing he couldn't do,

couldn't fix, couldn't make right. People came up to me at his funeral - people I had never met - telling me stories about the kind of Man, capital M, he was.

It goes without saying that my grandfather was of a rare breed, though as a rule the men I grew up around held themselves to a certain standard. Manhood was something they wore like a badge of honour, reflected in their appearance, the way they carried themselves, their priorities, their preoccupations, their love, their protectiveness, their loyalty. I have known men like this, and consider myself lucky for it. But I have known others too, and these were men who were violent, abusive, caused nothing but chaos, leaving only destruction in their wake. The list of these lesser men, lower case m, can be read from my personal life as well, and begins, it should be noted, with my father. And so while this endeavor is indeed an investigation into the crisis of masculinity, and into the potential and conflicting truths about who men really are, it has also been a learning process, a discovery of sorts, and a gazing into the depths of myself, my fantasies, my drives, my desires, shedding light upon the conflicting and potential truths about who I really am, what postmodern women may want, and who they, too, may ultimately be.

Violence is something that should never be tolerated; rape, aggression, emotional, mental and physical abuse of any kind all fall under that umbrella. And yet violence is something that pervades interpersonal relationships on a quotidian level. It also suffuses contemporary pornography on a level that is difficult to even fathom. Violence between the sexes is a reality, one that gets brushed under the rug much too often. It is damaging, it can be world-shattering, and it is also, in certain circumstances, part of what makes men attractive. Make no mistake about it; this work is not an endorsement of violent behaviour. Rather, it is a brutal and honest acknowledgement of sorts; a generous part of what made Stanley Kowalski so appealing to that pre-teen audience in my tenth grade classroom was his unpredictable and powerful *potential*. None of us could put our finger on the pulse of it back then; in truth, I'm still attempting to do so (this work is almost exclusively devoted to it) but what I couldn't ignore, and still can't, are the conflicting, contradictory expectations we have for men. My grandfather was the gentlest man I knew; my fondest memories with him were playing a game of wolf with my sister, or sitting outside on picnic blankets drawing pictures of little birds on paper. He loved animals and children, loved babies, loved long walks, loved gazing out of bay windows at the leaves and the trees and smoking King size Rothmans beneath the stars. He lived for simple pleasures, and was the absolute sweetest soul, but Lord knows he had that steaknife ready to go when he needed it. We ask so much of our

men; they need to be strong and sweet, potent and gentle, dangerous yet protective, faithful with options. The demands we make upon them as a culture are confusing and conflicting, and the more society progresses, the less space we make and the less acceptance we have for their baser, impulsive, aggressive instincts. Nevertheless the instincts remain, the impulses get repressed, and men are left to their own devices trying to negotiate the many different expectations, drives, fantasies, desires, dreams and nightmares they embody on the regular.

My fascination with public dreams - otherwise known as tabloid narratives - stems from my youth as well. An avid student of celebrity culture, I loved reading magazines, and so did my mom, cousins and godmother. I grew up with bedtime stories about Marilyn Monroe, Princess Diana, Bill Clinton, JFK, and Anna Nicole Smith, and I soon found biographies upon biographies about my favourite celebrities when I was old enough to sift through books at the library. I read these any chance I got. It was the stories that captivated me most; the way people spoke of stars, the characters in their narratives, the heroes, the villains, the archetypes at play in each interpretation, each telling, each tale, each theory about what really happened and why. So many of these stories circulate because we the public, the collective cultural consciousness, have yet to attain closure; put simply, we don't know all the facts, can never truly know all the facts, and our inability to know for certain what occurred in the lives of our pagan celebrity idols only makes us hunger more for the answers. Even at a young age, I understood that the stories we tell ourselves about celebrities are reflective of what's firing in our midst. Everything happens relationally in culture, and each event informs another, creating a perpetual, multangular domino effect forever in motion. We see what we want to see in the lives, in the faces, in the love stories and in the tragedies that celebrity tabloids present to us; we take from these what we want to take, nothing more and nothing less. The ultimate truth of who they were and what really happened inevitably comes to matter not.

I was two years old when Nicole Brown and Ron Goldman were found stabbed to death in Brentwood, California, and yet I grew up with a somewhat innate awareness of who O.J. Simpson was. He was in the ether, so to speak; while I was much too young to remember the details of the actual unfolding of events, Simpson's name had been on people's lips forever it seemed. To this day, references to Simpson can be found in rap lyrics, television shows, films, radio, podcasts, stand-up comedy sketches; the list is endless, and reflects everything from his football career to his domestic abuse to the murders and the trial of the century. In 2018, one must ask themselves

why a case declared closed in 1995, and why a man declared criminally *not guilty* by a California state jury, are both still in such predominant question and circulation today, more than two decades later. Certainly, the entire situation begs so many questions, and provides so few answers, leaving us - the public - to write our own stories in an attempt to achieve closure. But the trauma of the murders, and the extreme, conflicting archetypes Simpson personifies as man, celebrity and icon, have yet to be successfully negotiated by culture to this day. This, I argue, is why we can't leave O.J. alone: his star text, his iconicism, his representations and his image mean too much to us, and are too contradictory to assimilate into one idea of a man.

Men seem to identify with the complexities present in the curious case of who O.J. Simpson really is. This was something I had begun observing in my youth as well; the age-old adage of black and white was no longer useful to me as I grew older and began analyzing real life. The greyness of it all confused me all the more, and I was continuously confronted with mixed messages, mostly from men. They've loved me and hated me, they've protected and betrayed me, they've taken care of me, endangered me, they've both mended and broken my heart. More than anything, though, I've watched as men - a parent, friends, extended family members, lovers - struggled profoundly, wrestling with the demons and the angels on their shoulders, and I've too often witnessed the chaotic and terrifying downward spiral as those demons succeeded in taking hold. In my own opinion, winning this epic inner battle is what makes a man deserving of a capital M or not. Perhaps one can write it off as *people* being complicated and nothing more or less, but as a cultural sleuth, it's hard to ignore the signs, the signifiers, the hints, the clues, and everything in circulation all at once. When I think of all the things men are supposed to be, even I can sympathize with their attempt to negotiate culture's mixed messages, let alone what's swirling around in their respective psyches. "There's a coldness to being a man," Chris Rock said in his 2018 *Netflix* special *Tamborine*, and it tugged at my heartstrings; "only women, children, and dogs are loved unconditionally. My grandma used to say: a broke man is like a broke hand; *can't do nothin' with it*." As an analyst, I had to consider his point of view. Rock's astute observation played right into my research; in just a couple of sentences, he (and his grandma) concisely summed up my entire thesis. And then I thought: surely there's more where this came from.

Stand-up comedy is fertile ground for the subconscious drives, desires, and dreams in the ether. A good stand-up comic can sit in the midst of sadness and trauma, and synthesize observations that are reflective of the greater collective consciousness and how we as a culture

deal with, interpret and understand phenomena. As Steve Harvey says to Jerry Seinfeld in *Comedians In Cars Getting Coffee*, "when tragedy strikes… we [stand-up comics] have the jokes that night." Their perspective is one that allows for a broad sweep of culture, of ideas, and of the consideration of dark, depraved concepts at play that the layman wouldn't dare utter before an audience of three or four at his own kitchen table. Before a real audience, though, a stand-up comedian can run free, activating latent notions and ideologies present in the audience member that lie dormant until the punchline gets delivered. As an avid fan of stand-up comedy, I was familiar with the jokes made at Simpson's expense from the nineties to now, but it was only after I began researching with him in mind that I found a canon's worth of jokes, almost exclusively made by men, about how relatable to them Simpson was. This relatability is an undercurrent in so many stand-up routines that I simply couldn't ignore it. And so Simpson became the lens through which I was able to peer into manhood and further understand men in my work, for each male stand-up cracking a joke about Simpson had something to say, or some relationship to draw, between who they imagined Simpson to be, and who they really are as well. The darkness of the jokes is made bearable by their successful deliveries, but that darkness cannot be dismissed, nor should it be. Stand-up comics are crying out for us to hear them, to pay attention to their pleas in the name of all men. We must somehow make room for their complicated truths; we must assimilate this darkness inherent in masculine expression, this complexity, these contradictions and oppositeness, into our notion of the contemporary man.

It should be made clear that my sympathy for men does not negate my sympathy, and empathy, for the plight of women. Texts upon texts of feminist writings have been devoted to the conflicting demands that have been made by culture, by *men*, upon women. I'm all too familiar with those (I live and breathe them every day), and so my intrigue about what I don't know, what I don't relate to, and what I'm not made up of, brought me down this particular path instead. The cultural concept and performance of masculinity has a temporal and sexual history worth investigating, specifically (I thought) by someone like me, for despite the variant kinds of relationships I've had with men over the course of my lifetime thus far, men have inspired and continue to inspire me in many ways. And while none of my writings condone bad behaviour, they are an investigation into it. My favourite question to ask is *why*, and not "Why did O.J. commit those murders?" but instead "Why do men relate to him?" They did, and they still do; the

evidence abounds. This work is a collection of that evidence, in an attempt to shed light upon who our men really are, and who they may really be, today.

This thesis begins with a theoretical framework that encompasses a variety of authors and critical theorists, all of whom have profoundly influenced my line of thinking about men in general. Their insights into gender dynamics, and social and power relations are not insignificant, and all contribute in their own monumental rites to the formation, research and proceeding of the actual writing of this project. Beginning with John Berger on masculinity as promised power, my theoretical framework unfolds with an examination of the notions of the star and the celebrity by way of Richard Dyer, stating the importance of considering O.J. as a set of representations rather than reading into who he is intimately and personally. Freud plays a role in my thesis, for his writings on fetish, scotomization, drives, and dreams all allowed me to conjure up my own way of analyzing and interpreting the current cultural consciousness and its state insofar as masculinity is concerned. Foucault also provides insight into the supervision and policing of the body and its drives. Simone de Beauvoir and Judith Butler give background on gender as performance, and a closer look at masculinity as a phenomenon is provided by way of Connell and Messenderschmidt, as well as Susans Faludi and Bordo. Roland Barthes on myth serves my analysis in that he allows me to explore masculinity as it relates to both manhood and race in the case of Simpson while also drawing upon Michelle Wallace's work on what she calls black macho. Finally, my literature review employs theorists of stand-up comedy, including Andrea Greenbaum, Mikhail Bakhtin, Peter Stallybrass, Alan Dundes & Thomas Hauschild. These theorists lend a generous amount of information regarding the tensions and anxieties that underlie most jokes and punchlines, pointing to issues left open-ended surrounding and contributing to cultural crises. Attempts to attain closure can be found in the comedy generated, in this case around the topic of Simpson.

The third chapter of my work is devoted to historical background, and to a brief survey of Western cultural history in how it relates to the case of O.J. Simpson. Historical Background is crucial to evaluate prior to proceeding with analysis. Context is everything, and to properly understand the phenomena that are Simpson's many representations by way of media one must first complete a survey of the cultural movements, feelings and happenings that went down from 1990 to today. As a cultural analyst, I have picked representative texts of what I believe influenced Simpson's (and men's) public perception, including but not limited to magazine publications, televised news, documentaries, a survey of athletes engaging in domestic abuse, race relations in

the United States at the time, and so on and so forth. Chapter Three on historical background has an objective of establishing that which was circulating in the cultural consciousness at the time of, before, and after the O.J. trial. This gives the reader precedent, background and an ability to synthesize all the elements that make up the perfect storm that was O.J. Simpson as cultural phenomenon. Chapter 3 provides context that leads up to the analysis of how and why Simpson remains relevant as a subject in stand-up and as an undercurrent in the cultural realm.

Chapter 4 is comprised of a discourse analysis of O.J. Simpson in contemporary stand-up comedy. Discourse analysis allows me to contextualize the performance and cultural moment, positioning my subject in time and situating it amid the public reactions. Beginning with contextualizing what an O.J. joke is, this chapter is where the theoretical framework and historical background are synthesized to demonstrate how O.J. Simpson was and is still a major cultural force. Simpson was the culmination of a reckoning of sorts, and while race and athleticism certainly played major roles in his media representation, the jokes contained within my analysis play upon notions about masculinity that remain unresolved. All the jokes and comedic cultural moments selected have been delivered between the years 1990 to 2017. With each joke, I endeavor to answer the question, "what need is being met in the joke being told?" As a concluding aside, in their work on hegemonic masculinity, Connel and Messenderschmidt write, "Men's behavior is reified in a concept of masculinity that then, in a circular argument, becomes the explanation (and the excuse) for the behavior" (840). This is precisely what I want to avoid in my work. Excusing behavior is not what I'm after. Rather, I will deploy comedic routines and their ideological openings to encourage a conceptual synthesis of men's identities. Acknowledging their repressions, instincts, and somehow working them into society and culture in a practical way by understanding them is perhaps the best way to move forward, instead of blindly condemning men for their complexities and the mechanisms which make them up. Revealing the systemic processes at work and the paradoxes of masculinity could bring more peace, both within men themselves and the culture at large. The power of self-awareness is irrefutable. In Alcoholics Anonymous, the first step to overcoming a problem is admitting you have one. This thesis, and the jokes contained within it, are exactly that: acknowledgements and first steps towards the recognition of an issue about men within culture that goes deeper than one may expect.

Finally, a note must be made about my own subjectivity. Gillian Rose, in "Semiology: Laying Bare the Prejudices Beneath the Smooth Surface of the Beautiful," inspired me with her

application of semiology throughout her writing, insisting on the critical nature of making known to the reader the analyst's own subjective position in the reading of a text. Each and every analysis generated within these pages stems directly from one source alone, one subjective perspective, and it is inarguable that my social, psychological, emotional, mental and academic past has formed and informed me in such a way so as to incline me towards reading bodily performance while celebrating or critiquing it, and incorporating textual, discourse and etymological analysis. Moreover, the way I read a particular performance - the stories I follow, the dots I connect - may be different from another's reading. Despite this inescapable bias, my perspective will be contextualized by the public's understanding via discourse; this is my saving grace in terms of allowing most subjectivity to fall away while I investigate, formulate, and present my conclusions. It is impossible for me alone to read, ingest and crystallize absolutely everything that has ever been written on Simpson or the men and performances I plan to study. I account for this, however, via the strong belief that my academic history and training, my own fascination with the media, and my long-standing interest in pop culture icons have all prepared me to compose the following...

CHAPTER TWO: The Methods Behind the Man-ness

In *Ways of Seeing*, John Berger writes;

> a man's presence is dependent upon the promise of power which he embodies… the promised power may be moral, physical, temperamental, economic, social, sexual - but its object is always exterior to the man. A man's presence suggests what he is capable of doing to you or for you… the pretense is always towards a power which he exercises on others. (45-46)

John Berger on men, masculinity, potency and power suggests that notions of what it means to be a man in society are inextricable from agency; according to Berger, the measure of a man is what he is capable of. The above excerpt explains Rock's astute "broken man/broken hand" joke about masculinity from *Tamborine (2018)* - men are only significant insofar as what they can *do* - and this too is nothing if not a fantastic place to start when meditating upon the curious cultural case of O.J. Simpson. Berger's analysis proposes a variety of problems, for man is capable of acting in highly contradictory ways. Some of the stand-up jokes about O.J. Simpson chosen for this work quietly suggest that perhaps this is a defining feature of manhood. Formerly an icon of masculinity, Simpson is a man who has embodied many different kinds of power throughout his career in the public eye. However before his represented personhood or representational masculinity can be placed under the microscope, an inquiry must be made into the nature of fame itself. In other words, Simpson's story is only accessible to us by way of the vehicle that is media; that is, by way of his celebrity.

Media are mechanisms that provide a lens through which the world is filtered and interpreted. Celebrities and stars have a very important function in this paradigm for they provide relational points of reference for the public as sites of personhood and narrative. It is important to consider that while many look to celebrities because they feel they identify with them in some way, celebrities themselves are iconographic in nature. We never really know them; what we know is in fact their representation. Celebrity can be understood as "the popular recognition of the inherent qualities of [an] extraordinary individual" (Turner 6). Turner gives the example of Elvis, though an early O.J. Simpson fits this bill too. Simpson's football feats are well documented

and often referenced post-trial, sometimes even used in his defense as a way of subtly questioning how a man capable of such - as Turner says - *extraordinary* things on the football field is capable of doing such atrocious things, as Bill Maher says, "in a condo" (*Politically Incorrect with Bill Maher*). Graeme Turner, in *Understanding Celebrity*, writes, "[a celebrity's] fame is likely to have outstripped the claims to prominence developed [by way of] the positions or achievements that gave them their prominence in the first instance" (3). There is no more accurate definition than this for O.J. Simpson; his career arc from football star to media icon (for a vast many reasons at different points in modern history) to violent criminal demonstrates this transition perfectly.

To comprehend modern celebrity, attention must be paid "to the representational repertoires and patterns employed in this discursive regime" (Turner 8). According to Turner, celebrity is more about representation and discourse than it is about anything else. This is pivotal when approaching the case of O.J. Simpson for his mediated, culturally understood representations now exceed his personal or professional achievements that got him fame and attention in the first place. Richard Dyer, in his celebrated analysis *Stars*, prefaces his entire work by stating; "Stars do not exist outside of [their] texts; therefore it is these that have to be studied, and they can only be studied with due regard to the specificities of what they are, namely, significations" (Dyer 1998, 1). It is therefore "[stars'] specific signification as realized in media texts" (Dyer 1998, 1) that is the subject of this work, rather than inquiries into who Orenthal J. Simpson - the person - truly is. Simpson's personhood simply does not matter when one is trying to account for the impact his image and representationality has had on culture. Media, gender, celebrity: these are all "regime[s] of representation" (Kaite 1), institutions of iconography and iconoclasm, leading us to the conclusion that stars are signifiers, not simply people. While "the fact that [stars] are also real people is an important aspect of how they signify" (Dyer 2, 1998), this fact is only important insofar as making the celebrity or cultural icon relational to the layman or woman. As Dyer is quick to point out, "we" - the public, and on a grander scale, the cultural consciousness - "never know [stars] directly as real people, only as they are to be found in media texts" (1998, 2). Furthermore one must critically consider the inherent nature of reinvention and re-understanding fundamental to the celebrity text. Dyer's emphasis on stars' "structured polysemy" (1998, 3) speaks to exactly this concept. The celebrity text is never finished, and as history unfolds, each new cultural event re-informs past understandings; each new instance of a football player's domestic abuse references O.J.'s text and also adds to it, updating the cultural zeitgeist on an

ongoing basis. The O.J. text today is richer than it ever was, and this is a trend that will surely continue as long as media exists.

Dyer explains, "stars articulate what it is to be a human being in contemporary society" (1998, 7). As mentioned, the layman relates to the star or celebrity on the basis of their shared humanity. However the celebrity is also held to a higher standard, put up on a pedestal by the individual, by society and by culture, particularly because of their representational nature. A celebrity is not just a person in the world; he or she is a subject of or vessel for the public's desires, dreams, and so on and so forth. By way of this process, a celebrity becomes an icon, a configuration of disparate texts. Marilyn Monroe, Elvis Presley, Steve McQueen, Marlon Brando: all of these exist more so as abstractions than they do or ever did as people or performers. As an example, the mere mention of Monroe is practically interchangeable with the concept of sexuality, particularly of the feminine nature. Simpson, too, is a cultural abstraction; rather, he is iconographic of many conflicting notions. This contradictory polysemy is precisely what renders him so anxiety-provoking, but what is critical to remember here is that his representationality is fundamental to understanding why.

The tensions and negotiations around the production of meaning around O.J. Simpson can be understood only by examining his celebrity and iconicism created by the media. In laying bare these quiet workings of celebrity and iconography by way of media, Freud's notion of fetish helps us understand this process. Sigmund Freud's contributions to the realm of cultural studies are not to be discounted, and while psychology itself has evolved past the Freudian framework, the doctor's writings explain much in the way of outlining for his reader the elemental roles subconscious and sexuality play in day-to-day life. In his work "Fetishism," Freud explains, "The fetish is a substitute...for a particular and quite special [element] that had been extremely important...but later lost" (1983, 152). Of course, the doctor references his patients, generating an example of an individual's sexual fetish in his work so as to illustrate the mechanisms of how said phenomenon could occur. However, it should not be ignored that fetishization occurs as well in cases of extreme stardom (like O.J., Elvis, and so on). The media's fetishizing of an individual star is often a vital step to establishing a public figure as a bonafide celebrity. In terms of etymology and close reading, fetish is always described and understood actively with verbs in Freud's text, as in "the fetish *achieves*… *maintains*" (1983, 154). Put simply, the fetish does work, and is a powerful acting agent. The fetish endows something, and be it O.J.'s physical body or

O.J.'s cultural iconography, both have been fetishized at length in terms of sexuality, race, masculinity, and so on. The very creation of the fetish is the creation of a reminder of the values, concepts or notions the fetish maintains, sustains and represents; this is the case for Freud's sake, in the psyche of his individual patient, and for the sake of this work, in culture. Freud says trauma, the true nature of the fetish, "should normally have been given up, but the fetish is precisely designed to preserve it from extinction" (1983, 152). History and context come into play with O.J. precisely to create the fetish, that is, to fetishize him as a site of race, sex, masculinity, and power, specifically because these are cultural pillars that cannot be forgotten, and furthermore because at some point in time, the trauma of O.J. presented the media with the option and opportunity to fetishize him. In fact, I would go so far as to stipulate that the fetishization of O.J. eventually became inescapable.

Critical to fetish, Freud outlines, is trauma, and the trauma of O.J. Simpson left culture itself with only one available action, namely to fetishize this celebrity, forevermore rendering him a collection of concepts and making the mere mention of his name more historically significant than even O.J. himself could ever have dreamed. Simpson created a paradox in his abuse and murders, a paradox so strong that the resulting trauma triggered a need to act, render, and reinterpret. O.J. would never again simply be a football star, an actor, a product endorser, a husband, a friend, or even a murderer. Too many contradictory abstractions represented by Simpson that were firing all at once; in order for culture to quell the anxiety of too many identities, Simpson *had to* be fetishized as so much more. O.J. Simpson, the site of cultural negotiation, was born. The fetishizing of O.J. yields possibilities for understanding and reinterpreting, allowing media and culture to edit old schemas and generate new ones as it blazes forward.

With the introduction of the fetish, close attention must be devoted to O.J.'s body to understand what is so anxiety-generating and threatening about him to culture and society on a broader scale. Judith Butler's work on performativity, specifically in relation to gender, is foundational theory about the operations and meanings of bodies. As outlined by Butler in her work *Bodies That Matter*, performativity can be understood by acknowledging that bodies are both powerful and performative. They are vehicles and vessels, profoundly representational, and imbued with social, historical, racial, sexual and cultural cues. Bodies are constantly and consistently being read by people. A woman walking along a dark sidewalk at night will cross the street when she sees a tall, powerful-looking man approaching her from down the block. If,

instead, a young boy were approaching, said woman probably would not recede from the situation. She may even ask him where his mother was, and if he was lost. The tall, powerful-looking man walking towards the woman may in fact be the most gentle, kind and benevolent individual on the planet, but this matters not for she was reading the signs of his body and cross-referencing them with the knowledge stored in her cultural, social, sexual, historical and experiential bank. This snapshot of a moment is a small example of how bodies are read, and this close reading process gets taken to new heights with readings of celebrity bodies. As Susan Bordo writes, "the body… carries human history with it" (1999, 26), and so too does the cultural consciousness, applying knowledge so as to generate historically informed readings. In other words, "materiality" of the body "[becomes] rethought as the effect of power" (Butler 1993, 2).

It is imperative to note that male and female bodies are read differently. Butler speaks on this further in "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution," citing theorists like Simone de Beauvoir in her establishment of the cultural constructedness of gender itself. When de Beauvoir writes, "one is not born, but, rather, *becomes* a woman" (Butler 1988, 519), she employs the same kind of active language Freud utilizes when describing fetish. Gender and bodies are not things, but rather processes of representation, ceaselessly doing work, acting as renewed reminders of values, concepts, notions and so on. Butler and de Beauvoir's argument is that through acting - performing - in accordance with societal and cultural rules and regulations in a consistent manner, one can be identified as masculine or feminine, as a man or as a woman, "as an abiding gendered self" (Butler 1988, 519). Butler's "doing of gender" (1988, 521) speaks to this work in many ways, none in the least of which pertains to O.J. Simpson's doing or expression of masculinity. As previously outlined by Berger, masculinity is understood through the lenses of power and control. There is a boundedness to the male body that is paramount to understanding successful masculine bodily (and, by transitive property, conceptual) expression. Female sexuality is unbounded, soft, round and unending, associated with mysteriousness, fluidity, an uncontrollable cycle. This undistinguished, loose, fluid and out-of-control quality that femininity embodies renders the feminine threatening in its most conceptual incarnation, due to the fundamental unknowableness of it. Men, on the other hand, are made up of right angles and straight lines: their jaws, their genitals, their muscles. Their entire physical structure is meant to be "utilitarian" (Bordo 1999, 28), the hard body pointing to the hard phallus. Male sexual expression is supposed to be bounded, dominant, controlling, and sometimes even excitingly dangerous in its aggression.

But even the danger embodied by men points to one very important facet of what it means to be a man in the 21st century: the simple and critical element of control, be it of one's self or of one's environment. A male who performs this quality and performs it well is upheld and celebrated culturally, socially and societally as a man. Contradictorily, the moment of ejaculation is one of loss of control, of surrender of the man to a sexual force, temptation or pull greater than himself, and again as a result of paradox (since the fluid, loose and uncontrollable is characteristically associated with the threatening, unknowable feminine) sexual anxiety is generated as we have seen time and again. Simpson's nickname, The Juice, is particularly relevant here, and becomes even more so after his homicidal actions (his flying-off-the-handle). However most significant to masculinity is for one to be bounded and unstoppable, dominant and powerful; the kind of person who won't take no for an answer.

Masculinity itself is a complicated concept, with but not limited to discursive, physical, performative, and gender-related definitions, practices and applications. R.W. Connell and James W. Messerschmidt, in "Hegemonic Masculinity: Rethinking the Concept," provide a detailed and comprehensive survey of many ethnographic studies conducted on men and the consequences of their position within culture and society, specifically investigating "popular anxieties about men" (Connell 830). Masculinity, for Connell, Messerschmidt, and the ethnographers that inform their work, "represents not a certain type of man but, rather, a way that men position themselves through...*practices*" (Connell 841, my emphasis). The active language employed by Connell et al. here is not to be discounted, and traces back to Butler, de Beauvoir, and the very notion of gender as doing, as performance. Connell summarizes prior research conducted on hegemonic masculinity, first and foremost explaining that there exist many different types, variations of, and levels of compliance to, masculinity as both a concept and a practice. The ultimate goal of Connell's work is explained in his abstract as arguing for "a stronger emphasis on the dynamics of hegemonic masculinity, recognizing internal contradictions" (Connell 829). Connell's multiplicity of masculinities is quite central to this thesis, for in agreement with the comedians and their routines about Simpson, I too will examine and argue for the multiplicity of contradictory archetypes a man is capable of embodying, sometimes all at once. That very multiplicity is, in fact, where 'popular anxieties about men' stem from, and specifically where anxieties about Simpson can be traced back to. Connell puts forth the notion that, if masculinity were a hierarchy, hegemonic masculinity would occupy the top rung, and furthermore that "only a minority of men

enact it" (832). Perhaps this is also why hegemonic masculinity is so venerated in culture - very few men practice (or perform) it completely 'right.' One of the main studies analyzed by Connell and Messerschmidt found that hegemonic masculinity "was [specifically] deployed in understanding the popularity of body-contact confrontational sports - which function as an endlessly renewed symbol of masculinity - and in understanding the violence frequently found in sporting milieus" (Connell 833, my addition). Another reason for the veneration of hegemonic masculinity is the fact that its continued existence establishes (and reaffirms) a very specific gendered power dynamic. In order for hegemonic masculinity to be sustained as "a pattern," Connel explains the practice "requires the policing of men as well as the exclusion or discrediting of women" (844), yet another (not so) hidden agenda of Western patriarchy. Connell writes, "hegemony [does] not mean violence, although it [can] be supported by force; it [means] ascendancy achieved through culture, institutions and persuasions" (832). Being top dog means being a force to be reckoned with, practicing an ultimate incarnation of masculinity and embodying it continuously. As Connell and Messerschmidt explain in their article, this is very hard to do, and even harder to successfully sustain without consequence "to the victor in terms of emotional and physical damage" (Connell 834).

O.J. Simpson certainly performed masculinity to a "T" when he was first emerging onto the pop culture scene. The origins of his star power can be traced to the football field, where Simpson played for U.S.C. He went on to play professionally for both the Buffalo Bills and the San Francisco 49ers, and is largely still considered one of the greatest athletes in American history. The discipline, control, and power one must exert upon oneself and others to truly succeed as a college, and then professional athlete, is not a small feat. It is precisely for these reasons that people flock to football games and hang posters of athletes up on their wall. These men are idolized for their abilities, and as their careers blossom, they, like celebrities, come to represent more than just themselves. This potentiality athletes have sets them apart from the rest of us, for they are achieving, doing and performing physical triumphs that the majority of us simply cannot accomplish. Athletes also play into a concept called internal hegemony, coined by Demetriou in 2001 and referring to "the social ascendency of one group of men over all other men" (Connell 844). As far as masculinity as a concept goes, with a particular emphasis on the exertion of power, men who exert their power over other powerful men and *win* - in other words, contact-sport athletes - are positioned at the top of the (male dominance) pyramid. In her work *STIFFED*, Susan Faludi

writes; “To be a man increasingly [means] to be ever on the rise, and the only way to know for sure you [are] rising [is] to claim, control, and crush everyone and everything in your way” (11). Connell even goes so far as to cite Messner (1992) and his description and investigation of the athletes’ “bodies as *weapons*” (Connell 837, my emphasis) in driving home his point about how seriously athletes take their physical abilities and, by transitive property, their (male) dominance and power. While there is inarguably a genetic component to their accomplishment on the sports field, athletes are venerated more so because they embody an almost superhuman-like faculty for self-discipline and self-control, and a determined willingness to practice and excel no matter what. Athletes push limits, break boundaries, and set the world on fire when they’re truly extraordinary. Put simply, “[a man is] a man because he won’t be stopped...he is untouched by [society], soaring above it” (Faludi 10), practically defying gravity itself in how exceptionally he performs his masculinity and his ascendancy over everything in his environment. O.J. Simpson, by almost every account, was this kind of player.

Simpson’s athletic background is significant in understanding his highly gendered position of power, and the way culture refuses to release his athletic achievements despite his horrific, murderous actions. Susan Bordo, in *The Male Body*, explains this strange phenomenon in so many words;

> As spectators, we find these ‘displays of masculine aggression’ exciting in the ring [or on the field] precisely because they break with the taboos of civilization, act out the (forbidden) aggression in all of us. Indeed, we want the boxer [or athlete] to be as uncivilized as he can be; we reward him for it. In the meantime the boxer, ‘conduit’ for all this suppressed aggression, vestigial repository of primal masculinity, is a real person who is learning - in the very fibers of his being, his body - that civilized taboos against violence do not apply to him... The cultural adoration of those athletes who ‘perform’ masculinity for us often continues even after they have been charged with or convicted of serious crimes. (236-7, 1999)

The public’s denial, induced by said adoration, occurs precisely because we as a culture and society so value and enjoy an athlete’s ability to defy laws and rules on the field. It’s hard for us to believe (or, more to the point, it’s hard for us to *accept*) that superhuman athletes who (can) perform so

exceptionally (for us) can also perform so abhorrently. They occupy and operate in a special primitive arena within our overly civilized society. Thinkers like Freud and Foucault would probably argue that we - culture, and society at large - *need* these athletes so that we may live vicariously through them. They are vehicles as Bordo says, vessels for *our* repressed anger, rage, impulses, drives and desires which we are by and large forbidden to act upon (more on this later).

But the problem with O.J. is that he was not *just* an athlete. Simpson has been thought of as so much more, for he has occupied so many different realms, and played a variety of roles throughout his career in the public eye. He has embodied a nice guy, a murderer, a product endorser, a celebrity, a husband, a friend, a superstar, a humble athlete, an uncle, a victim, a convict. Simpson's archetypal role call is absolutely schizophrenic. The public simply cannot process how one man can be and do all these things at once, for in mythical narrative and supposedly in life, conflicting archetypes are not supposed to be embodied by the same man. Carl Jung's work on *Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious* elaborates on archetypes and their cultural, broad-scale implications. Jung believed archetypal figures were essential to the collective's understanding of themselves and the world in which they live. The concept of "the Great Mother" (Jung 75) is one of the analyst's more successful examples, illustrating how every individual is familiar with the emotional, religious, and primitive registers of the mother archetype, found everywhere in nature and certainly in culture. However, the Great Mother is only one in a grander collection of characters to pick from, and Jung's argument is that the public has already inherently ingested and understood this cast of characters. They sit in a little reservoir in the psyche, waiting to be activated, and indeed they are activated simply by way of the moment-to-moment interactions people have every day in their quotidian lives (this concept functions not unlike the reading of bodies). Archetypes, Jung says, "can be named and [have] an invariable nucleus of meaning - but always only in principle, never as regards its concrete manifestation" (80). In other words, archetypes are notions, abstractions, elements of the unconscious mind. But mechanisms like the media know just which notes to play to get specific ones to dance in our collective psyche. Processed on an unconscious plane, these archetypes are almost like universal characters, identifiable on a subliminal level by "the inborn, preconscious and unconscious individual structure of the psyche" (Jung 77). Archetypes are processed as such - unconsciously - allowing us to understand our reality and the situations life presents us with. The media, in particular, is a propagator of Jung's notion of the archetype, for in all media narratives each

celebrity, icon or public figure plays a particular part; many of these parts are eternal, with roots in some of the oldest tales known to man. The fascinating and anxiety-inducing element about Simpson is that he does not fit into a category, and is unidentifiable as playing one particular part, embodying one particular character, and living out the trajectory of one particular archetype. Jung's work on the "archetype" as "a hypothetical...model, something like the pattern of behaviour… [in other words] the *représentations collectives*" as relating to "myth [and] esoteric teaching" (5) functions to explain the cognitive frameworks at play when a comedian or the public attempt to resolve and achieve closure on the curious case of who exactly O.J. Simpson is (and who, exactly, men are).

Considering the threat O.J. poses to society as an iconic figure, Freud explains; "in the case of every individual who is supposed to join in the work of civilization, there is a risk that his sexual instincts may refuse to be put to use" (1983, 48). Freud's preoccupation in "Introduction" is of a sexual nature, but what must not be ignored is how the psychoanalyst describes sex, specifically as "put to use." The imperative and transitive argument here is that the individual is used by society, and that bodies are used by culture. If men's bodies are fetishized in culture as icons of control, power, and so on, then their social and cultural power and currency derive specifically from their ability to exert control over their environment like Berger stipulates. Of the utmost importance is a man's ability to exert control over himself, his impulses, his thoughts, his body and its expression in the world. And if he can become untouchable, defying the laws of physics and breaking league records by becoming "the first man ever" (Richman, 1973) to rush a football field for over 2,000 yards, he is supposedly all the more of a man because of it (Figure 2).

The turning point of Simpson's career was, of course, the murders and the subsequent trial. As a public figure and murderer, Simpson represents a threat to the societal order. The precariousness of society is what culture will not admit to itself, and what so often gets concealed by fetishizing the body, or the celebrity. These are the fundamental stakes when discussing the issue of O.J. Freud writes; "Society does not wish to be reminded of the precarious portion of its foundations" for "civilization has been created...at the cost of satisfaction of the instincts" (2001, 47-48). This statement is perhaps one of the most powerful in the analyst's work for our purposes here, because it explains why Simpson is such a point of fascination to this day. When one person, like O.J., disregards this general and sacrificial order, acting on his killer instinct and completely ignoring the building blocks to be respected for the sake of maintaining society, he presents culture

with a threat, and a valid one at that. Freud explains, "Civilization is to a large extent being constantly created anew, since each individual who makes a fresh entry into human society repeats this sacrifice of instinctual satisfaction for the benefits of the whole community" (2001, 47). In other words, one small slip-up could theoretically trigger a domino effect of sorts, and while this sounds somewhat sensational, Freud is quick to point out just how insecure this societal pillar of communal repression is. Civilization is founded upon the social contract of repression of drives, instincts, and impulses that are policed (by individuals themselves, and outside of that, by the law) for the greater good.

Michel Foucault's ideas about bio-power (e.g. in his chapters "Method" and "The Archeology of Knowledge" from *An Anthology* and *Michel Foucault* respectively) elaborate on the body as a site that must be bounded, whose drives must be supervised so that society can function in a rigorous, safe, controlled manner. The body is a meeting point of physical drives and societal supervision of those drives. Culture superimposes itself onto the body in its most basic form and expression and begins to regulate it, instituting gendered codes and enforcing them, and policing the body's infinite ability to express, making control a key operation. Furthermore, the "disciplinary society" (Foucault 206) within which we live functions much like Foucault's concept of the panopticon. While this may appear to be more so today than it has been ever before, the disciplinary nature of society has been in place, Foucault argues, for centuries, and functions on the mutual understanding - the "universal consciousness" (Foucault 213) - embedded in civilization that instincts and drives, as Freud says, are to be repressed, policed, and kept under control. When an individual or body does not act in accordance with all of the aforementioned societal norms and accepted regulations, a small threat to civilization in general is made. Taking this concept one step further, when a fetishized body, a celebrity, an icon breaks the cardinal rules of self-policing and self-control, the threat posed to society at large is much greater, for the body in question is not only admired by throngs, and represents not only itself, but many other cultural concepts as well, all of which are deployed when an unbounded, out-of-control, socially rebellious act is committed. Freud employs a term called scotomization, defined as the mental blocking of unwanted perceptions (1983, 153). Culturally, what is being scotomized by way of propagating certain values (heterosexuality, reproductive futurism, self-control, repression of drives, and bodily boundedness to name a few) is how precarious the foundation of society truly is, should all of us simply stop repressing and policing ourselves so agreeably. So long as these aforementioned

pillars are upheld and practiced by all, society will continue to be an ordered framework, expunging chaos and disorder at every turn. As Freud explains in his "Introduction," "society believes that no greater threat to its civilization could arise than if...instincts were to be liberated" (2001, 48). This is the meta-threat posed by O.J.'s case on a cultural scale, by way of his body, his drives, and the many contradictory archetypes he represents.

Critical race theory plays an elemental role in understanding O.J., for Simpson did perform blackness, and successful blackness, at first. He was an idol to the African-American community, but also transcended and extended what blackness meant for an individual: he was not subjected to the same ideologies and experiences any black man had to endure and live with for he was a celebrity much beloved for most of his career. The trial, long after the peak of his celebrity, resulted in a polarization of forces that seemed to be racially divided. Before the trial, Simpson was a celebrity. During the trial, Simpson came to represent black men (a tactic employed by his own defense), black victimhood, police discrimination, and so many other representations tied intimately to the experience of being African American in 1990's America. In Joanne Pope Melish's 2003 review of *A Hideous Monster of the Mind: American Race Theory in the Early Republic*, she explains; "While whites were busy 'accounting for' blacks, blacks were struggling to account for whites' prejudice and refute negative constructions of themselves" (899). This process played a key role in the trial, and in O.J.'s representations post-homicides.

Many "ignore the role of social structure in assigning meaning to race" (Van Dyk 78), but the determining social structure is particularly relevant when looking at O.J.'s social standing and his transcendence of race itself prior to (and, some would argue, after) the murders. Simpson's blackness represented or meant something very different when compared to someone else's due to his celebrity and belovedness stemming from his successful performance in the sports arena. Van Dyk's emphasis on the social realm is heavy-handed in her work; the critic suggests that "the race problem [lies] in the nature of American society" (78) rather than in the construct of race itself. Consider, too, that O.J. and Nicole were a mixed race couple. With another nod to Van Dyk's theories, interracial coupling was fairly progressive at the time, and Nicole and O.J. were a public couple, both accepted and celebrated socially. While they may have still been the topic of debate behind closed doors in more antiquated households, they were a celebrity couple who were a fixture in the tabloids. They symbolized, together, a type of union. Simpson's actions and murderous behaviour threatened that union and reintroduced, potentially revalidating, the notion

of the black man as savage, uncontrollable, and in need of containment. These concepts stem from far back, where one could draw upon Anne McLintock's writings on soap and civilization. The black man was presented to the white man as being in need of colonization due to his supposed inherent and essential savagery; many Pears soap ads were born of this idea, and while we look back on these today and cringe, the foundational, constructed notions about race that the ads conveyed linger still in the cultural consciousness. Ads can be revoked, but when it comes to ideas, once the seed is planted, culture does not simply forgive and forget. Simpson's murders echoed this construct; his out-of-bounds body, unpoliced, homicidal and out of control, reminded culture's subconscious of the fear said Pears ads instilled within the white man and instated in Western culture. And so, it was the media this time that began a process of colonization, using all its abilities, technologies and resources to find out absolutely everything about O.J., broadcasting it all for the world in an attempt to regain control of his out of bounds body.

It is evident that Simpson's iconography is entwined with his being an African-American. In his Oscar-winning documentary *O.J.: Made in America* (2016), one of director Ezra Edelman's interviewees says of Simpson in his career pre-trial; "he transcended race and color to the exalted status of celebrity." It is imperative to flesh out the rich and profoundly symbolic history of race which informs O.J. as a star text. African-Americans, particularly African-American men, have been "haunted by the mythology that surrounds the American black man...based upon the real persecution of black men" (Wallace 2015) in American history. In her work *Black Macho and the Myth of the Superwoman*, Michelle Wallace succinctly explains; "what most people see when they look at the black man is the myth" (2015). This is particularly significant due to the added layer of representation activated when confronted with the case study of an African-American male. Wallace indicates, just as bodies are read by way of gender, reading bodies occurs racially. Understanding how bodily readings are informed by signifiers is facilitated by venturing into the territory of myth, employing *Mythologies* by Roland Barthes. Barthes explains that myth is predominantly discursive, and is essentially "reality…[converted] into speech...a type of speech chosen by history" (108). The "modes of writing or of representations" (Barthes 108) that myth is comprised of dictate its ebb and flow, but at the very crux of the matter of myth is the simple idea of signs and speech, all of which make up story.

The largely semiological nature of myth is not dissimilar to Butler's notion of performative bodies; both Barthes and Butler understand and argue for the demystification of myth, in other

words, the laying bare of the mechanisms beneath the surface attitudes about a subject. "The meaning," Barthes explains, "must be able to hide [in the form]" (117), in the vessel, in the body, in the signifier which is the vehicle for the grander and often historically-informed signified meaning. Barthes references a *Paris-Match* magazine with a young Black man in a French uniform saluting on its cover, explaining that while this may in fact be the image pictured, the latent and potent signified is that of the power of the French Empire, its global ascendancy and its domination of many peoples (Figure 3). The subtle process Barthes lays bare for the reader here is no different from the close reading with respect to myth executed by culture and the public on O.J. Simpson before, and especially after, his trial. The Black man in America as the signifier conveys a (or many) meaning(s), the signified(s), and carries with him a history of oppression, violence, persecution, associations with fear, anger, sexuality, primitivity, slavery and so on.

Many of these are constructed concepts, created culturally and implemented by institutional forces far beyond the control of any particular individual. However, it is the individuals who suffer, and who are burdened with carrying the heavy weight of all these ideologies. The burden is particularly weighty, Wallace explains, for the African American man. All the imagery Wallace refers to in her work on African-American history is precisely what 'haunted' the O.J. case, and is partly why so many people rallied in the streets for Orenthal, who no longer represented himself but instead was an arrow pointing to all the atrocities committed against the black man in the ghost of America's past. Wallace explains; "the picture drawn for us over and over again is of a man who is a child, who is the constant victim," (2015) a concept that can be and was deployed in Simpson's favor. This very notion was utilized by the defense time and again during his trial. In fact, Simpson's constructed victimization by the defense hinged upon these concepts of the black man as victim, as symbol, as signifier without choice in the matter of what he culturally, racially, societally (and so on) signifies. Simpson, the defense argued, does not, did not, and cannot choose what he signifies, and this was a battle cry heard round the world by anyone who's ever been discriminated against because of their race or physical appearance and the related cultural cues these conveyed. It was perhaps the most brilliant move made by Simpson's defense team, and even I would argue one of the most manipulative and ingenious courtroom tactics utilized in the history of the American criminal justice system.

It should be noted though: Wallace is quick to point out that the paradox grows as time marches on. As society progresses racially, she writes: the black man "is no longer a pathetic,

beaten-down slave (if indeed he ever was only that)...he's grown, progressed, developed as a man and if one recognizes him as a man he must begin to carry some measure of responsibility for what happens to him" (2015). This progression, too, played into the Simpson trial, and was a factor in how media and the public perceived the defendant. Another interesting and informative racial element is the rich history of slavery and discrimination, particularly how it applies to the Black man's concept of his own masculinity. Wallace explains; "The slave father did lack traditional authority over his family. He could not control the destinies of either his wife or his children" (2015), rendering him out-of-control and therefore, as we have learned, emasculated personally, familially, conceptually, and culturally. The parallels here between Wallace's description of the Black male slave, unable to control or influence his own family, and Simpson's well-known domestic situation prior to the murders, is not to be discounted. Control and power are both hot-button topics in the realm of masculinity, but because of the complicated history of African Americans in the United States, the ability to exert power and control takes on an entirely new, more profound and potent meaning to the individual and the collective. In 1971, just one year before John Berger's *Ways of Seeing* was published wherein Berger established power as central to manhood, Black Panther Huey P. Newton wrote; "to [African Americans] power is, first of all, the ability to define phenomena, and secondly the ability to make these phenomena act in a desired manner" (277). Ironically, Bill Cosby's lawyer read out this same statement by Newton after Cosby's first mistrial in 2017 (Stern 2017). The overlap in definition here between Berger, Newton's ideas about power, and hegemonic masculinity is crucial to consider, but Newton takes it all a step further by referencing the ability to control phenomena, to manipulate reality to one's own advantage. By Newton's standards, Simpson fits the bill, embodying power to the utmost and completely fulfilling his definition of it; the force that was Simpson was somehow able to sway everything in his favor following what happened that tragic night in Brentwood, becoming a downright phenomenon himself.

Finally, it is important to note that an added layer of anxiety surrounding Simpson's masculinity stems from his interracial relationship with Nicole Brown. Nicole, a tall, gorgeous Beverly Hills blonde, is representative in her own right. Richard Dyer meditates upon the white, blonde icon in his work on Marilyn Monroe in *Heavenly Bodies*, explaining; "to be the ideal Monroe had to be white, and not just white but blonde, the most unambiguously white you can get [...] this race element conflates with sexuality [...] the white woman is offered as the most highly

prized possession of the white man, and the envy of all other races. [...] Thus there is the notion of the universally desired 'White Goddess'" at work constructing and insidiously implementing a "racial hierarchy of desirability" (Dyer 2004, 40). As such, the white woman is representative in culture, and particularly to the African American man, as the ultimate sexual conquest and furthermore symbol of status, signifying said man's ability to transcend race and acquire the White woman, that which supposedly belongs to the white man. Elridge Cleaver, in a brutally honest and self-reflective essay, details his own personal struggles with this racial hierarchy of desirability, describing a fellow black inmate's insight into the predicament: "all our lives we've [black men] had the white woman dangled before our eyes like a carrot on a stick before donkey: look but don't touch" (Cleaver 28). In Cleaver's writings from *Soul on Ice*, he contemplates his choice to hang a white pin-up on the wall of his jail cell. He muses: "I realized I had chosen the picture of a white girl over the available pictures of black girls [...] Was it true, did I really prefer white girls over black? Yes, I did." (27). Cleaver outlines the details of an incident in which a guard rounding on his jail cell rips said picture off his wall, disallowing the prisoner from even fantasizing about the white pin-up. Simpson, on the other hand, when speaking in representational terms, managed to actually acquire his white goddess in the realm of the real. For the conceptual dimension, this was fairly revolutionary. Simpson's marriage to Nicole undoubtedly contributed to his representational iconography as a man in the hegemonic sense. Simpson's defiance and surpassing of racial and societal boundaries in "acquiring" Nicole further solidified his masculinity, his prowess, his potency, and his ability to act as he pleases regardless of racial or societal constraints. These abilities to overcome regardless of circumstance are, according to Berger, Connel and Messenderschmidt, what makes up a man, and what constitutes a successful masculine performance.

This thesis's emphasis on humour as a vehicle for ideological change and iconoclasm was initially informed by Andrea Greenbaum and her article titled "Stand up comedy as rhetorical argument: an investigation of comic culture." According to Greenbaum, humour allows for a breaking open, for "cognitive change" (Perks 121); it forces the collective to consider a new ideological perspective about a given topic. This can be both revolutionary and transgressive. The comedian "[convinces] the audience to look at the world through their comic vision" (Greenbaum 33), taking the public on a ride by inviting them to see life through the comedian's unique lens. Integral to this process is the comedian's ability to play upon the concepts circulating within the

collective cultural consciousness, including the stories being told, the prevalent attitudes, the latent fears, desires, repressions, and drives that are constantly being threatened by any societal transgression. Greenbaum explains; "by challenging the social order, a stand-up engages in a subversive and confrontational discourse" (33) otherwise taboo in any other domain or realm. Humour, Greenbaum writes, "provides...people with an insulated means of argument to challenge the dominant view of the social order" and is "designed to persuade audience members to adopt certain ideological positions" (33). In light of the aforementioned precariousness of culture, and society on the whole, it is no wonder that humour itself is often thought of as particularly dangerous by institutional forces and regimes. Humour literally opens a door that would otherwise be kept shut, inviting the audience member to stroll through, to take a walk and consider some of their deepest, darkest opinions about an issue - opinions audience members sometimes didn't even know they had internalized. This is another component of successful humour: it enkindles hidden ideas, notions, concepts, beliefs and attitudes so latent in the audience that even the audience member him- or her-self had no clue these notions or perspectives were even part of his or her conceptual reality. Humour, like fetish, activates; it does work, and in each new instance of it, with each new punchline, it revolutionizes the way we understand our world.

Mikhail Bakhtin's theory of carnival provides support for my investigation of the role of humour about Simpson in culture. Bakhtin describes a "temporary suspension, both ideal and real…[that] created during carnival time a special type of communication impossible in everyday life," (10). The spectacle of stand-up comedy produces this same type of communion between comic and crowd, allowing for the opportunity to explore and investigate cultural ideology. In a pull-quote from *Rabelais and His World*, Mikhail Bakhtin writes, humour and carnival "[offer] a completely different, nonofficial, extracclesiastical and extrapolitical aspect of the world, of man, and of human relations" (6). He argues that mythology has always played a part in the culture of laughter and comedy, and this points to why Simpson is such a hot topic, as he represents a mythological American archetype of masculinity, violence and celebrity. Bakhtin's emphasis on "comic rituals and myths" (Bakhtin 6) as irrevocably intertwined with one another is also significant, for Bakhtin understands that comedy deploys myth when executed successfully in a joke, sketch or comedic moment. Myths - stories, signifiers and signifieds - are intrinsic components of successful comedy for, when done right, comedy itself is providing the audience member(s) with a critical take on a cultural narrative. This fresh perspective renders said issue

relateable, or at the very least comprehensible, to said audience. This process is executed by way of storytelling. Bakhtin also focuses on the grotesque as a site for humour in which "specific social phenomena are berated" (305), hence producing laughter on the audience's part as a result of "exaggeration, hyperbolism, excessiveness, [all]...generally considered fundamental attributes of the grotesque" (303). The "picturing [of] the body" (Bakhtin 303) critical to humour about the grotesque is another important component, for images of Nicole Brown Simpson's body still haunt American tabloid history, not to mention anyone who's ever laid eyes on those devastating photos. Simpson's body is also the site of significant tension and negotiation, and its abilities and variant potential are consequently sources of humour.

Stallybrass, developing Bakhtin's ideas, explains "the carnivalesque as an instance of a wider phenomenon of transgression" (3). The humour as transgressive somewhat mimics Simpson's behaviour as transgressive - in many ways, the form (joking) reflects the content (O.J.'s transgressive act). Simpson's murderous actions are transgressive, and so are jokes in general. Joking about the O.J. murders can be thought of as two birds, one stone - it accomplishes transgression twice over simply by making up the content of a joke and punchline. Maybe this explains why comics love employing him as a talking point. In their work on "Auschwitz Jokes," humour theorists Alan Dundes and Thomas Hauschild explore the function of the taboo in jokes, in other words why "sick humour" is so often employed as an effective strategy to start "[trying] to come to terms with the unimaginable and unthinkable" (260). Their work explains how jokes point directly towards a problem, "[demonstrating]...[what] is not dead" (Dundes 250) in the eyes of culture, the collective, and "as a barometer of the attitudes of [the] group" (250) in question. In this case, and for the purposes of this work, the group in question is predominantly modern men. Stand-up jokes about O.J. Simpson are performed in public, but as each new joke begins, a good comedian somewhat tweaks his or her delivery, speaking to a particular subgroup in the audience depending on the joke's content. Dundes and Hauschild explain, "The jokes exist and they obviously must fill some psychic need for those individuals who tell them and those who listen to them" (250), and while those individuals may be defined as a grander collective than just modern men, it seems as though the male joke-tellers themselves are continuously trying to negotiate their role in society by way of reminiscing on the complex and curious case of O.J. Simpson. Humour about the taboo, the unspeakable, the sick and wrong allows for one or the collective to "try to come to terms with the unimaginable and unthinkable" (Dundes and Hauschild 260). Dundes

explains in his work, "Auschwitz is a problem for the conscience of modern Germany, and that is no doubt why Auschwitz jokes exist and circulate" (258). I may extend this statement to the case of Simpson as well; O.J. poses a problem for the conscience of the modern man, and that is no doubt why O.J. jokes continue to persist. There are tensions and anxieties still circulating about men, O.J., violence, women, athletes, control, dominance, masculinity, and so on that exist, abstract though they may be. These have yet to be resolved for and within the consciousness of the post-modern, contemporary man, not to mention for Western culture at large. Dundes and Hauschild argue that the "joke cycle" is a step in the right direction, for it "indicates that… at least some [men] are admitting that the tragic event...did happen" (258). This, in itself, represents a form of progress, for the joke is "an admission" (259), an acknowledgement of a truth (even a shameful truth).

Like a hammer swinging forth and breaking through brick, stand-up comedy moments create an ideological opening, enabling people to see and relate to reality - and here, masculinity - in a new way. The consequences of this ideological opening manifest in media frenzy, circulating discourse, humour and cultural anxiety. This seeing of reality in a new way is often done through the collective, with an emphasis on the social realm and the public forum as an arena in which to work these issues (here, of masculinity and identity) out. Often these re-workings are best demonstrated in stand-up comedy jokes circulating about a cultural event which reveal the way people really feel beneath the circulating cultural anxiety on the surface. Many jokes made at O.J. Simpson's expense play upon the paradoxes in his character, ruminating on his incredible athletic ability and his incomprehensible murderous rage at the same time. They tend to point to culture as something which categorizes and archetypes, ultimately suggesting that these methods for understanding what makes up an individual - and especially a man - fall short. The jokes play upon masculine clichés and old world notions of manhood while referencing new contemporary understandings of politically correct masculinity. The close reading of punchlines and comedic commentary on the subject of O.J. pulls the thread and unravels a wide variety of ideas about masculinity and culture's inability to assimilate both beast and shining knight into one functional understanding of a man.

Just as Simpson has greater consequences for society and culture in general, so too does the humour about him. Humour has its function; it "allow[s] the joke teller and his audience to admit… [to] a part of history" (Dundes and Hauschild 259). Humour also indicates "the

recognition of [a] grim reality [that] has not ended" (Dundes and Hauschild 259). Furthermore, when "members of the group in question tell jokes about their own group, it may still be a matter of aggression. The concept of self hate" (Dundes and Haushchild 250) is vital and active in the humour mechanism, and many stand-up comedians employ it when discussing their own frustrations with their masculinity in theory and practice. What must be resolved or put to bed, namely with jokes about O.J. Simpson, is the complexity, confusion and mystery around what it means to be a man. Women are constantly identified as the more mysterious sex, more misunderstood, more incomprehensible, and yet it seems to remain a mystery to men themselves how they can embody so many different and contrasting roles, archetypes, feelings, emotions, desires, and drives. Furthermore, the grander mystery lies in how they - how all of us - can accept the tensions apparent in the polar archetypes that make up what it means to be a man. Dundes and Hauschild write; "as long as the jokes are told, [their subject] will remain in the consciousness [of the collective]" (259). Until masculinity itself is negotiated successfully, stand-up jokes about O.J. Simpson, it seems, will be here to stay.

CHAPTER THREE: The Nineties to Now

When Americans looked at O.J., they didn't see a man on trial. They saw a symbol, a representation, a signifier. They saw ideas; they still do. And, for many reasons, many men saw (and continue to see) themselves. History plays a key role in the story of O.J. Simpson and in the crisis of masculinity, for the concepts, events and phenomena that circulated continue to do so today. In Chris Rock's cinematic directorial debut *Top Five* (2016), the lead (played by Rock himself) attempts to explain to his romantic interest that cultural phenomena don't just happen randomly. He illustrates by citing the 1968 release of *Planet of the Apes* as a cultural trigger for the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr. the very next day (Figure 3). While this theory is of course false, Rock's argument calls attention to the subtle, influential forces that we imagine circulate within culture, propagated largely by its media mechanisms. More than anything, though, Rock's theory reminds us of how our understanding of things happens relationally: historical context is essential. And so to understand the cultural phenomena that are entwined with O.J. Simpson and the contemporary crisis of masculinity, an historical survey is needed.

It is inarguable that to understand O.J. Simpson, one must take into consideration his football stardom, its impact on his celebrity and how he is and continues to be received by the public. However, for the present purposes, I am more interested in "the fall" of Simpson and of masculinity itself, for it is this fall that is still being negotiated. My cultural and historical analysis will begin in 1990, continuing to 2018, allowing me an overview of the temporal period in which men, their practices and their place in society really began to be scrutinized by Western culture. This chapter, more than anything, is about connecting the dots and identifying the patterns in culture indicating a crisis in masculinity, setting the scene for the O.J. trial and response to it from the nineties to now.

What first must be examined is the fact that iconic, representational bodies have always been a mode of understanding and a vehicle for narratives about humanity and life. Reading bodies is a tool that is so deeply ingrained within us by way of culture that it persists despite our best efforts to evolve and progress. Men's bodies (and consequently, archetypal paradigms, or character templates if you will) are read and understood in a very specific way. In their ideal incarnations, their frames are powerful, rigid, utilitarian, forceful, potentially dangerous or aggressive, strong, and distinct. This speaks to how they are understood conceptually by us all; as

useful, productive acting agents who do, exert, create and destroy. Above all, according to conventional forms of masculinity, a man is supposed to be in control; it is agency that makes the man. To perform properly, he must have dominion over himself, his body, and furthermore over others if he embodies this cultural concept called masculinity successfully enough. The nineties were a period in history where, especially in America, some prominent men were tried for their performances of masculinity.

On February 14th, 1994, *TIME Magazine*'s cover screamed, in big bold lettering: "ARE MEN REALLY THAT BAD?" (Figure 5). The cover article's opening sentences, woven together by the provocative Lance Morrow, read as follows; "After God cast Lucifer and his followers into darkness, all the fallen angels came straggling together on the plains of hell -- to recriminate, to console themselves and to discuss their new identities as devils. It may be time for men to hold a convention for the same purpose" (1994). If that isn't a broad-sweeping condemnation of absolute biblical proportion, I don't know what is. Morrow's prose aside (let's face it, not everyone actually *reads* the articles), the mere placement of "men" and "bad" together in big block lettering broadcasted on every *TIME* cover visible at newsstands, grocery stores, gas stations and sidewalk kiosks in the entire Western hemisphere suggests volumes to anyone who laid eyes on the headline; that *men* are indeed *bad*, and that these two power-words, both conceptually loaded, are in urgent need of association.

In 1999, Susan Faludi published a work titled *STIFFED: The Betrayal of the American Man*. Faludi's dedication to the modern American male was a survey of the nineties and the ways in which this era in particular found men in crisis mode. Towards the turn of the century, Faludi explains, "American manhood was under siege," in the midst of "a domestic apocalypse" otherwise known as "the masculinity crisis" (6). "THE CRISIS OF MANLINESS" was broadcast on the cover page of the *Weekly Standard*, with publications upon publications investigating domestic violence in particular, throwing it into the forefront of the zeitgeist as "the emblematic masculine sin of our age" (Faludi 7). The discourse was thick in the air of men as monsters, in need of policing, handling, debate and punishment. For Faludi, "male violence was the quintessential expression of masculinity run amok, out of control and trying to control everything in its path" (7); this dichotomy, as we have seen in the literature preceding this chapter, is crucial to the production of anxiety around manliness and its culturally negotiated meaning. In man's attempt to gain control of his circumstances by way of violence, there is a loss of control, a letting

loose of one's self, leading to blatant disregard for society's rules and regulations. Man's out of control body both regains dominance and threatens the societal order. This contradiction was the crux of the anxiety generated, and is still the underlying reason for the generation of anxiety around men and their meaning today.

O.J. Simpson is a wonderful case study for the kind of work Faludi was doing, for he became an icon of the crisis of masculinity amid other crises coming to a head in 1990's America. Simpson was described to Faludi in her research as "the perfect case study of an American man who thinks he's entitled to just control everything and everybody" (8). His and Nicole's history of domestic violence had been well documented by the police throughout the early nineties prior to that murderous night, and so in an effort to better understand both Simpson and male aggression, Faludi herself attended domestic violence groups wherein men would share honestly about their incidents of aggressive behaviour while on the road to recovery. Faludi described one incident of a man in the group opening up as follows; "Looking back at that night when I beat her with an open hand, I didn't black out. I was feeling good. I was in power, I was strong, I was in control. I felt like a *man*….' that moment of control had been the only one in his recent life" (9). The men Faludi met at the domestic violence group "had lost their compass in the world...lost or were losing jobs, homes, cars, families" (9), and so their desperate attempts to regain control by way of exerting their physicality in the tangible world was, for them, the conceptual answer to reinstating (or at the very least, hanging onto) their manhood. As far as O.J. Simpson goes, the slow descent of his career and his deteriorating relationship with Nicole were probably contributing elements leading to that fateful 1994 night in Brentwood, but I digress. What's significant is that the cultural understanding goes as follows; "the man controlling his environment is today the prevailing American image of masculinity" (Faludi 10) and this, in turn, gets ingested, processed, by men (and women thinking about men) on an individual and psychic level. Manliness in the nineties (and for decades prior) was defined by this simple notion, and in many ways, still is. "The men," Faludi wrote in 1999, "had probably felt in control when they beat their wives, but their everyday experience was of feeling controlled" (9) and this becomes significant in the next chapter, wherein I investigate stand-up comedians and their jokes regarding how they feel about the state of masculinity in culture. From their jokes, men seem to feel as though society is gaining an upper hand on them, imposing a particular structure upon them and submitting them as men to said structure. This will come to light further as I explore male stand up comedians' perspectives on,

understanding of, and even relating to, Simpson's crimes. Faludi meditates upon masculine archetypes, delving into America's history of masculinity which "suggests a more complicated dynamic one in which from the nation's earliest frontier days...man in the community was valued as much as the loner in control, homely society as much as heroic detachment" (10). Ironically, O.J. embodied both polar archetypes described by Faludi (and so many more to boot). The images of him standing with his kids at Nicole's funeral, or his perception as a great friend and family man, juxtaposed with snapshots of him as a lone star on the football field or fleeing the cops cowboy-style in that white Bronco, are all so opposite from one another. Simpson has, over time, embodied so many variant archetypal masculinities, and this is part of why he perplexes Western culture. He is wrought with paradoxes, generating anxiety. His many representations greatly contribute to the crisis surrounding what men are, and who men should be.

Man as unstoppable force is often thought of with respect to the human male's physicality and its violent potential. Human beings sit atop the hierarchical pyramid with respect to all living things, but men in particular occupy the uppermost peak insofar as their capacity to dominate in the physical realm. One age-old phenomenon that reflects as much is rape. Date rape culture (and the publicized, much-debated condemnation of it specifically) was on the rise circa 1990, and this is a phenomenon that has persisted into present day. Today, the concept is widely accepted and understood: simply ignoring a woman's "no" means rape, regardless of the circumstances or even of how many times she may have said "yes" on the way to your apartment. Cultural critic and provocateur Camille Paglia would certainly disagree with the politically correct vigilance of 2018. In the early nineties, Paglia was a cultural outlaw. Her major, career-making work titled *Sexual Personae: Art and Decadence from Nefertiti to Emily Dickinson* was published in 1990 by the Yale University Press. Indeed, the writer actually champions masculinity, and implicit in her thesis from *Sexual Personae* is the essentialist notion that masculinity and femininity are age-old and predetermined concepts. She explains this further by way of outlining the Apollonian (masculine, controlled) and Dionysian (feminine, uncontrollable) forces in the universe, laid bare in the stellar introductory chapter of *Sexual Personae* called "Sex and Violence, or Nature and Art." Paglia claims she understands men, and that due to nature and the way of the world, men must see themselves and operate in a very specific way. She, like Berger, purports that it is through acting, *doing*, that men construct their identities. In "Rape and Modern Sex War" published by *New York Newsday* on January 27, 1991, Paglia wrote; "Women have menstruation to tell them they are

women. Men must *do* or *risk* something to be men. Men become masculine only when other men say they are. Having sex with a woman is one way a boy becomes a man" (51, my emphasis). And while having sex with a woman is certainly a ritualistic rite of passage for hegemonic masculine practices, so too is aggression and, as Paglia began to argue in the nineties, the sexual and aggressive forces are inextricably linked.

In "Rape and Modern Sex War," Paglia began by stating; "Rape is an outrage that cannot be tolerated in civilized society. Yet feminism, which has waged a crusade for rape to be taken more seriously, has put young women in danger by hiding *the truth about sex* from them" (49, my emphasis). In 1991, Paglia was advocating for what she coined "cold reality" (51), for "common sense about life" (56) and moreover for instilling within girls (and boys) a profound understanding of the aggressive nature of sex. Her essay was founded upon the simple premise that "aggression and eroticism are deeply intertwined" (Paglia 1992, 51) and, as such, women must not operate ignorant of the fact that such a primal force can sometimes "get out of hand." "Masculinity," Paglia wrote, "is aggressive, unstable, combustible. It is also the most creative cultural force in history" (1992, 53). Paglia's endorsement of a particularly conventional form of masculinity is a glowing one, chalking up its unpredictable aggression to part of what makes men interesting, attractive, and sexy. A young Nicole Brown certainly would have agreed back in 1977. After her first date with the football star, Brown reportedly came home with fresh rips in her jeans, telling her roommate who advised her against seeing Simpson again; "I really like him" (Edelman 2016). Dating, raping, aggression, and masculinity were all very much a part of the conversation long before O.J. Simpson was ever convicted of murder. However these notions really began to be debated publicly in 1990, and whatever side you were on, it was established culturally that men were an issue that needed to be policed, dealt with, re-understood, and ultimately, celebrated or punished.

Nicole Brown's utterance post-first date with Simpson echoes an *Ally McBeal* episode explored in 1999 by Susan Bordo's *The Male Body: A New Look at Men in Public and in Private*. In the episode "Cro-Magnon" airing January 5 1998, lawyer Ally McBeal defends a young male client who slugged a guy in a bar for insulting his (female) date. Independent Ally, educated, civilized, undoubtedly feminist lawyer (and, most significantly, created from the minds of television writers in the nineties) steps up to the plate and argues for her brawny client, and quite convincingly. McBeal takes a personal stance, telling the jury "if anyone insulted her, she would

want her date to 'rip his head off'" (Bordo 1999, 235); a controversial perspective in a decade spearheading the public punishing of men for performances of social and sexual dominance and aggression. Ally, instead, celebrates her client's outburst, wholeheartedly endorsing it as the right thing to do in that particular situation. As a follow-up, her co-counsel recounts a moment in his life where he felt completely emasculated for not defending himself physically in an altercation with another man; "'Every man is part warrior' he tells the jury; 'those primal qualities will always be there'" (Bordo 1999, 235). He continues by narrating a separate altercation in which he physically took action, describing "[the] punch" he eventually threw as "the most satisfying moment of [his] life" (Bordo 1999, 235). The sidebar storyline of the episode follows Ally on a date with a male companion described throughout the unfolding of the narrative as particularly "Alpha-Male" (Bordo 1999, 235) and, specifically, well-endowed. "The argument of the episode" Bordo wrote in '99, "is that the primitive animal - if we're honest with ourselves - turns a girl on" (1999, 236). Ultimately, Ally's admitted attraction to her date, as well as her sanction of her client's physical defense of his girlfriend at the bar, "has little to do with chivalry," and more to do with "the magnetic appeal of 'uncivilized,' untamed maleness" (Bordo 1999, 235).

Nicole Brown may have been attracted to O.J.'s physicality for similar reasons, and maybe even (dare I say) because of it? While this is a provocative question, culture in the nineties, while simultaneously condemning masculine aggression for the sake of societal, social and sexual progress, was trying to negotiate why part of what makes women (and men) so attracted to men is how dangerous and unpredictable they can be. Culture is still trying to negotiate this issue today; one of the jokes that had audiences rolling with laughter from Louis C.K.'s 2013 special *Louis C.K.: Oh My God* revolved entirely around a punchline with respect to how women can entertain going on dates with men at all when men themselves are womens' leading cause of death by a landslide (the bit was literally called "Men: The Number One Threat to Women"). *Ally McBeal*'s writers composed that entire episode in 1998 devoted to "the acknowledgement" (Bordo 1999, 236) of how sexy unbridled masculinity can be, regardless of era, rules, political correctness, and even regardless of the law (*McBeal* is a legal/courtroom drama, after all).

Certainly part of the attraction to aggressive sexuality is the complex morality it represents, something dealt with in the aforementioned *Ally McBeal* episode. A man who cannot kill another man isn't celebrated for not killing; that's not interesting, intriguing, or admirable, because said man is physically useless and ineffectual, and so it is no surprise that he does not kill, for he cannot.

But a man who can certainly kill another man (or woman) and chooses not to; well, this is when things get interesting, because this is when control is (or isn't) exercised. Part of the attraction to men being dangerous (full of consequence and so full of the ability to completely disregard consequence in an instant) is that they make a conscious choice to refrain from violence, despite possessing it, embodying it, and signifying it potentially. This attraction to that signification was still (and is still) a relevant phenomenon, and that anything-can-happen, on-the-borderline quality is really something only men can perform and embody due to the potential power they wield physically. There is something about the defiance of societal rules that somehow makes a man *more of one*, an outlaw, closer to animal. While it can be interpreted as succumbing to baser instincts, this primitivity implicit in male expression nevertheless fascinates us; there is something almost admirable about it (which Bordo makes explicit for her nineties reader by drawing upon McBeal's courtroom rant). There's nothing more appealing or attractive, *McBeal* was trying to suggest, than ultimate incarnations of the masculine; not caring, doing whatever one wants, whenever one wants to do it, and expressing oneself with brute, masculine force (just because one *can*). Of course, this admiration for such primitivity conflicts with the societal admonishing of it, but it is important to note that both of these were circulating at the time, and consequently this very paradox is responsible for the cultural anxiety generated around masculinity in the nineties. "Cro-Magnon" "vindicates" macho masculinity, and at the end of the episode, Ally McBeal is shown "sleeping peacefully" next to her uber-macho paramore, "[post-coitally]...knocked out" (Bordo 1999, 235).

In 1991, infamous boxer Mike Tyson was charged with the rape of an 18-year old girl. Desiree Washington claimed Tyson "raped her in his hotel room and laughed about it as she wept" (Shipp 1992). While Tyson denied the charges in court in an attempt to cling to his freedom, "the Mike Tyson story" as the *New York Times* wrote in 1992, "has been more tragic than triumphant, with repeated episodes of aggressive sexual behaviour towards women, including strangers he met in nightclubs or, in one widely publicized incident, a parking lot attendant" (Shipp 1992). Knowledge of Tyson's trademark sexual aggression had been notorious prior to Washington's accusation of him, however his rape trial showed the world that a beloved athlete could and indeed would fall from his pedestal for practicing aggression somewhere other than the boxing ring. Tyson's case was curious too; "on one hand, he was described as a gentle, shy humanitarian with a great love for children. On the other, he was a predator who abused women" (Shipp 1992).

People loved Tyson the way they loved O.J., and probably for many of the same reasons, but the polarities in his representation had yet (and have yet) to be negotiated much like Simpson's cultural situation. The Tyson case was one in the first of many "successful date-rape prosecution[s]" that persisted throughout the nineties to now, and Judge Patricia J. Gifford's simple statement rang true throughout the nation as the famous boxer was put behind bars: "rape is rape" (Shipp 1992).

Tyson was only one, however, in a long list of athletes accused of domestic and sexual abuse. This is a trend that has persisted into present day, with surveillance-era technology making allegations and incidents of the abusive nature all the more accessible and prevalent, captured from cameras perched inside of an elevator, to those conveniently located on the backside of someone's cell phone. The list of athletes who have engaged in abusive, aggressive physical or sexual behaviour with their wives, girlfriends or casual sex partners runs longer than this chapter will have room to investigate. Something to keep in mind, however, is that each new instance of an athlete's barbaric behaviour plays into his star text, and as a result of the cultural zeitgeist, references Simpson's in a subtle but nonetheless remarkable way. Notable instances of aggressive behaviour have been cherry-picked to illustrate the aforementioned trend, beginning with Simpson's murders of Nicole Brown and Ron Goldman in the year 1994.

In March 2009, Rams running back Steven Jackson beat his then-girlfriend Supriya Harris "until she was bleeding heavily;" *Huffington Post* provides a chilling description of events in which Jackson's little nephew, witness to the assault, "interceded and yelled 'uncle, she has a baby, stop.'" Harris was nine months pregnant with their child during the altercation. Despite Jackson's denial of the assault, the story circulated quite a bit, gaining real traction in the press, so much so that Rams coach Steve Spagnuolo had to get involved, releasing a statement assuring the public that the team was doing their due diligence on the matter (Huffington Post 2010). While charges against Jackson were eventually dropped, the incident yet again pushed the narrative that domestic abuse and athletic stars go hand in hand. In a widely publicized occurrence during the month of February 2014, football star and running back Ray Rice was caught on tape dragging a very limp and unconscious Janay Palmer, Rice's then-fiancée, out of an elevator at an Atlantic City casino. TMZ obtained and ran the footage on their affiliate website TMZ Sports, with a headline that read, in big bold letters: "Ray Rice Dragging Unconscious Fiancée after Alleged Mutual Attack." It should be noted, too, that Rice and Palmer were in fact married a short month and a half after the assault occurred (Reyes). Between the years of 2008 and 2016, football stars Nelson Agholor,

Julian Edelman, Jalen Mills, Jordan Hicks and James Harrison were all involved in publicized cases of abuse allegations, ranging from rape to battery and assault (in all five cases, the victims were women) (Hunter-Hart 2018). All five of these athletes played in the 2018 Super Bowl.

In a 2015 article for *BUSTLE*, reporter Lauren Holter wrote; "After receiving a great deal of criticism for […] light suspension[s] [of athletes charged with domestic abuse], NFL commissioner Roger Goodell created new rules for players who abuse a partner, saying the first offense would lead to a six-game suspension without pay and a second offense would lead to being kicked out of the league for at least a year." The mere fact that the NFL had to create a set of rules and procedures anticipating the inevitability of acts of domestic aggression suggests that there is undoubtedly a significant movement of violent behaviour at home within the athletic community, and in 2018, this can be considered a significant part of the zeitgeist. After all, who hasn't seen the chilling footage of Ray Rice oh-so-calmly dragging his unconscious fiancé out of that elevator? The eeriness of the footage is positively dreadful, and the availability of it (what with the internet and its accessibility on every device) makes incidents like these very, very public knowledge.

As a result of these highly publicized examples of athletes and aggressive behaviour, the nineties saw a wave of works published whose specific intent was to investigate this trend. Among these include Stanley Teitelbaum's work *Sports Heroes, Fallen Idols*, providing an accurate title to the cultural pattern of athletic icons falling from grace. The publishing of this book in 2005, and then of his follow-up work *Athletes who Indulge their Dark Side* in 2010, speaks volumes about the disillusionment many faced watching the rise and fall of their athletic heroes. The worship of the athlete is made clear by Teitelbaum in his work, as is the necessity for these heroes, particularly for men to look up to. Teitelbaum explains; "contemporary men are desperately searching for heroes in their lives. We're wanting for role models at a time when the ranks of positive male role models are fairly thin. So many athletes deserving of our loyalty have been glorified by the press and glorified by Madison Ave… Men search for an identification with a winner, a male figure who is effective, virile, and capable, one who knows how to get things done. Having a sports hero meets a need" (5). The language Teitelbaum uses is, unsurprisingly, reminiscent of the language used describing masculinity by Connell, Paglia, Berger, Bordo, and Faludi; men are acting agents, "effective" and "capable" in order to be conceived of as worthy of the title with a capital M. Of course, that capability and efficacy can be exerted in different areas. Providing for your family; sure, that's positive. But if one follows the logic, according to

Teitelbaum and culture's definition of masculinity, a man who can effectively beat or kill the mother of his kids is still a man, for (according to hegemony) manliness hinges on efficacy and control; it doesn't matter *what* he does, so long as he does it *well*. This is the crux of the problem of culture's conception of men, and this is also part of why athletes continue to be revered even after their aggressive domestic acts; they continue to be effective, on the field and off. "We often see our sports heroes as supermen," Teitelbaum wrote, "and many will ultimately reveal wings made of wax as their talents wane and they tumble from the heights where we have placed them" (7).

The debate will surely persist about athletes in particular being potent and dangerous, but Susan Bordo in *The Male Body* hit the nail on the head in 1999, asking;

> Could it be that our culture has a small problem knowing what it wants from men? Think of the instruction in raw aggression that football provides and how it encourages the player to think of his body as a fierce, unstoppable force of nature. Think of how this aggression is rewarded - with scholarships, community adulation, romantic attention… Now imagine the young quarterback at a workshop on date rape, held by the counseling center of the same high school which is encouraging him to be an animal on the football field. At that workshop, he's told he must learn that he is not an animal, that his body is not an unstoppable force of nature, that it must yield, in fact, to one little word. Now, which is this young man supposed to be… an animal or a gentleman? (234)

All the things that men should be according to culture combine, culminating in irreconcilable mixed messages. Of course, Bordo's example is sensationalized; it shouldn't be a stretch for young men to comprehend the simple fact that they cannot and should not operate in their sexual or romantic relationships the way they do on the football field. This theory seems to have issues being put into practice by these young men (Paglia would certainly chime in here, reminding us that the sexual and aggressive forces are linked). Regardless, moving forward and making progress begins with an acknowledgement of the failures of putting the aforementioned simple concept into play physically, and the nineties was an era in which culture at large was beginning to acknowledge that men (especially contact-sport athletes) had a problem doing just that.

Masculinity on trial, however, was not, and is not, limited to athletes. In the past five years especially, we as a culture have seen iconic men fall, with the brutal details of their alleged and proven behaviour broadcasted for all to contemplate. The first of these examples is Bill Cosby, who today has been accused by 51 women in total and is serving a lengthy prison sentence for his assault on one of them. Allegations against Cosby range from drugged rapes, which according to the testimonials was his hallmark, to "[shoving] his penis in [women's] mouths" without consent (Ioannou, Mathis-Lilly and Hannon 2014). Dave Chappelle, in his *Netflix* special *The Age of Spin*, describes the devastating reaction felt by people, and black men in particular, when these allegations began to be brought to light; Cosby was a significant paternalistic figure to many, but to black America particularly. For African Americans, the decline of Bill Cosby's public image was nothing short of devastating; as Chappelle explains, he was a "hero" to black men; "[it was] as if you heard that chocolate ice cream itself… had raped 54 people" (2017). The comedian explains Cosby's incredible history in the following excerpt;

> Let's just remember that he has a valuable legacy that I can't just throw away. I remember that he's the first black man to ever win an Emmy in television. I also remember that he's the first guy to make a cartoon with black characters where their lips and noses were drawn proportionately. I remember that he had a television show that got numbers equivalent to the Super Bowl every Thursday night. And I remember that he partnered up with a clinical psychologist to make sure that there was not one negative image of African Americans on his show. I'm telling you, that's no small thing. I've had a television show. I wouldn't have done that shit. He gave tens of millions of dollars to African American institutions of higher learning, and is directly responsible for thousands of black kids going to college. Not just the ones he raped. Here comes the kicker, you ready? Here's the fact that I heard, but haven't confirmed. I heard that when Martin Luther King stood on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial and said he had a dream, he was speaking into a P.A. system that Bill Cosby paid for. So, you understand what I'm saying? The point is this: He rapes, but he saves. And he saves more than he rapes. But he probably does rape. (2017)

Herein lie a handful of dichotomies not unlike those Simpson embodies, and completely aligned with the preoccupations of the crisis of masculinity, evidently a major cultural player to this day

(Chappelle's special is dated 2017). Rich Juzwiak, in his analysis of Chappelle's endorsement of Cosby, puts it simply; "more than one thing can be true at the same time" (2017), and while that may be a valid observation, anxieties about men and their multiplicities have remained, without closure as far as what men are supposed to do and be. Bill Cosby was a figurehead to men and women, and accusation after allegation had Cosby tumbling down, completely overturning people's worldviews and discrediting the idol they once revered as man, capital M. On April 27th, 2018, "finally," Eric Deggans at *NPR* wrote, "we no longer have to use the word 'allegedly'"; Cosby was convicted of three of his 51 charges, and will surely be dying in prison for his wrongdoings. *NPR* titled the article "Bill Cosby's Conviction Marks A New Chapter for #MeToo" (Deggans 2018), referencing the contemporary worldwide movement that had women hash-tagging #metoo in an effort to display solidarity against sexual assault. Almost every hashtag signified a woman coming out publicly as a victim of sexual assault at some point in their life to date; the results of the movement were, in short, both revealing and astounding, including everyone from laywomen to celebrities and public personalities sharing incredibly personal and often painful stories.

Another significant instance of cultural upheaval can be found in the case of Harvey Weinstein, notorious Hollywood bigshot and founder of Miramax pictures, among other cinematic ventures. This was a name on the lips of almost every actor and actress who ever won an Oscar between the years of 1988 and 2017 expressing gratitude to him as a major player in Hollywood, and the exposure of him as a sexual harasser took many by surprise. What it did demonstrate, though, is that men *keep* falling; it's practically a movement. On November 29th, 2017, somber-faced morning TV superstars Kathie Lee Gifford and Hoda Kotb announced the dismissal of their iconic co-host Matt Lauer, a much beloved news anchor who had been accused of inappropriate sexual conduct in the workplace backed up with evidence that this was a reoccuring behaviour for Lauer. The women call Lauer their "dear, dear friend" and articulate the difficulties they were facing trying to assimilate their notion of Lauer (friendly, respectful, "beloved" (NBC News 2018) and professional) with these new events revealing him to also be and embody the polar opposite of their understanding and experience of him. The women expressed their difficulty reconciling what he did to his victim with who he was to them in their lives. Many high profile men have now had charges brought against them, and to the cultural sleuth this indicates a distinct pattern that must not go ignored. Dr. Christine Blasey Ford's testimony against Brett Kavanaugh was another

step forward for the #MeToo movement, with Kavanaugh portrayed as outlandish and villainous by news outlets, a recurring photo of him grimacing angrily gracing tabloids everywhere (Figure 6). Kavanaugh's angry and unbelievable self-defense was iconic in that its formatting was reminiscent even of Clinton's televised confession to America (Figure 7). A decade later and men are still being tried. The crisis in masculinity can be seen by way of exactly this; men's continuous fall.

The crisis in masculinity of the 1990s provided a context for the O.J. trial. Another crucial aspect included racial conflict. Masculinity and race intersect significantly in the case of O.J. Simpson, for as a celebrity Simpson first transcended race, and then as a defendant, he embodied it. This was due to many forces at work; namely the archaic stereotyping of the black man in particular as criminal and dangerous. This stereotype was used by Simpson's defense team to his advantage as they called upon the jury (and America) to sympathize with Simpson. But O.J. as defendant also embodied celebrity: exceptions were made for him that would have been made for no other person in America, and that (many argue) would certainly not have been made for the African-American layman or woman in the nineties. The Bronco chase is a perfect example: Simpson was pursued so slowly by the LAPD that footage of the event looked more like a Presidential police motorcade than an actual chase. Teitelbaum, in his work, explains this too, stating; "We hate being disillusioned [by our fallen idols]. An extreme example was the Ford Bronco chase when spectators lined the Los Angeles freeway and cheered O.J. Simpson on even though he was a fugitive" (7). This is often chalked up to how uniformly beloved Simpson was as a public figure.

Ezra Edelman's Oscar Winning documentary *O.J.: Made in America* (2016) describes Simpson as "the counter revolutionary athlete. White America [was] looking for somebody who can erase the threat of these seemingly angry principled black athletes… O.J. made people feel good." Somehow, Simpson managed to make the public feel a kinship of sorts with him before the murders, regardless of race. O.J. was extraordinary, but he was also "just like us" (Edelman). The fascination stems from his ordinariness, his friendliness, just as much as it stems from his extraordinariness; anxiety always lies within the paradox. An interviewee of Edelman's described Simpson's ascendance as such; "He transcended race and color to the exalted status of celebrity." O.J. was, prior to 1994, an icon of greatness, and yet he was also relatable; everyone wanted to hang out with The Juice, wanted him to be their friend, because there was a familiarity to him, an

affable quality, an X factor or charisma that just drew people in. Edelman's documentary phrases it as such, describing Simpson's disposition as a young man as "based on being a pleasing person to white people… he was enormously self-conscious of who he was and who he needed to be… there was this character 'O.J.' that he was creating" (2016).

One of the most striking parts of the Edelman documentary is the way the filmmaker covers that infamous Bronco chase. The number of people who ran out to watch O.J.'s white Bronco and *cheer him on* was overwhelming. Why did they gather to watch Simpson flee from crime, from punishment, from rules, from regulation, from society itself? L.A. natives carried signs saying; "GUILTY OR NOT WE LOVE U O.J." (Edelman). *Guilty or not.* People loved O.J. for transcending race, and yet people remain fascinated with him in part because of his ultimate failure of that transcendence. Simpson did not prove cultural constructs wrong, the ones concocted and created defining Black men as dangerous. He did not maintain his uniformly beloved status and his safe embodiment of exceptional success. Instead, by way of the murders, Simpson acted in accordance with the worst of the racial and masculine stereotypes circulating in culture that the nineties were trying to wash away.

Howard Stern's prominence from the year 1992 onwards contributes notably to what was circulating in American culture during that decade. One of the most provocative features of his radio show is his courageous and dangerous ability to cover any and all topics with both comedy and brutal honesty; for this, he became "the king of morning radio" (Puig 1992) and absolutely dominated airwaves in the nineties. His show was a place people would go to get their current events, and more than that, to hear his and his staff's fearless opinions on what was happening in the zeitgeist. His coverage of the O.J. trial is absolute gold; the shock jock devoted hours upon hours, up to entire shows, to discussing the multi-faceted elements involved in this cultural happening. Within the many hours of O.J. discussions, Stern and his colleague Robin Quivers shared their personal perspectives, employing humour to drive their points home. "O.J. was the kind of black guy even white racists felt comfortable around!" Stern exclaimed in '96, asking his audience, "How do you identify a villain in this story? Is the villain O.J.? Society? Is the villain the high school football coach who coached O.J.?" Stern's banter is reminiscent of many of the questions posed within this very thesis, and makes evident the fact that discussions like these were very much in circulation in the mid-nineties about men, race, and who was ultimately to blame for all the tension. People were conscious of the contradictory elements of Simpson's curious case

even then, especially when it came to race and how Simpson was perceived by the public. These small snippets from Stern's morning radio show can be taken as something of a window into the attitudes and practices in the U.S. at the time of the trial. Stern was very clear on one thing throughout the entirety of his discussions, though; "[O.J. is] being treated like he is: a rich man." This was something agreed upon by everyone in that radio room. And yet Simpson's acquittal can be explained (paradoxically) by his embodiment of blackness just as much as it can be explained by his powerful celebrity.

Nicole and O.J.'s relationship is significant in that they were also, before their domestic disputes became public knowledge, a symbol of interracial progress. As a mixed race couple, they were fairly progressive for their time, and were both celebrated and scrutinized by the media (and by America at large). While their couplehood may have been the topic of debate behind closed doors in more antiquated households, Nicole and O.J. were nonetheless a fixture in both the tabloids and the sports world. Together, they symbolized more than one union; they were the image of the future, a more reformist, modern and tolerant future. They were the picture-perfect Brentwood couple for whom race didn't matter in the slightest. Simpson's actions and murderous behaviour threatened that union and reintroduced, potentially revalidating (for those who are believers), the constructed, imperialist notion of the black man as savage, uncontrollable, and in need of containment.

And so, with a nod to McLintock, the media began a process of colonization, using all its abilities, technologies and resources to find out absolutely everything about O.J., and broadcast it for the world in an attempt to regain control of his out-of-bounds body. Photos of Nicole's body post-mortem reaffirmed the deepest, darkest, most secretly feared notions circulating about African American men as barbaric, savage, uncivilized, and dangerous. These ideas are archaic, age-old and have been in play since a human being had the faculties to conceive of the conceptual 'other' as a potential threat. Notions about savagery, barbarism, and primitivity related to the African American (particularly the African American male) have been in circulation since the 1800's. While society has inarguably progressed, these concepts still echo in the cultural consciousness, and when photos of the slain Ron and Nicole showed up in the paper, said concepts were triggered, activated, hurtling full throttle into the forefront of zeitgeist once again. Today, the perspective on interracial couplehood is very different, and while tolerance is practiced, attitudes of intolerance towards interracial romance exist and circulate because of the

aforementioned antiquated notions about the African American male. Intolerance is fueled by these old concepts embedded in culture, and each new instance of an African American male acting in accordance with these constructed notions about African American males somehow validates said constructed concepts in the minds of those who ascribe to them. This, of course, is the problem, and is why said constructed and outdated notions still exist in 2018; all it takes is one time, one instance, one cultural trauma to dig up, uncover and re-present old notions society has attempted to put to bed in the name of progress.

Racial tensions in the United States of America culminated significantly via mob mentality in the L.A. Riots of 1992, triggered by the videotaped and subsequently publicized beating of Rodney King by the L.A.P.D. This event informed the Simpson trial in a major way, and was often referenced by his defense team to appeal to jurors in the name of discrediting the LAPD's collection of evidence against Simpson. King was beaten in 1991, and in 1992, the four police officers responsible for the incident were acquitted (Figure 8). This was the *élément déclancheur*, so to speak; the televised acquittal of four white police officers who enthusiastically and ruthlessly beat African American male Rodney King was too much to take for the people in California state, particularly the minorities who already felt jipped by the system. The riots began on April 29th 1992 "at the intersection of Florence and Normandie in South Central Los Angeles" (CNN Library 2018). Among the many deaths and acts of brutality, Caucasian truck driver Reginald Denny "[was] pulled from his truck and beaten" (CNN Library 2018) by the mob. The rioters' attack of Reginald Denny had everything to do with reading bodies; what mattered was that Denny was a signifier, an icon. His personhood (much like O.J.'s for our purposes here) was never even a factor in the local mob's actions. Their attack of the white truck driver was iconoclastic. Like Barthes who saw French Imperialism in the face of the saluting Black boy, rioters in L.A. saw a history of oppression, unfairness and double standards. They saw the White Man in Reginald Denny, and went mercilessly for vengeance. These riots were so intense that King himself gave a press conference asking everyone to "get along" (Mydans 1993). What Rodney King failed to understand (and what Johnny Cochrane succeeded in understanding) is that the LA Riots were no longer about him alone; in truth, they never were, just as the trial itself was about so much more than O.J. from the very beginning. Rodney King was "clearly burdened by his role as a symbol" Seth Mydans wrote for the *New York Times* in 1993, a phrase applicable to King and eventually Simpson as the nineties progressed with each passing year (Figure 9).

The year 1996 was a major year for scandal, particularly in terms of scrutinizing masculinity in the public sphere. This year and those following it saw not only O.J. fall from grace, but the President of the United States to boot. Bill Clinton was beloved by much of the American public, but in 1998 allegations of his affair with Monica Lewinsky rattled his reputation. The Commander-in-Chief was accused of having sexual relations with the twenty-two year old Beverly Hills native, the White House intern with whom he ultimately admitted to canoodling despite his marriage to Hillary Clinton. Bill and Hillary were wed in 1975 and are still together to date. High points of the story of the sexual affair included oral sex (her performing it on him), ejaculation on her blue dress, and the president's pleasuring of the young intern with one of his cigars. In 1999, Susan Bordo wrote of the scandal; "I wonder if Bill Clinton would have been treated in the press like such a voracious, infantile little boy if his sins with Lewinsky had been of the more active, 'manly' variety? I can't help thinking that the 'passivity' of his illicit affair - the fact that she was pleasuring him… fed into disdain for him" (294). Of course, Clinton was also in the power position, having a young intern at his beck and call. The paradoxes here are significant as well, but what Bordo astutely considers is the danger around the presidential body with respect to, in Clinton's case, its social and emotional penetrability, its vulnerability, its susceptibility and its succumbing to the temptation. These are all high stakes situations in the conceptual realm, for if the presidential body is both a national body and, to date, a male body, then Clinton's actions have conceptual consequences for culture and men.

We saw this yet again as Hillary and Donald went toe-to-toe in what was the incredibly surprising presidential race of 2016. Our fascination with and requirement to get closer to, and understand, bodies is still significant today, in an era where arguments against candidate Hillary Clinton include things like Trump's assertion that she did not possess the "stamina" to be president (a quote pulled from the CBS News coverage of the recent 2017 Presidential Debate). This quote in particular circulated on Twitter the night of the debate, as well as for weeks to come with memes and jokes attached, and not for nothing (Figure 10). Trump, in many ways, hit the nail on the head. With just one little word (and the history carried with it), Trump (and presumably his speech writers) triggered something in the cultural consciousness, pointing to Hillary's *lack* of masculinity. Her body is not hard - instead it is soft, feminine, mysterious, unknowable, its boundaries uncontrollable, and so if she cannot control herself, how will she be able to control the country? The world? These are the deep, subconscious, implicit questions that are activated when

Trump references "stamina" in his presidential rebuttal, not-so-subtly suggesting it as a requirement for Presidential candidacy. If the presidential body is a stand-in for the country itself (so the supposed gendered logic goes), then it *must* have strong borders, and strict control; it must be self-policing, rigid, utilitarian, reminiscent of George Bush on a jog, Obama on the basketball court, or JFK Jr. commandeering a sailboat (yet another superstar of his environment) (Figures 11, 12). The presidential body *must* be a force to be reckoned with, for this is how America *needs* to see itself. Trump's argument was clear - Hillary was not up to the job, would never be up to the job, simply by virtue of her femininity (specifically, her feminine body and what it connotes). This recalls Butler's theories on performance and gender. Bodies matter; *reading* bodies matters. As unfair as it may be, and as outdated as it may seem, acquiring knowledge this way is still one of our predominant modes of understanding in 2018 (especially when it comes to gendered readings). The tangible consequences those readings have for real people in the real world *are real*, and often men are held to a very particular set of standards as far as gender performance goes.

In 1996, Camille Paglia was featured on *Politically Incorrect with Bill Maher*, a provocative nineties show that had America tuning in to hear popular personalities talk about taboo subjects. Maher opens the episode by telling a joke about *Playboy*'s new Playmate of the Year, Tracey Addell, who apparently "had a conversation [with] O.J. Simpson the day he killed his wife - I mean, allegedly. And I think she's a good match for him, because she listed, among her turn-ons; 'A man who's not afraid to show his emotions.'" Again we find in the discourse this idea of the unbounded. Emotions are supposed to be controlled and contained if you're a man who is powerful and in command of himself and others. There is an implied leakiness, and unboundedness of emotions or inner states. This is also something that people often said of Bill Clinton, who was known to cry in public as well as overeat (many articles were published on his love of fast food and his inability to control his appetite - nutritional as well as sexual as it turns out). Negotiations and renegotiations of masculinity ran rampant in the nineties - these were things, behaviours and attitudes that people were extremely preoccupied about. Outlets published news stories about Clinton's susceptibility to getting emotional (crying), and about overeating habits, and not for nothing; the collective cultural consciousness was trying to incorporate all these behvaiours into its concept of American masculinity, judging whether the President was performing successfully with respect to what it means to be a modern man.

That night in '96, Paglia told Maher and his entire televised audience, "there *is* such a thing as [...] masculinity and femininity." She argued that these concepts do in fact exist within the realm of the real; they're not just constructs, and while they are and can be sex roles, there is also an essential truth, or gendered energetic essence, underlying their conceptuality. "There *is* something that is lust," Paglia proclaimed in '96. "There *is* something that is barbaric behaviour." She reinforced that barbarism and primitive energy are real, and emphasized that these energies circulate within the psyche of a man. "Most women cannot understand what is going on in the primitive mind [of men]" Paglia purported, things like "extreme criminal behaviour; rape, murder and so on" (Maher 1996). Condoning these acts by recognizing the energies and drives fuelling them is not the goal of this thesis, nor is it Paglia's goal (though people often get confused due to her very vocal championing for and endorsement of masculine energy). Rather, the hope is that by acknowledging that these conflicting and sometimes dark drives exist, constantly stifled by societal structures and personal policing of an individual's own exertion of control, more room will be made for re-workings, reimaginings, and reincarnations of what masculinity can mean today. Paglia told Maher; "we do not want castrated men." This is a bold statement. What she points to, of course, is not the physical castration, but rather the conceptual, psychological castration that goes on when men become feminized; in other words, when they stop being powerful entities wielding control over themselves and their environment. If a man can no longer do something to or for you (as Berger would also argue), he consequently becomes conceptually castrated, and his manhood as understood by himself and society at large goes right out the window.

In Paglia's discourse about the aforementioned issues surrounding masculinity, it's almost as though she's attempting to call upon a kind of respect for (as well as a wariness and awareness of) the primitive energies and aggressive capabilities men have. This echoes her written work. She encourages women to acknowledge that male aggression is a very real part of our reality, still present even in this contemporary, politically correct era. As a provocateur, this dangerous side to men was something Paglia was actually encouraging in her work, and in her celebratory statements about lust, aggression, rock music and so on. She cites this impulsive, dangerous, creative and destructive force as one that actually propels society forward, generating feats of civilization from great art to skyscrapers. By and large, Paglia wants women and the Western world to acknowledge the fact that these dangerous drives are very real for men, and that men

grapple with their polarities, for they (according to Paglia) essentially possess specificities in energy and expression, as well as gender-specific performative requirements, that women simply don't. Paglia's comments all point to her trying to showcase that masculinity is very much a reality for men, regardless of the ivory tower debates about whether it's a constructed concept versus an essentialist expression. Paglia says masculinity, its demands and its requirements *feel* real, actions are taken in the real world because of it, and ultimately, this is what the everyday individual must negotiate. Conclusively for Paglia, male impulse, aggression, and danger are realities, and ignoring or condemning men for them may only lead to more chaos and destruction.

"There should have been great specials showing O.J.'s prowess on the football field for people to understand" Paglia explained to Maher, "to see why people love O.J. so much" (1996). Paglia was trying to convey that these hypothetical specials would demonstrate to the public Simpson's incredible ability to control, influence, and dominate everything in his environment. This element of his celebrity and athleticism - dominion over all, even over powerful men, and sometimes seemingly even over physics itself - was Simpson's reality. The aforementioned is something beloved by and very familiar to Americans, for it runs as a current, a theme, through the vein of American culture as far as its conception of masculinity is concerned. Print ads of the Marlboro Man, an American emblem of masculinity, depict and naturalize this exact notion, showing the icon stalking the American countryside, a whip or lasso in one hand, a horse in the other, with nothing but mountains and fields of green grass as far as the eye can see. While the Marlboro Man was retired from the print world in 1999, his image and archetype is recalled in the American consciousness again and again as an icon of hard, gruff, American masculinity. In billboards and print ads, the Marlboro Man sits atop the hierarchical pyramid; like God Himself, he is in complete control and at ease, comfortable, with his dominion over everything. The dominion part is what's important for our purposes here; yet again, this notion of control is integral to the Marlboro Man's, and the American man's, successful masculinity. He owns it all, from the land to the beasts and beyond, simply by virtue of being a man and performing masculinity in its ideal incarnation with his dirty hands, his rough demeanor, his stoic grimace, his macho utilitarian body, and the implicit hard physical work they connote. One look at O.J. on the football field, Paglia argued, and you'll quickly understand his extraordinariness, and furthermore why it's not such a leap from there, to his extraordinary murderous actions. Both Marlboro Man and Simpson are superstars of their environment, and this notion is something internalized by O.J., by men, and

by culture as successful masculinity. If O.J. wanted something on the field, he took it; he chased it, and hit for it, and ran farther and longer than almost every other player for it, and to him (and to America) that meant everything. Try telling *that* guy "no" (Figures 13, 14, 15).

Integral to Paglia's crusade re: the sex war was resolution. Paglia told Maher; "It's the nineties [...] we can say the time for hostility towards men in feminism is over. It's time to reconcile, to find common ground. 21st century feminism has to let men find their own voices [...] it's up to men to find themselves" (Maher 1996). And while it may be up to them to do so, it seems as though they are struggling more now than ever to reconcile the polarizing archetypes, desires, urges and drives they find themselves wrestling with. In order to better understand extreme criminal (and aggressive masculine) behaviour, Paglia's argument is that we must acknowledge that these impulses exist within us all and, furthermore, that they still exist, unreconciled, in the contemporary, postmodern man. These have yet to be dealt with culturally, have yet to be integrated and understood properly, and so stand up comedy comes in with attempts to negotiate the undercurrents, taboo and leftover.

Of course, the real trials were carried out between the years of 1994 and 1996, culminating in a verdict of not criminally guilty, and civilly guilty. The criminal trial was publicly televised, and was, as a family member of mine put it recently, "the first ever reality television show." Another reality television show whose genesis begins with O.J. is *Keeping Up With The Kardashians*. The show (and its many spin-offs) follow the Kardashian clan as they live and grow in the wake of Robert Kardashian's death. Kardashian was a good friend to O.J.'s; the two attended college together and stayed friends until the final months of the trial. Kardashian's daughters are arguably some of the most famous people in the world to date, however in the telling of their story, one must start with O.J. Simpson, for the girls' connection to O.J. is what makes them not beautiful, or fashionable, but culturally relevant. This was and continues to be their currency. In a recent interview with Kim and Khloe Kardashian, Howard Stern begins in exactly this place; asking them questions about their father, the trial, and "Uncle O.J." Simpson's presence in their life is, without a doubt, the genesis of their empire; he validates their presence on the pop culture landscape, and is the seed that sprouted everything they, and Kris Jenner, have created. Simpson renders the Kardashian clan interesting, and most importantly, pertinent.

The O.J. trial is still a major part of the zeitgeist, and many a television show has involved the cultural currency of Simpson in their plotline, sometimes devoting entire episodes to the

cultural icon. *Seinfeld, Unbreakable Kimmy Schmidt,* and *The People v. O.J. Simpson* are a few among many who detail, utilize and parody the Simpson narrative; what is notable about these shows is that they were broadcast and created from 1996 to now. These televised, pop culture examples draw, sometimes very explicitly, from the real O.J. trial, and perhaps what's more significant is that they cite the *memory* of it more than anything else. The criminal trial is recalled in the American collective memory and consciousness as a massive failure on the part of the American justice system; this is parodied to the nth degree by *Kimmy Schmidt* in particular, with its clownishly ineffectual prosecution team. The real Marcia Clark explained it best in a 2016 interview with Vulture.com during *The People vs. O.J. Simpson*'s moment in the spotlight: "[the real trial] was...one bad ruling after another, one ridiculous, bizarro moment after another... it was the most devastating, constantly maddening, traumatizing experience of my life" (Fernandez) and, I would argue, of America's modern cultural life as well. Quiet questions about the trial are clearly still in circulation today, left open-ended and infuriatingly unanswered; How could someone so completely, so obviously, so undeniably guilty be found innocent? Was it his celebrity, his charisma, his x factor quality that won the jury over? Was it his athleticism, his defense team, the prosecution - was it *their* fault? Or could the LAPD, and racial tensions in the US, be to blame for such a gross legal mishap? Maybe it's just as simple as The Juice being above the law, slip-sliding his way out of the grips of America's judicial system; an exception to the rule just like he had been on the football field. The answer, of course, is that it was everything all at once; a perfect storm brewing and then culminating in the trial itself and, as is human nature, our inability to pinpoint a concrete, singular explanation only makes us yearn for one more. The fruits of this need for closure continue to sprout and grow, generating series, shows, specials, news stories, tweets, memes, and inescapably, stand-up jokes. As the jokes unfold over time, it is crucial to keep in mind that history runs like a current throughout comedy about Simpson and men. Years later, in 2018, O.J. jokes persist, and the sensitivity and anxiety linger surrounding the issue of who he, and who men, may potentially be.

CHAPTER FOUR: O.J. Simpson: A Force to be Reckoned With

Freud's theories on interpreting dreams can be funneled down into one simple procedure: utilizing memory by association. The psychoanalyst has a patient pick objects, people, and moments out of their dreams to free associate with until analyst and patient have co-created an interconnected web of associations. This web supposedly reveals something hidden in the patient's subconscious about themselves, providing revelatory information that contributes to the patients' all-around self-awareness. If one were to employ this strategy in the analysis of culture, can jokes then become public dreams? Joseph Campbell's myths certainly are, much like the theories of Barthes, explored in the second chapter of this thesis. Stories and overarching narratives are public dreams, often employed by joke-tellers in their routines, and the O.J. trial and cultural episode certainly can be defined as a public event (a dream or nightmare depending on how one looks at it) that became part of American mythology. Dreams point to the unknown, the subconscious, the latent, and as this thesis has explored, the joker plays the role of representative of the public, projecting back to the audience its own ideas and dreams, and consequently revealing underlying drives, desires or notions surrounding a particular topic. The symbiotic relationship between comedian and culture is not to be discounted; the audience and the public dreams that are in play at a particular moment in time have everything to do with informing the comedian with respect to the development of his routine. The successful comedian investigates and unpacks what is relevant to his audience, searching for what truth can potentially be found at the heart of any given situation of importance, be it gender dynamics, race, politics, quotidian interactions between everyday people, and so on. Paramount to the analysis of jokes is asking the question; what need is being met when this joke is being told?

As explored in previous chapters, and specifically deriving from Dundes and Hauschild's work on Auschwitz Jokes, jokes are created, birthed, and unearthed, out of a need to hear them. In other words, the joke and and the historical context are inextricable from one another and interdependent. Within every joke exists a genesis that occurred precisely because there is a subgroup that needs to hear it, a subgroup that would find a joke like this meaningful, humorous, and above all, on some strange level, accurate. The "funny 'cause it's true" idiom exists for a reason.

Comics try to unpack what it means to be a man in contemporary culture by looking to the past and attempting to negotiate it with dominant standards of manliness, and this is where both historic necessity and scholarly demand comes into play. Today's so-called politically correct landscape supposedly keeps misogyny in line. Inarguably, among some, there exists a romanticization about the days when men were men, and had dominion over everything around them, including the way society operates as well as the physical well being (or lack thereof) of "their" women. This nostalgia is explored by male comics and their utterances, many of whom reference O.J. specifically, while others simply meditate upon the paradoxes alive in masculinity in general. Listening to a podcast from comedian Joe Rogan, I was surprised to find him and his guests reminiscing of days past when guys could slap women around freely, without being societally and socially condemned for it. Joey Diaz, an older comedian, described to the roundtable one of the opening scenes of *The Longest Yard* (1974) in which Burt Reynolds's character has an altercation with his girlfriend in their shared home, completely shutting it down by delivering a chilly, vicious backhand to her cheek. In the film, the hit is so brutal that she spins, out of control, into the wall and collapses, visibly unconscious. To the men on the podcast, it seemed like those were the days, and any listener shouldn't ignore the aching nostalgia in their voices for those supposedly simpler times, and the disdain they expressed for the heightened policing of male behavior in cultural play today.

The language regarding a crisis of masculinity rose in tandem with discourses about Simpson. A common observable thread in many stand-up jokes about O.J. is that comics somehow relate to Simpson and his many contradictions. When a stand-up is attempting to negotiate the problem of who O.J. really is, they call their own identity and masculinity into question, paralleling their many paradoxes with those of O.J. as a cultural icon. It is precisely Simpson's embodiment of both peak physical perfection and utter abject failure that make his story so anxiety-generating. There is an inability to categorize O.J. as one particular kind of man, which extends to masculinity and modern manhood. Stand-up comics are, by way of their jokes, revealing these complexities.

The O.J. of the "now" and the O.J. of yesterday are two very different representations. Of course, meaning is never stable; it is always in flux, a constantly shifting entity, and this applies to O.J.'s star text insofar as with each moment that passes, said text is updated, and the representation of O.J. for the purposes of this work is constantly changing. While the third chapter of this thesis situated O.J. historically, the subsequent pages attempt to take into account jokes about O.J.'s

representation up to and during the month of August 2018 in the world of Western comedy. O.J.'s star has somewhat faded, as has his football legacy, and images of him as an old man pervade Google News. Yet, Simpson is still remembered by many as both football star and nineties defendant, and the punchlines contained within these pages all somehow reference him or the cultural trauma surrounding his actions and embodiment of masculinity from the nineties onwards.

In 2016, Jimmy Kimmel hosted the Emmy Awards. 2016 also happened to be the year of Ryan Murphy's *The People v. O.J. Simpson: American Crime Story*, a show that was nominated for many Emmys. Kimmel incorporated Murphy's show into his opening monologue, remarkably in two particular instances. First, Kimmel addressed the presence of Marcia Clark in the room, saying; "Everyone in L.A. knows if you want to win, sit next to Marcia Clark" (Deerwester 2016); of course, the implication here is that Clark as prosecution actually lost the *real* trial. Kimmel then asked Clark publicly; "Marcia, are you rooting for O.J. to win this time [at the Emmys]?" (Deerwester 2016). This got a roaring laugh from the crowd, as well as from Clark herself and the actress who played her (Sarah Paulson) who was seated just beside her in the audience. Kimmel points yet again to the fact that the O.J. trial was so polarizing, disturbingly made out to be as trivial as an awards show by America and its people as they tuned in night by night "rooting" for their chosen candidate. Another significant jab by Kimmel was his Johnnie Cochran reference; "after Courtney B. Vance won an Emmy for playing the defense attorney…[in] *The People v. O.J. Simpson*," Kimmel quipped; "I have to think that Johnnie Cochran is smiling up at us right now… too soon?" (Deerwester 2016). Of course, the catch here is that it *is* too soon; it's *still* too soon, and jokes about Simpson, Cochrane and the rest of the gang still feel like low blows. The lingering, inerasable relevance of Simpson rang throughout the auditorium at the Emmys that night, and throughout the world as well.

O.J. jokes are nothing new and have been around now for decades. Jokes in circulation about O.J. include some of the following examples, chosen to demonstrate exactly how the discourse surrounding Simpson, and masculinity, is at work. In the online website www.jokes4us.com, we find their subgenre of "Celebrity Jokes," which includes a subcategory of "O.J. Simpson Jokes."

Q: What are two things that O.J. has that every man wants?

A: A Heisman Trophy and a dead wife.

(Jokes 4 Us 2018)

Within American culture, it seems there exists a space for "dead wife" jokes, with a punchline pointing to some very dark content about the heterosexual masculine mind. What is being scotomized by culture, societal structure, and political correctness is laid bare for the listener and reader of the joke, namely that, on some level, what men really want is to act as O.J. did, murderously doing away with their wives. Of course, this statement isn't literally true, but rather it references a cultural undercurrent that runs through dominant gender dynamics. Victory and acclaim are not so subtly stored in the Heisman Trophy part of the punchline, which reflects upon hegemonic masculine priorities.

This joke is paramount in understanding how humour works to reveal what culture and societal forces otherwise conceal. The joke lays bare a truth, and this is essentially what makes a joke effective or not. If that truth resonates with many, then the comedian has created a successful stand-up routine. The aforementioned joke from Jokes4us.com speaks to masculinity in the utmost. Here O.J. is likened to an everyman, and becomes a symbol for men, for masculinity, and for the values it holds dear. These values, according to said joke, are winning (this explains the trophy reference) and freedom from constraint (of marriage, in this particular case). The freedom from constraint portion of the punchline is an essential part of the joke, and cites icons like The Marlboro Man, the cowboy, Dirty Harry or Rambo-like archetypes who are epitomized in American culture and by hegemonic masculinity as ultimate men; they live by their own code, *not* society's. As this work has explored, efficacy and control are above all defining features of hegemonic manhood rather than following societal regulations. Rebellion against rules is understood and internalized as somehow making a man *more of one*, primitive, so potent, powerful and superior that he follows his *own* rules rather than society's. This is the crux of many jokes providing commentary on masculinity, and it certainly features predominantly in the subtext of O.J. Simpson punchlines.

Another joke, stemming from the online forum Angelfire.com, is printed as follows:

Q: What's the difference between Mark Fuhrman and a black woman?

A: A black woman can't get O.J. off.

(Angelfire.com, 2018)

Simpson's transcendence of race is illustrated here, juxtaposed with his masculinity in a significant way. This joke points to his sexuality, highlighting his mixed-race coupledom with Nicole Brown. It plays upon Simpson's preference for Caucasian women (something often referenced by Dave Chappelle and other comedians in their stand-up routines about the football star). The joke is built on the offensive concept that Simpson, as a man, is only able to reach completion with a white woman. This punchline is founded upon Simpson's defiance of racial boundaries, implying his rejection of African American women while going so far as to stipulate that Simpson is so transcendent of his racial status that the celebrity has moved up the racial hierarchy of sexuality described by Dyer in the second chapter of this work; Simpson is consequently (according to the punchline) unable to be sexually satisfied by a black woman. Of course, in attempting to describe Simpson's racial transcendence, calling attention to race itself is unavoidable; herein lies the paradox, tension and the anxiety surrounding Simpson's racial representation.

In the vein of the above-mentioned jokes is a stand-up routine from Joe Rogan. Published on YouTube for public viewing in September 2015, the eight and a half minute clip features Rogan addressing a crowd at a comedy club about "the most famous person on the planet," Kim Kardashian;

> If aliens came down here and we had to explain human culture, what would be the most confusing thing to explain? Kim Kardashian. It's not even a joke. Not that there's anything wrong with her; she seems like a reasonable, nice person. She doesn't seem mean; I've got no problem with her. But if you had to explain why she's the most famous woman on the planet, it'd be a little difficult. If they were like 'what's going on? Why her?' You'd be like 'ooh. Um...' That *is* the most famous female on the planet, by the way. I see some of you shaking your head… who's more famous? Oprah? No sex tape. She [Kardashian] wins. What's fame? People paying attention to you. I really think that's the most famous person on the planet that's a female. And if you were talking to aliens… if you're like

'how did that happen?'… 'Um… do you guys know what football is?' You'd have to explain football, because you'd have to explain O.J. Simpson. And if you're gonna really truly tell the Kim Kardashian tale correctly, you'd have to go; 'Football is the great American pastime, and what it is is, our number one sport. We take the biggest super athletes and we pad 'em up, and it's all about moving the ball across the line. If the ball goes across that line, everybody gets fucking pumped, cause that means that we scored. *But* if the ball goes across *that* line, everybody gets really sad, because that means *they* scored. Okay? So, more people watch football than vote for President; *it's our number one thing*. Now, O.J. Simpson was really good at football, so he fucked *a lot* of white chicks, and he got crazy and he married one of them. And what marriage is is, you write some shit down on paper, and then when the woman gets tired of your nonsense, she can leave and have sex with new men, but you have to continue sending her money. Yeah, well… O.J. wasn't buying that either. [crowd applauds] So… so he allegedly got a thing called a kitchen knife, and he found his ex wife alone with another man, and he put the knife in their bodies until they stopped being alive, and then he hired a team of legal assassins to get him out of trouble, and they worked their verbal wizardry, cause if the glove does not fit, you must acquit! And all this craziness, and O.J. *walked* on all charges. But Kardashian and Johnny Cochrane died young of cancer. I don't know if karma really is a motherfucker, but if you got a better example, tweet it my way, you know what I'm sayin'? But this is not Kim's fault, and Kim is Robert Kardashian's daughter. And when a dad leaves behind a daughter, it leaves a hole, there's a void. Men need moms, and girls need dads; there's this weird thing that happens. We have a yin and a yang. And when a young girl grows up without a father, a lot of times they develop this exorbitant need for male attention, and it can manifest itself in some really sad ways. Like they become strippers, or they become prostitutes, or in Kim's case she fucked this black guy with a giant dick, and she *filmed* it, and then it got on the internet, and she was like 'how'd that get up there?' And she went on from that, to make fifty times more than the President of the United States. Those are real numbers. If you went to Harvard business school and said; 'listen, I'm thinking about starting a business. I wanna make about fifty times more than the President, here's my plan… I'm gonna fuck an R&B singer with a giant dick, and I'm gonna film it… and that's it.' They would be like; 'Get the fuck out of our office, you

> don't know shit about business.' But meanwhile, they were wrong; they were wrong and she's right. A woman with a fake ass makes fifty times more than the Commander in Chief of the greatest army the world has ever known. And the aliens would be like… 'we're gonna fucking kill you all.' (Rogan 2015)

Rogan addresses a contemporary American audience full of people who are intimately familiar with seeing Kardashian on the cover of magazines regularly. Furthermore, he speaks to both men and women, and while his joke supposedly caters to "humans" as he so cleverly puts it in his explanation, his commentary on "not buying it" inarguably stems from the male perspective, and is set up so as to appeal to men more so than women. Women are actually somewhat villainized in his joke; seemingly favoured or being given an advantage societally by being permitted to go sleep with other men while their male exes are obligated to "keep sending [them] money." Rogan, of course, leaves out many of the factors that go into this expected dynamic, including lifestyle, precedent, and the simple fact that many women are the ones who wind up raising or having primary custody of children after relationships end. Of course, none of this information is humorous or contributes to Rogan's perspective, but it is interesting that these important elements seem to fall by the wayside while Rogan advocates for the male perspective on divorce and relationships. The notable little nugget contained within Rogan's routine - the fact that O.J. "wasn't buying that" - cites the aforementioned rebellion against society that Simpson embodied, and that the anonymous Jokes4us punchline utilizes. Put simply, Rogan is saying that Simpson refused to bend to anything other than his own will and whim, and in Rogan's set-up and delivery there exists a sneaking sense that this refusal is something the audience understands and perhaps admires somehow. After all, as Rogan explains to the hypothetical aliens, "Yeah, O.J. wasn't buying that, *either*," discreetly implying that his alien audience wouldn't buy it, too.

What O.J. is not buying into is, of course, care for other human beings, but also society and societal structure more generally, and the aliens in Rogan's joke also seem to be experiencing a little cultural shock in their inability to understand human customs; in other words, Rogan explains Simpson's actions by attributing them to the frustration of man in the face of a progressively changing and restrictive societal environment. These restrictions pertain in Simpson's case to maintaining his ex-wife Nicole's lifestyle and wellbeing financially. Rogan's joke is very smart in that it sets up the hypothetical situation of Rogan attempting to explain to "aliens" cultural and

societal norms. One has to reduce the setup, operation and endorsement of said norms to very basic talking points in order to really explain to an alien being, a foreigner to Western culture and its customs, why certain societal structures are in place. The brilliant part of Rogan's bit is that he, too, sympathizes with the aliens' inability to comprehend contemporary human customs like divorce, maintaining an ex-wife's lifestyle, and the illogic of celebrity. In other words, he calls attention to what he as a man deems ridiculous about the societal system in place (and presumably, we can assume that a generous amount of like-minded men feel the same; this is demonstrated in the roaring laughter heard from the audience throughout Rogan's delivery). The policing of his own self, the regulation of it, the bending to others' whims - women, the courts, popularity - is what Rogan is setting up in the bit as ridiculous. As a man, he is "not buying it," just like the aliens in his hypothetical scenario are having a hard time believing this is an actual cultural custom for humans. Somehow, by the audience reaction, one can ascertain that the fact that Rogan, O.J. and so on are "not buying it" makes them more of a man, just as Chapter 3 explored how admonishing society, and rebellion, somehow makes a man *more of one*. Of course, this is the problem with hegemonic masculinity in Western culture (and this is also why Rogan's joke works); its standards of manliness encourage men not to "buy it," promising them they will be somehow rendered more powerful, in control and superior if they refuse to bow or acquiesce to anyone, including society, rules and women.

Rogan's implication that "buying it" is somewhat kooky actually places Simpson, in Rogan's paradigm, as someone whose actions maybe aren't all that crazy. Rogan implies that those of us who "buy it" are the crazy ones, and his suggestion is addressed to men in particular as he lists for the "aliens" all the things Simpson (and men) have to put up with here on Earth, including but not limited to ex-wives, alimony, and so on. As Faludi writes in *STIFFED*, "if men are the masters of their fate, what do they do about the unspoken sense that they are being mastered, in the marketplace and at home, by forces that seem to be sweeping away the soil beneath their feet?" (23). Like the men Faludi interviewed in the domestic violence group she visited who had all felt more in control of their out-of-control circumstances by acting out against their women violently, Simpson too was, by Rogan's explanation, taking back control of his life; a life which had been up to that point defined by the societal forces he was under obligation to bend to. Rogan's joke is built upon sympathy for this perspective, for *Simpson*'s presumed perspective, redirecting the 'crazy' from Simpson to society itself.

Rogan's joke is also brilliant in that it points to the fact that Simpson is a hub of cultural currency. The comedian plainly states that if one were to begin explaining today's most famous woman alive, they would have to start with Simpson. Kardashian, in essence, is yet another fetishized image, another attempt to scotomize and make sense of the O.J. Simpson trauma. Perhaps by getting closer to Kardashian, to her family, to her body, America will finally uncover some hidden truth about her father, Robert, and where it all went wrong with Simpson. The camera in this instance functions much like a microscope, and this is undoubtedly part of the reason why *Keeping Up With the Kardashians* keeps getting resigned season after season. The intrigue surrounding the family, their mystique, stems from their implication in Simpson's scandal.

Another joke featured on the Jokes4us.com website allows for the potential comparing of 'bad' masculinities;

Q: What did Johnny Cochran say when accused of beating his wife?

A: At least I didn't kill her like some people I know.

(Jokes 4 Us 2018)

Cochrane's masculinity here isn't as 'bad' as Simpson's, and what this joke does so cleverly is feature Simpson as a yardstick for fallen, violent manhood (this thesis does so as well). Remembering Lance Morrow and *TIME Magazine*, this joke casts Simpson in the part of Lucifer, and implies, like the joke before it, that there are many other men who feel, and could potentially act, just like him. These jokes are potent and powerful and get by discreetly without serious investigation from many because the veil of humour allows for people to dismiss them quickly. Nevertheless their content is worth a second look, a deeper gaze, a moment of pause to contemplate just what kind of forces are swirling around, generating the truth upon which the dark joke is built.

Q: What's O.J.'s motto?

A: Life's a bitch, and then you stab one.

(Jokes 4 Us 2018)

Q:Why did O.J .kill his ex?

A: He wanted to terminate her free agency.

(Yuks R Us 2018)

Life in the first joke is set up as just another 'thing,' and the relationship within the joke between women and things is subtly systematized by the joke's structure. The objectification of women in this particular case is quiet but present. Again, the audience here certainly isn't women; any woman would take offense to the uttering of this punchline for a variety of reasons, all of which stem from the patriarchal objectification of women employed for the sake of a laugh. The violent overtone of the content is very important as well, so blatant that to even call attention to it in analysis seems like a cheap note, though one that must be made regardless. There is humour to be found in the violent jab at women for the demographic to which this joke caters; namely, men, and the reason it is humorous is because, quite simply, something about it rings true for said demographic.

The second joke speaks to Simpson's mastery and control over his domestic situation, suggesting he acted so as to dominate his wife and assert his will. This joke has connotations of the physical, whispers suggesting Simpson's powerful potential in terms of his body and its abilities, however it speaks more so to the conceptual realm and circumstances surrounding his relationship with Nicole. Ron Goldman, after all, was rumoured to have been seeing Nicole Brown post-divorce, and surely Brown had other boyfriends since Simpson (Rubin-Dorsky 33). This was a major topic in the discourse surrounding her murder, and has everything to do with Simpson's jealousy and outrage at his inability to maintain dominance and control over his relationship with her. He had, on many accounts, "told [Nicole's] girlfriends, 'if he ever caught her with anyone he would kill her'" (Rubin-Dorsky 33), and furthermore had "grabbed Nicole's crotch, shouting 'this belongs to me'" (42). By hegemonic masculine standards, Simpson was asserting himself with his homicidal actions, claiming what he felt was rightfully his, namely, Nicole. When his fame fell away after football was no longer an option, "to have her was to be powerful, to own what other men wanted, and thus to be admired anew" (Rubin-Dorsky 42). If he couldn't have her, "his most cherished trophy" (Rubin-Dorsky 42), nobody else would either, and this joke implies that Simpson felt so out of control that murder was the only tactic to "restrict her free agency" (Yuks R Us 2018). The violent or aggressive impulses towards women that men harbour, either consciously or subconsciously, are a reality, and are the fundamental building blocks of jokes such as these. Possessiveness of women aside, the fear men experience at seeming or feeling less of a

man is even more worrisome, for it is ultimately this that most likely drove Simpson to act out in the way he did that night, and it is this profound anxiety which underlies jokes such as the aforementioned. What does it say about the man in question if he can't control *his* woman? Perhaps that he doesn't satisfy her completely? That he's not man enough? Beneath the aggression and the murder on the surface of the joke exists deep-rooted, crippling fear, anxiety so powerful that breaking with societal rules seems to be the saner choice. Being revealed as less of a man is, for many men, much more dangerous to their sense of self.

Of course, the violent impulse is sometimes attributed, in Simpson's and other professional athletes' behaviour, to the fact that it is fostered by their profession. However, in Simpson's case, his extraordinary ability on the football field was further emphasized by his extraordinary evasion of criminal charges in the courtroom. This is another major trauma for American culture, and the entire process has been shrouded in mystery as questions about how it all went wrong go unanswered and misunderstood. Jokes like the following cite Simpson as the superstar player in the entire equation;

Q: What do the LAPD and NFL defences have in common?
A: Both let O.J. slip through their fingers.

Q: Why did O.J.'s kids want to live with their dad?
A: They knew they could get away with murder.

(Jokes 4 Us 2018)

These cater to sports fans. Their priority is to address the cultural trauma Simpson's trial created by pointing the finger to Simpson himself as the extraordinary element of the equation. Paglia, in the chapter preceding this one, also touched on aspects of this notion in her discourse with Bill Maher, citing Simpson's extraordinary abilities on the football field as part of what allowed him to commit an extraordinary act such as double homicide. His ability to break the rules, to defy perceptions (and sometimes even physics on the sports field) somehow transfers over to the courtroom in these setups and punchlines, and the reason jokes like these are recurrent and retold is because Simpson's evasion of law and guilt seems almost superhuman and doesn't make sense. It parallels the out-of-this-world physical abilities Simpson's body represented throughout

his sports career; old footage of Simpson "slipping" through seemingly impossible situations on the football field left, and still leave, sports fans in awe. Simply put, the physical (and eventually judicial) feats Simpson "could get away with" seem somewhat extraordinary. Bakhtin's "picturing of the body" (303) is a quiet undercurrent here, a subtle influence and component of rendering these jokes effective. This reading of O.J.'s body is present in the deployment and processing of these jokes. They are grounded upon the communally understood reading of Simpson's body as particularly extra-ordinary, with superhuman abilities. As Butler argues, notions about the physicality of bodies have implications for the conceptual realm, too; the physical and conceptual ideas about Simpson's body inform one another. As Marcia Clark said in her *Vulture* interview, the trial was "the biggest anomaly [she'd] ever seen" (Fernandez 2016), and O.J. was literally "[getting] away with" it, "[slipping] through" (Jokes 4 Us 2018) the cracks. He was absconding with a great feat, both the hero and antihero of America's first reality show; the O.J. Simpson Trial. Clark, and America, couldn't believe it was happening. But it *was* happening, against all odds, and such a happening leaves us desirous of answers. The creation of jokes like the aforementioned alleviates the pressure of searching for said answers, if only for a small while, by providing one in jest.

Jokes like these speak to Simpson's manhood, too, particularly reminiscent of Faludi's commentary regarding men feeling caged in by society and its structure, the "forces" (23) they must reckon with while reconciling their more primitive urges. Just like a Dirty Harry or Rambo antihero, Simpson's representation asserted something masculine according to hegemonic masculinity in his evasion of the law that fateful day he was declared criminally innocent. Simpson remained effective, in control, and the ultimate usurper throughout the entirety of the trial for which he was supposed to be fighting for his life. Instead, he often sat there smiling, seemingly above the law from minute one of the televised saga. Steve Harvey touches on this with outrage in his 1997 special *Live… Down South Somewhere*, telling his audience;

> [O.J.'s] reactions ain't right for me. If you ain't did it, act like you ain't did it. [He's] sitting over there drawing, laughing, ha ha ha… *are you* [O.J.] *listening to the trial*?! [What] the hell [are] you laughing at O.J.? Your ass is up for double murder! … if I'm on trial for double murder and I ain't did it, the gag rule is in effect on me every day. Imma be there with handcuffs on and toilet tissue in my mouth [Harvey pretends to scream

> silently while bound by handcuffs]. *That's* how you act if you ain't done nothing… all day, sitting up there way too cool. Stand up on the table!

His routine is pertinent in that Simpson's behaviour was more than a little peculiar throughout the trial's television. It was almost as though he knew everything would play out in his favour. This, too, speaks to his superhuman-ness in the eyes of the public, and certainly plays into his manhood in some way; his confidence and "cool" attitude, as Harvey comments, is practically extraterrestrial, and certainly by hegemonic Western standards, uber-macho. An innocent man being tried as guilty would *never* comport himself the way O.J. did in that courtroom, and his evasion of justice made him both superhuman and villain in the eyes of the American public. So which is he then; Superman or Lex Luthor? Can he potentially be both?

Harvey certainly has his own opinion about Simpson's iconicism. He elaborates in his routine with the following;

> I think O.J. tried to kill everyone in that god damn driveway. [...] A couple things make me think he did it. [...] they found the Heisman trophy in the bushes! [...] The media is trying to make this a racial issue. This ain't about race, this is about somebody done killed somebody else, and I don't care what color he is; if he killed somebody, he done got to go. I don't give a damn if he do play football. [...] The media got all of black America in an uproar about it being a race issue… O.J. ain't been black since he won that damn Heisman trophy. [at this point there are whoops and hollers from the audience, more so than before in the unfolding of Harvey's special] So I ain't picketing for no damn body...kiss my ass… Oh, I might go down there and picket, but you ain't gonna like what's on my sign. Cause I'm gonna have 'FUCK O.J." on both sides! (Harvey 1997)

Harvey interprets Simpson's act from a very basic standpoint; if he killed those two people, he's "got to go." However he does something important halfway through his rant by referencing the media circus that was built up around Simpson's racial profile in relationship to the trial. Harvey's stroke of brilliance is his punchline; "O.J. ain't been black since he won that damn Heisman trophy." The audience goes wild for this bit, for Harvey is making apparent the fact that Simpson, thus far, from football career to trial, has been, as Stern outlined on his radio show, "treated like a

rich man." Of course, O.J. *is* black, but he also isn't in terms of what blackness meant in 1990's America. Simpson was a celebrity, like Edelman's documentary interviewee said; he embodied "the exalted status" of fame, allowing him to transcend the social, societal and economic boundaries of race at the time. This took effect, Harvey is suggesting, after he won the Heisman trophy (in simpler terms, once he became an A-list kind of celeb) and continued into his trial for double murder. It was certainly a factor in influencing judges, who let him off easy with a misdemeanor fine after Nicole had pressed charges of domestic assault the first time around.

Harvey's attempt to take race out of the equation is genuine, though the time he spends on it in his routine also suggests its cultural relevance made that very endeavour an impossible feat. O.J. "[hadn't] been black" since winning that trophy, but African-Americans had been persecuted unfairly for years, and after Cochrane's defense, many identified with the archetype of O.J. the Black Man in the Courtroom; a character the media often had him play in their papers. As Harvey said years later on his daytime talk show, Cochrane defended O.J. by doing one very ingenious thing; "Johnny Cochrane put the system on trial," (Harvey 2017). Simpson was, in actuality, simply the vehicle for the defense attorney's prosecution of the American justice system in how it dealt with African American men for decades.

Upon the release of Dave Chappelle's 2017 two-part *Netflix* special called "Deep in the Heart of Texas/The Age of Spin", *The Atlantic* released an article published in its culture section by David Sims titled "Dave Chappelle Reckons with Himself." This title is incredibly apt, for Chappelle in his work attempts to negotiate his own contradictory and polar views, opinions, desires, beliefs, drives and urges by aligning them with the crisis of masculinity in contemporary America. The reckoning happening within Chappelle himself is, in many ways, reflective of the reckoning going on culturally, especially where manhood is concerned. The comedian, in his work, addresses this very fact a number of times. Chappelle's special is structured around asking his audience; can a man be everything? A murderer, The Juice, an icon, a celebrity, a violent aggressor, a nice guy and an amazing athlete? Is it possible to be everything at once, and not just one thing? This question in relationship to manhood is extremely pertinent and contemporary, and Simpson is a perfect vessel for it. Chappelle is no fool; Simpson's cultural situation renders him ideal for the kind of investigation the comedian is attempting, and this is unmistakably why the entirety of "The Age of Spin" is structured around a four part narrative in which the comedian regales his audience with the four times he met O.J. Simpson;

> I've been watching that new O.J. show, I can't get enough of that shit. Doesn't it bring back good memories? I forgot just how polarizing that O.J. case was. And you know, I've met O.J. Simpson on 4 different occasions in my life, and before the end of this show, I will tell you about each of those occasions.
>
> The first time I met O.J. Simpson, I was in Santa Monica [...] at the time I was 18, I had done the show, and then the guy from the club came up and said 'hey, O.J. Simpson's here, and he says he wants to meet you.' I said 'what?! Fuck yeah!' I ran down the steps, and O.J. was there and he was like; [impersonating O.J.] 'hey young man, how are you? It's very good to meet you and uh, you're doing really good work and I hope good things happen for you in your life.' I was like, 'Man, thanks Mr. Juice.' Standing beside him… well, I don't know the nice way to say this, uh… his soon-to-be-slain wife. [Audience gets restless] ...Ladies and gentlemen, man the fuck up or you're not gonna make it through the end of this show. Just man the fuck up. She's *dead*, we already know... we know what happened! We don't know who *did it* [Chappelle winks at the audience and they laugh hysterically] but we know what happened. I should tell you that woman was very nice to me. She actually embraced me. She said; 'I think you're adorable!' And she hugged me, and she said 'Good luck to you!' And she held me for a long time. And I whispered in her ear… 'bitch, are you tryna get us both killed?' [Audience roars] I'm just kidding, I didn't say that. But that was the first time in a nutshell. (Chappelle 2017)

Chappelle's humorous whisper to Nicole, certainly a fictitious embellishment on actual events for the sake of drama, is pre-emptive, though what it does is suggest to the audience that O.J. *did it*, despite the American court system declaring him innocent. Chappelle's nod and wink to the audience halfway through this bit also furthers this existing communal notion that O.J. really *is* guilty and capable of murder. His capability, his *potential*, is what is so cleverly hidden in Chappelle's whispered utterance to Nicole, as though Chappelle himself knew Simpson could pull off such an act years before it even happened. Chappelle's joke is reminiscent of the potentiality embodied by Brando as soon as he steps into frame during *Streetcar*. Simpson's dominating presence, playing into his Alpha stereotype as football player, factors into Chappelle's intimidation and fear, for that presence signifies the unspoken potentiality for power and violence that Simpson

can manifest at any time. When Nicole got a little too intimate with Chappelle in the presence of her man, the comedian was afraid because that potentiality was in the room with them that day, an unspoken part of the social interaction he lays out for the audience between him, Nicole and The Juice. Chappelle asserts O.J. as the dominant male in their three-way scenario, and makes no mistake about letting the audience know that in his experience, Chappelle felt that Simpson was more than capable of such an act way before the murders took place.

> The second time I met O.J. Simpson was right after the trial of the century. There I was, now a young man of probably twenty-three. O.J. Simpson was *the most famous or infamous face on planet Earth*. I was in a restaurant in Beverly Hills with my agents; I wasn't alone in the restaurant, but I was alone. I was the only black person in the restaurant, and in the nineties that felt very uncomfortable [...] I was having dinner with my agents celebrating a deal that they told me was lucrative that I later learned fuckin' sucked, and suddenly a group of women walked by. Every race was in that group. Black, white, asian, latina, white, white and white again [the audience laughs]. They were all gorgeous. I watched them walk by. Then, I saw a familiar face; Al Collins, the man from the infamous Bronco chase, walked by and embraced one of the women, and they walked towards the door. Couldn't believe what I saw. And *then*, close behind him, was O.J. Simpson, newly released from jail. The restaurant fell still. I was *shocked*. I didn't mean to say it out loud, but it just came out; '*O.J.!'* He stopped, turned around to see who said it, saw my black face and correctly assumed it was me [more laughs]. I was sitting in the corner of the booth. He leaned over all the white people I was having dinner with and shook my hand. [impersonating O.J.] 'How are you young man?' He looked in my eyes, and I could see in his eyes… that he didn't remember meeting me the first time. And then he walked away. And I looked back at my agents, and all of them had nothing short of disgust on their faces. And the only one with the courage to voice their disgust was the woman named Sharon who used to represent me. 'How could you?' She said. 'How could you shake hands with that murderer?' I said, 'Sharon, with all due respect… that murderer ran for over eleven thousand yards.' [audience goes wild] And… he was acquitted! So, you know. Glove didn't fit. [Chappelle shrugs comically, audience laughs again] Glove did not fit. Get over yourself. (Chappelle 2017)

This routine pokes fun at Chappelle himself as a young black male. Simpson was evidently an idol or icon in Chappelle's youth, and post-trial, despite everything that had went on and been televised, the young man was still star-struck by Simpson in a way that made his Caucasian co-diners enraged. More than anything, though, Chappelle is suggesting that in some way, Simpson's actions in Brentwood don't take away from his feats on the football field. This is a revolutionary idea, and a somewhat politically incorrect way of looking at things, but Chappelle proposes it anyway. By that logic, Chris Brown's brutal beating of Rihanna shouldn't have any effect on his record sales whatsoever, for he's still a great singer, woman-beater or not, right? This is quite the notion, and seems somewhat unfair, though it's an idea Chappelle delivers to his audience nonetheless, as he himself is having difficulty reconciling his childhood hero with America's most infamous murderer. Perhaps the personal and professional realms should remain separate, Chappelle is implying, and maybe that way the disappointment won't be so great when male icons inevitably fall.

> The third time I met O.J. Simpson… [audience claps enthusiastically]. The third time I met O.J. Simpson I was doing great in life. I just finished the second season of The Chappelle Show. Man, those were good days. I was playing a comedy club in Miami; *The Improv*, I don't know if you've ever been, but if you have, you'd know the door for the green room is right on the stage. Can you imagine such a thing? If I walked out of the door of the green room, *bam* I'm just right here, just right from the dressing room. And I did that; I walked out, and the whole crowd was like 'hurray!' and I looked, ma'am… [Chappelle motions to a woman in the front row] as close as you are to me… I saw, as I came out; The Juice. And I saw recognition in his eyes and it filled me with pride that he knew who I was. I didn't acknowledge his presence because it was a white audience, and I didn't want to start a panic. But I did my show, show went great, I said 'goodnight everyone!,' they all said 'yay!' And I didn't say nothing to O.J. but I just gave him the signal, let him know I knew he was there… [Chappelle does Simpson's trademark finger-guns signal, crowd laughs]. And I walked into the green room… *and O.J. was already in there!* [crowd roars with laughter]. I was like, 'how the fuck is this possible?' I was scared. And then my friends came in, and we all started talking. We sat down on the couch, and

> I'm just telling you what I saw with my own eyes; you can believe me or not believe me. But in my experience, O.J. Simpson; one of the nicest men I'd ever met. He was nice to me, he was nice to my friends, the conversation was filled with warmth and levity, humour and wisdom. We talked for ninety minutes and then suddenly The Juice said 'you know what? I've gotta be going. But it's good to see you again, and I'm glad things went so well.' And I said 'thanks, Juice,' and my friends said, 'Yeah! Goodbye Mr. Juice.' [...] He said 'no, thank you for your hospitality. Goodnight guys," and we said 'goodnight,' and he walked out of the room. And as soon as the door closed we all looked at each other like; 'that ni**a did that shit. [audience roars] Did you feel it? Could you feel it? I could feel like… *murder* in the room.' (Chappelle 2017)

This is undoubtedly the most powerful of the four instances in which Chappelle met Simpson. The fact that the comedian felt immediately prideful upon realizing Simpson's recognition of him is a controversial emotion in the face of everything we now know about the trial. Again, Chappelle's inability to reconcile Simpson's conflicting archetypes plays a role here. Then the comedian launches into a routine we've seen time and again where Simpson is concerned; elaborating upon how "nice" of a guy O.J. Simpson was. The comedian gives Simpson a glowing recommendation, demonstrating how well mannered and generous with his time he was, until finally Simpson leaves the room and Chappelle and his friends commune immediately. Despite all evidence to the contrary in Simpson's behaviour, Chappelle's gang somehow innately knows "that ni**a did that shit." This gets a giant roar from the crowd, as they, too, somehow innately know Simpson is guilty of murder, regardless of who prevailed in court. Furthermore, Simpson's ability to evade the laws of physics is touched upon when Chappelle finds the defendant in his dressing room before he could have physically and realistically had the time to get there. Certainly Chappelle is embellishing here, too, but what he embellishes upon is this circulated undercurrent notion that Simpson is somehow immune to the laws of physics, and can accomplish things we as laymen do not understand, both on the field and off. A comedian called Earthquake also touches on this in his routine titled "O.J. is the Only Man to Beat DNA," elaborating by emphasizing that even in the fictitious world of "Law & Order [...] they wouldn't even need a whole hour to convict him" (2013). To Chappelle and Earthquake, Simpson is sometimes more Superman than Lex.

Chappelle's final meditation on Simpson is a contemporary one;

> The fourth time I met O.J. Simpson… the fourth time is not the funniest time, but it was the last time I'd see The Juice. For some reason, I was at the Kentucky Derby, it's a very long story. This is right after I quit Chappelle Show in spectacular fashion. There was a party hosted by Michael Jordan and every athlete I had ever admired was in that room. Yes. And then I saw a familiar face by the bar, standing there, drinking alone; it was Chris Tucker [another comedian]. Now, you have to remember, at this time we were both technically missing [they were both on respective career hiatuses]. And we went over and we were talking with one another, and motherfuckers were amazed to see us together. Seeing me and Chris Tucker at that point would be like seeing Big Foot riding a unicorn. You wouldn't believe that's what you was seeing. And then, through all the gawkers, a familiar face pushed through the crowd. There he was again; The Juice. He had his camera ready. He was like, 'Dave. Chris. Good to see you guys. Hey, come on, guys, let's all get together for a picture.' And at the same time me and Chris were like… no. Sorry Juice, my career's too flimsy to survive a picture with you! (Chappelle 2017)

Of course, O.J.'s public image changed over time, and Chappelle is poking fun at Old O.J. as a much less cool public figure. As a young man, he was full of pride at being recognized by the controversial celebrity, but as a more seasoned comedian, his refusal to be photographed with Simpson suggests that Chappelle's own opinions of Simpson have changed with the times.

"The Age of Spin" is structured around Simpson and, consequently, around the very problem this thesis is trying to negotiate; how many things, and many paradoxes, make up a man. Its structuring around his four part O.J. Simpson narrative is key, for this is a problem that epitomizes everything that sparks such cultural anxiety around the notorious public figure. Put simply, the reason he is so anxiety generating, or the reason he is so fascinating to the masses, is *because* O.J. is, represents and embodies many things, many of which contradict each other. Simpson cannot be categorized; one cannot put him safely in a box, or understand him completely as one particular archetype. He is not simple; he is complex, and Chappelle suggests that perhaps this is part of what it means, and what it is, to be a man, and that inclusive within the notion of manhood are some darker impulses, drives and worldviews that contemporary society is demonizing. Now, Chappelle isn't advocating for the halting of such demonization on society's

part; rather, he is attempting to understand and negotiate both the goodness and badness that he feels is intrinsic and inescapable to himself as a man, and to others as men. Chappelle also talks about Bill Cosby in his special, in a joke that revolves around the comedian's attempt to negotiate Cosby as a figure who both "rapes and saves" (2017). He asks the audience: can Cosby be a benefactor as well as a rapist? His challenging question begs answers; culture is quick to demonize, to make monsters out of public figures who do something bad, and insofar as masculinity goes, Chappelle is asking: is it perhaps possible for a man to be both good and bad? To embody both sides of the same coin? Perhaps, is that what maybe even *defines* an individual as a man? To have both good and dark impulses? To be both brawn and brute? Both beast and shining knight? Both sinner and saint?

Chappelle himself has trouble negotiating this idea, says so, and continues to probe it throughout his special. He references himself often, and his instinctual reactions to certain situations where he perhaps should have been a better man. He thinks about the dilemma he is attempting to mitigate within his own psyche in relationship to other grander cultural narratives of masculinity, and his cognitive dissonance is palpable throughout his specials. Chappelle even talks about Manny Pacquiao reinstating Filipino "masculinity with his motherfuckin' fists" (2017), not unlike O.J. reinstated his own that night in Brentwood. Chappelle's genius is that he parallels himself with all the male characters he looks at in terms of multiplicity of identities, many coming together to form one complex being or man: him. He even talks about Bruce Jenner becoming Caitlyn, and how maybe America is culturally moving towards a place where to be many things is actually acceptable. However, Chappelle still remains unable to reconcile his idols' bad and glorious archetypal incarnations, and reverts back to the contradictions within himself to look for answers. The only one he comes up with is that people, and men, are complicated creatures who sometimes both "rape and save." What culture (and what people) often like to do is archetype; Chappelle, by way of his work, is proposing that this is probably an inadequate way of understanding what makes a man. Categorizing is easy, but assimilating all the categories and paradoxes that one man can embody into one concept is much harder to do, simply by virtue of the way culture has trained its audience to understand the world in archetypes - black and white, instead of complicated, dissonant grey.

Chappelle's ability to sympathize with fallen icons is part of what allows him to investigate their hypothetical inner psyches, for he too admits to having dark or depraved desires throughout

his act. One instance in particular, from "Deep in the Heart of Texas," sees Chappelle in a situation in which he is to decide the fate of three young men who threw a snowball at him on the street as they drove by, shouting racial slurs at him as they did it. Chappelle's immediate thought, upon seeing their mother in tears, is to have said mother physically "suck [his] dick" (2017) as the boys' punishment. This is hardly an upstanding, respectable conclusion, though it's the first thing Chappelle thinks of, and it's the solution the likeable comedian offers up to his audience. Jamie Foxx also relates to Simpson in a way, explaining in his own routine from 1997's Jamie Foxx *Unleashed: Lost, Stolen and Leaked!*:

> All my heroes went from sugar to shit and O.J. started that shit. O.J. been running his mouth […] he gonna get *everybody* caught.

Foxx immediately points out to the audience the genesis, the *élément déclencheur*, the trigger moment in culture when "it" all began: the fall of O.J. Simpson, and the subsequent fall of men. Foxx positions Simpson as the Lucifer, the first fallen angel, in the series of angels (or heroes, as he calls them) who fell from that point onwards (to continue in the vein of *TIME Magazine's* Lance Morrow's biblical commentary). Foxx's emphasis on "everybody" subtly insinuates that many men have been acting in the way Simpson has, perhaps to different degrees; the relationship he's setting up is significant here for it establishes sympathy, or even empathy, on the part of Foxx, and presumably on the part of men in general. Again, this empathy or sympathy is in jest, though that doesn't mean it should be discounted as untrue. The reason it's humorous at all is because of the latent truths that underlie the comic's rant.

Finally, the brilliant Chris Rock addresses O.J. Simpson in his 1996 HBO comedy special *Bring The Pain*. His commentary is rich in many topics that speak directly to this thesis' agenda, but the themes and emotions involved in his explanation are what make Rock such an astute cultural observer. What is most interesting is Rock's ability to "understand" (1996) Simpson by way of the comedian's emotional interpretation of the Simpson case as it relates to the way contemporary (then, late nineties) men seem to feel stuck, screwed by the system, powerless and subjected to rules, court orders, alimony, women, and so on. Rock as a joke-teller is particularly interesting in that he demonstrates for the audience how certain pop culture events happen in

tandem while paralleling the way culture sees, interprets and polices the modern man. Rock explains;

> O.J. was big [this year]...Black people were way too happy. They were like, 'yay, we won! We won!' What the fuck did we win? Every day I look in the mailbox for my O.J. prize... *nothing*. [As though] it's all about race. That shit wasn't about race, that shit was about fame. Because if O.J. wasn't famous, he'd be in jail right now. If O.J. drove a bus, he wouldn't even be O.J. - he'd be Orenthal the bus-driving murderer. Everyone was saying 'the jury is so stupid.' Get the fuck out of here - white people would have done the exact same shit. Cause if that was Jerry Seinfeld charged with double murder, and the only person that found the glove just *happened* to be in the Nation of Islam, Jerry would be a free man, eating cereal right now. But let's break down the case, okay? What happened? Ron Goldman? That was [Nicole Brown's] boyfriend. Don't be mistaken and think that was just some guy returning glasses. When's the last time you left some shit at a restaurant and they brought it back to your house? Shit, I wanna eat there. Shit, you could leave a newborn baby in a restaurant and they would put him in the coat room. Second of all, [Goldman] was known to drive around town in this Ferrari that O.J. bought for [Nicole]. Think about *that shit*. If I buy you a car, you're gonna let another man drive around in my car? Are you out of your fucking mind? You better recognize! I don't even have a Ferrari, but if I saw somebody driving my *Pinto*... that shit would blow up like *The Godfather*. And I'm not saying he should have killed her! *But I understand*. Know what else? O.J. spent twenty five thousand dollars a month in alimony. *Twenty five thousand dollars*. And four thousand dollars a month for food. For *food*! What the fuck was she eating for four grand a month? Women, ya'll got it good. When it's time for a divorce, women got it made. You go to court, start talking that shit; 'Your Honor, I'm used to this, I'm used to that, I'm *accustomed* to this'... What the fuck is accustomed? What's that got to do with shit? Hey, if you go to a restaurant, you're accustomed to eating. You leave, you ain't eating no more! They don't owe you a steak! But women go to court, talk that shit… 'I want some money, gimme some money' and they get some money. What about what the *man's* used to? What about what the *man's* accustomed to? And that might not be *money*, but during the course of a relationship a man grows accustomed to a few things. And I would love to see a man

> go to court and say 'Your Honor, check this out. Now I'm accustomed to fucking her four times a week. And I feel like I should be able to fuck her at least twice a week. I mean she can have the alimony, but I want some p*ssy payments.'... Alimony, that's what made O.J. crack… Paying that big-ass alimony, [when] he ain't scored a touchdown in twenty years. That's right, he should have had a prenup; prenuptial agreement. Everybody needs a prenup. People think they gotta be rich to get a prenup; oh, no. You got twenty million, your wife want ten, big deal! You ain't starving. But if you make thirty *thousand*, and your wife want *fifteen*, you might have to kill her! Shit, I ain't gonna move back with my mama cause you ain't in love. You gonna have to *die*. So you've gotta think about O.J.'s situation; twenty five thousand a month, another man driving around in his car, fucking his wife, in a house he's still paying the mortgage on. Now I'm not saying he should have killed her! *But I understand.* You know who I feel for in the O.J. case more than anybody else? Ike Turner. You know why? Cause Ike was the king of the women-beaters till O.J. took his title. Ike's going 'hey, I coulda killed Tina! What about me? What's black got to do with it?' That's the big thing now - domestic abuse. That's the big shit in '96. Everybody's doing it - O.J., Warren Moon, Billy Dee Williams. *Billy Dee Williams* hitting on women! What the fuck is the world coming to? Say it isn't so! Billy Dee Williams… I guess he must have had a little too much Colt 45. You know what they say - there's no reason to ever hit a woman… *shit*. There's a reason to hit *everybody - just don't do it*... ain't nobody above an ass whooping. Anybody can give you a reason to hit. (1996)

There is a direct relationship established here between Rock's state of mind and O.J.'s. It sets up an evident likeness between what he can conceive of as a man in Simpson's position and what O.J. actually went through with in real life. Of course, the humour of it all brings Rock's perspective some levity, but beneath that lightness lies a dark revelation. What other jokes do subtly, subconsciously, Rock's joke does blatantly; he puts it right out there for the listener because the concept he's attempting to convey is, in reality, extremely complicated. His understanding and sympathy for Simpson's actions are convoluted, complex, rooted in culture and history and gender relationships, and so in order for the joke to work successfully, Rock reduces it to a little punchline: "I understand." But his understanding was informed by much more than simple sympathy. It derives from everything that preceded it contextually, with contributional factors like the crisis in

manhood of the nineties, the territorial nature of man-woman love relationships, the patriarchal understanding of women as possessions, a culture that requires men to be effective, potent and in control above all else, and the influence of hegemonic masculinity exerted upon the individual male psyche. Rock is suggesting that all this was deployed in Simpson's being prior to that fateful night, and furthermore, that all this exists and swirls around within the psyche of men, allowing them to "understand" Simpson's murderous actions.

Rock's brilliance stems from his revelation of his own repression and personal identification with Simpson as a man. What Rock does so slyly is that he acknowledges and, furthermore, makes it okay for the *audience* to acknowledge the fact that there is a shared, latent understanding of O.J.'s actions on some level, especially among the men in the crowd. He allows his audience adopt a relational standpoint to O.J., offering them an opportunity to peer out at the world from his perspective, and in doing so, unveils, unmasks and uncovers the deeper impulses or inutterable thoughts within every man, those which every modern man must train, self-police and control in any given moment. It is a highly empathetic and sympathetic joke, revolving around a punchline that essentially places him in the same position as the murderer. Rock can understand Simpson's motive, and consequently this must be because he himself has and possesses as a man the same murderous, villainous impulses, given the right situation. Possessive, animalistic urges and drives exist; O.J. just lost control of them, or expressed them on the outside, in the real world. Much like how Paglia endorses the condemnation of rape, Rock too says, of abuse and murder, "just don't do it" (1996) however what's important to remember is that the condemnation of something does not erase it. In fact, it's just the opposite; condemnation occurs *because* the impulses exist and persist, and so it is up to the greater collective (society) to establish order amid the chaos.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

O.J. Simpson is hardly emblematic of manhood in general, or African American masculinity specifically. I received a vehement response to this effect whenever I began explaining my work to the men in my life. Many of them were interested at first, but upon further elaboration of my thesis, men often felt the need to speak up and refute the crux of what they *thought* my argument was, stating they hardly looked up to Simpson as a male role model. This, of course, is not the argument contained within these pages, though I can see the potential for misunderstanding to occur. Simpson, to be clear, is *not* a representation for or of all men; rather, he has been and continues to be a vehicle for the deployment and examination of certain attitudes, discourses and notions about men. He enables the media and its audience to tell stories about what's circulating within our contemporary cultural landscape. His representations speak to manhood in that they are employed to spin narratives about life and about men. The narratives he embodies are familiar to us, for all men have experienced and embodied them on a fractional level at some point in either their real or fantasy lives. This is why Simpson continues to fascinate and to persist as an icon in American culture; all men have to some degree experienced successes and failures, destruction and invincibility, command and loss of control.

Simpson is a collection of paradoxes, and many men can relate to the warring dichotomies within themselves, the ones that are plastered so blatantly on newspaper covers, written about in the pages of magazines juxtaposed with images of Simpson, both an icon of excellence and of unbelievable failure. Men often nodded before me, conveying a deep and meaningful understanding when I described how profoundly Simpson was said to have desired Nicole. One young man even told me: "it's a tough pill for guys to swallow, seeing their girl with another man. A lot of them can't take it." Within his words, there was not a justification for violence, but only a recognition, however minute or momentary. That, in essence, was proof enough of the necessity of pursuing the argument I did in this work.

And so while Simpson is no longer the role model he once was in his heyday of football superstardom, he still lingers as a vessel, a vehicle, a figure who presents a way for culture and for men in particular to work out, negotiate, break apart and re-understand their own ideas, perceptions of the world, impulses, drives, and multiple realities. This is where stand-up comics operate, doing the leg work and presenting the negotiations to their audiences and to the world by way of their

deconstruction of what it all means in jokes and routines. The relation that exists and persists between Simpson and men is the most important part of these stand-ups work, so clearly delivered by Chris Rock's routine ("I understand"), and often subtly presented by other comics in the fourth chapter of this thesis. It is the relationship established between Simpson and men that is significant to examine, for there is a kind of sympathy, a common feeling between men, when Simpson's narratives are deployed by comedians as representations of man's place in contemporary culture. Rogan's and Rock's routines are prime examples of this. Societal mechanisms policing men are in place for a reason; they function so as to maintain a certain order, and to increasingly provide security and safety to the greater collective. Rules both cannot and should not be refined or redefined because men may sometimes feel conflicted and repressed. Ultimately, societal regulations do more good than harm, and must remain regardless of the cognitive dissonance some men may feel. But it must also be acknowledged that cognitive dissonance does exists within men, for the first step towards correcting an issue is acknowledging its existence.

What Simpson embodies is not new. His iconography spans from athletic hero, to loyal friend, to scorned lover, to murderous villain. He has embodied blackness, both class and racial transcendence, celebrity, invincibility, physical ability that borders on extraordinary inhumanness and a painful human fallibility that saw him fall from such heights. This, too, is a point of contention frequently raised by the men in my life, a reality they are passionate about addressing. They often feel like society is heading in an overly sanitized direction; one acquaintance in his mid-thirties used the word "antiseptic," telling me it (culture, society, and specifically its policing) is becoming "too much." "You can't even say, 'hey, nice sweater' to a girl at work anymore," he told me over drinks one evening, expressing his discontent at how arduously he felt he had to regulate himself with every utterance. Men, he feels, are being tried for offenses as minor as this; utterances he felt shouldn't even be labeled offensive to begin with. Many feel as though something is lost in the sanitation of culture, in the extremism that suffuses "political correctness" nowadays, in the upped antes and the increasing need to self-police in every social situation. After all, how can men be men in a Western world of tip-toeing, of increasingly playing by the rules, of bending further towards social equilibrium, when hegemonic masculinity tells them with every undercurrent that exerting power upon others, and establishing disequilibrium, is in fact what makes them a man? Do men feel as though they are giving up dominance in the arena, the element that supposedly, and according to hegemony, fundamentally distinguishes them as men from

everybody and everything else? Undoubtedly this is the catch-22 from which their frustration stems. This is why contemporary stand-up comedy is a perfect vehicle for the exploration of the subconscious cultural consciousness; the stage provides a space, a bubble, within which "political correctness" can be thrown out the window should the comic choose to approach his subject matter in a blunt fashion that disregards rules. This is often how stand-ups get laughs; by doing and saying what the layman can't, but profoundly wants to or is thinking. The revelation of latent attitudes by way of stand-up comedy is something that deserves more attention, and more serious consideration, especially when it comes to today's men.

This work has presented a survey of literature that speaks directly to the representation of masculinity in a troubling celebrity text. Employing Connell and Messenderschmidt, whose findings state that multiple masculinities and incarnations of manhood exist, studying the many manifestations of masculinity seen in Simpson's representations has allowed for an understanding of why he is such a fascinating cultural figure. There is dissonance among the many characters he has embodied. Simpson's body is a signifier for many concepts related to race and masculinity, none of the least of which is power; the integral component when it comes to understanding an entity as a man or not. Promised or potential power is what distinguishes the men from the boys, the men from the women, the men from everything else that walks the Earth...at least according to hegemonic masculinity. This potency, efficacy, and dominance is both dangerous and exciting, profoundly linked to the aggression that suffuses the sexual realm, and while a certain amount of said aggression is present in us all, professional athletes foster their aggressive impulse, as they are rewarded for expressing it to its utmost on the field. These lines often blur in their personal lives. A survey of contact-sport athletes from the nineties to now who have all engaged in aggressive domestic or sexual behaviour exposes the flaws in attempting to relegate masculine aggression to the athletic arena, not to mention how intrinsic and important dominance, power, aggression and potency are to the athlete's sense of manhood and self.

The nineties saw lively discussions about the changing modes of masculinity. Some understood these changes as the demise of masculinity. Athletes were part of the problem, but it was more than that; men appeared to be put on trial for the very qualities that hegemonic masculinity insidiously fosters within them. No longer was it acceptable for men to dominate by force or aggression, to utilize their positions of power (be it positions of physical power or otherwise) to exploit or control phenomena. The case of O.J. Simpson's complexity makes it

difficult to negotiate. As an African American icon, he represented a defiance of social and sexual boundaries by way of his marriage to Nicole, as well as embodying progress for interracial coupledom in the early nineties. In his homicidal actions, he reinforced antiquated notions about black men and men in general, fundamentally regressing representationally and contributing to the cultural crisis of masculinity. Implications for African American celebrity were rich here, too, as Simpson symbolized both progression and regression for the black community, representing everyone and no one simultaneously while both embodying and transcending race throughout his sports career and time as defendant. He is perhaps the most infamous case of a black American sports star committing domestic violence, and has become iconic for it. His celebrity text, in a constant state of update, served as an arena for negotiations about what and who men are and may be.

What can inevitably be concluded is that Western hegemony's definition of manhood is intrinsically problematic, for it hinges upon, as Berger writes, a promised power; upon efficacy and control more than goodness or nobility, more than providing for your family or keeping them safe. This is why Simpson persists as an icon of multiple masculinities; he successfully embodies a potential power that we as culture have seen time and again throughout the course of his ascent and descent. Simpson gets fetishized. Simpson's body, too, is a site of reading and performance; his is an athletic body that is unstoppable, carrying the potent histories of both race and masculinity with it. Furthermore, Simpson as a man poses a problem, and represents a threat to societal order with his murderous actions. His homicidal behaviour exposes the precariousness of culture, and his refusal to police his own self in that moment reveals the fact that society is constructed upon the shaky foundation and communal agreement to regulate impulses. The murders represented both a loss of control and a taking back of it for and by Simpson respectively. The fact that he absconded with such hideous crimes is yet another win for him as a man as well, somehow maintaining and asserting his power and control of phenomena by evading the judicial system altogether in an almost superhuman fashion back in 1996. America had watched him dominate phenomena time and again on the football field. When he seemingly did it again in court, he further reaffirmed his masculine power, and as terrifying and problematic as that sounds for the individual, the fact that his judicial evasion affirms manhood according to hegemonic masculinity is even more frightening. With that, I return to my initial agenda of acknowledgement: admitting there is a problem with the way men process violence, control, supremacy, and their own self

perceptions. The individual trying of men is, put simply, a Band-Aid on the bullet hole, though this may be a necessary part of the process. There must be a collective trying, acknowledging the institutions and the mechanisms put into play further back than any of us can remember, insidiously informing men of what masculinity is supposed to be. The way forward is not to condemn men, putting a pig in a power suit on the cover of *TIME* Magazine. The only way forward is truth, and reconciliation.

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Images

Figure 1. How Stanley Kowalski clears the table. Brando as Kowalski dominating his environment and everything in it, including the women. "Every man is a King!"

Figure 2. O.J. defying gravity: extraordinary masculinity in action.

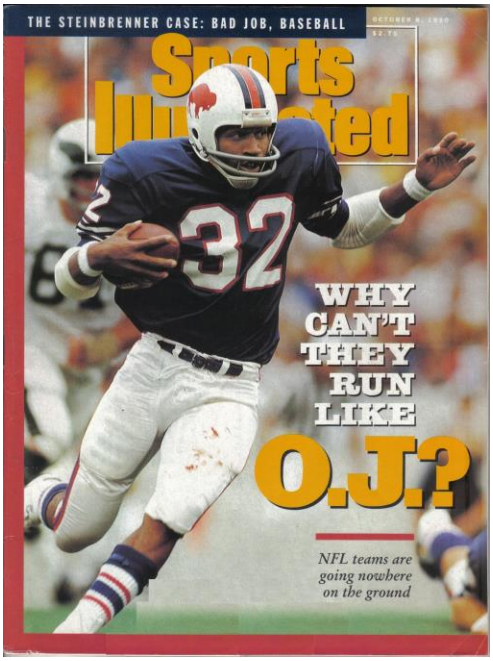

Figure 3. The cover of *Paris Match Magazine*; an example given by Barthes with respect to signifiers and signifieds. The young boy saluting is actually read in a way that signifies the supremacy of the French empire. This is the latent meaning of the photo, and of his physical performance on the cover.

Figure 4. *Planet of the Apes* (1965) promotional poster.

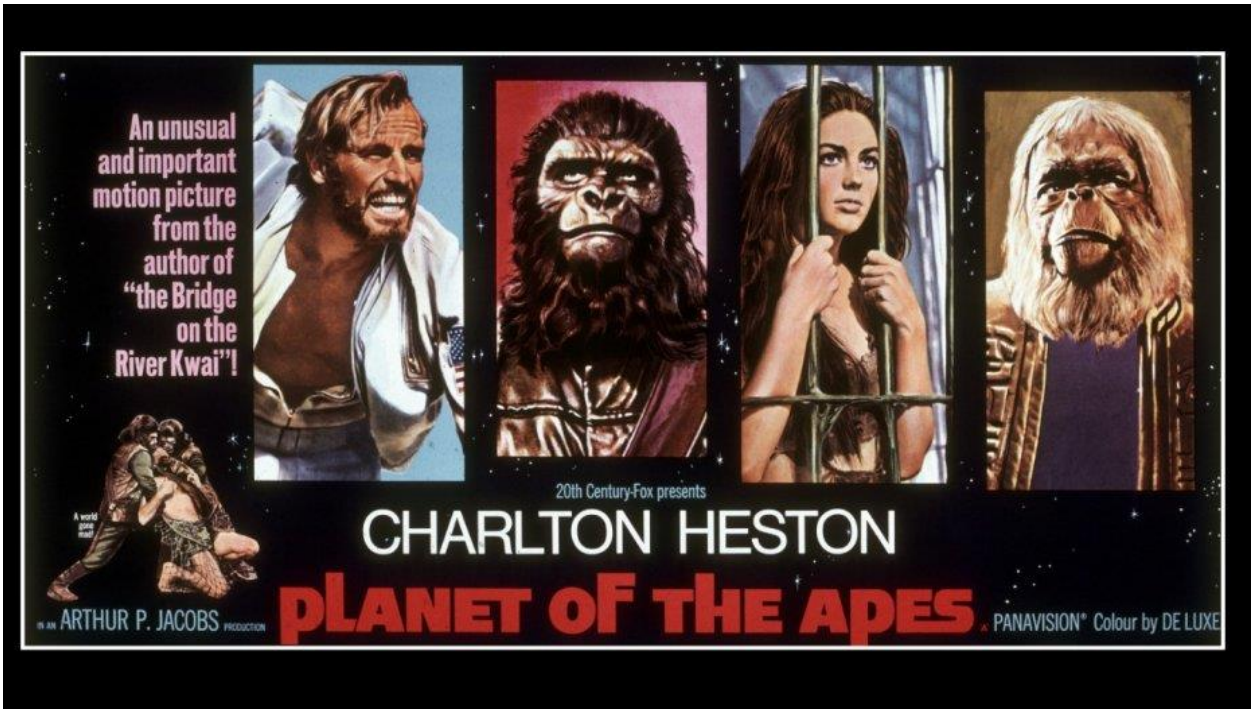

Figure 5. "Are MEN Really That Bad?" *TIME Magazine*'s cover, the fall of man by Lance Morrow detailed within. Published February 14th, 1994.

Figure 6. Men on Trial: Brett Kavanaugh testifying, 2018. This photo has become something of a staple in published articles about Kavanaugh online. Depicted as villainous, angry, evil, his face repulsive, his yellowed teeth prominent, Kavanaugh has come to signify the patriarchy in its most destructive, dangerous, repugnant and powerful form.

Figure 7. Men on Trial: Clinton confessing, 1998.

Figure 8. Rodney King & police brutality circa 1992.

Figure 9. A snapshot from the L.A. Riots, circa 1992. "Why are the police above justice?"

Figure 10. Then-presidential candidate Trump declares Hillary does not have "the stamina," quietly calling her gender into question in relationship to her potential performance as Commander in Chief.

Figure 11. JFK sailing, looking happy and in control.

Figure 12. Obama on the court.

Figure 13. The Marlboro Man & manifest destiny: he owns it all.

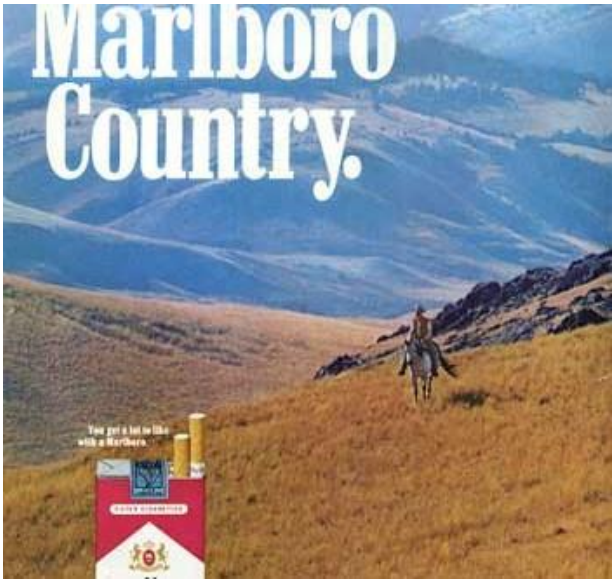

Figure 14. Another Marlboro ad, this time with the Marlboro Man in action.

Figure 15. O.J. in action, dominating his environment. See Figures 13 & 14 for parallel images.