Remembering and Reconceptualizing1950s Suburbia:

Collective Memory and Counter-Memory in *Revolutionary Road* and *Far From Heaven*

Lindsay Codispot





Allegheny College

Senior Comprehensive Project

Department of Communication Arts

December 1, 2011

Remembering and Reconceptualizing1950s Suburbia:

Collective Memory and Counter-Memory in *Revolutionary Road* and *Far From Heaven*

Lindsay Codispot

Submitted to the Department of Communication Arts in partial
fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Bachelor of Arts.

December 1, 2011

I hereby recognize and pledge to fulfill my responsibilities as defined in the Honor Code and to maintain the integrity of both myself and the college community as a whole.

_____

Approved by:

Professor Emily Yochim _____

Professor Courtney Bailey _____

Professor Dan Crozier _____

Table of Contents

Introduction……1

Chapter 1

Literature Review…….....7

Chapter 2

Living in the 21st Century: Suburbia Out, New Urbanism In……...21

Chapter 3

The 1950s Housewife: A Reminder of Women's Progress……..33

Conclusion……48

Bibliography.....53

In the first decade of the twenty-first century, a prominent trend emerged in popular culture—media texts looking back on the past. Author Simon Reynolds described the 2000s as dominated by retro culture, complete with film and television remakes, music revivals and band reunions, and the reselling of aesthetically retro clothing, toys, and other products (xi). From remakes of films from other eras such as *Ocean's Eleven* (2001) and its sequels and *Hairspray* (2007) to aesthetic period films such *The Aviator* (2002) and *The Good German* (2006), the past permeates Hollywood production today (Reynolds xv; Sprengler). Television's *Mad Men,* a 1960s drama centered on businessmen in advertising, which first aired in 2007, has captured attention for its revival of the 1960s and has also initiated conversations, popular and scholarly, about how the show's storylines link up with the present (Click). The significance of *Mad Men's* depiction of the past is evidenced by a book, *Analyzing Mad Men,* complete with twelve essays assessing what the show has to say about politics, women's roles, nostalgia, and stereotypes in American culture (Stoddart). Arguably, the popularity of *Mad Men* has led the way for other television shows set in the past such as *Pan Am* and *The Playboy Club.* The relationship between past and present cannot be ignored if the significance of such media texts to current culture is to be illuminated. It was this type of inquiry that intrigued me when I first saw the film *Revolutionary Road* (2008), which focuses on a young married couple, Frank and April Wheeler, struggling with their lives in suburbia in the 1950s. I am especially interested in how the film's representations of suburban life in the 1950s are a product of looking back on that time period from the twenty-first century.

In addition to this dynamic between the past and present, my project focuses on ideologies of suburban life as represented through film. Suburbia has been a popular setting in film since as early as the 1940s, which is not surprising because as the United States developed,

more and more people moved to the suburbs. Many films were set in suburbia and revolved around suburban life in a manner that scrutinized various aspects of this way of life. From *The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit* (1956) to *Neighbors* (1981) to *American Beauty* (2001), life in suburbia has consistently been an object of critique from many different angles, whether it be the struggles of men balancing work and family life, or the nosiness of and conformity imposed by neighbors, or the malaise caused by everyday suburban life. These are films specifically *about* suburbia—not just suburbia as a setting, but also the way people live there. Undoubtedly, the suburbs also provide the setting for many films that do not focus on it as an object of critique, but scholars have been mainly interested in films in which suburbia is a central feature. Several other films about suburbia look back on the past, as *Revolutionary Road* does, including *The Ice Storm* (1997), *Pleasantville* (1998), and *Far From Heaven* (2002). I chose to analyze *Far From Heaven* alongside *Revolutionary Road* because they are both produced in the first decade of the twenty-first century and are both dramas that look back on the 1950s. These common elements provide a base for analyzing the relationship between a specific past and a specific present. George Lipsitz, whose theory of collective memory guides my analysis about the past, used pairs of films to apply his theory and show how different films about the same subject could influence present ideologies in similar or dissimilar ways. It is valuable to analyze *Far From Heaven* and *Revolutionary Road* together because, while each film is generally similar in addressing a married couple's struggles in 1950s suburbia and the oppression of women, they have otherwise different storylines that forward similar meanings. *Revolutionary Road* focuses on abortion as well as madness, while *Far From Heaven* deals with racial segregation and social pressure. My analysis shows that these very different topics support the same ideologies about suburbia in the present. Both films support the controversial idea that women have gained social equality in the

present while suburbia is represented as a negative environment that needs to change. The two films show the connectedness of ideas about suburbia and ideas about women's roles in cultural memory—the idealization of both suburban life and women as housewives—and challenge the inherency of this connection by reimagining the 1950s. For this analysis I am interested in the cultural meanings *Revolutionary Road* and *Far From Heaven* create about the present through the ways in which they represent the past, specifically concerning the topics of the suburban environment and women's roles.

Far From Heaven and *Revolutionary Road* are both critically acclaimed dramas of the past decade. *Far From Heaven* was written and directed by Todd Haynes, who was nominated for a Golden Globe and an Academy Award for Best Screenplay. The film stars Julianne Moore as Cathy Whitaker, a suburban socialite, housewife, and mother who becomes the subject of scrutiny and gossip after becoming friends with a black man, Raymond Deagan, played by actor Dennis Haysbert. Dennis Quaid plays Frank Whitaker, Cathy's husband, who is a closet homosexual and an executive salesman of television for a large company. *Far From Heaven* received four Golden Globe nominations including Best Performance by an Actor in a Supporting Role in a Motion Picture and four Academy Award nominations including Best Cinematography. Julianne Moore was nominated for both a Golden Globe and Oscar for Best Actress.

Revolutionary Road was directed by Sam Mendes, who also directed successful films such as *American Beauty* (1999) and *Road to Perdition* (2002). *Revolutionary Road* stars Kate Winslet as April Wheeler, an unhappy suburban housewife and mother with strong opinions about how she wants to live, and Leonardo DiCaprio as Frank Wheeler, April's conforming and insensitive husband. *Revolutionary Road* was nominated for three Oscars and its nominations for

four Golden Globes included Best Director, Best Motion Picture, Best Performance by an Actor in a Motion Picture-Leonardo DiCaprio. Kate Winslet won the Golden Globe for Best Performance by an Actress in a Motion Picture Drama.

Because I am primarily interested in the ways the films represent the past, George Lipsitz's theoretical work on collective memory offers one way to make sense of this dynamic. Lipsitz's object of inquiry is how memory functions in popular culture in order to support ideologies. The main principle behind this theory is that ideologies of the past can function to legitimate ideologies of the present. Through cultural texts depicting the past, they draw on and build either a collective memory or counter-memory that influences how people think about the past—if they remember it positively or negatively, for example—which potentially influences how people think about the present. I will use the concepts of collective memory and counter-memory as a way of understanding how *Revolutionary Road* and *Far From Heaven* depict two related topics: the suburban space and women's roles in that space. Analyzing how the films address the suburban 1950s provides insight into the various ways in which this particular moment in the past is relevant to the contemporary moment.

My analysis is situated by previous scholarly work about suburbia, the past, and the suburban past. Suburbia was idealized in American culture mainly through representations of suburban families on television in the 1950s. Scholars have identified a trend of films being a medium through which to critique the suburban lifestyle, even at the same time as television depicted suburbia as perfect. Scholars contend that the suburban ideal is still a part of culture which is reflected through visual nostalgia in films; however, to some extent film has also called out the suburban myth, pointing out that there are desirable and undesirable aspects of the suburban life—it is not all ideal. Turning to scholarly work on the past in media, Lipsitz's case

studies forward his theory of collective memory. Several authors talk about the past in film through the idea of nostalgia, which is often represented through the visual. The topic of nostalgia is a central way of thinking about the suburban past, and I will take a supplementary approach to this topic by framing it through ideas of collective memory and counter-memory.

My methodological approach for this study of *Revolutionary Road* and *Far From Heaven* relied on close analysis of the films over several viewings to consider how the visuals, plot, dialogue, and characterizations contributed to the overall meaning of the message. The analysis concerns only the films themselves, excluding other information such as intent of the directors or production techniques. I am interested in the films as cultural texts that create cultural meanings for everyday people. Using the theory of collective memory as a means to better explicate how the films' meanings are operating within society requires a consideration of the current cultural context. I examine New Urbanism as well as post-feminism supported by the media, which are the foundations for current ideologies about how people should live and the roles of women. Establishing ideologies through an examination of current context allows for an analysis of how the films contribute to these ideological discourses.

In Chapter 1, I discuss my theoretical framework, outline the current academic conversation surrounding representations of the past and of suburbia in media, and review previous work on *Revolutionary Road* and *Far From Heaven*. Chapter 2 analyzes how the films' representations of suburbia create connections between the conformity of suburbia and the conformity of residents' lives. Through the theory of counter-memory, I also explore how the film's negative depictions of the suburban environment support a cultural shift in ways of living, specifically how the films' critiques of suburbia are similar to New Urbanism's critiques of suburbia. I argue that this undermines the vision of suburbia as ideal in the 1950s, hence

supporting a change in lifestyles in the present. Chapter 3 expands the previous chapter's discussion of conformity by focusing on expectations of women conforming to traditional gender roles of the 1950s. Through a consideration of how the films portray a collective memory of women in the past, I argue that the films legitimate current society as post-feminist.

While the past has not served as a primary concern in previous scholarship on *Far From Heaven* and *Revolutionary Road*, my study of these films contributes to these academic conversations by focusing in on the films' temporal aspects. Scholars have not approached either of these films from the theoretical standpoint of collective memory, and by using this theory, my analysis also builds on the study of the past in film, which has mostly focused on the idea of nostalgia. Although *Revolutionary Road* and *Far From Heaven* have been studied separately or with other films, it is significant to analyze these two together for the combined collective memories and counter-memories they create about the 1950s from the perspective of the twenty-first century culture. The ways in which these past ideologies are represented is important because the films contribute to the current ideological discourses, especially in light of emerging emphasis on New Urbanism and post-feminism in American culture.

Chapter 1

Literature Review

A focus on how representations of the 1950s in Revolutionary Road and *Far From Heaven* legitimate the present requires inquiry into the following academic discourses: the theory of legitimation and collective memory, representations of the past and suburbia in popular media, and existing literature on *Revolutionary Road* and *Far From Heaven*. The first section will trace the theory of legitimation from Jurgen Habermas to George Lipsitz, who situates the theory in media and discusses collective memory and counter-memory. The next section will review the academic discourses of suburbia. The third section will discuss the past in film and extend the discussion to representations of the suburban past. The final section will review the existing academic dialogues about *Revolutionary Road* and *Far From Heaven* as a foundation on which my analysis can supplement and expand. Scholarly discourses on suburbia and the past examine how films perpetuate suburbia as ideal through visual nostalgia while also critiquing the suburban lifestyle, types of representations that can be further explained by Lipsitz's concepts of legitimation and collective memory.

I. Theoretical Development of Collective Memory

George Liptsitz's theory of collective memory, developed in *Time Passages: Collective Memory and American Popular Culture*, is my primary orientation for analyzing the significance of how *Revolutionary Road* and *Far From Heaven* are temporally situated. For Lipsitz, collective memory is not just the historical memory of a group of people. Rather, collective memory is a construction of the past fostered through popular mass media that in part draws on historical memory but also functions to create a homogenous memory for the masses (Lipsitz 16-

7). Collective memory can be thought of as partly false memory, because it is not a person's actual past experiences or memories; instead a mass media representation of the past becomes a common "memory" shared between members of the mass audience. The phenomenon created by collective memory is "consumers of electronic mass media experienc[ing] a common heritage with people they have never seen" (Lipsitz 5). Lipsitz contends that there need not be common ancestry or geographical location among consumers of media for them to identify with each other based on the created collective memory (5). Collective memory contributes to creating common identities by drawing on established ideological frameworks such that audiences can relate to a common set of values through popular culture texts.

Collective memory creates more than just audience identification with one another; its more important function is to make audiences identify with the dominant ideology of the contemporary moment. This is accomplished through a process called legitimation that involves drawing on ideas of the past to justify or reinforce the current dominant ideology (Lipsitz 42). Jurgen Habermas developed the concept of legitimation, which is closely related to Antonio Gramsci's concept of hegemony, or domination by consent. Using the past in order to make certain ideas dominant is a hegemonic process, for it appeals to what people already know or believe so that "those in power make their own interests appear to be synonymous with the interests of society at large" (Lipsitz 67). This dialogue with the past is crucial because, as Mikhail Bahktin theorized, an audience member interprets a text based on his or her own "historical consciousness" (Lipsitz 68). If media texts include a particular representation of the past, it encourages the audience to remember the past in a certain way and therefore guides them to see the present social context in a certain ideological way (Lipsitz 68).

Legitimation is a complex process because, as Habermas identifies, capitalist society is in a constant state of legitimation crisis, the existence of contradictions within the system that can potentially undermine it. Therefore, some ideas must be negotiated in order to maintain an ideology's dominance. Stuart Hall explains that there has to be some room for shifting—or negotiating—an ideology to appeal to diverse audiences in order to retain dominance (Lipsitz 69). An example of a legitimation crisis is that the capitalist system requires people to have both a strong work ethic and the desire for leisure consumption to sustain the system (Lipsitz 68). Popular media manages to legitimize both of these values simultaneously by presenting the past value of a strong work ethic—which is credible because it speaks to past and tradition—within the current consumer culture. Media representations appeal to the past value of hard work as necessary to be able to provide for a family's needs, but the new value that comes into play is that providing for one's family is making enough money to provide them consumer leisure goods (Lipsitz 72). The past value does not get completely lost, but rather put in a context to forward a different ideology of leisure consumption; this ideology is legitimated by the very fact of being based on a stable ideology of work ethic rooted in the past. However, Habermas notes that legitimation can backfire, because bringing up the past could highlight a disconnection between past values and the present time (Lipsitz 72). This in part relates to why ideologies need to be legitimated in the first place—because there are always conflicting views in society that exist alongside one another. Stuart Hall describes this circumstance as a terrain of struggle (Lipstiz 16). There is never one ideology that wins full dominance over all others, but ideologies are always competing for more power and legitimacy within society. Constructed collective memory is one device through which cultural texts can legitimate current ideologies.

Legitimation is not limited to collective memory when considering relationships between past and future ideas. Lipsitz recognizes the possibility for audience disconnection with media texts that are being produced with the past in mind and consumed with the past in mind. People live in the present and also have their own past experiences, so what is the effect of perpetuating representations of dominant past ideas? The answer for Lipsitz is that "the gap between lived experience and the false promises of popular culture always created the possibility for counter-memory" (11-12). Lipsitz defines counter-memory as a re-creation of the past that focuses on narratives previously obscured by dominant ones (Lipsitz 213 and 228). Counter-memory is characterized by its identification of "the repressed and suppressed traditions of resistance to oppression" (231). Counter-memory narratives reveal non-dominant historical experiences, which he claims are often those of ethnic minorities and women, and place them into the larger social context of the past (Lipsitz 213). These counter-memory narratives may be the experiences of the minority, but they seek recognition as a legitimate part of collective memory. The very creation of a counter-memory narrative for mass-media audiences both points out its previous absence of the narrative in society's collective memory and shows its significance to the past and present (Lipsitz 231).

II. Discourses on Representations of Suburbia

The intersection between suburbia and the past in *Far From Heaven* and *Revolutionary Road* requires looking into separate academic discourses about representations of suburbia and representations of the past in popular media to build a foundation analyzing the specific context of the films. First I will look at scholars' approach to and arguments about suburbia in film over

the decades, then I will review the discourse on representations of the past beginning with Lipsitz's application of collective and moving on to contemporary representations of the past.

David Wilt traces the topic of suburbia in film from the 1950s to 1990s, finding a general trend of films questioning suburbia as the epitome of the American dream. In the 1950s, films were highly critical of the conformity of suburbia, from the uniformity of the homes themselves to the division of communities by similar socio-economic class, which was shown through dramatic films about people's everyday lives (Wilt 484). Surburbia was shown as a place where many negative occurrences were emerging such as rape, murder, racism, alcoholism, divorce, materialism, and teenage violence and vandalism. The 1960s and 1970s were perhaps lighter in their criticism, often creating a satire out of suburbia through the comedic genre. Themes of romantic entanglements and socially unsanctioned sexual escapades were prevalent (484). Wilt describes representations of suburbia in the 1980s and 1990s as "suburban hell," as horror and alien plots played out in suburban neighborhoods. Suburbia also began to be portrayed as a false reality where people lead empty lives (485-6). Nonetheless, while films from the 1950s to 1990s have negatively depicted suburbia, the very fact that many films feature suburbia as their main setting shows that living in the suburbs is the norm for middle-class Americans.

These film critiques were a response to what some people felt was a false presentation of suburbia as ideal. It is worthwhile now to take a step back and examine where the ideology of suburbia as ideal originated. Beginning in the 19th century with many immigrants and southern blacks moving to cities and radical social movements emerging, Americans began to become concerned with the so-called vice of the city and its perceived negative effect on raising a family, thus yielding a shift to suburbs as a space isolated from the negative city and also promoting family togetherness (Spigel 17; Miller 393). Lynn Spigel cites such circumstances as creating the

"ideological merger between suburbia and domestic bliss" (17). After World War II, residential construction was focused on suburbs and the affordability led many people to move there to raise families. The government encouraged the move to the suburbs by providing housing loans and building infrastructure such as highways and utility services (Spigel 33). Television shows in the fifties often presented communities of families and neighbors living happy, social lives (Spigel 100). Dolores Haydn calls the suburban developments of the 1950s and 60s "sitcom suburbs" for their image and supposed lifestyle was replicated in sitcoms of the time such as *Ozzie and Harriet, Father Knows Best, The Dick Van Dyke Show,* and *Leave It to Beaver* (128). These shows depicted that "the proper residential environment was one in which every family resided in a one-family home with plenty of yard within a locally controlled, homogeneous community, [a vision] still embraced by many Americans today as the American Dream itself" (qtd. in Fitzgerald 10). These ideal images of suburbia reinforced the lifestyle as more "wholesome" than the city; as Douglas Rushkoff argues, "the ability of these TV families to solve their problems in a half-hour was really an advertisement for the suburbs" (qtd. in Fitzgerald 36). Amy Kenyon talks about conceptions of suburban space being produced in the 1950s through cultural texts "mystifying" and "dreaming" about suburbia (2). She argues that such ideal *visions* of suburbia normalized the *actual* space of suburbia as ideal in people's minds, which is what allowed suburbanization of the country to succeed. The 1950s television depictions of the suburbs are arguably the basis of the nostalgic collective memory of the ideal suburban space and lifestyle.

Current scholarly work on films about suburbia discusses interesting contradictions within depictions of the suburban space and the suburban lifestyle. Kathryn Knapp indicates this relationship with her definition of the "suburban myth" a term encapsulating the conflicting representations of suburbia as ideal but simultaneously plagued with negative aspects (810).

Knapp argues that postwar film and literature had already begun to "reimagine" the idealized values of suburbia in terms of evaluating suburbia's downfalls (820). A common thread throughout the scholarly conversation is that visual images of suburbs in films seem to remain ideal, appealing to American nostalgia for that space, while the events that unfold there are far from ideal, which is where the critique comes into play. Indeed, Kenyon argues that "suburbia provided the spatial imaginary for the culture critics' assault on American conformity… drawing on an image bank of tract houses and subdivisions" (69). These images that were idealized on television as associated with family life, now were settings for critiquing suburban lifestyle, especially through film. Even in the 1950s, the supposedly ideal suburban space was a setting for the horror of conformity in *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (1956) and family detachment in *The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit* (1956) (Kenyon 84). Film became the medium through which the suburban space was perpetuated but also critiqued.

Robert Beuka's work is primarily interested in the visual suburban landscape in film and how it functions to create values related to suburbia. Through analysis of films about suburbia, Beuka concludes that suburbia is not just a setting in which plots unfold, but a setting that is central to relaying meaning in the film (15). Films about suburbia play a role in constructing the idea of suburbia both psychologically and culturally by playing out tensions that are specific to suburban spaces (Beuka 15). Beuka identifies that the suburbs are a dominant setting for Americans and that this setting in film has much to say about both American values and anxieties and their changes throughout the decades. Beuka provides a case study of the suburban past in film, *The Truman Show* (1998). The film takes place in the present and follows Truman's false life on the set of a television show, which is a recreated ideal of a postwar suburban community. The image of suburbia is ideal but the overall message about suburbia is not. Beuka claims that

the movie shows American culture's ideal suburban lifestyle as constructed—not real—and that this very construction entices people, but then traps and debilitates them as they struggle to attain an ideal life that never existed in the first place (227). *The Truman Show* is no exception to Beuka's argument that most films depicting suburban life have represented it negatively—as an "American dystopia"—indicating a perpetual state of instability between lived experiences in the suburbs and suburbia's imbedded idea of the American Dream (228).

III. Discourse on Representations of the Past and the Suburban Past

Beuka's discussion of *The Truman Show* begins to illuminate connections between suburbia and the past, as Beuka explains the film's success in creating nostalgia for the suburban environment of the past through visuals only to undermine the validity of this nostalgia (229). This use of nostalgic images of the past ultimately creates a counter-memory of life during that time. As my research question deals with the relationship between past and present, I now turn to the scholarly discussion of this dynamic, beginning by revisiting Lipsitz's theory of collective memory through his case study of 1950s television, and then moving on to the conversation about contemporary representations of the past in film.

George Lipsitz's collective memory is better understood through his application of this theory to representations of the past. One of his case studies is the television show *Mama*, a popular program running from 1949 to 1956. The show draws on Mama's past as a Norwegian immigrant. The character's background sets the stage for conflicts, such as immigrant values of family versus American values of making money (85-6). Lipsitz says the show creates a dialogue between the past and present that reflects these ideological tensions going on when the show was produced and aired (80 and 96). The plots of the show *Mama* functioned to teach lessons and

suggest resolutions for people's real lives by appealing to memories of the past within the show, suggesting that it worked out for the characters and it can work out for viewers as well. Lipsitz also discusses how *Mama* was originally a set of stories in the 1940s and then was re-made as a book, broadway play, radio special, and film, then finally the television show in 1949. His conclusion is that this specific story was retold and revised along the way and reflected a discussion on the changing roles of family as a social unit over the course of this time period (Lipsitz 81).

Lipsitz's central argument about film's use of the past is that it transforms our memory of the past which then influences our present and future orientation to the world (164). Lipsitz uses pairs of films as case studies to show how films of the same time period can rely on different aspects of the same historically situated memory to suggest different or similar possible meanings in the present. In this way, films may not only emphasize certain parts of historical memory, but misrepresent, and therefore revise, history for the purposes of relating it to the present. He also illustrates how films represent a dialogue of an issue over time, reflecting how social circumstances change over time (Lipsitz 169). A film is ultimately a cultural artifact, and reflects the time period in which it was made.

Christine Sprengler adds another dimension to the study of representations of the past by exploring the importance of visual aesthetics in her book *Screening Nostalgia: Populuxe props and Technicolor aesthetics in contemporary American film.* Sprengler orients the concept of nostalgia toward the visual for her analysis; nostalgia is triggered by intentionally produced visual elements in visual media (Sprengler 33). Another element defining nostalgia is its close connection to the Fifties, "nostalgia" sometimes being synonymous with "Fifties nostalgia" (34 and 40). It is important to note that Sprengler differentiates the time period of the 1950s from

the Fifties, the latter being a nostalgic creation of people's imaginations, a construct. Sprengler says that Fifties nostalgia was manifest throughout the 1970s in film, television sitcoms, fashion, advertising, and consumer products. Through a case study of the 2002 film *Far From Heaven*, Sprengler exhibits the continued existence of Fifties nostalgia. Sprengler analyzes how the costumes and sets take viewers back to the 1950s without ever having to mention it explicitly, which allows viewers to place the themes of the film within the context of the past era and also lets the themes resonate with current social context (135). Sprengler argues that nostalgia need not be all about reminiscing about the positive aspects of the past; instead, this visual kind of "nostalgic cultural expression not only evokes the [nostalgic] sentiment, but allows audiences to explore, probe, and critique it as well" (34). Two other case studies of *Sin City* (2005) and *The Aviator* (2004) illustrate the use of props and reproduction of an old film aesthetic to transport the audience to a different time period. These analyses reinforce Sprengler's definition of nostalgia films visually invoking the past to comment on the present, but not necessarily creating a longing for the past.

Aspects of suburbia and "past" discourses come together in Greg Dickinson's critical analysis, "The Pleasantville effect: nostalgia and the visual framing of (white) suburbia." Dickinson conceives the Pleasantville effect—a concept he derives from the 1998 film *Pleasantville*—as the visual establishment of suburbia as white, heterosexual, and patriarchal, creating nostalgia for a past suburban "good life." Dickinson includes other films in the development of his Pleasantville effect concept—*American Beauty* (2000), *Edward Scissorhands* (1990), *Far From Heaven* (2002), and *The Truman Show* (1998). These all include elements of memory to imagine suburbia. His visual analysis illuminates how the films create nostalgia for the past. The relevance for the audience is the question, "What constitutes the good life in

contemporary suburban living?" This question is not meant to suggest that the films under study actually represent the good life, but rather the ways in which the nostalgic vision of the suburban environment contrasts the unhappy lives of people who live there. Dickinson argues that the convergence of themes and visual images creates meaning both for an imagined suburbia and in the reality of everyday life.

The discourse about suburbia comes to the general consensus that suburbia is perpetually a construct in popular culture, a struggle between an ideal suburbia and a critique of that vision. Discourse about representations of the suburban past is discussed in terms of memory and nostalgia and is concerned with intersections between the past and the present. My analysis of *Far From Heaven* and *Revolutionary Road* will be situated within the idea of the suburban myth—that suburbia is at once visually ideal but not the ideal lifestyle. Through using George Lipsitz's collective memory, I examine how the films use the past to forward ideologies of the present by relating the film's narratives to current societal context.

IV. Critical Analyses of *Revolutionary Road* and *Far From Heaven*

Scholars have studied *Far From Heaven* with a variety of different approaches from Sprengler's visual analysis mentioned earlier to Rebecca Scherr's analysis using queer theory. Scherr's article "(Not) queering 'white vision' in Far From Heaven and Transamerica" focuses on the dual narrative of racial and sexual orientation taboos in the 1950s white suburban community where *Far From Heaven* is set. Cathy Whitaker's attraction to a black man and her husband Frank's homosexual desires mirror one another as equally deviant behaviors from the white perspective dominant in the film (Scherr). Scherr also considers the temporal positioning of the 2002 film looking back on the 1950s as challenging what it means to be "queer"—the

negative connotation of queer in the 1950s is contested by increased acceptance of queer as a legitimate identity today. In terms of the characters' identities, *Far From Heaven* shows that it is more oppressive for Cathy and Frank to try to live up to expectations of white suburban life than to embrace their taboo longings and deal with the social consequences (Scherr). In a different approach to identity, Salome Skvirsky evaluates *Far From Heaven* in terms of nostalgia film and examines the function of the film as a remake that is set in the same time period as the film it imitates, Douglas Sirk's *All that Heaven Allows*. Skvirsky argues that *Far From Heaven* is not purely a nostalgia film because that requires appealing to the past and ignoring the present; instead, the film seeks to comment on the present. *Far From Heaven* is set in the same time period but it updates the social consciousness of the storyline by including issues of racial relationships and sexual orientations, whereas the *All that Heaven Allows* included issues of only class and gender (Skvirsky). Drawing on the realism represented through melodramatic conventions, Skvirsky concludes that *Far From Heaven* highlights changes in society but does not fully relate the relevancy of oppression of racial and homosexual identities in the present. Sharon Willis similarly looks at *Far From Heaven* in comparison to its predecessor, *All that Heaven Allows*, using feminist film theory of the 1980s and 1990s to illustrate how *Far From Heaven* updates the 1950s storyline (134). The analysis focuses on Cathy's role of ideal 1950s housewife being disrupted by the reality of her homosexual husband and her own desire for a black man. Willis refers to the film as both archaeological and fantasy-driven, arguing that the film recreates the 1950s but overemphasizes the social issues of interracial relationship and sexual identity that would not have been openly discussed in that time period (135).

While *Far From Heaven* is the main subject of a number of critical analyses and is mentioned in many larger works, *Revolutionary Road*, as a more recent film of 2008, has less

scholarly work published about it at the present time. The only critical analysis I found in my research was Chris Richardson's article, "The empty self in Revolutionary Road or: How I learned to stop worrying and love the blonde." Richardson uses the concept of performativity to analyze how the characters construct their identity through performance. Three main areas of Richardson's analysis are the physical space of the suburban home, the ideas associated with the workplace in the 1950s, and the roles of the domestic sphere (9). These historically situated spaces and ideas create the foundation for a stable self that is based on social norms, which Frank's character embraces in the film. However, April's attempt to reject conformity and her gendered role in life represents an "empty self" or an individuality that is not guided by social traditions and values—a true individualism (Richardson 8). Richardson concludes that the film functions to show a struggle between a stable vision of the self and an emptiness of the self that reflects the contemporary moment (15).

In these existing analyses of *Far From Heaven* and *Revolutionary Road* there seems to be some brief discussion of the temporality of the films, but it is not the main subject of inquiry. My analysis will build on the existing discussions of temporality in *Far From Heaven* and *Revolutionary Road* by using Lipsitz's collective memory as a theoretical foundation. I will analyze two main aspects of both films: their representations of the 1950s suburban space and their representations of women's roles in that time and space. My analysis of these topics allowed me to explore how they related to current cultural contexts, specifically New Urbanism and post-feminism representations in popular media. The existence of these contexts in the current moment suggest that certain ideologies have a more dominant place in society; New Urbanism suggests a new way of living, specifically a move away from the American Dream of suburban living, and current media representations of women suggest that women are equal and

there is no longer a need for feminism, whether or not this is true in reality. The concepts of counter-memory and collective memory aid in explaining how the films implicitly legitimize these current dominant ideologies through representations of the past.

Chapter 2

Living in the 21st Century: Suburbia Out, New Urbanism In

New Urban communities are bustling centers of residential and commercial activity where community members can safely ride bicycles to their workplaces or stroll down the street to the grocery store, greeting neighbors sitting on their front porches along the way. This increasingly popular lifestyle today is in many ways opposite from life in the suburbs, and indeed the ideals of New Urbanism are not fully realized within suburban communities because of their very structure. One way in which *Revolutionary Road* and *Far From Heaven* are relevant to the current societal context is through their critiques of suburban life that are similar to New Urbanism's critiques. The films revolve around suburban settings, depict how people live in this type of environment, and express value judgments on the suburban lifestyle of the 1950s, thereby creating a counter-memory narrative about suburbia. Although the two films do not refer to New Urbanism directly, they need not do so to influence the current discourse on where and how people should live, according to Lipsitz's theory. Based on the theory of counter-memory, I argue that the representations of the suburban space in *Revolutionary Road* and *Far From Heaven* function to change perceptions of the suburban past in order to foster legitimacy for New Urbanism in the present.

The community planning philosophy of New Urbanism has established a strong presence in the realm of real-estate development in the twenty-first century, and its representative organization, The Congress for the New Urbanism (CNU), was founded in 1993 (Grant; "Congress"). CNU is a group of architects, developers, and academics, who believe that "community, economics, environment, health and design need to be addressed simultaneously through urban design and planning," the ultimate goal being the "reconfiguration of sprawling

suburbs" ("Congress"). New Urbanism encompasses a method of designing and building communities in ways that encourage residents to live by a certain set of values: strong relationships within the community, a healthy lifestyle, and low impact on the environment ("Congress"). New Urbanism places itself in direct opposition to suburban living, which is detrimental to these values because of the suburbs are structured for conformity; the suburban community's lack of walkability exacerbates obesity and health problems; and the car-centered lifestyle, as well as the general sprawl of suburbia over the land, harms the environment (Christens). The constructed spaces that New Urbanists claim can promote positive values for community, health, and environment include houses that are close together and have front porches as spaces for social interaction, main streets, and communal areas such as parks, recreating the feeling of "Small Town USA" characterized by being self-contained (Boxer 7; Brenner 3). The interspersal of residential and commercial buildings is considered "new" urban because the density replicates that of a city but on a smaller scale, which is opposed to the low density populations of the suburbs. The urban-like plan of the community allows easy accessibility to workplaces and stores, as in a big city but with a small town feeling (Dietsch H01). Sidewalks and bike paths facilitate this accessibility and also encourage residents to do more physical activity in going about their daily routine, therefore mitigating health problems. Additionally, the ability to walk to work or the grocery store requires less driving which reduces carbon emissions that contribute to global climate change (Boxer 7). A distinguishing characteristic of New Urban communities is the variety of housing options available, from apartments to town homes to single family homes, as well as the option to rent or buy. This variety of housing options aims to achieve the desired positive effect of a diverse array of people living together in one community—people of different socio-economic classes, ages, and racial

backgrounds (Dietsch H01). These basic tenets of New Urbanism rely on deliberate choices of space planning translating into a community living by a certain set of values.

New Urbanism has not been wholly embraced. The debate over its actual value to society as compared to suburban life is a terrain of struggle in the current time. As much as New Urbanism critiques suburbia, many people have critiqued New Urbanism as well—for relying on people's nostalgia for traditional architecture, for their semi-deterministic stance on environment creating community, for the cost of homes in these neighborhoods being exclusive, and for ultimately not being any better than suburbs (Boxer 7; Kaline 2; Dietsch H01;. Trudeau and Malloy).While these critiques and others are a significant portion of the cultural debate, analysis of the films *Far From Heaven* and *Revolutionary Road* shows that these texts' negative depictions of suburbia critique this space and lifestyle in many of the same ways that New Urbanism does, lending some legitimacy to New Urban values. Despite that the films were produced in the recent decade and in the midst of New Urbanist ideas, they do not depict New Urban communities or promote them directly. Instead, the films are centered on suburban communities of the 1950s. The question then is, how are these depictions of the 1950s that seem so far removed from the present relevant at all to present ideas of New Urbanism?

Lipsitz's theory of counter-memory helps to explain this relationship that seems disconnected at first glance. The concept of counter-memory—a narrative that revises the past to legitimate the present—is useful here because central to the legitimization of New Urbanism is the delegitimization of dominant ideologies of how is best to live, namely the suburban life. As discussed in Chapter 1, suburbia has been idealized by popular culture, and this cultural idea remains today. Whether or not suburbia is ideal in reality, it has gained a prominent social status such that "the American dream is still a detached house in a subdivision in the country, or what

used to be country, with generous yards and a three-car garage," according to a 2002 *Washington Post* article (Lewis H07). In 2005, the *New York Times* reported that people desire the space of suburbia because it gives them more privacy and "most home buyers still aren't willing to part with their auto-oriented lifestyle" in suburbia, which gives them control and convenience (Johnson). In fact, as of the 2000 Census over half of all Americans lived in suburbs, while cities and rural areas housed 25 percent each (O'Toole 20). The New Urbanist movement cannot succeed if suburban life still has this widespread appeal among Americans, because New Urbanism seeks to change the structure of suburbs toward New Urban structures and values. The representations of suburbia in *Far From Heaven* and *Revolutionary Road* function to challenge the vision of ideal suburban life at its roots—the 1950s. Americans seem to have a desire to go back to the suburban community of the 1950s, which is nostalgically remembered as ideal and community-oriented (Kaline 2). By negatively portraying a time and setting that is arguably *the* foundation for how Americans strive to live, the two films transform perceptions of life during that time as well as every decade after. Essentially, the films representing suburbia of the fifties negatively destroy the ultimate reference point for the suburbia-as-ideal paradigm, making it more difficult to envision suburbia of the present or future as ideal—it is as if the films say, suburban life was never ideal and never will be ideal. In accordance with counter-memory, the films aim to present their revision of 1950s suburban life as truly undesirable in the past and present, which lines up with the values of New Urbanism in the current terrain of struggle between New Urban living and suburban living. At a broader level of values, the struggle seems to be between the American Dream and sustainability. While the American Dream is an *individual* endeavor of attaining "the good life," living sustainably means thinking beyond your own benefits—not only about the health of the environment but also about substantial community relationships—to ensure that the

quality of life you enjoy will continue to exist for future generations. This is not to say that these two ideals are opposite ends of the spectrum. New Urbanism seems to be trying to combine these values by making New Urban communities, with their broadly sustainable features, the new ideal for living and part of a new American Dream. The relevance of representations of the past is that it is necessary to break down the suburbia-as-ideal mindset that is rooted in the past, to make space for a shift in ideas about how we should live.

Significantly, *Revolutionary Road* and *Far From Heaven* both begin with typical—what most people would think of as positive—characteristics of suburban communities in America, drawing on society's nostalgia for suburban aesthetics of the fifties, which remain much the same today. In Revolutionary Road, the make-up of the suburban neighborhood is best described by the Wheelers' real-estate agent, Mrs. Givings, in a scene where April flashes back to buying their home. Mrs. Givings describes the neighborhood as they drive through it:

> There is one place up here I want to show you… Now of course it isn't very desirable at this end. As you see, Crawford Road is mostly these little cinder-blocky, pick-up trucky places…plumbers, carpenters, little local people of that sort. But eventually... Eventually it leads up to Revolutionary Road, which is much nicer. Now, the place I want to show you is a sweet little house and a sweet little setting. Simple, clean lines, good lawns, marvelous for children. It's right around this next curve... Now you'll see it. There. See the little white one? Sweet isn't it? The perky way it sits there on its little slope? Charming, isn't it?

The visuals in the film enhance this description. Crawford Road is lined with similar-looking houses and Revolutionary Road has "nicer" but similar houses—each subdivision is defined by a certain design and style, the houses all structurally identical, distinguished only by varying color

palettes. The similarity of the houses seems to attract people of similar socio-economic class, as Mrs. Givings points out that working class people such as plumbers and carpenters live on Crawford Road. Other visuals throughout show spacious green lawns and houses not too close together on a quiet street, which Mrs. Givings appeals to as "marvelous for children," promoting family values. April reacts to seeing this "charming" house with a happy and hopeful smile, as if the aesthetics alone have fulfilled a dream. Frank's commute to the city for work by car and then by train indicates the community as a suburb that is far away and isolated from the city.

Unlike in *Revolutionary Road,* the characters in *Far From Heaven* do not explicitly talk about the suburban space, but the aesthetic and spacial characteristics of suburbia are obvious. The film opens with Cathy Whitaker driving in a commercial area, which has shops and the train station, back to her home in a suburban community. Similar to Frank Wheeler, Frank Whitaker must drive to the train station, and commute via train to work. The Whitakers' home and neighborhood is visually similar to the Wheelers'. In the suburban community the street has no other traffic, safe enough for Cathy's son to ride his bike in the street; the houses are far apart and in some areas separated by small patches of trees; the yard around the house is spacious and landscaped, requiring a seemingly full-time gardener, Raymond, to maintain it. The film also represents the suburban ideal of close relationship with neighbors: Cathy and her friend Eleanor casually drop by each other's houses to discuss their plans for a party, and Cathy has her neighborhood friends over for lunch. Both films initially present suburbia as positive by presenting visuals that draw on society's nostalgia for this type of environment.

However, the unfortunate events that unfold in—and because of—the suburban settings serve the purpose of creating a counter-memory that suburbia is inherently conformist, which is then the downfall of the characters. One of the major critiques New Urbanism makes of suburbia

is that its design encourages conformity, and relationships are superficial because of their basis on conformity (Boxer B7). The films support this argument by providing evidence that social conformity emerges because of the physical space of suburbia itself. This representation plays into the New Urbanist critique that suburban environments do not foster positive community relationships as well as supports the idea that an environment can influence lifestyle (Boxer B7). While New Urbanism does not take the determinist stance that certain built environments *always* create certain social interactions, New Urbanists do argue that New Urban design is better at fostering positive community relationships than suburban design (Trudeau and Malloy 433). The films' connection of suburbia to negative social relations creates the possibility that a different built environment—New Urban design, perhaps—could create better social relations.

Both films use the common theme of the forest as an escape to indicate the connection between suburban space and ideologies of suburbia. The constructs and pressures that exist within the suburban home are no longer a factor when the characters leave that physical space. In Revolutionary Road, John Givings, is labeled as insane within the suburban home but is quite rational outside of it. John's mother brings him to visit the Wheelers as a break from his recent institutionalization at a mental hospital, which happened after his mother took him to court for getting mad and throwing her coffee table—a symbol of the suburban space—against the wall. John's rebellion is symbolically against suburban conformity, which his mother epitomizes in her controlled manner, shrill voice, and carefully chosen words which presents her as neurotically conformist. Furthermore, John undermines the expectations for social interaction within the suburban home. John sarcastically refers to himself as a "certified lunatic" and laughs in an "insane" manner, shocking even April and Frank. John's mother gives him disapproving looks when he harshly challenges Frank's claim that his job is "stupid" and "not interesting at

all" with a blunt question, "What do you do it for then?" After John, Frank, and April's interaction while walking in the woods outside the home, it is clear that John's behavior in the home is seen as insane only because of suburban constructs of normalcy. Once removed from these constructs, John does not seem insane. His conversation is calm and rational. He talks about his electrical shock treatments affecting his ability to study math, in which he has a Ph.D. When Frank identifies "the hopeless emptiness" of suburban life as the reason why he and April want to move to Paris, John responds with insight: "Plenty of people are onto the emptiness but it takes real guts to see the hopelessness." The consequence of John actively rejecting suburban norms is being *labeled* insane and marginalized, but outside the suburban space those norms do not apply and his rejection of suburbia is enlightening instead of forbidden.

For Cathy in *Far From Heaven*, the forest is also an escape from limits placed on her by suburban society. While John defies norms in suburbia and escapes from being treated as insane, Cathy abides by suburban norms within suburbia and breaks them when outside suburbia in the forest. One day, Eleanor is concerned about Cathy, but Cathy feels she cannot confide in her friend because of the topic of her troubles—her husband struggling with his homosexuality and rejecting her. Raymond, gardening in the front lawn, sees that Cathy is upset but she is hesitant to say anything, expresses embarrassment at having these troubles, and apologizes for being emotional. Raymond invites her to run an errand with him and get some fresh air, which she politely declines at first, but changes her mind at the last second. They take a walk in the woods and Cathy openly answers Raymond's inquiry about a bump on her head. She admits Frank accidentally hit her while they were arguing, which is the truth. Outside of suburban norms, Cathy can admit that her marriage is not perfect, because there is no fear of scrutiny. As Raymond say, "Sometimes it's people outside our world we confide in best." This also speaks to

the fact that Cathy confiding in a black man would be looked down upon in segregated suburbia, but in the woods this rule does not exist. Limitations on how people can interact are not relevant outside suburbia, showing a direct link between the suburban space and societal expectations that control people's lives.

The films accomplish the creation of a counter-memory centered on conformity in different ways: *Revolutionary Road* more directly through dialogue about suburbia and *Far From Heaven* in the less direct manner of portraying the internal conflicts of the characters. In *Revolutionary Road*, April is very conscious that her unhappiness stems from living in the suburbs where she feels pressure to conform. She proposes moving to Paris, a place Frank experienced during the war and said of it, "People are alive there, not like here." Frank responds that moving is unrealistic to which April adamantly replies, "No, Frank, this is what's unrealistic. It's unrealistic for a man with a fine mind to go on working year after year at a job he can't stand, coming home to a place he can't stand, to a wife who is equally unable to stand the same things." April identifies "place," the suburban community, as the source of their unhappiness. To financially support a family in the suburbs, Frank must work a job, any job, even one that is unfulfilling. April resents that Frank settles for this circumstance and that there is no option in conformist suburbia for their unique dreams to be played out. She says, "Our whole existence here is based on this great premise that we're special and superior to the whole thing, but we're *not*. We're just like everyone else." The implication here is that April and Frank thought they could operate outside suburban conformity but the very action of living there has dragged them into living the expected lifestyle. April's awareness of her own plight in suburbia creates empathy with her character and helps her situation seem like reality, which a counter-memory narrative seeks to do—establish a different reality of the past.

Far From Heaven's revision of the dominant suburban ideology relies on portrayals of characters' internal struggles to choose either to conform and be unhappy, or to live by their true beliefs or identities and be criticized by the community. The conformist standards of the community create a lose-lose situation—the only way to "win" is to leave the community. Frank Whitaker is torn between embracing his homosexuality and supporting his wife and kids, based on the fact that the community does not accept "homosexuals." As Eleanor says, "I like the men I'm around to be *all* man." Frank at first chooses to get treatment for his "sickness" because being homosexual has the potential to "destroy my life, my family's life"—essentially his work reputation and ability to provide financially for his family. However, Frank eventually falls in love with a man, divorces Cathy, and leaves behind the suburban community, and its prescribed role for men, to live in an apartment with his partner. Cathy's struggle is choosing between the community's belief in segregation or her own belief in equal rights for black people. Cathy's kindness to her black gardener, Raymond, is the basis for the community scrutinizing her. The society newspaper publishes that Cathy is "a woman as devoted to her family as she is kind to Negroes," after she is seen touching Raymond's shoulder in expressing condolences for his father's death. Soon after, when Cathy is openly friendly to Raymond at an art show, people stare and whisper. Later, when Cathy is seen in public with Raymond, vicious gossip spreads throughout the community creating a scandal that could hurt her image and her husband's career. When Frank starts an argument about this Cathy expresses her exasperation, saying, "Apparently here in Hartford even the thought of a white woman *speaking* to a colored man is—" but Frank's anger makes her yield to conformity, saying that she has fired Raymond. She sorrowfully and regretfully tells Raymond, "It isn't plausible for me to be friends with you." Raymond's reputation as a gardener is also compromised, which makes him to decide to move to

Baltimore. He is sad to leave his hometown but sees that the segregationist attitude of the community will not change. Cathy predicament exists because of the conformist standards imposed by the suburban community. The close relationships Cathy has with her neighbors seem positive, but when she acts on her different beliefs, they gossip about and shun her, attempting to regulate her behavior. Cathy's inability to make a definitive choice leaves her stuck in the limbo of suburbia.

While *Far From Heaven* and *Revolutionary Road* are focused on the negative aspects of suburban life, the films also support the values of New Urbanism by subtly suggesting that the better alternative to suburban life is living in a city. As just mentioned, Raymond's remedy for the community's negativity toward him is to leave the community, and not just to another suburb, but to the city of Baltimore. Frank Whitaker, too, seems to have moved to the city with his partner; he is shown in a small room characteristic of a city apartment, as opposed to his spacious house in the suburbs. Moving was the only way he could have a relationship with his partner without being harassed for it. *Revolutionary Road's* opening scenes are images of the city, which is the setting of a flashback in which Frank and April first meet each other, a happier time before they moved to the suburbs. Additionally, April believes going to the city of Paris will let her and Frank live more freely; she suggests that she can work a secretarial job in a government organization and Frank can figure out his passions. This also subverts the expected gender roles of the suburbs; the city is perceived as having more freedom and opportunities. After April's death, which will be discussed in-depth in the next chapter, Frank moves to the city, because he witnessed the detrimental effects suburban life had on April's mindset. This underlying idea that the city is preferable to the suburbs only supplements the more powerful

function of the movies to create a negative counter-memory of 1950s suburbia, which legitimizes alternative ideas of how to live in the twenty-first century, specifically New Urbanism.

The films' unfavorable representations of suburban conformity create a counter-memory of suburban life in the 1950s as undesirable. This is successfully done through dialogue about suburbia, characters' struggles with identity within the suburban space, contrast between characters' actions inside and outside the suburban home, and juxtaposition of aesthetically pleasing suburban space with the unhappy lives of people living there. The films establish an inseparable connection between the physical place the characters live and the quality of life there. The themes in *Revolutionary Road* and *Far From Heaven* contribute to discourse on how people should live and indirectly legitimize New Urbanism through representation of the stance that suburban life is detrimental to people's lives.

Chapter 3

The 1950s Housewife: A Reminder of Women's Progress

As established in Chapter 2, *Revolutionary Road* and *Far From Heaven's* message about suburbia relies on linking conformity to the suburban space; however, it is not just conformity to the whims of the suburban residents. Both films depict specific expectations of adhering to traditional gender roles for both men and women, with suburbia as a place of patriarchal social relations. While both the men and women characters are subjected to the pressures of conformist gender roles, the focus is on the women as main characters who are marginalized by these pressures. Therefore, this chapter will more closely examine the portrayal of women's roles as a subset of suburban conformity and also how the films' images of oppressed 1950s housewives relate to views of women in the 2000s, the decade the films were produced and viewed. Lipsitz's theoretical work is once again useful for explaining this relationship, which is a collective memory, unlike the counter-memory about suburban space. In addition, Susan Douglas's *Enlightened Sexism* provides contextual information for society's stance on women's roles today by examining the mass media's post-feminist portrayals. *Revolutionary Road* and *Far From Heaven* contribute to a collective memory about women's roles and lives in the past which, in juxtaposition to the current states of women's lives, supports the current ideology of post-feminism.

In the twenty-first century, conceptions of women's roles revolve around choice, individualism, and equality. This is a far cry from women of the past being confined to domestic tasks or limited in their job selection and being subservient to men. Even in the midst of these unequal social conditions, media often represented the postwar housewife as conforming to her household and familial duties and being perfectly happy with it (Coontz 22). However, as

Stephanie Coontz argues, the "happy housewife," a prevalent image in popular media of the 1950s and 60s, has been recognized as closer to a cultural myth than to the real lives of most women (163). This change in perception was largely catalyzed by Betty Friedan's book the *Feminine Mystique*, which illuminated the plight and needs of women—particularly housewives—through intellectual and emotional writing (Coontz 21). From Friedan's 1963 book to second wave feminism and beyond, there have been dramatic changes in perceptions such that "few people today believe that being feminine means being submissive" (Coontz 175).

Indeed, Susan Douglas's book *Enlightened Sexism* is based on the existence of the dominant idea that the United States is a post-feminist society, meaning that men and women are equal and there is no longer a need for feminism (2 and 10). Douglas does not agree that this is true—for example, women still don't have the high-ranking jobs of men or get paid equally—but she argues that media representations of women have created a strong *perception* among Americans that women have gained equality with men in this country (3 and 10). Television shows that depict women working high-ranking jobs (*Law and Order, Gray's Anatomy, The X-Files*) or getting to be heroines (*Buffy the Vampire Slayer, Xena*) create a sense that women are empowered in today's society (Douglas). As a critique and rejection of this post-feminist view made by the media, Douglas redefines the current ideological stance of society as enlightened sexism. She argues that enlightened sexism results from the achievements of feminism, which society uses to justify sexist attitudes toward women, as if to say, we know women are equal to men but "women are still fundamentally female" (10). Media representations emphasize the beauty of women's bodies, clothing, and sexuality as the acceptable way of gaining power, often by gaining men's attention (Douglas 10). This is sexist for its focus on women's looks as their most important feature and also undermines feminism, because it shows women still relying on

men. Douglas does acknowledge that the manifestation of enlightened sexism need not be conscious or deliberate. Producers of media and American citizens may not see themselves as trying to undermining women's equality; nevertheless, popular TV shows—*The Bachelor, The Hills,* and *Jersey Shore* to name only a few—present stereotypical and sexist images of women. On the surface, media representations of women show audiences that America has achieved post-feminist values, but Douglas convincingly demonstrates that this conception is inaccurate and that society remains patriarchal. Although Douglas grounds her argument in media examples of women as powerful through objectification, *Revolutionary Road* and *Far From Heaven* do not show these types of representations yet still support Douglas's discussion of post-feminism. The films participate in the media trend of perpetuating post-feminist ideology; but instead of undermining feminism through hypersexualized images of women, the films undermine the need for feminism by reminding Americans of how societal attitudes about women were oppressive in the past and have dramatically changed for the better since that time.

Revolutionary Road and *Far From Heaven* do not fit the post-feminist mold of modern media texts depicting women in positions of power, but collective memory helps explain how the films still perpetuate the current post-feminist ideology. The films draw on and contribute to society's collective memory about traditional gender roles of women. Collective memory relies on history but also creates a particular construct of this history based on the current time period. In part, the films are playing on society's understanding that the "happy housewife" is merely a stereotype and myth. More directly, the films reinforce the generally accepted idea that traditional patriarchal gender roles were stifling and unsatisfying to women in the postwar era. The meaning produced about the 1950s is essentially that patriarchal gender relations of that era were oppressive—a feminist critique. From the present perspective, however, remembering an

oppressive existence of women in the past—which required the initiatives of feminism to escape from—actually undermines the need for feminism in the current time. The depiction of oppressed women of the 1950s provides a stark contrast to the freedoms and power women can exercise in the current social climate. If the audience had any doubt as to whether women actually have equality in the present time, the contrast of the past and present in the films convincingly provides an answer: yes. Although *Far From Heaven* and *Revolutionary Road* do not directly depict that twenty-first century women are equal, their constructed collective memories legitimate post-feminism in the present by implicitly demonstrating how far women have progressed in society.

Both films critique society of the 1950s to create a collective memory that supports the broad idea of post-feminism, but each film critiques the past in different ways. The films' central topics deal with sensitive social issues of the 1950s and function to show the limits on women's agency in society. In *Revolutionary Road,* abortion becomes a main issue of conflict between April and Frank and illustrates April's lack of choice regarding her future. April considers an abortion despite its illegality and moral questionability, which leads Frank to label her insane. Insanity is a theme throughout the film, and Frank uses this label to delegitimize April's views that deviate from the patriarchal suburban ideology. In *Far From Heaven,* Cathy's divergent opinions are suppressed by her husband and by the gossip of women in the suburban community. The film presents racial segregation and patriarchal gender relations as the norm of the 1950s, and thus Cathy's belief in racial equality is rejected because she is a woman traversing social boundaries. Cathy's kindness to her black gardener Raymond ignites hurtful gossip in the community which leads her husband, friends, neighbors, and even Raymond, to shun her because she breaks strict social rules. The topics of abortion and racial segregation are significant because

they show how women's choices were limited on a societal level in the 1950s. The fact that women today have choices about abortion, who to have relationships with, and more generally, the choice to act on their convictions, are obvious contrasts to the past, which then foster a sense of post-feminism in the present.

In *Revolutionary Road,* the recurring theme of insanity is used as a mechanism of patriarchal control. April voicing her opinion consistently leads to her being labeled insane by her husband. Frank uses this label as a means of maintaining his power within his marriage. By the second scene, Frank and April are intensely arguing and Frank calls April "sick," while pointing to his head, because she refuses to acknowledge that she has failed as an actress. April then refers to how Frank has got her "safely in this little trap," indicating Frank's controlling nature. She has to respond in the manner *he* believes appropriate or else she gets call "sick," the trap being that she can never win. If she expresses her own views she gets degraded by her husband. If she responds how he wants, she is being untrue to herself. Despite her inability to voice her opinions without backlash, April continues to challenge Frank, who embodies male authority. As discussed in Chapter 2, April wants to move to Paris to escape the conformity of the suburban lifestyle, including traditional gender roles, saying she can get a job in Paris while Frank finds his passion. After laughing at this idea as if it were absolutely ridiculous, Frank responds with the supposed voice of reason: "It's just not very realistic." Significantly, Frank changes his mind when April appeals to him as being the "the most beautiful and wonderful thing in the world—a man." Frank requires reassurance that he will not lose his societal status as a man by leaving suburbia and his job. April's views are only legitimate if they fall within the patriarchal construct of society.

Although the film allows the housewife temporary agency in influencing this major life decision, the film then reinforces conformity to gender roles as a product of the typical 1950s suburban lifestyle, especially through the dialogue about abortion. For a while, Frank and April feel liberated by their decision to move to Paris, but it is not long before the norms of patriarchal society begin to influence Frank; an offer of a better paying job entices him, making him think he can support his family and they can be happy in their current suburban lifestyle. The final factor that solidifies Frank's conformity is April's unplanned pregnancy, which would be their third child. This conversation follows April telling a stunned Frank she is ten weeks pregnant:

April: I'm sorry, Frank. I'm so sorry.

Frank: I know you are.

April: We don't have to let this stop us. There are things we can do. Remember that girl at school I told you about...? As long as you do it before 12 weeks, it's fine. (Frank is clearly uneasy and stares in silence.) We've got to be together in this, Frank. Otherwise nothing's going to make any sense.

Frank: Okay. We'll figure it out. (Pause) Twelve weeks. So we have time.

April: I love you, Frank.

Frank: …I love you too.

The fact that April feels a need to apologize to Frank for being pregnant speaks to her perception of herself being in a marginalized position. She fears Frank will be upset with her for being pregnant and wants to avoid this. Frank's response, "I know you are," only reinforces that it is somehow her fault for being pregnant. But clearly, having another child is not what she wants, only because she assumes that Frank will call off their move to Paris. Because of this, April brings up abortion out of obvious desperation, but doing so with caution—not even saying the

word “abortion”—shows that the topic is social taboo. Frank’s silence indicates a lack of a way to talk about the issue, another indicator of abortion’s exclusion from societal norms. While April brought up the topic to discuss it, Frank’s power is clear when he is able to avoid the issue by saying they “have time” to decide, effectively ending the conversation without discussing anything. Significantly, April requires Frank’s consent on this major decision—“We’ve got to be together in this,” she says—as if his consent would legitimize the action. This further demonstrates April’s lack of control over her life.

The next series of scenes show that abortion is the antithesis to suburban family values. Frank and April are arguing about going to Paris, and Frank expresses his unhappiness with his job but cites that they can’t go to Paris because “I have the backbone to not run away from my responsibilities,” even though he wants to go. This shows Frank’s immersion in society’s expectations, because if they went with the new baby, *he* would not be providing for his family as he should, and if they aborted their child in order to go then the value of family would be undermined. Then, Frank finds out that April has obtained an abortion device and viscerally reacts, yelling at April, clearly disapproving, threatening her.

April: You know you really are being melodramatic about the whole thing. As long as it's done in the first twelve weeks, it's perfectly safe.

Frank: That's now, April! Don't I get a say?

April: Of course you do! It would be for you, Frank, don't you see? So you can have time. Like we talked about.

Frank: How can it be for me if the thought makes my stomach turn over?

April: Then it's for me... Tell me we can have the baby in Paris, Frank. But don't make me stay here. Please.

Frank: We can't have the baby in Paris.

April: Why not? I don't need everything we have here. I don't care where we live! I mean who made these rules, anyway? The only reason we moved out here was because I got pregnant. Then we had another child to prove the first one wasn't a mistake. I mean how long does it go on?

In this scene Frank finally makes clear his stance on abortion after avoiding the issue for two weeks. This is an assertion of dominance in conjunction with his firm statement, “We can’t have the baby in Paris.” Whereas Frank expected to have a choice about the abortion, he gives April no choice about their future—there will be no abortion, no going to Paris. The only option is continuing their life in suburbia. The lack of justification for Frank’s decision, even when April asks “why” reveals the deeply imbedded assumptions of suburban life that Frank operates under—that the suburban lifestyle is ideal for families and that husbands make decisions that are best for the family. Indeed, April pleas “Don’t make me stay here,” because she sees the connection between suburbia and patriarchal social values that oppress her. This time, April’s claim that aborting their child and moving to Paris are for Frank does not sway him. Neither does her claim that it is for her benefit. Ultimately Frank is influenced by society—his neighbors, co-workers, and friends, who are appalled by and disapprove of the plan to move to Paris—to operate within suburban norms. An abortion and leaving means he has doubly failed as a family man—rejecting a child and raising children in an inappropriate atmosphere. On the other hand, having a third child and staying means society deems him a success. Similarly, it is easier for Frank to say no to the abortion, rather than yes, because society at large does not sanction abortion.

The issue of abortion and the theme of insanity in *Revolutionary Road*, as well as the tragic ending of the film, strongly reinforce the 1950s as a patriarchal era in which women were oppressed by men. Frank expects April to accept the fact that his decisions were for the good of their family. But after April continues to insist on her unhappiness with their current life, Frank rationalizes that April is insane because she fails to meet society's expectations of women as wives deferring to their husbands and being caring mothers. Calling April insane is a means for Frank to stop April's behavior—continuing her argument would only make her seem more crazy—and thus solidify his authority as the patriarch. Frank first implies April's demented way of thinking when she asks Franks if he actually wants a third child. His answer, "All I know is what I feel, and anyone else in their right mind would feel the same way," suggests there is only one logical and obvious answer. What he "feels" is that abortion is wrong and April is not in her "right mind" because she is considering abortion. Frank also thinks April is insane because she rejects the role of mothering a third child:

April (quietly): But I've had two children. Doesn't that count in my favor?

Frank: Christ! The fact that you even put it that way! You make it sound like having children is a punishment.

April: I love my children.

Frank: And you're sure about that?

April: What the hell is that supposed to mean?

Frank: April, you just said our daughter was a mistake! How do I know you didn't try to get rid of her, or Michael for that matter? How do I know you didn't try to flush our entire fucking family down the toilet?

Frank takes April's comments literally, which enable him to say she is a bad mother, and therefore insane. However, in the previous conversation that Frank refers to, April says, "I mean,

who made these rules, anyway? The only reason we moved out here was because I got pregnant. Then we had another child to prove the first one wasn't a mistake." April is not actually a bad mother or insane; she is not regretting her children, only the fact that they had children and chose their lifestyle based on social expectations. Now that they are following this social script once again with a third child, she sees abortion as a rational way to escape this cycle that lacks personal choice. For Frank, her attitude is more evidence of her insanity because he believes the social norms she rejects are legitimate, as displayed when he shouts intensely, "April, a normal woman, a normal sane mother doesn't buy herself a piece of rubber tubing to give herself an abortion so she can go live out some God damn fantasy!" The label of insanity hinges on April breaking away from women's roles through considering abortion and wanting to leave suburbia, hence being a bad mother and rejecting the housewife role, respectively.

Frank labeling April insane effectively breaks her down. The argument dissipates with April saying feebly, "So I guess Paris was a pretty childish idea, huh?" After this argument, April seems to have given up on taking control of her life, walking through the motions of her housewife duties, being detached from Frank and depressed. Frank is not satisfied with this and April's lack of interest in discussing their problems starts an argument and leads Frank to define insanity as "the inability to relate to another human being. It's the inability to love." This refers directly to April's behavior of being distant from him and relates to societal expectations of women being defined by their relationships—if April cannot love him, then she is insane. A screaming match ensues, but the next day April acts if nothing happened, surprising Frank when she cooks him a nice breakfast, acts pleasant, shows interest in his job, sees him off to work, and assures him she doesn't hate him when he asks. April breaks down crying after he leaves, as if acting out this housewife role is debilitating. She proceeds to try to abort her child, an attempt to

take control of her life, even though she knows it is too late and dangerous. She loses too much blood and dies. Frank, at the hospital, says, "She did this to herself." April's death is at once both a punishment for a choice she does not have license to make as a woman and an escape from the oppressive gender roles of patriarchal suburbia. Patriarchal society is ultimately oppressive because it leaves no room for women to change their situations, only to escape them through death.

While *Revolutionary Road* shows the oppression of women mainly by the patriarchal husband, *Far From Heaven* focuses more on oppression of women by the broader society of suburbia. In *Far From Heaven,* Cathy's place in society as a woman is made clear from the beginning series of scenes when she is shown picking up her daughter from dance class, unloading groceries, planning a dinner party for her husband's company, picking up her husband from the police station after an accident, getting her children off to school, and being interviewed for the local society paper. Her role is caretaker of both her children and husband, and managing home life and the family's image. As the community soon makes clear, these are the only roles available to her—as a woman she is not allowed to have an opinion different from the community, much less act on it. Cathy's divergent belief is in racial equality within a community that is strictly segregated. As mentioned in Chapter 2, Cathy's developing friendship with her black gardener—it is acceptable for blacks to work as gardeners in white communities—is the manifestation of her beliefs of which the community disapproves. Interestingly, those who consistently engage in control of Cathy's actions by using social pressure are women. The society newspaper reporter who insults Cathy as "a woman as devoted to her family as she is kind to Negroes" is a woman, as are the socialites at a gala opening who gossip about Cathy and Raymond, as is Mona Lauder who spreads the word of Cathy and Raymond's public interactions.

These women are merely enacting the rules of patriarchal society where white men perpetuate segregation, as Cathy's husband does. The women are a mechanism of social control because the social world is their realm, but it still revolves around men. As planners of husbands' work parties they maintain men's social relations and reputations, and when gathering with other women friends, they inevitably talk about their husbands. This reflects that women of the suburban community are caught up in a male-dominated society, and thus the women follow the views of their husbands and society at large and do not think it acceptable for Cathy break patriarchal norms by crossing racial lines.

Far From Heaven more clearly shows the connection between patriarchy and racial issues in an argument Cathy has with her husband. Frank is seething with anger when he asks Cathy about the rumors of her and Raymond having a relationship and threatens her before she can answer: "Because if it is [true], even in the slightest, I swear to God, Cathleen…" Cathy's calm response is sympathetic to her husband's concerns, exemplifying the appropriate manner in which a woman should act: "Frank, I am sorry you even had to hear such nonsense." Despite Cathy's willingness to live by her own beliefs in secret, when her husband finds out, she does not hesitate to lie, signaling Frank's ultimate authority over her. Next, Frank says, "The whole friggin town is talking. Christ, Cathleen, do you even have the slightest idea about what this could mean? Don't you realize the effect this could have on me and the reputation I have spent the last eight years trying to build for you and the children and for the company?" This statement explicitly states the patriarchal nature of the society they live in—Frank considers himself to be the one that does everything important for *his* family. Cathy gets no recognition for her caretaker role and there is no concern over Cathy's reputation being damaged, indicating that women are perceived as much less valuable in society. During the argument, Cathy continues to lie to her

husband, admitting only the time she talked to Raymond at the art show. Her attempt to assert her own views is brief and futile, “But, apparently, here in Hartford, the idea of a white woman even speaking to a colored man—” as she gets cut off but her husband saying, “Oh, please! Just save me the Negro rights!” Frank says this with a tone of disgusted dismissal. Frank’s concern with his reputation is one reason he cannot stray from the dominant belief in segregation, or else he risks being socially attacked for his beliefs, as Cathy is. Also, Frank’s very ability to have a job would be threatened by racial equality. Because Cathy’s expected role as a woman is to support her husband, it is unacceptable for Cathy to undermine this patriarchal relationship, both between men and women and between white men and black men. Frank’s patriarchal power is shown when his stance on racial issues triumphs—Cathy gives up on her argument, says she has fired Raymond, and then proceeds to tell Raymond they cannot be friends, even though this is not what she wants or believes is right. Cathy’s husband seems to have complete control over her.

Far From Heaven ends by exhibiting 1950s suburbia as a society permeated by patriarchal beliefs that enacts consequences on women who step outside their prescribed role. Cathy is ultimately rejected by everyone she formerly relied on because of the deeply stigmatized idea of racial integration that she believes in. Interestingly, Cathy’s friend El is sympathetic when Frank divorces her even though it’s because he’s gay, a lifestyle seen as unnatural and unacceptable in the community—Cathy is simply the helpless victim of Frank’s choices. However, when Cathy reminisces about Raymond—“I think of him. I do. What he’s doing. What he’s thinking”—to El, her friend’s response is cold and lacks understanding: “You’re so full of surprises. I’m speechless.” Even though Cathy emphasizes that “nothing happened” between her and Raymond, El feels like she has made a fool out of herself for

defending Cathy and cannot sympathize because Cathy has put herself in this adverse social position. El's final comment signals the end of their friendship: "Cathy, it's none of my business, but you certainly make it sound as if something had [happened]." That El does not want to know Cathy's business is a stark contrast from earlier in the film when she is nosy with her friends and encourages Cathy to confide in her. Cathy's loss of her best friend and therefore community support indicates that a woman is not allowed to have different views or act on them and still be accepted. Even Raymond who once had faith that people might be able "to see beyond the surface, beyond the color of things" now rejects Cathy's friendship and a possible relationship with her. To Cathy's claim that their relationship would work because "no one would know us there," in Baltimore where Raymond is fleeing to, he says it would not be "wise." In part he has witnessed the backlash of their friendship—their reputations hurt, people not supporting his business, and his daughter being harassed—but he also recognizes that it is not just this community rejecting them, but the larger society that is against racial integration, let alone interracial relationships. Cathy still goes to the train station in hopes of stopping Raymond from leaving, but he leaves without a word, just a wave. The conformist demands of larger society make Cathy unable to have autonomy over her life. At every turn she is rejected—by her neighbors, friends, husband, and Raymond. The end of the film shows Cathy alone with none of her roles as a woman restored.

The ways in which each film internally builds a collective memory about women's lives in the 1950s are important to consider, because the films are not necessarily "the truth" but merely one construction of the truth. The films use different topics—abortion and interracial relationships—and different forms of marginalization—insanity and social control—but both rely on society's memory of the 1950s as being patriarchal and women having little agency

concerning their own lives. However, the films do not just represent the main women characters as helpless and completely under the control of their husbands—this representation might suggest that it is women's place to be subservient to men. Instead, April and Cathy are shown trying to take control of their lives. This is especially significant because it is a more modern take on women—women have the ability to think for themselves and make decisions. However, the fact that April and Cathy's efforts are ultimately quashed by their husbands suggests that 1950s patriarchal society is the culprit of women's oppression. Within the context of the twenty-first century, women making independent choices as April and Cathy did would not meet the same reaction or consequences, making the past seem harsh and the future seem ideal. Furthermore, April and Cathy's views do not conform to the ideals of the suburban communities where they live, and the very act of women expressing their views is shown as unacceptable within the larger context of patriarchal society. *Revolutionary Road* and *Far From Heaven* both have relevance to the present through the reinforcement of a negative collective memory of the past. The past is significant to the meaning of the films, because if narratives of women's oppression were set in the present, this would likely demonstrate a wholly different message—for example, a need for more feminist work for women's rights. Instead, the films' representations of the 1950s as a patriarchal era of women's oppression reassures twenty-first century audiences that women have far better lives than in the past, perhaps even creating contentment with women's now "equal" place in society.

Conclusion

Analysis of the temporality of *Revolutionary Road* and *Far From Heaven* showed the varying ways media texts use the past to legitimate the future. By first focusing on how the films portrayed and created meanings about the suburban space and women's gender roles, it was then possible to explore how these meanings were relevant to contemporary discourse on those topics. From the beginning it was clear that the meanings about suburban space and gender roles were relevant not only to the past they are set in, the 1950s, but also to the present. Lipsitz's theory about the past in popular culture guided my analysis of this dynamic.

Chapter 2 examined how the films' representations and critiques of suburbia linked up with New Urbanism's critiques of suburbia. Based on scholarly work that suggests the suburban space remains visually and nostalgically ideal in the minds of many Americans, I argued that the films created a counter-memory of the suburban space. The strong link between suburbia and an unhappy life was established in the films through the visual conformity of suburban space, characters' dialogue about their lives, the characters' actions within and outside the suburban space, and gestures toward city living as the more desirable lifestyle. The counter-memory in this film is significant because it reveals the flaws of 1950s suburbia, a time associated with suburban life as the perfect life. By breaking down popular conceptions of this idealized past, the present suburban lifestyle, which seeks to live up to the past, is also questioned. The films participate in a current debate about how people should live by demonstrating how they should not live, which relates to the critiques New Urbanism makes of suburban communities and lifestyles.

Chapter 3 expanded on one central aspect of conformity in suburbia—expectations about women's roles. Representations of the main female characters' oppression were different but still stemmed from patriarchal suburban conformity. April was oppressed by her husband and his

insistence on living the suburban family lifestyle that made her unhappy. Cathy was oppressed by her husband and the suburban community constantly watching and judging her actions, thus pressuring her to withhold her opinions. These representations are a collective memory of the patriarchal 1950s. Remembering oppression as existing in the *past* does not serve the function of women identifying with oppression in the present, but rather a function of legitimizing a current state of post-feminism by recognizing the great progress of women in society. *Revolutionary Road* and *Far From Heaven* reinforce post-feminism by appealing to a past in which women are drastically worse off than they are in the present.

It is intriguing that *Far From Heaven* and *Revolutionary Road* represent counter-memory narratives on the subject of suburban living but represent collective memory narratives on the subject of women's roles. In some ways, the messages seem to conflict. Perhaps this is because suburbia and the housewife have often been closely linked in the cultural imagination. Instead, these films separate the two topics. The message about women's roles is that society—men and women alike—*can* be happy with the equality that women have gained since the 1950s. This message stems from a collective memory about women's roles in the past as oppressive. The films' portrayals are collective memory—as opposed to counter-memory—because the feminist movement in the United States has illuminated the inequalities women faced throughout the years. Therefore, Americans can remember and relate to a past where women were oppressed because the history of the feminist tells us that women were oppressed. The films merely provide a few specific examples of this past that function to remind audiences of the social conditions of the 1950s. By doing so, it also reminds audiences of how far social issues for women have progressed in the current time, creating a positive message of women's empowerment. On the other hand, the films' messages about suburbia are negative, showing that people cannot be

happy within the physical space and ideological constructs of suburban life, no matter what era they live during.

As opposed to the collective memory about women's roles, the films' representations of suburbia are counter-memory. This is because the desirability of suburbia is still ingrained in the American consciousness, for example through the continuing perception that striving to achieve the American Dream will lead to a fulfilled life. Despite New Urbanism and film critiques of suburbia, Americans do not *remember* suburbia as undesirable because they in fact think it has always been and is *still* desirable. This may be explained by the fact that there has never been a widespread social movement that exposed the flaws of suburbia and worked to make structural changes to the housing industry—as feminism did for women's oppression. Arguably, New Urbanism is a growing movement working to make such changes within the past decade, but the movement has not succeeded in shifting the cultural conceptions about suburbia. Because suburbia is remembered nostalgically by popular culture, the films' negative depictions of suburbia function to build a counter-memory about suburbia. This undesirable depiction of suburbia supplements the current discourse of New Urbanism. In relation to the present time, the counter-memory narrative of suburbia depicts a need for a change in cultural conceptions, while the collective memory narrative about women reflects societal changes that have already occurred.

The films are at once reinforcing the current cultural ideology of post-feminism and undermining another current cultural ideology, suburbia as ideal. It brings up a complicated message for audiences, especially because the main women characters are the crux of both the counter-memory narrative and the collective memory narrative. Their actions and experiences simultaneously support the ideas that suburban life is inherently undesirable and that women

have progressed in society. The singular representations of the past in the films evidence both this positive and negative aspect of current society, but the combined meaning of these representations is that society is still flawed. If both of these messages are simultaneous realities, women who live in suburbia today are still victims of the negative environment of suburbia despite having gained equal rights—in fact, men living in the suburbs are victims as well. The films' messages may create some sense of empowerment for American women and they may create a sense of disillusionment to the over half of the American population living in suburbs. However, both of these messages taken together imply that quality lives for both women and men can be fully achieved only if Americans shift away from suburban living and ideologies.

The interpretations of suburban life and women's roles discussed in this study are certainly not the only ways in which audiences can read *Far From Heaven* and *Revolutionary Road,* especially since people have unique contexts of their own that influence their viewing of the films. By establishing a broad sense of today's dominant cultural ideas regarding suburbia and women's roles, I was able to interpret the films within this context. My analysis relies on the premise that all cultural texts are in some aspect products of the time period and societal context in which they are produced. This idea is also central to Lipsitz's theory of collective memory—even though the films are set in the past, this does not mean their message is limited to being *about* the past. Lipsitz's theory is especially significant in the current decade when retro culture is being resurrected and past media texts being remade. The analysis of ideologies in *Revolutionary Road* and *Far From Heaven* and other media texts about the past is important because it can shed light on the frameworks of current cultural ideas. *Revolutionary Road* and *Far From Heaven,* although set in the past, contribute to discourses on real social issues in the present and play a part in influencing the trajectory of such issues in the future. In the case of

Revolutionary Road and *Far From Heaven*, the issues could not be more fundamental to society as the films reflect on where and how people should live their lives.

Bibliography

Beuka, Robert. *SuburbiaNation: reading suburban landscape in twentieth-century American fiction and film.* New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2004. Print.

Boxer, Sarah. "A Remedy for the Rootlessness of Modern Suburban Life?" *New York Times* 1 Aug. 1998, late ed: B7. *LexisNexis.* Web. 26 Oct. 2011.

Brenner, Elsa. "A Village Nestled in a Village." *New York Times.* 1 Aug. 2004, late ed: 3. *LexisNexis.* Web. 26 Oct. 2011.

Christens, Brian. "Suburban Decentralization and the New Urbanism: A Pragmatic Inquiry into Value-based Claims. *Journal of Architectural and Planning Research* 26.1 (2009): 30-43. Web. 1 Nov. 2011.

Click, Melissa. "Out of Time." *Antenna Blog.* 24 Oct. 2011.

"Congress for the New Urbanism." *The Congress for the New Urbanism.* 2011. Web. 1 Nov. 2011.

Coontz, Stephanie. *A Strange Stirring: The Feminine Mystique and American Women at the Dawn of the 1960s.* New York: Basic Books, 2011. Print.

Dickinson, Greg. "The Pleasantville Effect: Nostalgia and Visual Framing of (White) Suburbia." Western Journal of Communication 70.3 (2006): n. pag. Web. 25 Sept. 2010.

Dietsch, Deborah K. "The New Neo-Traditionalists: Developers Build on Familiar Designs to Create Denser Neighborhoods with Added Amenities." *The Washington Post*. 8 Sept. 2001, final ed: H01. *LexisNexis.* Web. 1 Nov. 2011.

Douglas, Susan. *Enlightened Sexism: The Seductive Message that Feminism's Work is Done.* New York: Times Books, 2010. Print.

Far From Heaven. Dir. Todd Haynes. Perf. Julianne Moore, Dennis Quaid, Dennis Haysbert, Patricia Clarkson. Focus Features, 2002. DVD.

Fitzgerald, Michael Ray. "Sitcoms and Suburbia: The Role of Network Television in the De-urbanization of the U.S. 1949-1991." MA Thesis. 2007. Web.

Grant, Jill L. "Promises and Prospects: New Urbanism in Practice." Working Paper. 22 Oct. 2006. Web. 1 Nov. 2011.

Haydn, Dolores. "Sitcom Suburbs." *Building Suburbia.* New York: Pantheon Books, 2003. Print.

Johnson, Robert. "Why 'New Urbanism' Isn't for Everyone." *New York Times.* 20 Feb. 2005, late ed: 11. *LexisNexis*. Web. 26 Oct. 2011.

Joyrich, Lynne. "Written on the screen: mediation and immersion in Far From Heaven." *Camera Obscura.*19.3 (2004): 187-219. Web. 25 Sept. 2011.

Kaline, Dan. "It Takes More than Good Urban Design to Create a Community." *Public Management.* 78.8 (Aug. 1996): 2. Web. 1 Nov. 2011.

Kenyon, Amy Maria. *Dreaming Suburbia:Detroit and the Production of Postwar Space and Culture.* Detroit, Michigan: Wayne State University Press, 2004. Print.

Knapp, Kathryn. "Life in the 'Hood: Postwar Suburban Literature and Films." *Literature Compass* 6.4 (May 2009): 810-823. Web. 7 Oct. 2010.

Lewis, Robert K. "Principles of New Urbanism Are Gaining Wider Acceptance." *The Washington Post*. 12 Jan. 2002, final ed: H07. *LexisNexis.* Web. 1 Nov. 2011.

Lipsitz, George. *Time Passages: Collective Memory and American Popular Culture.* Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1990. Print.

Miller, Laura J. "Family Togetherness and the Suburban Ideal." *Sociological Forum.* 10.3 (1995): 393-418. Web. 20 Oct. 2011.

O'Toole, Randal. "The Folly of 'Smart Growth.'" *Regulation.* Fall 2001: 20-25. Web. 1 Nov. 2011.

Revolutionary Road. Dir. Sam Mendes. Perf. Leonardo Dicaprio, Kate Winslet, Michael Shannon, Kathryn Hahn, David Harbour, and Kathy Bates. Paramount Vantage, 2008. DVD.

Reynolds, Simon. *Retromania: Pop Culture's Addiction to Its Own Past.* New York: Faber and Faber, Inc., 2011. Print.

Richardson, Chris. "The empty self in *Revolutionary Road* or: How I learned to stop worrying and love the blonde." *European Journal of American Culture.* 29.1 (2010): 5-17. Web. 10 Sept. 2011.

Scherr, Rebecca. (Not) queering "white vision" in *Far From Heaven* and *Transamerica*. *Jumpcut: A Review of Contemporary Media.* n.p. 50 (2008): n. pag. Web. 10 Sept. 2011.

Skvirsky, Salome Aguilera. "The price of heaven: remaking politics in All that Heaven Allows, Ali: Fear Eats the Soul, and Far From Heaven." *Cinema Journal.* 47.3 (2008): 90-121. Web. 10 Sept. 2011.

Spigel, Lynn. *Make room for TV: television and the family ideal in postwar America.* Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1992. Print.

Sprengler, Christine. *Screening Nostalgia: Populuxe props and Technicolor aesthetics in contemporary American film.* New York: Berghahn Books, 2009. Print.

Stoddart, Scott F. *Analyzing Mad Men: Critical Essays on the Television Series.* Jefferson, NC, McFarland: 2011. Print.

Trudeau, Dan and Patrick Malloy. "Suburbs in Disguise? Examining the Geographies of the New Urbanism." *Urban Geography* 32.3 (2011): 424-447. Web. 1 Nov. 2011.

Willis, Sharon. “The Politics of Disappointment: Todd Haynes Rewrites Douglas Sirk.” *Camera Obscura.* 18.3 (2003): 131-175. Web. 1 Oct. 2011.

Wilt, David E. “Suburbia.” *The Columbia Companion to American History on Film: How the Movies Have Portrayed the American Past.* Ed. Peter C. Rollins. New York: Columbia University Press, 2003. 480-487. Print.