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B'ARS AND CATAMOUNTS: A STUDY OF DAVY CROCKETT THROUGH GENRE AND  
MEDIUM

By  
Jack Fieweger

A thesis submitted to the faculty of The University of Mississippi in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements of the Sally McDonnell Barksdale Honors College.

Oxford, MS  
May 2021

Approved By

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Jack Fieweger

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DEDICATION

To Lola—A True Legend.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I want to thank my fantastic parents, Pam and Chris, for supporting me in any endeavor I've embarked. Thank you, Zoë and Nora, my beloved sisters and best friends, for never letting me take anything too seriously. Finally, I want to thank Dr. Reed, for guiding this project, and nurturing my love for myth and literature.

## ABSTRACT

### B'ARS AND CATAMOUNTS: A Study of Davy Crockett through Genre and Medium

This project seeks to investigate and discuss the changes and variations that have occurred to the mythology of David Crockett over the course of time. Initially appearing as a literary character in 1833, the likeness of Crockett has appeared in a myriad of different texts including: biographies, almanacs, plays, dime novels, comics, television shows, and films. The project attempts to discern how these different iterations of medium and genre altered the mythology of David Crockett. In order to methodologically understand these changes, this project makes use of W.T. Lhamon's concept known as the Lore Cycle. Lhamon identified that lore diffuses through culture cyclically: the nascent stages of a lore occur as a construct of basic capital, but over time is assumed and promulgated by industrial capital. Overall, this project identified three distinct lore cycles that pertain to Crockett: the first begins during Crockett's lifetime, the second occurs after Crockett's death and continues through the nineteenth century, and the last cycle identified occurs in the twentieth century. The initial lore cycle produces a mythology that promotes the ideals of American Exceptionalism. Crockett's story bolsters early American myths in order to create a sense of unified identity. The second cycle relies upon these underlying myths in order to modify Crockett's mythology into a social and economic regulator. Finally, the last cycle identified utilizes Crockett as a means of instilling conservative ideals. Fully assumed by corporate entities, Crockett's likeness is utilized to restore order in a tumultuous century.



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## Crockettology: An Introduction

To the average American, Davy Crockett is conceptualized as a bushwhacking, bear-slaying superstar of the early nineteenth century. His list of mythological accomplishments are as vast and wild as the Tennessee wilderness with which he is associated: he killed a bear at the ripe age of five, grinned so mightily at a tree that the bark flung itself from its arboreal core, and his racoon skin cap is as ubiquitous as President Lincoln's stove-pipe hat. Even Crockett's death emanates folkloric energy, as the man martyred himself in the name of freedom at the Battle of the Alamo.

The historical David Crockett lived a rather event-filled life. While various biographies exist, the most widely acclaimed and accurate biography comes from the 1956 work of James Atkins Shackford's text *Davy Crockett: The Man and the Legend*. Born on August 17, 1786, Crockett gained renown throughout western Tennessee for his prominence as an outdoorsman: he was an excellent hunter of bears. Poorly educated, Crockett utilized his local fame as a means to trampoline into the political light. He initially served as a local judicial magistrate, but quickly rose the ranks of Tennessee legislature to serve three terms in the House of Representatives, from 1827-1831, and serving one more stint from 1833-1835. Politically, Crockett is most famous for his opposition to Andrew Jackson and his implementation of the Indian Removal Act of 1830. After losing reelection in 1835, Crockett sought out for Texas, where he fought and died at the Battle of the Alamo.

However, the nature of the historical project is not the subject of this project; while the history of Crockett is filled with a myriad of misnomers and blatant untruths, this phenomenon has been studied repeatedly. Instead, this project seeks to dive into the mythology that surrounds the literary Crockett. As a character, Crockett's portrayal varies widely from text to text. In many

instances he assumes a chivalrous demeanor, saving damsels in distress and aiding lowly frontier folk; Conversely, some texts depict him as an unruly, turbulent man who drinks and uses tobacco to excess. This project attempts to map the transitions that allowed for this vast spectrum of portrayals to exist. The fact that Crockett's lore changes is undeniable; who changes it and why is the subject of this project.

In its most basic stages, the lore of David Crockett began as a series of both falsified and legitimate biographical depictions of the man. However, Crockett's legacy not only burgeoned after his death, it became a central aspect of American folklore, manifesting in almanacks, plays, and popular fiction of the nineteenth century. In most recent history, the children of the mid-twentieth century obsessed over Davy, as theatrical depictions by Fess Parker and John Wayne dominated the televisions and cinemas of America. However, where Davy Crockett found massive success, other American folk heroes have gone by the wayside—Paul Bunyan's axe hardly exists outside of a Minnesota-Wisconsin football rivalry; Mink Fink is a mere cultural antique. This thesis seeks to investigate the means that allowed for Crockett's folkloric stock to not only achieve its cultural pertinence, but the avenues it took to maintain its sustainability.

While the various myths surrounding Crockett can often be contradictory, foggy, and plainly false at times, the entirety of Crockett's mythological catalogue can be made more sensible through use of a concept known as the "Lore Cycle". Originally borne of the mind of W.T. Lhamon, the lore cycle is a means of dissecting a myth as it changes and diverges over time. In order to better separate the two concepts, myth refers to an old, passed down story, while lore refers to a constantly changing series of stories; just as in linguistics the phoneme constructs the morpheme, the same principle applies to myth and lore. As Lhamon writes, "The turns of a lore cycle convert the dead hands of the past into living presences that deviate from what went

before.”<sup>3</sup> A myth changes over time as different groups of people tell the story. Cultures change drastically over the course of time, just as they change when one visits a new locale. The inherent utility in discussing lore cycles comes from this sentiment; while myth appears as a fixed, slow to change entity, the central essence, cultural weight, and use of the myth metamorphizes over time.

In order to understand the concept of the lore cycle one also has to have a grasp on the sociological construct known as the *habitus*, a concept presented by French writer Pierre Bourdieu. Bourdieu discusses the concept, defining habitus as, “Systems of durable, transposable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures, that is, as principles which generate and organize practices.”<sup>4</sup> Bourdieu’s habitus is a sociological concept which makes efforts to explain how people coordinate similar behaviors over the course of time. It is a meta-structural idea that portrays human activities being standardized through the minutiae of human life. In the same vein, the lore cycle seeks to observe how myth not only maintains itself as pertinent over the course of time, but also as to how the myth warps and changes, carrying with it new connotations and implications.

The lore of David Crockett emulates this theory: in his initial literary iterations, Crockett is presented as a down-to-earth man of principle; over time, however, his lore becomes fluid in connotation, varying from overt disorder to chivalric gentility. This phenomenon of change can be explained, as Lhamon argues, from those who intimate with the content itself: the group. The concept of the group is about those who use the lore itself, with those who interact with the content putting themselves within the confines of the group. However, a single myth may be the

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<sup>3</sup> W.T. Lhamon, *Raising Cain* (Harvard University Press, 1998), 71.

<sup>4</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice*, trans. Richard Nice (Stanford University Press, 1990), 53.

subject of the lore of multiple groups; it is the relationship that causes the lore cycle to move.

“Because one group’s lore overlaps and catches on another’s, the turnings of lore are not smooth,”<sup>5</sup> writes Lhamon, “every group’s member must adjust their lore cycle constantly.”<sup>6</sup> As a result, the lore cycle, “is alive in its stresses and constantly moving, always becoming something else.”<sup>7</sup> It is different groups converging on the same myth the turns the lore cycle.

In his essay “The Esoteric-Exoteric Factor in Folklore”, William Hugh Jansen attempts to technically display the means by which multiple groups affect a given lore. He defines the relationship through use of two terms: the esoteric and the exoteric. “The esoteric,” Jansen argues, “applies to what one group thinks of itself and what it supposes others think of it.”<sup>8</sup> The exoteric, in contrast, “is what one group thinks of another and what it thinks that other group thinks it thinks.”<sup>9</sup> Lore cycles turn as a direct result of this relationship. The presuppositions one group makes upon another’s lore causes a tensile relationship between both versions of a myth; this “he said-she said” relationship allows for a myth to change in both of its respective groups, but also in a semi-collective view of the specific myth. Not only will people from different locations and cultures maintain different interpretations of a myth, but views will also be changed as a result of time; take, for example, the myth of the Greek gods, such as Athena and Zeus. Just as a Persian counterpart to Homer would perceive those myths in a different light, Homer himself would most certainly scoff at today’s commercialized view of these deities.

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<sup>5</sup> W.T. Lhamon, *Raising Cain* (Harvard University Press, 1998), pp. 71.

<sup>6</sup> W.T. Lhamon, *Raising Cain* (Harvard University Press, 1998), pp. 71.

<sup>7</sup> W.T. Lhamon, *Raising Cain* (Harvard University Press, 1998), pp. 71.

<sup>8</sup> WM. Hugh Jansen, “The Esoteric-Exoteric Factor in Folklore,” in *The Study of Folklore* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, Inc., 1965), 46.

<sup>9</sup> WM. Hugh Jansen, “The Esoteric-Exoteric Factor in Folklore,” 46.

In summary, these three characteristics of the lore serve as the scaffold for the project. Firstly, lore is to be understood as a collective of separate and varying myths. Secondly, the constant, mechanical turn of the lore cycle changes the functions and uses of the lore as it changes hands between different levels of capital. Lastly, the actual turns and exchanges of the lore cycle are dictated by the esoteric and exoteric functions of who interacts with the lore.

The lore cycle of David Crockett can be separated into three succinct categories: In my first chapter, I examine the initial creation of Crockett lore. The first wave of Crockett folklore blossomed in the early 1830s, when Matthew St. Claire Clark published his fictitious biography *Sketches and Eccentricities of Col. Crockett, of West Tennessee*. David Crockett countered in 1834, when he produced *A Narrative of the Life of David Crockett, Of the State of Tennessee*. Within this turn of the lore cycle, Crockett's likeness and portrayal is used as a means for cementing basic myths of American exceptionalism: the myth of the self-made man, and the myth of the great American frontier are absolutely critical. Crockett's lore within this cycle is developed by the common man, and reflects the ideas and wants of the citizen.

In my second chapter, I examine the lore that becomes created after Crockett's death. The second turn of the lore cycle, which occurred in a post-Crockett nineteenth century, radically transformed the lore of Crockett. Presented through genres and mediums previously foreign to the subject, Crockett's lore fractured greatly. First, Crockett will be studied in *The Second Nashville Series of Crockett Almanacs, 1839-1841*. Then, Robert Murdoch's frontier melodrama *Davy Crockett; Or, Be Sure You're Right, Then Go Ahead* will be discussed. Finally, Crockett's depiction in two dime novels, *Kill-bar, the Guide; or, The Long Trail* and *The Bear-Hunter; or, Davy Crockett as a Spy* will become the topic of dissection. Within this turn of the lore cycle, Crockett moved away from basic American myths, and became utilized as a locus for

understanding American economic regulation. This idea of Crockett as an economic symbol directly correlates with those who espoused his myth; no longer a subject of basic capital, Crockett's myths are depicted by those who have the means and abilities to reproduce them.

For my third chapter, I examine Crockett in a new age. The third turn of the lore cycle presents Crockett at his most popular: Crockett of the twentieth century. Within this turn, one facet of Crockett's lore becomes supremely more important than the rest: Crockett's last stand at the Alamo. First, the half-comic book half-textbook *Texas History Movies* will be investigated. For the final two pieces of Crockett lore, the use of television and film will be discussed. In Disney's wildly popular *Davy Crockett, King of the Wild Frontier*, Crockett comes to represent a reinterpretation of popular American myths. In *The Alamo*, a film produced by John Wayne, Crockett and his mythology are used as a means of reinstating conservative ideals. Overall, this final turn of the Crockett lore cycle induced a complete symbolic fracturing of Crockett lore, as his lore becomes reimagined by the massive enterprises.

Finally, my concluding section seeks to briefly examine Crockett in the twenty-first century. After evolving over the course of nearly one hundred and eighty years, Crockett's depiction has entered a state of ideological combat. Caught between progressivism and conservatism, Crockett as a symbol has entered a state of symbolic tug-of-war; While some attempt to use Crockett to interrogate the American identity, others use it as a simplistic means for gratifying American greatness.

Overall, this thesis seeks to demonstrate how and why the lore surrounding Crockett changed over time. Through different turns of the lore cycle different groups have the opportunity to interpret and imagine Crockett's mythology. As a result, Crockett's likeness is distributed throughout a wide variety of mediums—biographies, almanacs, plays, comic books,

television and film all contribute to Crockett's lore. Similarly, Crockett's symbol is utilized through multiple different genres—Subversive humor, frontier melodrama, history, and the epic film. As a result of these different formative and functional changes, Crockett's lore evolves from a basic representation of American mythology to a scant reinterpretation devoid of many original ideals.

## CHAPTER 1: The Origins of David Crockett

The initial mythologization of David Crockett began in the 1830's as a product of a series of biographies. The first text to be released was *Sketches and Eccentricities of Col. Crockett, of West Tennessee*, written by Matthew St. Claire Clark, anonymously.<sup>1</sup> Clark's text contains a series of anecdotes about Crockett's life, though the author never once actually met the frontiersman. Based on hearsay, Crockett's campaign speeches, and an imaginative mind, Clark's text paints an exceedingly lively portrait of Crockett. Clark's account was so imaginative that Crockett himself felt the need to correct the record—or control the growing legend. The second biography produced to create the original myth for David Crockett came in the form of an autobiography. Written by Crockett, in 1834, with the help of Thomas Chilton, a fellow Congressman, the duo produced *A Narrative of the Life of David Crockett, Of the State of Tennessee* which seeks to dispel any falsehoods portrayed in Clark's biography.<sup>2</sup> Together, these two texts firmly cemented Crockett as an American folk legend, introducing some of the central concepts, settings, and characterizations of the Crockett mythology.

Written in 1833, Clark's text is critical in understanding what audience held an especially high interest in the lore of Crockett. As the author states in the preface, "I know there are those who dwell in the splendid mansions of the east, and whose good fortune enables them to tread a Turkey carpet, or loll upon a sofa, to whom a faithful representation of the manners and customs of the 'far off West,' will afford a rich repast."<sup>3</sup> Clark's audience represents an East Coast

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<sup>1</sup> Matthew St. Claire Clark, *Sketches and Eccentricities of Col. David Crockett, of West Tennessee* (New-York, J. & J. Harper, 1833).

<sup>2</sup> David Crockett, *A Narrative of the Life of David Crockett, Of the State of Tennessee* (Philadelphia, E. L. Carey and A. Hart; Baltimore, Carey, Hart & co., 1834).

<sup>3</sup> Matthew St. Claire Clark, *Sketches and Eccentricities of Col. David Crockett, of West Tennessee* (New-York, J. & J. Harper, 1833), VI.



interest in Western affairs, members of an established society seeking to understand the trials and tribulations faced on the open frontier. Notably, Clark establishes a degree of separation between the “grave philosopher,” who he believes would read his text, and the Western frontiers-people he describes. As a result of his description of the trappings of wealth of the east, Clark clearly denotes his belief that civilized society will be most involved in reading his text. Financially well off, this eastern bloc of readers has unique interests in the tough as leather, poor, scrappy existence of those living on the frontier.

Completely opposed to this sentiment, Crockett writes with a completely different idea in mind. For Crockett, his main goal is to right the supposed wrongs of Clark’s text; to establish a “plain, honest, homespun account of my state in life.”<sup>4</sup> As Crockett puts it, the main goal of this book is to clarify his reality, to allow for his reader to understand the man in truth, not as a caricature of what he supposedly represents. However, perhaps there is more to the question of audience than meets the eye. As M.J. Heale states, “what transformed Crockett from a failure to a success was the image so carefully constructed around him.”<sup>5</sup> Though Crockett alleges the truthfulness of his narrative, he is also meticulously constructing his celebrity status. In doing so, Crockett is highly specific in what concepts he wants to surround his myth. David Crockett cared deeply about his public persona, and so his autobiography represents a determined effort to carefully build himself up in the public eye. All in all, Crockett’s autobiography has two goals in relation to audience: not only to right falsehoods presented to Clark’s preceding audience, but

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<sup>4</sup> David Crockett, *A Narrative of the Life of David Crockett, Of the State of Tennessee* (Philadelphia, E. L. Carey and A. Hart; Baltimore, Carey, Hart & co., 1834), 6.

<sup>5</sup> M. J. Heale, “The Role of the Frontier in Jacksonian Politics: David Crockett and the Myth of the Self-Made Man,” *The Western Historical Quarterly* 4, no. 4 (1973): 406, <https://doi.org/10.2307/967284>.

also to create a narrative to be promulgated amongst the masses, a book for all, allowing his readers to perceive the frontier as Crockett did.

When discussing folklore, audience and authorial intent is critical for understanding the lore's purpose. In order to understand how a myth functions, one must have an understanding of the people who interact with the myth, and those who blazon the myth. However, this concept is most especially important in the earliest facet of the Crockett myth, as this is the only time where Crockett himself, the subject of the myth, has the faculties to actually establish it himself. Returning to Jansen's concept of the esoteric-exoteric relationship is critical. In terms of the Crockett myth, the esoteric view is that held by David Crockett himself; The exoteric, on the other hand, is delivered in the forms of Clark's text.

However, in order to properly discuss this exoteric-esoteric relationship, the specific facets of the Crockett myth need to be introduced and discussed. Firstly, language credited to Crockett must be surmised. Secondly, Crockett's relationship with hunting and nature is to be touched upon. Likewise, Crockett and the myth of the self-made man must be understood. Finally, Crockett's service to his country will be analyzed, which takes the form of not only his warrior spirit, but also his public life as a politician. In all, the early iterations of the Crockett myth pose the man to be an honest, uniquely spoken man, with a materialistic, yet paternal outlook upon the wilderness. These traits combine to allow Crockett to be perceived as a casually righteous figure, serving out of necessity rather than glory.

### **The Language of Crockett**

Language, the dialogue used to portray a person, helps to understand how one person or group contextualizes and perceives another person or group. In *Sketches and Eccentricities*,

Clark's use of local color and vernacular depict Crockett and westerners as dull, poorly educated folk. While this sentiment is not entirely incorrect, as Crockett never came to fulfill even an elementary level education, the caustic and abrasive notions of class shine bright in the text. Throughout Clark's book, Crockett delivers anecdotes and speeches. However, Clark never seems to maintain a consistency in his dialect for Crockett. One of the more exaggerated examples comes in the sixth chapter of the book, where Crockett is out on the electioneering trail. In his speech, Crockett describes helping out a friend, who faced the unfortunate mishap of a chicken massacre. Clark depicts Crockett thusly: "Well, tam it, what you tink, a tam harricoon come to my hinkle stall [...] an picked out ebery hair out de backs of all my young hinkles."<sup>6</sup> Conversely, whilst depicting Crockett in Washington D.C., Clark allows the character a higher grammatical capability. In discussion of class on the frontier, Crockett states, "Our people are divided into classes, and each class has a particular sort of fun."<sup>7</sup>

The difference in lingual faculties is rather stark; the chicken anecdote conveys Crockett to be, in simplest terms, simple. However, while in D.C., Crockett assumes a much more proper, normalized dialect. One reason for these different depictions could be that of a political nature. Clark is attempting to portray Crockett's political savvy, therefore, self-awareness for the character was extremely necessary. Whilst campaigning, Clark's version of Crockett would in theory want to relate as much as possible to his audience; therefore, his language would mirror that of those to whom he is speaking. He is a Tennessean speaking to fellow Tennesseans. Opposite to that notion, when speaking in the nation's capital Crockett assumes a dialect that

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<sup>6</sup> Matthew St. Claire Clark, *Sketches and Eccentricities of Col. David Crockett, of West Tennessee*, 77.

<sup>7</sup> Matthew St. Claire Clark, 172.

would be inoffensive to his educated, wealthy audience. This fluid alteration of language allows Crockett a capable means for relating to others.

The resulting folkloric implications from this language division are of a particular interest. According to Clark's text, "it has become customary"<sup>8</sup> to portray those living on the frontier with such strange and almost unintelligible dialogue; as Clark calls the phenomena, "uncouth sayings, and in new coined words, difficult of pronunciation."<sup>9</sup> However, that is not to say Clark believes this interpretation of the western dialect is in anyway derogatory or offensive. The author states both in the preface and towards the text's conclusion that he believes there is a certain sense of honor and decency in the frank, casual nature of frontier speech. Clark remarks that frontier folk, "express themselves in the simplest language possible. The most extravagant ideas they clothe in the simplest words,"<sup>10</sup> which allows for an honesty unseen in high society. Due to this lingual rusticity, Crockett and his fellow frontiersman dispose a "generosity and nobleness of soul, seldom met with in a more polished society."

Remember now, the intended audience for *Sketches and Eccentricities*. Clark assumed his novel would have its furthest reach in eastern circles, circles where educated gentry would have more proper speech patterns. The relationship between the rustic language found in the text, and the properness assumed to be found in the reader represent what Tom Lutz calls a "hallmark of local color."<sup>11</sup> Lutz argues that the use of local color and regionalism is most effective when a foreign person enters the region; the generally better educated foreigner allows for a disparity to be built around this language, often in order to highlight the eclectic, strange nature of regional

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<sup>8</sup> Matthew St. Claire Clark, VI.

<sup>9</sup> Matthew St. Claire Clark, VI.

<sup>10</sup> Matthew St. Claire Clark, VI.

<sup>11</sup> Tom Lutz, *Cosmopolitan Vistas: American Regionalism and Literary Value* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004), 30.

language. The relationship here is inverted; now, the regional language enters as the foreigner in eastern society, imputing a sense of respect for those in the west. Though the inversion complicates the relationship, the same effect occurs: highlighting the difference in language allows for an appreciation of another culture. “The implied author and implied reader meet in an understanding broader than, more cosmopolitan than, that of the characters or narrator.”<sup>12</sup> The resulting use of language in *Sketches and Eccentricities* creates a homogeneity between both groups, allowing for those out east to admire Crockett for his use of language, generating a sense of respect for the character. In the exoteric sense of folklore, the use of language shows that outside groups attempt to lionize David Crockett for his upright and candid nature. He comes to symbolize a sense of western honesty based out of a lack of erudite, prolix speech, obliging all to maintain a favorable stance towards Crockett.

While Clark’s text extols the honest simplicity of Crockett’s dialect, Crockett himself is much less obsessed with the sentiment. Within the preface of his autobiography, Crockett deprecates *Sketches and Eccentricities* for its subversion of the frontiersman’s tongue, writing, “when he [Clark] professes to give my narrative in my own language, and then puts into my mouth such language as would disgrace even an outlandish African, he must himself be sensible of the injustice he has done me.”<sup>13</sup> Crockett unabashedly assaults Clark’s claim that his portrayal of language is that of a positive nature; he criticizes the author for his unhinged use of a pseudo-Ebonic dialect applied to himself. Crockett utilizes language much differently within his text, as it would appear that language merely serves as a stylistic tool. As opposed to using a strange orthography and sense of accent, Crockett uses his massive battery of sayings, idioms, and

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<sup>12</sup> Lutz, 30.

<sup>13</sup> Crockett, *A Narrative of the Life of David Crockett, Of the State of Tennessee*, 4..

maxims, in order to create his stylistic imprint. When describing heroic acts during the Creek War, Crockett states he, “should have been genteelly licked,” as his bad situation put him in a, “devil of a fix.”<sup>14</sup> When describing his father’s lingering wrath, Crockett claims the emotion stays, “like a turkle does to a fisherman’s toe,”<sup>15</sup> and in his punishment his father would, “give me the devil.”<sup>16</sup> On the topic of hunger during war Crockett claims, “like the Irish by hanging, we got used to it.”<sup>17</sup> A party is a “tip-top country frolic”<sup>18</sup>, while lies can be described as “catchpenny.”<sup>19</sup> Crockett never once credits himself or others westerners for having a fantastically simple language; instead, he wants a natural presentation of his dialect to demonstrate his quick-witted, creative nature.

### **Crockett and the Frontier Mythology**

Arguably the most potent, highly mythologized aspect of the Crockett lore asserts itself as the man’s relationship with nature. Almost universally portrayed as wearing buckskin and a racoon pelt hat, Crockett garnered fame as a bear hunter, a sportive event so dangerous only the most iron-willed men could participate. However, Crockett’s nature experience served as a much more than what Clark called an “eternal war with the beasts of the forest.”<sup>20</sup> A frontiersman through and through, Crockett made several efforts to conquer the canebrakes of western Tennessee, often finding himself in exceptionally grave situations. However, both authors elect to depict Crockett’s relationship to nature quite differently. Matthew St. Claire Clark posits the wilderness as Crockett’s play-pen: it is where Crockett is most comfortable, and most capable of

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<sup>14</sup> Crockett, 99.

<sup>15</sup> Crockett, 33.

<sup>16</sup> Crockett, 33.

<sup>17</sup> Crockett, 120.

<sup>18</sup> Crockett, 140.

<sup>19</sup> Crockett, 3.

<sup>20</sup> Matthew St. Claire Clark, *Sketches and Eccentricities of Col. David Crockett, of West Tennessee*, 19.

achieving his wild conquests. Crockett, quite conversely, poses the frontier wilderness as a land of strict opposition—everything seeks his demise. It is only through his masterful navigation of the landscape that permits him to survive. As a result of his portrayal on the verge of American society, Crockett effectively symbolizes a lionization of American wilderness, while concomitantly conveying the hardship of western life.

Crockett's fame almost entirely hinged itself upon his repertoire as a hunter, therefore understanding the nuances of his hunting and wilderness mythology allow insight into the entirety of his lore. In Matthew St. Claire Clark's depiction, nature takes on a uniquely feminine role, serving as a setting for total conquest for the hero. The primary means of denoting this conquest comes in the form of Crockett's relationship to hunting. Throughout *Sketches and Eccentricities* Clark asserts a marital quality to Crockett's hunting practices. After moving to Gibson County, one of the more western districts in Tennessee, Clark writes that, "here he became wedded to hunting,"<sup>21</sup> a sentiment Clark repeats six times throughout the narrative. This concept of marriage to hunting is particularly intriguing for a myriad of reasons. Firstly, this sentiment denotes the idea that Crockett cares much more for hunting than his actual marriage. The sport maintains itself as Crockett's primary focus, the man's will to live. However, in a more unique sense Crockett's relationship to sport becomes overtly sexualized. This concept materializes itself in description of Crockett's hunting tool, his flintlock rifle which the hunter christened as "Betsy". Clark personifies the rifle as a rugged, worn down woman, writing, "his favorite, *Betsy*, as he termed her, I had the pleasure of shooting. She is a large, coarse, common rifle, with a flintlock, and, from appearance, has been much used."<sup>22</sup> Ostensibly phallic in nature,

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<sup>21</sup> Matthew St. Claire Clark, 63.

<sup>22</sup> Matthew St. Claire Clark, 67.

Betsy comes to represent a dominative display of power. His description of the fire arm as highly used depicts Crockett as a man of repeated, unceasing conquest over the wildlife of the West.

Yet, Clark's depiction of Crockett contains another form of nature as a location of conquest. After finding himself lost in the woods which are proclaimed to be under the dominion of David Crockett, the folk hero finds his eventual wife. Both figures are rather discombobulated, searching for a means back to civilization. Regardless of the dire straits the duo finds themselves in, they maintain a generally positive disposition. "Together did they thank kind fortune for having, in a sportive humour, brought about so remarkable a meeting."<sup>23</sup> In this instance nature comes to represent a fortunate deliverer. However, the use of the word "sportive" maintains a rather unique connotation. The *Oxford English Dictionary* maintains a rather sexual connotation to the word: "engaging in or inclined to amorous dalliance or sexual play."<sup>24</sup> While this definition may seem unnecessarily sexual, one needs to understand the basic essence of the interaction. Crockett finds himself wandering about the woods, an already sexualized locale, when he randomly stumbles upon a woman, an object of conquest, not altogether unlike bears or deer, to Crockett. The parallels to hunting are uncanny; Crockett finds himself within his typical domain, when an object of desire appears before him. Within the confines of the text the wilderness employs itself as a location of primal activity. Hunting and mating occur in the wild, activities so inherently ingrained into the human lifestyle they cannot be escaped.

As a result of the feminization of nature and the dominion that Crockett controls over the subject, Clark emphasizes the masculinity of the figure. In an essay discussing the similarities between hunting and masculine heterosexuality, Brian Luke posits that, "hunting and predatory

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<sup>23</sup> Matthew St. Claire Clark, 53.

<sup>24</sup> "Sportive, Adj. and n.1," in *OED Online* (Oxford University Press), accessed November 10, 2019.



sexuality are instances of romance because each is simultaneously sexual and an expression of power.”<sup>25</sup> Crockett himself is described within the text as being, “perfectly a child of nature,”<sup>26</sup> so the concept of him being a predatory romantic suits his character. He is rather attuned to his primal instincts; a wild man in a wild place. By asserting the figure in such a fashion, Clark permits the figure to allow his masculinity to assume a rather animalistic, almost bestial status.

Aside from the psychosexual undertones of Crockett’s relationship to hunting, the nature of the environment itself plays an important role in the myth of David Crockett. Within *Sketches and Eccentricities*, the purpose of nature, or rather, the reasoning for displaying nature, is to aid in glorifying American wilderness. Clark postulates this idea in the introduction to his text, writing, “Nature yet reposes in her loveliest form. The whole country spreads before us a field for speculation, only bounded by the limits of the human mind.”<sup>27</sup> The image of Crockett immediately evokes to the reader the essence of nature; his entire mythological existence rides on his domination of the American frontier. By aligning the concept of the beauty of the American wilderness and Crockett, Clark permits the wilderness to assume itself a mythical quality, the proximity of the concepts allowing for a diffusion of awesome invocations. The fact that this admiration of the wilderness comes from the Eastern text denotes a trope of early American literature. As Daniel Payne writes, “It is a virtual truism that the first Americans to express an appreciation for the wilderness lived in the east, where the wilderness had long since disappeared.”<sup>28</sup> Clark writes the text from the vantage of attempting to venerate American wilderness. Though distinctly separate from the content of his writing, his efforts to lionize

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<sup>25</sup> Brian Luke, “Violent Love: Hunting, Heterosexuality, and the Erotics of Men’s Predation,” *Feminist Studies* 24, no. 3 (1998): 630, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3178583>.

<sup>26</sup> Matthew St. Claire Clark, *Sketches and Eccentricities of Col. David Crockett, of West Tennessee*, 55.

<sup>27</sup> Matthew St. Claire Clark, 13.

<sup>28</sup> Daniel Payne, “Voices in the Wilderness: American Nature Writing and Environmental Politics,” 1996, 23.

American natural resources display a sentiment of American exceptionalism, which Payne further expounds upon. “Many Americans were at least viscerally convinced that the frontier was what distinguished their nation from Europe.”<sup>29</sup> The immaculate, untapped potential of the American wilderness dignifies America from its European counter-part; Crockett distinguishes this relationship, asserting that a true, American frontiersman is needed to conquer the land.

Within Crockett’s autobiography, nature assumes a much more adversarial demeanor. Once again returning to the topic of hunting, most notably that of bear, Crockett purports some rather unusual phenomena. Towards the end of his tale Crockett delivers to his audience an anecdote about one of the largest bears he has ever slain. Through a dream, Crockett receives a premonition of a bear he will soon encounter. As Crockett states, “I had dreamed the night before of having a hard fight with a big black nigger, and I knowed it was a sign that I was to have a battle with a bear.”<sup>30</sup> This statement from Crockett allows a deep analysis of the figure’s character. In terms of hunting, the relation between predator and prey, is of innumerate importance, as it helps divulge not necessarily how Crockett views himself, but how he desires to view himself and be viewed by others. “Hunters zealously pursue those animals they have made into emblems of strength and independence. Deemed worthy of being killed, game animals instantiate just the characteristics the hunter hopes to possess by transference through the process of killing and eating.”<sup>31</sup>

To Crockett, bears represent the pinnacle of hunting; fast, deadly, behemoth sized mammals, bears represent a large portion of Crockett’s mythology. A large portion of his

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<sup>29</sup> Payne, “Voices in the Wilderness: American Nature Writing and Environmental Politics,” 24.

<sup>30</sup> Crockett, *A Narrative of the Life of David Crockett, Of the State of Tennessee*, 161.

<sup>31</sup> Luke, “Violent Love,” 643.

electioneering capabilities disseminated from his notoriety as a hunter of bears, a mortal man hunting the most potentially grave of prey. As a result of this relationship, it would appear that David Crockett covets the sentiment associated with bears to be subsumed upon himself. That is, as a result of slaying and consuming bear, Crockett himself absorbs the characteristics of bear, allowing him to purport himself as a masterpiece of killing; a deadly, highly evolved creature, importing an impetus of raw savagery. Yet, this notion fails to address Crockett's association of bear and the likeness of a black man. One potential explanation could be that Crockett's psyche attempts to reconcile supposed similarities between the two figures. Both the bear and the black man represent powerful, oppositional forces to Crockett. They are oppressed by Crockett, yet simultaneously represent a potential of unleashed retribution; in the same way that a bear could annihilate Crockett, vindicating the fallen members of the species, a potential slave rebellion, or complete abolition of slavery, could pose Crockett to the difficulties of unrelinquished backlash. The 1830s represent a time of increased abolitionist activity, and as a serving member of Congress, the sentiment could weigh on Crockett heavily.

One last critical aspect of Crockett's relationship with nature comes as a result of his dealings with Native Americans throughout his lifetime. Almost only strictly discussed within his autobiography, Crockett's relations take on two general aspects: Crockett as a slayer of Indians, and Crockett maintaining rather pleasant relations. As an Indian hater, Crockett's characterization is rather one-note; he threatens to scalp a Native American in order to, "make me a mockasin,"<sup>32</sup> and aids in the slaughter of one-hundred eighty six men, women, and children, where American soldiers, "shot them like dogs."<sup>33</sup> Passages such as these establish Crockett as a

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<sup>32</sup> Crockett, *A Narrative of the Life of David Crockett, Of the State of Tennessee*, 40.

<sup>33</sup> Crockett, 88.

veteran Indian killer, a facet of the myth that becomes increasingly more prevalent in later lore cycles. Likewise, this depiction allows Crockett to establish a dominance over not just the environment, but Native Americans as well.

Quite contrary to these ideas, Crockett also presents himself as having friendly ties to the Native American population. Crockett depicts two separate situations where Native Americans appeared as amicable aids, and even saviors. The first anecdote occurs during Crockett's service during The Creek Wars. After a long series of marches, Crockett finds himself famished after the military only has small rations of bread that can be offered to the troops. Thoroughly displeased with this notion, Crockett takes off through the wilderness, in effort to trade with the enemies with whom he is fighting. After arriving in Big Warrior's town, Crockett trades bullets and gun powder for a few hats of corn. As Crockett writes, "I then offered him ten charges of powder for another hat of corn. To this he agreed willingly. So I took off my hunting shirt, and tied up my corn; and though it had cost me very little of my powder and lead, yet I wouldn't have taken fifty silver dollars for it."<sup>34</sup> Crockett's actions here show a certain humanity of the man; though in the toils of war, Crockett is not above asking the enemy for help to survive. Crockett's actions even seem to efface some notion of bravado. By delivering to the enemy ammunition, Crockett appears to be eschewing the looming sense of death that comes with war. The man is so bent upon finding food, arming a man who has a potential to kill him does not bother Crockett in the slightest.

Furthermore, Crockett extends the concept of pleasant relations between himself and Native Americans, not only as givers of food, but as heroic, salvation-giving figures. Two years

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<sup>34</sup> Crockett, 121.

after his return from the war, Crockett talks about his efforts to explore the new counties of Tennessee. After going out with a party of two other men, Crockett found himself lost and sick in the wilderness. Thankfully for the frontiersman, a pair of benevolent Native Americans appeared before the figure. Crockett writes on the gravity of the situation that, “They then signed to me, that I would die, and be buried; a thing I was confoundedly afraid of myself.”<sup>35</sup> To Crockett’s delight, however, one man lends a hand, “one of the Indians proposed to go with me, and carry my gun. I gave him half a dollar, and accepted his offer.”<sup>36</sup> Once again, Crockett’s humanity is uniquely depicted whilst being aided by the Native Americans. This section of his autobiography is one of the few times Crockett admits to his fear of death, an interesting notion given the man’s martyrdom at the Alamo.

Crockett portrays Native Americans in a fashion quite common in nineteenth century America; as Philip Deloria writes, “Americans wanted to feel a natural affinity with the continent, and it was Indians who could teach them such aboriginal closeness.” By depicting himself as receiving the help of native peoples, Crockett asserts his potent, close relationship with nature. Crockett bridges a powerful gap in American lore, as he simultaneously represents American Exceptionalism, by dominating the wilderness and those who inhabit it, but also representing a submissive need for pleasant relationships between Indians and white Americans. Crockett is the paradoxical focal point between Native American relations and American Exceptionalism; white Americans needed Native Americans to feel better about themselves, yet also needed them to survive. Unfortunately, this balance is only found within Crockett’s lore. As

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<sup>35</sup> Crockett, 129.

<sup>36</sup> Phillip Joseph Deloria, *Playing Indian* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), 5, <http://web.a.ebscohost.com.umiss.idm.oclc.org/ehost/ebookviewer/ebook/bmxlYmtfXzUzMDU5X19BTg2?sid=01532484-f45d-4904-a84e-4f46e923c7df@fdc-v-sessmgr01&vid=0&format=EB&rid=1>.

a result of his ability to enter this super-state, Crockett becomes the wilderness incarnate; he is a man so evidently capable in nature he comes to efface an innate American dominance of nature.

### **Crockett and the Myth of the Self-Made Man**

Another form of myth building occurs as by-product of Crockett's frontier-based life, as the frontier promotes itself as a place for a man to make himself. The lore of David Crockett immerses itself fully into the realm of the self-made man. Unlike Crockett's wilderness lore, St. Claire Clark and Crockett both espouse very similar ideals. Within his autobiography, Crockett very rapidly allows his reader to know of his status as a man made of himself. Quickly after beginning his text, Crockett writes, "I stood no chance to become great in any other way than by accident. As my father was very poor, and living as he did *far back in the back woods*, he had neither the means nor the opportunity to give me [...] any learning."<sup>37</sup> The concept of poor parents is rife within either of these early texts. The Clark text similarly promotes the Crockett family's poverty, stating that his father's "extreme indigence"<sup>38</sup> rendered young David uneducated. However, both texts note that Crockett does not hold angst towards his father's destitute state; instead, Crockett feels obligated to aid his father in any way possible. One anecdote both narratives have in common is the story of Crockett delivering a large sum of money to his father. Around fifteen years of age, Crockett began working for a Quaker man in North Carolina, for which his tenure was to last six months. At the conclusion of his stay, Crockett rode home and delivered to his father thirty dollars. As a result of his "duty as a

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<sup>37</sup> Crockett, *A Narrative of the Life of David Crockett, Of the State of Tennessee*, 16.

<sup>38</sup> Matthew St. Claire Clark, *Sketches and Eccentricities of Col. David Crockett, of West Tennessee*, 23.

child,”<sup>39</sup> Crockett forced his father to tears— “he was sorry he couldn’t give me anything,” Crockett recalled, “but he was not able, he was too poor.”<sup>40</sup>

As a result of the immediate exhibition of his class stature in life, Crockett deftly and immediately sets the confines and terms for his mythologizing. Within the myth of Crockett, both authors almost instinctively demonstrate the man’s lack of wealth. The result of this effort is two-fold. Firstly, by invoking the myth of the self-made man, the character of David Crockett is allowed to assume a sense of normalcy, as only regular, everyday Americans can become self-made. As folklorist Richard Dorson wrote, Crockett presented his story within an American culture defined by a “strident young nationalism, of a surging westward push, of the emergence of the common man.”<sup>41</sup> By citing the myth of the self-made man, the myth of Crockett allows itself to generate a certain sense of plausibility; while the myth is obviously about Crockett, his humble origins assert that anybody could have been placed in a similar position to the frontiersman. Simultaneously, the myth of Crockett reciprocates mythologization upon the myth of the self-made man. Both myths have become so interwoven they begin to support one another. Operating in coordination, the myth of the self-made man asserts a validity to the myth of Crockett, while Crockett himself also validates the myth of the self-made man.

Though the concept of the self-made man is of utmost importance to the myth of Crockett, the figure himself often notes the harsh reality of such a concept. The idealized concept of Crockett purports the figure to be a legendary hunter, with a knack for dominating his environment. However, the reality for Crockett manifested in harsh ways; frontier life difficulties managed to slither into every aspect of the man’s existence. After his marriage to Mary Elder,

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<sup>39</sup> Crockett, *A Narrative of the Life of David Crockett, Of the State of Tennessee*, 46.

<sup>40</sup> Crockett, 46.

<sup>41</sup> Richard Dorson, *American Folklore* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1959), 202.

more affectionately known as Polly, Crockett began his first homestead in Tennessee. Unfortunately for the frontiersman, life in an unsettled land proved inconceivably difficult. As Crockett himself writes, “We worked for some years, renting ground, and paying high rent, until I found out it wan’t the thing it was cracked up to be; and that I couldn’t make a fortune at it just at all.”<sup>42</sup> Within the given passage, Crockett appears to undercut the myth itself. Not only is becoming a self-made man difficult, but at time it appears to be impossible, not worth the trouble even.

Throughout the mythology of Crockett, a series of statements similar to this are created. Throughout his career as a frontiersman, Crockett managed oversee a series of debauched business plans. Both Crockett and his father lost mill businesses to a flood; Crockett also lost thousands of staves, wooden planks utilized for building, in a tremendous failure on the Mississippi River. After over-encumbering two make-shift skiffs up with the wooden wares, Crockett and his ship mates failed to land properly, causing the men to lose all of their goods. Pondering the incident, Crockett writes, “I felt happier and better off than I ever had in my life before, for I had just made such a marvelous escape, that I had forgot almost everything else in that; and so I felt prime.”<sup>43</sup> Overall, Crockett widely failed in his role as a self-made man: aside from bear hunting, Crockett poorly handled business. As Scott A. Sandage notes, “to a nation on the verge of anointing individualism as its creed, the loser was simultaneously intolerable and indispensable. Failure was the worst thing that could happen to a striving American, yet it was the best proof that the republican founders had replaced destiny with merit.”<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Crockett, *A Narrative of the Life of David Crockett, Of the State of Tennessee*, 68.

<sup>43</sup> Crockett, 199.

<sup>44</sup> Scott A. Sandage, *Born Losers: A History of Failure in America* (Cambridge, UNITED STATES: Harvard University Press, 2005), 27, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/olemiss/detail.action?docID=3300274>.



It is rather evident that Crockett's capabilities on the frontier were at times rather lackluster. His ability to farm was poor at best, he failed to retain the earnings of business ventures, and aside from hunting, was generally incompetent on the frontier. *Sketches and Eccentricities* magnifies these failures, claiming that more often than not, the self-made man was the consequence of good fortune, rather than of ability. Clark writes on the topic, "A frontier country is no place for a man of modesty, of refinement, or of delicacy; and it must ever be that in a society so constituted, success is as often the result of accident as the consequence of merit."<sup>45</sup> Though Clark deforms the concept of the self-made man, connecting the myth with character traits allows the myth to assume a new potential: that of instilling values. M.J. Heale contemplates the nature of the self-made man on the frontier, writing, "The self-made man himself evoked a dual image: he had both raised himself to prominence from lowly beginnings and he was the master of his own destiny. Further, the self-made man confirmed other American ideals."<sup>46</sup> Clark here is essentially delivering his notion of the ideal American; they are tough, rough, and able to accommodate any hardship thrown their direction. Furthermore, it should be noted that Crockett is not a self-made man, but that his self-making is not a result of his pioneer spirit.

### **Crockett and the Myth of Service**

If David Crockett cannot be viewed a self-made man as a result of his frontier exploits, only one segment of the man's mythology can deliver such a prescription: his faculties at facilitating the needs of the American people. Within the Crockett mythology, the man managed to serve his fellow people in two separate roles: that of a warrior, and that of a public servant. As

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<sup>45</sup> Matthew St. Claire Clark, *Sketches and Eccentricities of Col. David Crockett, of West Tennessee*, 63.

<sup>46</sup> Heale, "The Role of the Frontier in Jacksonian Politics," 415.

a result of his proximity to a heavy Native American presence, Crockett served as a volunteer soldier in The Creek War. In terms of public service, Crockett served a plurality of roles: he served as a justice of the peace, in the Tennessee General Assembly, and in the United States House of Representatives.

First and foremost, it should be noted that Crockett's military career serves as the driving force behind his political one. Those two aspects of his public persona are completely intertwined, as his military service operates as the means to justify a political end. Matthew St. Claire Clark notes this relationship in *Sketches and Eccentricities*. As the man claims, "Naturally of a fine person, with a goodness of heart rarely equaled, and a talent for humor never excelled [...] No man ever enjoyed a greater degree of personal popularity, than did David Crockett while with the army; and his success in political life is mainly attributable to that fact."<sup>47</sup> As a result of his humorous and kind disposition, Crockett received a rather pleasant welcome in the military. This pleasant aspect helped to further his political career, as his jests garnered him a copious amount of attention from officers, most notably his military ally and future political enemy, Andrew Jackson. Clark's depiction of the war for Crockett is rather interesting as it manages to create a strict dichotomy between the undeniable horrors of combat, and Crockett's hearty temperament. By portraying the man in such a fashion, Clark creates a characterization of Crockett that appears to be infallibly happy, content, and whimsical on the battlefield.

While Clark fixates on the comic notion of Crockett, the man himself portrays a much more nuanced version of his military career. Similar to Clark's concept of Crockett, the frontiersman himself does denote an overtly masculine character; as the man states, he "had none

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<sup>47</sup> Matthew St. Claire Clark, *Sketches and Eccentricities of Col. David Crockett, of West Tennessee*, 55.

of the dread of dying that I had expected to feel.”<sup>48</sup> Crockett’s machismo attitude towards life is displayed proudly in his sections about war. This sentiment continues as Crockett delights in the company with whom he finds himself fighting. After a contingent of thirteen-hundred soldiers is accrued, Crockett quips of the troop, “All determined to fight, judging from myself, for I felt wolfish all over. I verily believed the whole army was of the real grit.”<sup>49</sup> Crockett’s frontiersmanship and military service coalesce in order to exalt the military capabilities of America. As Frederick Jackson Turner claims in *The Frontier in American History*, “the importance of the frontier, from that day to this, as a military training school, keeping alive the power of resistance to aggression, and developing the stalwart and rugged qualities of the frontiersman.”<sup>50</sup> The frontier serves to bolster the culture of American Exceptionalism, as the frontier is the unique location where the American spirit is toughened; the iron of the frontier sharpens the iron of American aggression. Crockett’s depiction of war on the frontier allows his myth to absorb this ideal, permitting him a sense of exceptional bravado, toughness, and grit.

While the war serves as a means of proving Crockett’s toughness, it also allows for the man to display his patriotic qualities. After receiving a furlough, Crockett returns home for a brief stint, steeling himself for another combat experience. Prior to his departure, one of Crockett’s recently drafted neighbor’s approaches, and offers the frontiersman one hundred dollars to serve in his place. In typical Crockett fashion, he not only declines, but manages to make the situation beneficial to his own image. Crockett’s reply to the man is as follows: “I told him I was better raised than to hire myself out to be shot at; but that I would go, and he should too, and in that

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<sup>48</sup> Crockett, *A Narrative of the Life of David Crockett, Of the State of Tennessee*, 72.

<sup>49</sup> Crockett, 74.

<sup>50</sup> Frederick Jackson Turner, *The Frontier in American History* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1920), 15, <http://hdl.handle.net/2027/mdp.39015008268776>.

way the government would have the services of us both.”<sup>51</sup> Crockett depicts himself as rallying cry for military service; positing himself as well raised, it is an obvious decision for the man to not only to fight, but to inspire others around him to insert themselves into combat. Crockett invokes a sense of blind patriotism into his narrative, allowing himself to sanctify himself into American civil religion; he follows the lead of the founding fathers, fighting and inspiring in the name of America.

This sense of patriotism is expanded upon by means of description of the hellish fighting Crockett and his fellow soldiers had to endure during The Creek War. Within the text, Crockett describes the massacre that occurred at Fort Mimms, the powder keg which initiated the war. The description is visceral and brutal, as Crockett asserts that the Native Americans, “immediately commenced scalping, without regard to age or sex; having forced the inhabitants up to one side of the fort, where they carried on the work of death as a butcher would in a slaughter pen.”<sup>52</sup> The description here helps to elevate Crockett’s moral standing; a man’s value in combat can only be judged against the supposed evil to which they are resisting. Likewise, it creates a sense of savagery, a lack of humanity, not effaced in Crockett’s other descriptions of Native Americans. Aside from this sentiment, Crockett’s tale furthers the idea of American superiority. Wilbur W. Caldwell writes, “With every victory America came more and more to view her superiority in was as a confirmation of her cultural and moral superiority. Victory over the Indians confirmed American civilization as superior to Indian savagery.”<sup>53</sup> Written in an age

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<sup>51</sup> Crockett, *A Narrative of the Life of David Crockett, Of the State of Tennessee*, 101.

<sup>52</sup> Crockett, 105.

<sup>53</sup> Wilbur W. Caldwell, *American Narcissism: The Myth of National Superiority* (New York: Algora Publishing, 2006), 126.

where America was still trying to define itself, Crockett's narrative helps to not only create, but cement a sense of domination.

In his service to America, David Crockett also entered the political realm. It should be noted that his political feats and values will not be analyzed in this section. While it is important to understand some aspects, such as his opposition to the Indian Removal Act of 1830, Crockett was not mythologized as a result of his actions in office; simply achieving office served as the mythologizing. In his efforts to attain an elected position, Crockett's silver-tongued, brazen nature shines most prominently. In both early texts, Crockett's smooth, straightforward thinking approach is described, creating an almost bribe-like essence. To Crockett, a simple kind gesture is all that is need to incur a vote, therefore he offers his potential constituents a horn of whisky, and a twist of tobacco: "I never like to leave a man worse off than when I found him. If I had given him a drink, and he had lost his tobacco, he would not have made much; but give him tobacco and a drink too, and you are mighty apt to get his vote."<sup>54</sup> Crockett's campaign strategy mirrors his backwoods upbringing; no speedy, slick, evasive political speech is needed, simply the display of a kind nature is needed to be elected. Furthermore, Crockett's rhetoric allows himself to present himself as a man of the people. His political abilities do not prevent the man from a drink, nor a chew, and therefore his political prowess bases itself upon closing the gap between politicians and those electing them.

While Crockett's unique ability to relate to his constituents aids in his mythologizing, both texts also assert David Crockett's unceasing need to serve, and serve those who elected him well. Within *Sketches and Eccentricities*, Clark gilds Crockett's political career, noting that he

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<sup>54</sup> Crockett, *A Narrative of the Life of David Crockett, Of the State of Tennessee*, 169.

“attends to the interests of his constituents, who, without wasting time in idle declamation, is ever at his post, voting upon all subjects, which in any manner affect the people of his district.”<sup>55</sup>

In his autobiography Crockett proclaims a rather similar statement, declaring that he “had supported the public interest, and cleared my conscience in giving it, instead of gratifying the private ambition of a man.”<sup>56</sup> Within these texts, Crockett is associated with the pinnacle of democratic rule, the human incarnation of *vox populi vox Dei*. More importantly, however, Crockett is juxtaposed against his friend-turned-political rival, Andrew Jackson. Contemporary politicians of both fellows described Jackson as similar “to Caesar, Cromwell, and Napoleon as usurpers of executive privilege and destroyers of the people’s independence.”<sup>57</sup> Supporting democracy, Crockett denounces the wrong-doings of his fellow politicians. He emanates the inherent goodness of democracy, represents the best interests of his people, and as a result, presents himself as an idealized politician.

It is acutely important to understand both Crockett’s and Clark’s texts were campaign biographies, designed to “pave the way,” as Shackford writes “for a presidential bid in the election of 1836 when Andrew Jackson was to step down from office.”<sup>58</sup> Both of the biographies surrounding Crockett sprouted out of a need to create a political doctrine. They help to reinforce the idea of Crockett being the superior candidate, a man bent upon the proper implementation of democracy. However, while the political aspect of these texts is critical for understanding them in a contemporary light, the sentiment of politics pervades the mythological institutionalization of David Crockett. Born only a few years after the creation of the Declaration of Independence,

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<sup>55</sup> Matthew St. Claire Clark, *Sketches and Eccentricities of Col. David Crockett, of West Tennessee*, 175.

<sup>56</sup> Crockett, *A Narrative of the Life of David Crockett, Of the State of Tennessee*, 171.

<sup>57</sup> Rigal, Laura. “Black Work at the Polling Place.” *Commonplace: The Journal of Early American Life*. 2008.

<sup>58</sup> James Shackford, *David Crockett: The Man and The Legend* (The University of North Carolina Press, 1956), X.

Crockett's mythology is intrinsically intertwined with the diffusion of democratic ideals. His presence in early America allows for a demonstration of the grace of the new nation, allowing for its ideological support looking forward. Crockett's narrative within these texts serves to impart ideals of American government to the masses. Patrick J. Deneen and Joseph Romance discuss this need for civic-minded literature, writing, "the Constitution did not itself seek positively to inculcate the civic virtues that a liberal regime necessarily requires: the framers left this work to the private realm when an instruction in virtue would take place in families, in churches, in local schools, and within the context of small communities."<sup>59</sup> The tales told about Crockett were told for a particular reason. In terms of politics, the man serves as a beacon of the goodness of Democracy, a representation of what American government could and should be.

The myth of David Crockett is as multi-faceted as it is American; the wealth of mythological concepts found within the myth are numerous. For the frontier, Crockett served as a vehicle of recognition, allowing for the veneration of America's environmental beauty, while simultaneously connoting the masculine nature of survival upon the frontier. In terms of the self-made man myth, Crockett subsumes the myth, bends it, and creates his own version where luck and good fortune allow for a rising in status, and a circulation of the American ability to better oneself. His service myth concomitantly allows for a dissemination of American superiority; not only does America fight the good fight, but its government allows for the preservation of such exceptional goodness. Both *Sketches and Eccentricities* and *A Narrative of the Life* create a fundamental layer of the myth of Crockett. They are the closest to the source as possible, and

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<sup>59</sup> Patrick J. Deneen and Joseph Romance, eds., *Democracy's Literature: Politics and Fiction in America* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2005), 3.

create the most basic form of the myth. Looking forward, these texts allow for a sense of nostalgia to be created around Crockett, as his myth becomes more and more available to the American public.



## CHAPTER 2: Davy Defined—Crockett in the Nineteenth Century

After committing the ultimate patriotic sacrifice at the Alamo in 1836, martyring himself in the name of independence, Crockett's lore status in America skyrocketed. No longer capable of influencing his own mythology, other Americans began to depict the frontiersman, taking great liberties with their creative advance. This stage of the Crockett lore cycle is of utmost importance; after his death, the historical figure of David Crockett began to fade, allowing for the emergence of "Davy" Crockett, a wholly mythologized, completely literary character. Brazen, uncouth, and undoubtedly fictitious, this version of Crockett assumed the myths that previously upheld the myth of David, and used them to bolster a series of new myths in American culture.

While the first chapter of this essay sought to establish the original myths associated with David Crockett, this chapter seeks to describe the evolution of those myths after Crockett's death. Crockett operates rather similarly to the Saussurean signifier within these texts, with his myth serving as the signified; the Crockett character serves to vaguely assert some form of mythic meaning. Aside from having Davy Crockett as a character, the following texts have little to no commonalities between themselves; yet, the presence of Davy Crockett allows these texts to immediately evoke the mythological baggage of the character. As William R. Bascom writes, lore serves the "overlooked function of maintaining conformity to the accepted patterns of behavior."<sup>60</sup> Furthermore, lore does more than simply verify institutions; Bascom further states, "some forms of folklore are important as means of applying social pressure and exercising control."<sup>61</sup> As a folkloric figure, the historical Crockett created, molded, and associated himself

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<sup>60</sup> William R. Bascom, "Four Functions of Folklore," in *The Study of Folklore* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, Inc., 1965), 294.

<sup>61</sup> Bascom, 294.

with a select group of ideals and myths. As a fictitious character, Crockett symbolized these previous ideas, which could be subverted and warped at will, utilized as a lore-based stipend by which society could be commented upon.

These new iterations of Crockett lore represent a rotation in the lore cycle, a rotation defined by two interrelated motivations. First, as a result of the increased capacity to reproduce these myths, the lore surrounding Davy Crockett garnered a much broader sense of topic. The reproducibility of Crockett lore began to uptrend in this era for two different reasons. Primarily, the texts created in this time span generally could be created more often; Dime novels were cheap, almanacs were almost ubiquitous, and the play to be dissected in this chapter was preformed over three thousand times. On a much deeper level, the texts became more reproducible as they ventured away from their biographical, original, subject matter. The tales and stories about Crockett are not necessarily being reproduced, but rather the sentiment and aura that the character himself evokes. The literary character of Davy Crockett allows the author to immediately import both myths commonly associated with the man, and also to rapidly evoke a portrayal of a wild, antebellum America.

Secondly, esoteric and exoteric groups changed drastically in this era, as Crockett lost his ability to change the myth, and other social groups assumed power over the man's likeness. After his death at the Alamo, David Crockett lost any ability to correct and revise his lore. What came to follow was an often crude, regularly vulgar, extreme version of a wild Crockett. As Richard Dorson writes, "the characterization reached the point of caricature; the language dissolves into absurd misspellings, the adventures move to faroff land and fantastic climaxes."<sup>62</sup> The David

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<sup>62</sup> Richard Dorson, *American Folklore* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1959), 207.

Crockett of the autobiographies and the Davy of this new fiction are drastically different from one another, to a point, at times, of almost unrecognizability.

While the first segment of the Crockett lore began almost strictly as a series of politicized biographies, the second ushered in a myriad of different mediums and genres. Appearing right around the date of Crockett's passing, *Davy Crockett's Almanack, of Wild Sports of the West, and Life in the Backwoods*, emerged in 1835. Flourished with woodcut illustrations, this almanac took humorously to many anecdotes found within Crockett's autobiography, as well as creating some tales of its own. Years after the almanacs, Frank Murdoch's 1872 play *Davy Crockett; Or, Be Sure You're Right, Then Go Ahead* was scripted. Though Murdoch never witnessed the exhibition of his frontier melodrama, it succeeded stupendously, as Frank Mayo helmed the titular character thousands of times over a twenty-two-year period. Finally, two separate dime novels, *Kill-bar, the Guide; or, The Long Trail* and *The Bear-Hunter; or, Davy Crockett as a Spy* will be the subject to investigation. Written in 1869 and 1873 by respective authors Charles D. Warren and Harry Hazard, these texts are critical as they allow for a juxtaposition of Crockett's mythic depiction within the same genre and medium.

### **Crockett and His Almanacs**

When discussing the formation and evolution of the figure known as Davy Crockett, no single body of work has had more impact than the posthumous almanacs created from 1835-1856. It is in these texts that Davy Crockett metamorphizes into the folkloric figure he is known as today—they represent his mythological coronation, and a racoon skin cap will serve as his crown. The almanacs form the basic building blocks of Crockett's lore: they are the initial combination of both Crockett's self-effaced myths, along with newly created myths of a fictional variety. More importantly, the almanacs revolutionize the function of Crockett lore, changing the

figure from a representation of American ideals, into a regulator of societal and economic institutions.

While there were over fifty different almanacs containing Crockett related material, only three will be utilized: *The Second Nashville Series of Crockett Almanacs, 1839-1841*.<sup>63</sup> The reasoning behind these texts is three-fold: first, the Nashville series is considered one of, if not the first, series of Crockett almanacs to be produced. Secondly, the *Second Nashville Series* benefits from a mythological Goldilocks effect: it is close enough to the original subject matter to be pertinent, yet far enough away to only contain non-autobiographical materials. Thirdly, these texts are presented in facsimile form, allowing for an analysis of just not the texts, but other paratextual material relating to almanacs.

In order to understand the functional change in the Crockett lore, three changes pertaining to form need to be discussed: these changes relate to the form of the lore itself, the form of the genre, and the form of the medium. The changes to lore and genre are both attributed to specific uses of language within the texts, while paratextual information allows for an analysis of medium. Within the Nashville Series of Crockett almanacs, one characteristic stands prominently amongst all others: the rife disregard for orthographic convention. Perhaps the most definitive aspect of the almanacs comes from the gradual implementation of grossly misspelled, misconstrued, and improperly used words throughout the tales. The 1839 edition contains relatively little evidence of such a notion. “I missed him intirely, which proves to me he war not the reel actual devil,”<sup>64</sup> speaks Crockett of hunting an elk. By 1841, however, the “Awlmyneck”, as Crockett calls it in a fictitious letter, entered a realm of complete disarray. Further on in the

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<sup>63</sup> Michael A. Lofaro, ed., *The Tall Tales of Davy Crockett: The Second Nashville Series of Crockett Almanacs, 1839-1841*, Enl. facsim. ed, Tennesseana Editions (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1987).

<sup>64</sup> *The Crockett Almanac, 1839*, 1st ed., vol. 2 (Nashville: Ben Harding, 1839), 11.

letter, Crockett relates a story of him being rescued via watercraft. “I got to this big bote and the men let me cum in, and when I telled ‘em my name war Krockett, they gin 3 cheers and axed me into a little suller in the hinder eend of the bote.”<sup>65</sup> Over the course of just two years, the regional language transfigured itself from an element of the text, to its most defining feature.

One means of explanation for this lingual phenomenon comes from F.C. Bartlett denotes as folkloric principles of familiarization and rationalization. These processes occur anytime some form of lore is reproduced; essentially, reproducers of lore reframe myth by overstating aspects that are were found to be critical in initial iterations. Bartlett defines these principles as a means of altering lore “into such a form that it may be accepted with uneasiness, and without question,”<sup>66</sup> creating a situation where “a pleasant mood of unquestioning acceptance is evoked.”<sup>67</sup> In the initial iterations of the Crockett lore, his snappy maxims and strange speech patterns serve as a means of displaying the quirky, unique character of David Crockett. Within the almanacs however, the vernacular of Davy Crockett subsumes the entirety of his lore. The cumbersome abuse of language is a result of familiarization and rationalization; the creators of the almanacs found Crockett’s dialect to be one of the more prominent features of his lore, and transmogrified it into the most common association of Crockett’s lore. The resulting lore is now more consumable to its intended audience, allowing itself flexibility and ambiguity disguised by erratic regional language.

Formative changes to genre are yet another implication of the textual absurdities of the almanacs. David S. Reynolds classifies the comic elements of the almanacs as American

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<sup>65</sup> *The Crockett Almanac, 1841*, 3rd ed., vol. 2 (Nashville: Ben Harding, 1841), 4.

<sup>66</sup> F.C. Bartlett, “Some Experiments on the Reproduction of Folk Stories,” in *The Study of Folklore* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, Inc., 1965), 251.

<sup>67</sup> F.C. Bartlett, 251.

Subversive humor. Defined by raucous, dark, and often vicious actions, Subversive humor dominated antebellum America. Reynolds claims that this Subversive humor created a situation where “political and social freedom was reflected in a sudden linguistic freedom. Words were violently stripped from their normal associations and were left to float in ever-changing linguistic space.”<sup>68</sup> It is through the strange orthography of the almanacs that Crockett gains a sense of mythological agency as the character enters a state of signifying freefall—linguistic freedom grants mythological openness. As a culmination of both Subversive humor and the processes of familiarization and rationalization, Crockett’s lore enters a state of super significance; not only can Crockett represent anything, but what Crockett represents will be easier to digest for his audience. This is arguably the single most important aspect of Crockett’s lore from the almanacs: while the content of his lore begins to solidify during this stage, the actual form of the lore, what it represents and how it represents itself, becomes completely fluid.

Lastly, the paratextual elements of the text need to be discussed. In order to determine the function of lore, the function of the text in which it is presented needs to be dissected. The “Nashville” series of texts contain the paratextual elements necessary to an almanac; outside of the very simple 1839 edition, the almanacs contain full lunar charts, zodiac symbols, sunsets and rises, and asserts the calculations are accurate not just for America, but Canada as well. Gerard Genette writes that paratext serves as a “conveyor of commentary” which creates, “a privileged place of a pragmatics and a strategy, of an influence on the public, an influence that—whether well or poorly understood and achieved—is at the service of a better reception for the text and a

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<sup>68</sup> David S. Reynolds, *Beneath The American Renaissance: The Subversive Imagination in the Age of Emerson and Melville* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1988), 444.

more pertinent reading of it.”<sup>69</sup> The question, then, is how does this almanac related paratext influence the reading of these texts? The function of an almanac is that of economic reference, as the paratextual elements allow for estimations upon the weather; farmers may utilize sun charts to decide when to sow seeds, and fishermen may use tide charts to choose when to cast net. However, these almanacs most likely never served their intended function as they were, “the work of Boston illustrator-editor-publisher Charles Ellms,”<sup>70</sup> and were, “written for a largely urban market.”<sup>71</sup> This pointed intention of audience drastically changes the function of the paratext of the almanac; instead of serving as a point of economic reference, the tables and charts maintain a sense of socio-economic survivability. The typical Bostoner does not need access to agricultural information. Instead, these almanacs rely upon Crockett’s association with the myth of the self-made man in order to import a sense of plausibility to the reader’s life. Crockett pulled himself up from poverty, and the almanacs contain the tools to veritably start a farm, therefore anybody can achieve a similar fate. It is this concept that allows the fictitious Crockett to regulate economy and society. The language of the texts allows Crockett lore to be simultaneously consumable and hyper fluid; The paratext of the almanacs generate a function that speaks to socio-economic status. In culmination, a highly adaptable, well-received lore surrounding the regulation of economics and society is created.

Now that the function of Crockett’s lore is understood, the actual tales in which the figure is depicted need to be dissected. The first tale to be analyzed will be from the 1839 edition of the almanac, a story titled “Col. Crockett and the Squatter.” This tale tells the story of Crockett and

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<sup>69</sup> Gerard Genette, *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation*, trans. Jane E. Lewin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 1.

<sup>70</sup> Lara Langer Cohen, *The Fabrication of American Literature: Fraudulence and Antebellum Print Culture*, 1st ed, Material Texts (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012), 73.

<sup>71</sup> Cohen, 73.

his encounter with Jim Hickory, a settler attempting to garner free land by means of the rite of preemption, a law which allowed frontiersman free land if they developed the area. After being approached by Hickory in the forests of Kentucky, the man asks Crockett to vouch for the development of his land, a prospect which Crockett finds dubious at best. After agreeing to survey the land, Crockett discovers the plot to be in the exact condition he expected: croplless, and totally underdeveloped. Fraught with anger, Crockett forces Hickory to consume a cow manure, the only product of the farm.

Simultaneously virtuous and abhorrent, Crockett within these texts comes to represent the nineteenth century trope of the “Screamer”, a vulgar, vituperative, often violent figure that rips through the world spouting strange maxims, while also righting the moral wrongs of others. David S. Reynolds writes that the screamer was, “the ultimate moral reformer, who, while supposedly a sympathetic figure, drinks and swears with gleeful disregard for moral values.”<sup>72</sup> Crockett’s paradoxical morality, and lack thereof, is perfectly displayed within this passage. After asking Jim Hickory if he had lied to him, Crockett proclaims, “because if you do there will be trouble between us in less time than hell would scorch a feather.”<sup>73</sup> Likewise, after watching Hickory eat the excrement, Crockett quips that, “he’ll never forget the taste of parjury as long as he lives.”<sup>74</sup>

In order to posit Davy Crockett as a moral reformer, the text relies upon Crockett as a predisposed example of the myth of the self-made man. As a self-made man himself, Crockett serves as an economic and social gatekeeper, deciding who, and by what means, somebody can

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<sup>72</sup> David S. Reynolds, *Beneath The American Renaissance: The Subversive Imagination in the Age of Emerson and Melville*, 450.

<sup>73</sup> *The Crockett Almanac, 1839*, 2:11.

<sup>74</sup> *The Crockett Almanac, 1839*, 2:12.



become self-sufficient. After discovering Hickory's deceitful attempt at attaining property, Crockett declares, "I stand on the character of a gentleman and the universal dignity of human nature."<sup>75</sup> Though his actions would show otherwise, Crockett represents frontier gentility, a self-made man evolved into the upper echelon of society. As a result of such characterization, Crockett symbolizes the oppressive nature of American economics. Carroll Smith-Rosenberg writes that the Crockett myth, "was formulated at the very time when institutions in the service of commercial and industrial capitalism and, often, with the specific purpose of socializing and controlling the youthful population, first proliferated."<sup>76</sup> Within this tale Crockett represents the ideals of the eastern bourgeoisie; the proper capitalist not only earns his keep, but does so in a morally clear manner. In an almost nonsensical fashion, the wild, poor Crockett comes to represent urban, upper class ideals.

The almanacs continue to comment upon eastern society in another story titled "A Pretty Predicament." Once again appearing in the 1839 edition, this tale is about one of Crockett's near-death experiences in the wilderness. After perusing about the wilderness, Davy Crockett finds himself tired, and utilizes the crotch of a tree as a pillow. After falling asleep the man wakes up to find his hair being tugged at savagely by a crop of eagles; Crockett goes on to yell for help, and is eventually assisted by a young woman. In typical Crockett style, the woman becomes a target of sexual conquest, as Crockett requests she, "bundle with me tonight."<sup>77</sup> Crockett becomes completely infatuated with the girl, especially noting her backwoods tendencies. As the character proclaims, "She said she could not play on the piano nor sing like a nightingale, but she

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<sup>75</sup> *The Crockett Almanac, 1839*, 2:11.

<sup>76</sup> Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, *Disorderly Conduct: Visions of Gender in Victorian America*, Oxford Paperbacks (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 107.

<sup>77</sup> *The Crockett Almanac, 1839*, 2:14.

could out-scream a catamount and jump over her own shadow; she had good strong horse sense and knew a woodchuck from a skunk.”<sup>78</sup> Once again Crockett’s mythology is used to comment upon societal actions. Crockett’s infatuation with the girl is based upon her ability to conform to the social practices within the given world of the story. Within the bizarre world of the Crockett almanacs, normalcy is dictated by one’s ability to subvert and deconstruct the natural order of things. The lady is the complete opposite of the dainty, songful nature a woman of aristocratic society should possess; however, the commentary is not that of critique, but of reflection.

Overall, Davy Crockett’s portrayal in these almanacs served as a spring-board for his mythology—while it was already developed, these almanacs sent Crockett’s lore into the stratosphere. Moreover, his lore began to function as a regulator, deciding who and what defines an economically prosperous American, a theme that continues throughout the majority of his nineteenth century lore cycle.

### **Crockett in the Theater**

After over twenty years of almanacs, Crockett’s lore changed once again in the 1872 as a result of Frank Murdoch’s massively successful play *Davy Crockett; Or, Be Sure You’re Right, Then Go Ahead*. Performed predominantly in New York, Murdoch’s play dominated the theater scene at the end of the century, as Frank Mayo acted his role as Crockett more than three-thousand times.<sup>79</sup> The Crockett of the theater differed drastically from the Crockett of the almanacs; while the almanacs portrayed Crockett in a crude manner, Davy of the theater is much more reserved, moralistic, and chivalrous. However, while the character of Davy Crockett

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<sup>78</sup> *The Crockett Almanac, 1839*, 2:14.

<sup>79</sup> Roger A. Hall, *Performing the American Frontier, 1870-1906* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 16.

contradicts his character in the almanacs, the purpose and function of his lore maintains a similar status: to enforce and ensure economic and societal norms.

*Davy Crockett; Or, Be Sure You're Right, Then Go Ahead* tells the story of a young Davy, in his efforts to swoon Eleanor Vaughn, a former love interest who has recently returned to the frontier. The main conflict of the play derives itself from Neil Campton, who has been arranged to marry Eleanor, and his uncle Oscar, a meddling, conniving figure who manipulates Maj. Hector Royston, Eleanor's guardian and financial fiduciary. Through a series of heroic and chivalric actions Davy Crockett eventually wins the heart of Eleanor, ending the play with their hasty marriage.

The function of Crockett's lore is inherently connected to the type of documents it is being portrayed in; in this case, Davy Crockett takes form in a uniquely American style of theater, denoted as the frontier melodrama. As Richard Wattenberg states, "melodrama not only functioned as popular entertainment, but it also offered audience members reassurance that certain moral values had the permanence of eternal truths."<sup>80</sup> The cementation of traditional ideals is the main purpose of the frontier melodrama. It is this concept that directly impacts this version of Davy Crockett; Crockett's lore serves as a vehicle for fortifying and reassuring socially constructed ideas of morality, and as a result, the character of his form becomes significantly more upright. Furthermore, Crockett's moral exemplification owes itself to the audience to whom he was portrayed. Bruce McConachie writes that, "by the 1870s, matinee ladies, fashionable latecomers, commuting early-leavers, serious-minded businessmen, and other

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<sup>80</sup> Richard Wattenberg, "Americanizing Frontier Melodrama: From Davy Crockett (1872) to My Partner (1879)," *Journal of American Culture* 12, no. 1 (1989): 7, [https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1542-734X.1989.1201\\_7.x](https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1542-734X.1989.1201_7.x).

bourgeoisie dominated theatergoing in the Northeast.”<sup>81</sup> Given the tumultuous climate of late-century America, the financially well-off constituents of New York and Boston needed some form of moral reassurance; economic depression struck in 1873, Reconstruction still consumed much of the nation, and Gilded Age political corruption ran rampant.

In order to construct a Davy Crockett that is critically disposed to the dissemination of supposed moral correctness, Murdoch creates a pastoral wilderness. Prior to the drawing of the curtains, a Chorus initiates the play, describing the frontier setting of the play in poetic form. “When high o’er the mountain / Field, valley and crag, / The sun gilds the fountain / We watch for the stag.”<sup>82</sup> The wilderness Davy encounters within Murdoch’s play is staunchly different from the wilderness found in other iterations of his lore. Instead of placing Crockett in a violent, deadly frontier, the figure finds himself in a rather pastoral, amiable environment—the sun shines over a beautiful mountainside whilst deer wander about. As a stalwart moral figure, Crockett can only reflect the morals of the environment in which he resides. Thus, the idealized, poetic setting of the play helps to bolster Crockett’s moral standing; Crockett personifies this environment, as he is a great man living in the great American wilderness. The wilderness also serves a means of constructing Crockett’s good-standing in society. As Crockett first enters the play, a fellow hunter by the name of Yonkers describes the frontiersman. “Yes, that’s his voice—as clear as a bell and as sharp as the crack of a rifle—not another one like it in the settlement, and yonder he comes with a two-year-old buck over his shoulder.”<sup>83</sup> The bourgeoisie characteristics of Crockett immediately are construed with his entrance into the play. As a notable man in

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<sup>81</sup> Bruce A. McConachie, ed., *Melodramatic Formations: American Theatre and Society, 1820-1870*, 1 edition (Iowa City: University Of Iowa Press, 1992), 204.

<sup>82</sup> Frank Murdoch, *Davy Crockett, Or, Be Sure You’re Right, Then Go Ahead*, ed. Isaac Goldberg and Hubert Heffner (Princeton, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1872), 119, <http://search.proquest.com/lion/docview/2138582422/citation/6DB75A264B848A3PQ/1>.

<sup>83</sup> Murdoch, 121.

society Crockett serves two primary roles: by hunting, Crockett effaces the idea of man as a provider, while his unique vocal characteristics speak to the man's moral clarity.

While the setting of the play helps to create the base for Crockett's morality, it is through Eleanor, the feminine counterpart to Crockett, that allows for proper extrapolation upon his character. After accidentally breaking her saddle, Eleanor and her entourage enter the play, stumbling upon Crockett's house and asking for help to repair her saddle. Davy and Eleanor reconvene for short while, dabbling in flirtatious banter, when Eleanor expresses her desire to not marry Neil Crampton. Eleanor seeks advice from Crockett, asking him to read a letter that hints at Oscar Crampton's nefarious intentions. Eleanor proclaims to Crockett, "Your strong man's nature will make it all clear. Read it, for I trust you, Davy Crockett."<sup>84</sup> Crockett negatively responds to her request however, as Murdoch calls upon the historical facts of Crockett's education. "I would—as I'm a man—but take back your letter and find a better friend than Dave Crockett, for I'm a backwoodsman—and I cannot read."<sup>85</sup> This scene helps to establish one ideological facet of the play. While Crockett does not exude the typical qualities of an upper-class male, as evidenced through his illiteracy, he does maintain a rather strict moral backbone, and as a result, still serves a beacon of bourgeoisie thinking. Bruce McConachie writes that, "Moral reform melodrama insisted on a cause-and-effect relationship between individual respectability and social success. The message was clear: economic well-being reflected inner sincerity and sensibility."<sup>86</sup> Crockett represents a means of justifying economic success: wealth is simply an external sign that displays moral rigidity. The disparity between Crockett's morals and his lack of wealth help to further this concept. Crockett comes into wealth in the denouement

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<sup>84</sup> Murdoch, 128.

<sup>85</sup> Murdoch, 129.

<sup>86</sup> McConachie, *Melodramatic Formations*, 214.

of the play, only as a result of his marriage to Eleanor. Within the confines of the play, not only does wealth connote morality, but morality directly leads to an incurring of wealth.

After informing Eleanor of his illiteracy, Crockett runs off aimlessly into the wilderness, and the entourage continues on their journey. As the second act starts, Crockett enters a hunting shack as he seeks shelter from a blizzard. Davy overhears some calls for help, and comes to find Eleanor and Neil lost, nearly frozen, and in a general state of disarray. Davy, never a man to deny help, brings the couple in, and uses a wooden door bar in order to start a fire. After Neil falls asleep, Crockett returns Sir Walter Scott's *Marmion* to Eleanor, and she reads to him. Most notably, Eleanor reads "The Song of Lochnivar", a poem about a knight who rides from the west in a quest to win his love, Ellen. The inclusion of Scott's poem serves a few functions throughout the play. Most obviously, Crockett's effort to win the heart of Eleanor mirrors the efforts of Lochnivar—the fourth act of the play is even titled "Lochnivar's Ride". Mythologically, the inclusion of Lochnivar serves as a means of comparison for Crockett; the concept of Lochnivar gives a sense of depth to the Crockett myth, allowing Davy to be judged against a character of equal literary importance. As Richard Wattenberg notes, "Just as the knight Lochinvar was a Romantic hero because he was free of the petty, political interests that preoccupied Renaissance princes, so Davy is a hero in the Romantic vein because he remains untouched by the petty interests of the nineteenth-century, urban world."<sup>87</sup> Lochnivar creates a mythological backdrop for Crockett, helping to illuminate Crockett's mythology while also generating concepts of chivalry and Romanticism around the character.

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<sup>87</sup> Wattenberg, "Americanizing Frontier Melodrama," 9.

Crockett's chivalric nature best manifests shortly after Eleanor delights the backwoodsman with the poem. Prior to reading, Crockett utilized a wooden bar to create a fire for Eleanor. Unfortunately, shortly after igniting the wooden bar, the most spectacular action of the play occurs, as a pack of wolves surround the house. Eleanor is completely distraught as the wolves enclose, until Davy valiantly saves the day, staying the wolves away by barring the door with his own arm. Davy, in an especially theatrical form, shouts that nothing can save the day except for, "the strong arm of a backwoodsman."<sup>88</sup>

Crockett's actions in this scene are particularly interesting given Crockett's disposition towards Eleanor. Crockett greatly reveres Eleanor; however, he feels as though they are incompatible as a result of class relations. Prior to the arrival of the wolves, Davy laments that "I ain't fit to breathe the same air with you. You are scholared and dainty, and what am I, nothing but an ignorant backwoodsman, fit only for the forests and the fields."<sup>89</sup> Eleanor represents the ideal bourgeoisie woman: she is educated, well-mannered, and feminine. Crockett's line, combined with the spectacular and ostentatious display of bravery, coalesce into a fitting commentary upon the socio-economic ideology of the play. As Amy E. Hughes writes, "the spectacle serves as an epicenter of meaning. The intense and culminative character of spectacle demands the viewer's attention and calls forth his affective response."<sup>90</sup> As a result, spectacle leads the audience to "vibrantly reflecting or violently rejecting cultural ideology."<sup>91</sup> Sitting in a lower social class than Eleanor, Crockett sacrifices his body in the name of economic and social

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<sup>88</sup> Murdoch, *Be Sure You're Right, Then Go Ahead*, 134.

<sup>89</sup> Murdoch, 133.

<sup>90</sup> Amy E. Hughes, *Spectacles of Reform: Theater and Activism in Nineteenth-Century America* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2014), 44.

<sup>91</sup> Amy E. Hughes, 44.

prosperity. Crockett saves Eleanor, literally keeping the wolves from the door: he uses his self to maintain the economically well-off.

After Davy staves off the wolves, the remainder of the play tries to reconcile the issue of class status between Eleanor and Davy; the play cannot happily end unless Crockett consummates his love for Eleanor. Crockett's morality compensates for his lack of wealth, allowing him a means of entering frontier gentility via loophole. However, it is only through a proper recognition, a formal acknowledgement, that Crockett can helm his genteel status. Eleanor finally grants Crockett this accolade after the wolves dissipate from the shack. Eleanor first notes Davy's chivalric nature: "This night has shown me all your noble self—your loyalty, your unselfish devotion." Crockett's high morals allow Eleanor to literally bestow a title upon the man. As she states, "I read your nature, as you cannot, for in the greatness of your heart, you depreciate those qualities which in my eyes raise you far above your kind, to where, rugged and simple but still preeminent, you stand a man."<sup>92</sup> Crockett is the antithesis of aristocratic norms: he cannot read, he is not trim and proper, and he is poor, hunting to help sustain his family. However, as a result of his morality, and willingness to comply to bourgeoisie ideologies, Eleanor pulls Davy into her social class; she elevates Crockett, as he is "far above your kind."

The final act of the play represents Crockett's final initiation into aristocratic society. After rescuing Eleanor from marrying Neil, the duo rides off to Crockett's home, in efforts to finalize their marriage hastily. A parson is summoned, and marries Eleanor and Davy, just as Neil and Oscar Campton arrive, in efforts to take back Eleanor. Crockett, however, delivers a speech not only cementing his vows to Eleanor, but also asserting his legitimacy as an aristocrat

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<sup>92</sup> Murdoch, *Be Sure You're Right, Then Go Ahead*, 135.



by means of virtuosity. “This girl belongs to me, I won her fair, square and legal. I saved her life, when the wolves were howling around her.”<sup>93</sup>In the plays final moments, Crockett asserts his status as a newly inducted member of aristocratic society. He married Eleanor after winning her heart with his virtue. To invalidate Davy’s claim to marriage would be to violate the system of aristocracy in place, and as a result, Crockett’s claim to Eleanor stands.

In this iteration of Crockett lore, the character becomes more performative than ever before. *Davy Crockett; Or, Be Sure You’re Right, Then Go Ahead* brought Crockett to American audiences in a fresh, exciting manner, utilizing his likeness in the widely popular genre of the frontier melodrama. This shift in genre allowed Crockett to continue the trend of moral supervision, albeit in a much more sensible fashion. Through spectacle and speech, Davy of the theater helped to define the bourgeois sentiments of the Gilded Age.

### **Crockett in Popular Fiction**

Perhaps the most overt display of the malleable nature of myth comes from the use of Davy Crockett in dime novels. Found in every corner of American society, the dime novel’s role in the late nineteenth century was that of pulp fiction—it was cheap, and it was everywhere. Davy Crockett served as the central character in many of these novels, with four titles under his belt. This analysis will focus upon two of these texts, *Kill-bar, the Guide; or, The Long Trail*, published in 1869, and *The Bear-Hunter; or, Davy Crockett as a Spy*, printed in 1873. These texts contain exceedingly different portrayals of Crockett under one genre and medium, therefore allowing for a juxtaposition of mythic interpretation.

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<sup>93</sup> Murdoch, 145.

Called dime novels because of their price, these books were easily accessible by most members of society, and as a result, had a massive audience. As Daryl Jones writes, “though dime novelists aimed their stories at a predominantly working-class audience, the appeal of the genre in fact pervaded the entire culture,”<sup>94</sup> providing, “entertainment and diversion for any individual of any social class.”<sup>95</sup> Dime novels had a ubiquitous readership throughout America; Union or Confederate, rich or poor, man or woman, almost every literate American possessed dime novels. The popularity of the dime novel can be attributed to the electrifying, enthralling, exceedingly reproducible nature of the medium, embracing “stories of scouts, white settlers, and Indian fighting; mysteries of the city; historical and international romances.”<sup>96</sup>

Unparalleled in terms of popularity, the dime novel’s importance in society cannot be underestimated. As a result of the ensuing popularity of the genre, many iterations began to adopt a keenly moralistic approach within the text. As Paulette D. Kilmer writes, “dime houses offered readers information, narratives, and advice in conformity with the expectation that reading was to be educational.”<sup>97</sup> Dime novels held a uniquely powerful position in terms of literary and moralistic clout; not only were the easily digestible, highly prominent texts, but they also touted highly moralized messages, granting a great sense of ideological diffusion.

Ideological to their core, the dime novel served to display correct moral structures to a vast amount of people, and the same can be said about the dime novels containing Davy Crockett. While both texts seek to distribute moralistic codes, the means by which both texts

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<sup>94</sup> Daryl Jones, *The Dime Novel Western* (Bowling Green University Popular Press, 1978), 14.

<sup>95</sup> Jones, 14.

<sup>96</sup> Shelley Streetby, “Dime Novels and the Rise of Mass-Market Genres,” in *The Cambridge History of the American Novel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 586.

<sup>97</sup> Paulette D. Kilmer, *The Fear of Sinking: Th American Success Formula in the Gilded Age* (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1996), 41–42.

achieve this goal is vastly different. *Kill-bar, the Guide; or, The Long Trail* written by Charles Dudley Warren, portrays Crockett rather similarly to his almanac counterpart, as he erratically meddles in a variety of frontier related issues: marriages, war, and Crockett's own quest for love all intersect in a rather bombastic iteration of Davy Crockett. Conversely, *The Bear-Hunter; or, Davy Crockett as a Spy*, written by Joseph E. Badger, Jr., under the pseudonym of Harry Hazard, paints a drastically different version of Crockett. While similarly violent, Badger's tale creates a much more genteel, esteemed Crockett, as he attempts to rescue Amy Richmond, a highly respected woman, from the clutches of the Frontier Wolf, the novel's main antagonist. The dichotomy in the depictions of Crockett maintains itself as the main focus of this section, as this analysis seeks to assert how two completely opposite iterations of the character allowed for similar assertions upon morality.

“Ker-whoop! Thunder and lightnin’! B’ars and catamounts,” cries Davy Crockett in the introductory lines of Charles Dudley Warren’s dime novel, *Kill-bar, the Guide; or, The Long Trail*. Vivacious, loud, and constantly on the run, the Davy of Warren’s novel immediately evokes the general essence of his character within the initial moments of the text. *Kill-bar, the Guide; or, The Long Trail* presents Davy Crockett rather similarly to his iterations within the almanacs—Davy is violent, talks strangely, but most importantly, he operates in a wild, lawless frontier. The way Crockett is characterized directly comports with the essence of the wilderness in which he lives. Threatening and unforgiving, the frontier Crockett resides in forces the character to a nomadic lifestyle: “A sort of knight-errant in the woods, he had been brought up a thorough hunter, and thus had discovered a strong distaste for settling in once place.”<sup>98</sup> Crockett

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<sup>98</sup> Charles Dudley Warren, *Killb’ar, The Guide; or, Davy Crockett’s Crooked Trail* (New York: Beadle and Adams, 1869), 3.

bisects the spectrum of gentility at the time; he lives in the wilderness, rather similarly to that of an Indian, while also effacing some general ideas surrounding whiteness and civilization. Creating a nomadic Crockett immediately asserts the means by which he can regulate morality. Instead of serving as an established member of society, Crockett is a roamer—his morals represent those of a man outside of civilization. His actions do not reflect the thoughts of society, but rather those of natural goodness.

Though Crockett does not necessarily abide by the rules of civilization, most notably East Coast society, he does efface a sentiment of upholding white privilege. Within Warren's novel Crockett does not face the typical antagonist of many dime novels; instead, Davy opposes Native American presence on the frontier as a whole. The title relies upon Crockett's frontier upbringing for a sense of sought-after vengeance: "Having lost several relatives by tomahawk and scalping-knife, he had learned to look upon most red-men as his mortal foes."<sup>99</sup> This violent relationship with Native Americans is promptly juxtaposed with Crockett's "solemn vow to assist any white person whom, in his wanderings, he might meet in a situation requiring his aid."<sup>100</sup> Crockett creates a spectrum of goodness based entirely off of race—to be good is to be white. The moral of compass that Crockett represents almost entirely stems itself from this argument. However, the relationship between Native Americans and white people is not that of comparison, but that of contrast. As Roy Harvey Pearce writes, in late nineteenth century literature "what Indians signified was not what they were, but what Americans should not be. Americans were only talking to themselves about themselves."<sup>101</sup> The presence of Native Americans within the text

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<sup>99</sup> Charles Dudley Warren, 3.

<sup>100</sup> Charles Dudley Warren, 3.

<sup>101</sup> Roy Harvey Pearce, *Savagism and Civilization: A Study of the Indian and the American Mind* (Baltimore: The John Hopkins Press, 1953), 232.

allow for a juxtaposition against their white counterparts, however, as previously mentioned, Davy does not function within white society, but rather as a nomadic, white agent on the frontier.

In order to comprehend Crockett's opposition to Native Americans, the ruthless means by which they are depicted needs to be understood. At the beginning of the novel, Crockett finds himself wandering in an east-bound direction, in order to attend the marriage of Mark Winters, a fellow trapper, and Lucy Ward. In yet another iteration of the myth, Crockett miraculously finds a woman lost in the wilderness, which he comes to realize is Lucy, who has been displaced from her husband-to-be. Crockett claims he will help her find her husband, which apparently ends in tragedy. After following a smoke trail for several hours, the duo finds an immolated corpse within the hollow of a tree, which is deduced to be Mark after discovering his ring on the body. Crockett sensationally proclaims, "I'll avenge yer lovyer; I'll make some of the red-skins squarm for this deed!"<sup>102</sup> Aside from being brutally violent, the murder of Mark Winters represents an attack upon white society's ability to procreate. Lucy is described as the "acknowledged belle of the settlement,"<sup>103</sup> so by rejecting her ability to wed, the Native Americans prevent the advancement of civilization. Whereas white settlers seek to live a standard, wedded life, Indians represent an offensive force bent upon causing unnecessary destruction. They prevent the consummation of white, civilized ideals, and therefore must be stopped at all costs.

While the antagonistic nature of Indians is fairly straightforward, rather typical in nature, it is Crockett's opposition to the figures that truly helps efface the morality of the Warren's text. Throughout the text Crockett's anti-Indian philosophy is made rather prominent; Chapter Five is titled "Killb'ar On The Rampage", and portrays Crockett cutting throats with tomahawks, and

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<sup>102</sup> Charles Dudley Warren, *Killb'ar, The Guide; or, Davy Crockett's Crooked Trail*, 4.

<sup>103</sup> Charles Dudley Warren, 3.

blasting natives with his rifle. Crockett also enjoys relaying stories of his murderous sprees. Crockett describes fighting two Native Americans, claiming, “my steam bein’ up to the b’ilin’ point, my own knife jist jumped out of my belt and walked into the stomach of t’other skunk.”<sup>104</sup> Crockett very evidently hates Indians, refusing to even grant them the quality of humanity. His disposition in the text reflects what Daryl Jones calls the “ugly white man” character that was often found within dime novels. “The ugly white man personifies the possible atavistic effects upon the human character of the moral and social vacuum offered by the wilderness—its dangerous freedom, its absence of institutional controls.”<sup>105</sup> Davy Crockett in *Kill-bar, the Guide; or, The Long Trail* represents the early iterations of Crockett lore—his defining characteristic is his relationship with nature. He is wild, in tune with the wilderness, and abides by the law of no man other than himself. His erratic nature is reflected by his speech patterns within the text, as they rather similarly present themselves to his speech within the almanacs.

The question at hand, then, revolves around Crockett’s capacity to serve as a moral compass. He is a violent, hateful character, constantly defiling Native Americans, and generally represents a terrible example of moral properness. It would appear that Crockett’s sense of moralistic import generates itself not from some sense of strict ethical code, but rather from spontaneous acts of goodness that appear incongruent with Crockett’s character. Throughout the novel Davy heroically risks his life for the sake of others; he almost singlehandedly holds off a Indian attack on the settlement, and lets a Native American named Omoski (who Crockett often refers to as “Moscow”), live after they fight, saying, “you are the bravest of yer kind”.<sup>106</sup> Arguably the best example of Crockett’s random heroic acts comes in the eighth chapter of the

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<sup>104</sup> Charles Dudley Warren, 11.

<sup>105</sup> Jones, *The Dime Novel Western*, 28.

<sup>106</sup> Charles Dudley Warren, *Killb’ar, The Guide; or, Davy Crockett’s Crooked Trail*, 14.

novel. Crockett and Lucy find themselves atop of a tree, in efforts to hide from a band of Indians in the area. Whilst perched, Crockett sees the tribe, who have taken a white woman captive. The woman turns out to be Suke Spoon, a raucous, uncouth, female counterpart to Davy, whom Crockett despises. While initially opposed to saving her, Crockett is coerced by Lucy, and embarks on a valiant rescue mission. “I s’pose, as she are a woman, I’m bound to try my best and save her, though I don’t see how it’s to be done!”<sup>107</sup> The moral compass associated with Crockett directly correlates with his random acts of heroism, especially heroism towards woman.

In *The Bear-Hunter; or, Davy Crockett as a Spy*, Crockett’s lore is similarly used to institute moral rigidity, however the message of the text, along with the means by which Crockett is depicted, differ rather starkly from *Kill-bar, the Guide; or, The Long Trail*. *The Bear Hunter* tells the story of a genteel Davy Crockett attempting to save Amy Richmond from the grasps of the Frontier Wolf. Unlike the other dime novel, Badger’s novel utilizes a much more traditional dime novel form: “the melodramatic triangle of male villain/captor, female victim/captive, and male hero/rescuer is foundational.”<sup>108</sup> Crockett’s ability to serve as a moral imposer is greatly influenced by the construction of the plot itself. Unlike *Kill-bar, the Guide*, Crockett faces a concrete antagonist, assuring the reader of his moral capacities: Crockett, as the hero, has to be predisposed to be good. This sentiment follows Crockett throughout the text; he is fearless, “steady as the finger of fate”<sup>109</sup>, and overtly moralistic.

Perhaps the most critical understanding of Crockett’s role in the text delineates itself from the way in which Crockett is presented. Crockett’s myth within the text hinges itself off of

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<sup>107</sup> Charles Dudley Warren, 8.

<sup>108</sup> Shelley Streetby, “Dime Novels and the Rise of Mass-Market Genres,” 593.

<sup>109</sup> Harry Hazard [Joseph E. Badger, Jr.], *The Bear-Hunter; or, Davy Crockett as a Spy* (New York: Beadle and Adams, 1873), 76.

one very simple concept: the fact that Davy Crockett, the backwoodsman, is in fact, a mythical entity. Throughout the novel the reader repeatedly learns of Crockett's mythology, creating a much more elevated societal position for Davy. After introducing himself as Davy Crockett to Tom Ashe, a stranger he meets in the woods, Ashe proclaims, "What! Not the Tennessee Crockett, the big-bear hunter?"<sup>110</sup> After nearly dying by a band of bandits, Crockett gets saved from a series of settlers, who refer to Crockett as "The Davy" and claim he is a "household name." The text goes so far as to reference Crockett's death in the future. "The desperate bravery that shone so bright at the *Alamo*, showed itself now."<sup>111</sup> Finally, the end of the novel claims that Crockett's legacy "still lives, nor will it ever die."<sup>112</sup>

The internal mythologization of Crockett once again presents F.C. Bartlett's principles of rationalization and familiarization. In recreating the lore of Crockett, Badger's continued presentation of Crockett's mythic status grants a sense of consumable legitimacy to the character; within this dime novel, Crockett's ability to construe moral correctness is directly implicated from his myth. Unlike the other iterations of Crockett lore, *The Bear-Hunter* directly pulls from Crockett's status as a mythic hero in America. While the character of Crockett is informed by general myths surrounding his lore—Crockett's frontier myth most notably—his agency as a moral informant is almost completely generated by his lore status. Whereas other iterations of Crockett utilize his myth to create a sense of otherness in Crockett, *The Bear-Hunter* relies upon Crockett's mythic superiority to drive the ideological concepts within the text.

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<sup>110</sup> Harry Hazard [Joseph E. Badger, Jr.], *The Bear-Hunter; or, Davy Crockett as a Spy* (New York: Beadle and Adams, 1873), 19.

<sup>111</sup> Harry Hazard [Joseph E. Badger, Jr.], 18.

<sup>112</sup> Harry Hazard [Joseph E. Badger, Jr.], 100.



Crockett's role as a moral scaffolding demonstrates itself throughout the plot of the novel. In an almost cookie-cutter way, Amy is kidnapped, Crockett is set to the task, invades the Frontier Wolf's camp, saves Amy, then murders the Frontier Wolf. He murders outlaws with reckless abandon, and saves multiple women. While Crockett's opposition to the Frontier Wolf helps to inform his moral capacities, it is his salvation of women that truly evoke the moral positivity of the character. As Stephanie Le Menager offers, "the dime novel Western's utilization of male rage and female terror offers insight into the fragile hegemony of American exceptionalism. Ideologies could be sustained and undone in a dynamic popular culture."<sup>113</sup> Crockett's primary moral drive denotes itself from his relationship with women. After finding Amy in the woods, Crockett fawns over the beauty of the girl: "As he gazed keenly upon her, Crockett felt the blood tingling in his veins. Like all true, big-hearted men, he was an admirer of womanly grace and beauty."<sup>114</sup> After saving Amy, the characterization of Crockett almost perfectly surmises the moral messages of the text. Men's morality, according to the text, should be based upon their treatment of women. Great men admire the beauty of women, yet also, beautiful women admire great men. The text effaces a morality of protection, prosperity, and promulgation of white, upper-class society.

Davy Crockett's portrayal in dime novels represent a sort of microcosm for his lore on the whole. Two stories that were separated in publication by just four years portray the malleable, ever changing nature of Crockett: he can simultaneously be couth and uncouth, peaceful and violent, genteel and peasant-like. Furthermore, the dime novels evoke sentiments surrounding Crockett found in other mediums; while *Kill-B'ar* utilizes Crockett in the almanacs

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<sup>113</sup> Stephanie Le Menager, "Imagining the Frontier," in *The Cambridge History of the American Novel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 524.

<sup>114</sup> Harry Hazard [Joseph E. Badger, Jr.], *The Bear-Hunter; or, Davy Crockett as a Spy*, 54.

as a sort of backdrop for the character, *The Bear-Hunter* depicts Crockett more akin to his iteration in the play *Davy Crockett*. While the changes in his lore can be attributed to an increased capacity to fictionalize the myth, it is a change in the esoteric and exoteric groups who converse with the lore that truly mold Crockett.

The initial iterations of the Crockett mythology sought out to expound upon myths that help create an identity for America; Crockett was presented as a self-made man on the frontier, who helped to verify American political ideals and exceptionalism. However, after the death of Crockett, his function changed as a result of new exoteric groups who cast Crockett for their own goals. W.T. Lhamon writes that the lore cycle, “describe features of those groups which begin to appear with merchant capital, come to self-awareness within industrial capital, and continue into industrial aftermath.” The portrayals of Crockett presented within this section were inherently dominated, controlled, and presented to East Coast elitists. This turn in the lore cycle represents an elemental change to the Crockett lore: instead of defining American identity, Crockett served to standardize what, who, and how somebody could be considered American.

### CHAPTER 3: Crockett Craze—Davy in the Twentieth Century

Perhaps the most consistent aspect of the lore of David Crockett is its ability to conform to any and all forms of media. As the nineteenth century rolled into the twentieth, Crockett's mythological inertia momentarily leaped into a wide array of mediums of which Crockett himself could never have conceived. The comic book, the television show, and the movie, three of the most definitive aspects of twentieth century culture embraced Davy Crockett with a fresh, experimental zeal. It is under these new forms that Crockett's celebrity would reach a fever pitch, as Crockett mania would encompass the midcentury United States. Deeply ingrained within a culture of youth, the racoon skin cap, Crockett's trademark headwear became a staple in American suburban backyards, as materials for production of these hats were, "sent soaring by 2,000 percent."<sup>115</sup>

Though Crockett culture erupted in the twentieth century, Davy was a starkly different character in these new forms of media. As yet another turn of the lore cycle began Crockett was left in a state of "industrial aftermath."<sup>116</sup> Crockett was no longer the celebrity of tiny frontier towns and east coast popular culture: Crockett became reproduced property of international, multimillion-dollar companies. Left bereft of his tobacco spitting, whisky guzzling, backwoods characteristics, the modern Crockett was presented as a man of upright idealism. As Walter Benjamin states, "the most perfect reproduction of art is lacking in one element: its presence in time and space, its unique existence at the place where it happens to be."<sup>117</sup> The frontier and life

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<sup>115</sup> Frederick S. Voss, "Portraying an American Original: The Likenesses of Davy Crockett," *The Southwestern Historical Quarterly* 91, no. 4 (1988): 457.

<sup>116</sup> W.T. Lhamon, *Raising Cain* (Harvard University Press, 1998), 74.

<sup>117</sup> Walter Benjamin, "Walter Benjamin," accessed January 14, 2020, <https://www.marxists.org/reference/subject/philosophy/works/ge/benjamin.htm>.

as Crockett knew it was long a relic of the past; within this new industrial era of Crockett mythological creation modern intonations and ideas pervaded the content in abundance.

Another critical change to Crockett's lore is the focus of the myth. Prior iterations focused on Crockett's exploits while he was still alive; while those myths are still talked about in more modern iterations, the primary focus has bent towards Crockett's heroic sacrifice in Bexar, at the Alamo. While these versions strain to great lengths to prop and bolster the heroism of event, typically portraying Crockett as dying surrounded by mountains of Mexican bodies, the historical facts of the situation do not seem to comport. In 1975 the diary of Mexican officer José Enrique de la Peña was published, which claimed that Crockett did not die fighting to the death, but instead was captured and executed. Peña writes that Mexican General Antonio de López de Santa Anna ordered the brutal attack upon the Americans: "With swords in hand, fell upon these unfortunate, defenseless men just as a tiger leaps upon its prey. Though tortured before they were killed, these unfortunates died without complaining and without humiliating themselves before their torturers." Even more recently, historians have come to question Peña's allegations. One prominent theory that has recently risen is that Crockett died heroically, but in a manner quite separate than before thought. In Phillip Thomas Tucker's text, *Exodus from the Alamo*, the author claims that Crockett attempted to protect his fellow soldiers, writing that, "Crockett may well have stayed in his position at the palisade to buy time and protect the flight of his comrades." Regardless of how Crockett actually died, the mythological interpretations of his death speak volumes towards his perceived importance in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Crockett became more than a symbol for American exceptionalism; Crockett turned into a justification of American exceptionalism.

The first text to be inspected in this section is Jack Patton and John Rosenfield, Jr.'s *Texas History Movies*, a 1926 comic book that cultivates the story of Texas' history. Zany and cartoonish in nature, Crockett straddles the line between historical significance and mythological fiction. Next, Disney's *Davy Crockett, King of the Wild Frontier*, will be discussed. Originally released as a serialized television show, the story of Crockett eventually made its debut in American cinemas in 1955. The single largest igniter of Crockett ubiquity in the century, the film garnered two and a half million at the box office.<sup>118</sup> Lastly, Crockett became the investigation of one of the most prolific actors of the century, as John Wayne helmed the character in his 1960 hit *The Alamo*. Presenting a thoughtful, patriotic Crockett, *The Alamo* offers a look into the most neglected aspect of his lore within this thesis: the myth of the last stand.

### **Crockett in the Comics**

*Texas History Movies*, the brainchild of illustrator Jack Patton and writer John Rosenfield, Jr. initially hit the presses in 1926. In its most developmental stages, *Texas History Movies* ran as a daily comic strip within the *Dallas Morning News*, until 1928, when Magnolia Petroleum Co., a predecessor to the Socony-Mobil Oil Co., acquired the copyright. Patton and Rosenfield's efforts with their text was relatively straightforward: to create fun, entertaining means by which children could easily learn about the history of their state. Their method for this attempt manifested in the form of a comic book, which melded fact packed glosses with cartoonish panels. Patton and Rosenfield more than succeeded, as *Texas History Movies* was "distributed to schools throughout

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<sup>118</sup> Blair Davis, "Made-From-TV Movies: Turning 1950s Television into Films," *Historical Journal of Film, Radio & Television* 29, no. 2 (June 2009): 8, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01439680902890670>.

the state,”<sup>119</sup> served as a pedagogical tool for over thirty years, and was “how many Texans learned about their past.”<sup>120</sup>

*Texas History Movies* displays a wide range of historical Texas events, starting from early Spanish colonization, all the way up through post-civil war events. However, perhaps no one period of time receives more explicating than the Texas Revolution, and more specifically, the Battle of the Alamo. The Alamo maintains itself as the spiritual bedrock for Texas independence: more than one hundred American men were slaughtered in defense of the mission. Men such as James Bowie and William B. Travis became household names as a result of their sacrifice; however, Davy Crockett’s volunteering at the Alamo served only to expand his fantastic historical and mythological resumé. Crockett is featured prominently within the panels that discuss the events that occurred at the Alamo, and through the text further solidifies his weight amongst other mythologized Americans.

The comic book, as a medium, falls under a much broader category of art known as “Sequential Art,” a term which includes mediums such as the comic book, graphic novel, Japanese manga, and other forms. Initially coined by Will Eisner, one of the most prolific comic creator, graphic novelists, and comic scholars of the Twentieth Century, Eisner describes the form as a “distinct discipline, an art and literary form that deals with the arrangement of pictures or images and words to narrate a story or dramatize an idea.”<sup>121</sup> The crux of sequential art deals with deliberate sequencing and juxtaposition of words and images—the inclusion of each allows the units of the work to influence one another. For example, a comic may portray the image of a

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<sup>119</sup> George B. Ward, *Texas History Movies* (Austin: Texas State Historical Association, 1974), 1.

<sup>120</sup> Ward, 2.

<sup>121</sup> Will Eisner, *Comics and Sequential Art: Principles and Practices from the Legendary Cartoonist* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2008), XI.

child happily frolicking on a jungle gym; however, the tone of that image may change based upon the included text. “Johnny watched his son play with delight” and “Johnny longingly yearned to be youthful” drastically change the sentiment of the image. By studying not only the content of text and images of a piece of work, but how these separate entities interweave with one another, the function and logic of the text can be discussed.

Within *Texas History Movies*, Patton and Rosenfield use a distinct pattern of comic panels and exterior text in order to guide to chronology of history. In terms of format, the majority of the piece is a series of panels (bordered, bracketed off images, with included dialogue) that encompass a few single sentence annotations. The panels themselves display action: pioneers are entering the land, wars are being fought, and democracy is being constructed. Conversely, the exterior annotations, the text found separate from the panels, serves as a frame for the images: dates, places, names and other facts are touted in order to help guide the reader to the happenings within the panels. It is this show-and-tell relationship between the panels and the inter-panel text that is critical in allowing an analysis for the text, but also serves to delineate issues with the text on the whole.

In order to understand how Crockett functions within the text, his depiction within the two separate units of the text, the glosses and the panels, needs be understood. The glosses of the comic book, serve as a wholly factual skeleton for the text: they are the most “textbook” part of the hybrid text. Crockett himself features one singular gloss, which reads, “Crockett was a hunter in the Tennessee woods most of his life.”<sup>122</sup> Staying true to form, the gloss contains completely factual, though somewhat underwhelming, background to Crockett’s historical life. However, the

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<sup>122</sup> John Rosenfield Jr. and Jack Patton, *Texas History Movies* (Magnolia Petroleum Company, 1943), 166, <https://tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/edtyk>.

factuality of Crockett's depiction within the comic panels changes drastically, as Patton and Rosenfield present a murky, half-mythologized, half-factual account of Davy Crockett and his presence at the Alamo.

In the very first panel to depict Crockett, his lore assumes a primary role, as a scene from Frank Murdoch's *Davy Crockett; Or, Be Sure You're Right, Then Go Ahead* is presented. The panel depicts Crockett barricading a door with his own arm, in order to prevent wolves from attacking him, which manifested as one of the critical scenes within Murdoch's play. The accompanying intra-panel text states that, "It is said that once he repelled an attack of wolves by using his arm as a door-bar."<sup>123</sup> While Patton and Rosenfield exoterically repurpose the wolf-door myth of Crockett, they also facilitate their own form of myth creation. As the comic progresses towards the siege of the Alamo, Crockett is presented as a soothing, calming, voice of entertainment, yet another repetitive trait for Crockett lore, as he passes time with his fellow nervous soldiers. In two separate panels Crockett is shown captivating his comrades with his enthralling stories, denoted as "tall yarns"<sup>124</sup>, and the assuaging croon of him playing a fiddle, a newly created facet of his lore.

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<sup>123</sup> Rosenfield Jr. and Patton, 166.

<sup>124</sup> Rosenfield Jr. and Patton, 169.



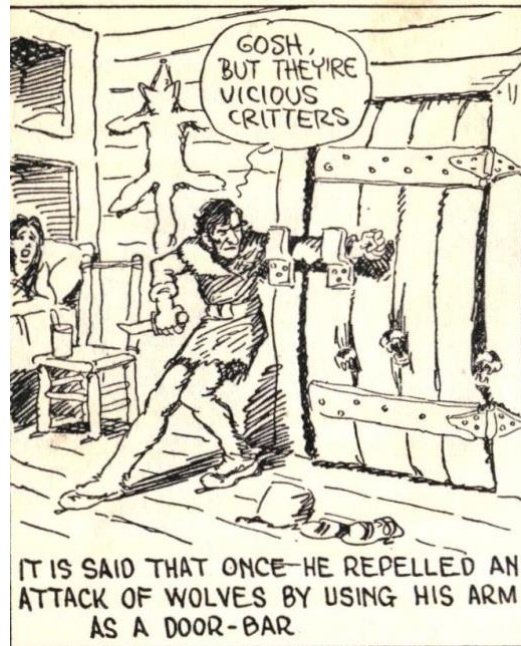


Figure 1: Texas History Movies p. 166.

One reason to explain Crockett's mythologization within the panels relates itself to the formal elements of the text: the cartoonish nature of the comic book panels. In his text *Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art*, Scott McCloud attempts to argue that cartoon, the simplified yet abstracted style of comic drawing, allows the comic to better relay the message it intends. McCloud's argument relies upon the phenomenological experience involved when one views a cartoon; humans can perceive the simplest of images to be human in form. McCloud argues that this "amplification through simplification"<sup>125</sup> allows "cartoons to focus our attention on an idea,"<sup>126</sup> arguing that cartoons maintain a sense of universality. Within *Texas History Movies*, the presentation of Crockett in cartoonish form allows his mythology itself to become a

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<sup>125</sup> Scott McCloud, *Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art* (New York: HarperPerennial, 1993), 30.

<sup>126</sup> McCloud, 31.

cartoon. Crockett represents an abstract, yet simplified sense of American ideals and virtues: he is strong, comforting, iron-willed and undoubtedly patriotic.

However, this argument is not without flaws. The second panel depicting Crockett assumes the position of being very non-cartoonish. The panel contains an almost woodcut-like portrait of Crockett, combined with his inescapable “Be sure you’re right, then go ahead,” motto. The realism of the image detracts from the other cartoonish elements of the text, granting Crockett a concrete sense of identity. While the cartoonish panels create a mythologization of Crockett’s actions at the Alamo, the very realistic woodcut imparts a sense of reality to the historical Crockett. As Anne Magnussen writes, “The interaction between text, drawing style, dialogue and panel sequence plays with stereotypes and makes it possible to relate to the comics characters in ways that are impossible in a textbook without dialogue and where pictures mainly illustrate the text.”<sup>127</sup> By virtue of the cartoonish flair of the text, Crockett is allowed a sense of mythological flexibility—Crockett represents frontier related mythology, but also a general sense of American exceptionalism on the whole.

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<sup>127</sup> Anne Magnussen, “Comics as Historical Source Material: Race, Ethnicity and Power According to Texas History Movies,” *Studies in Comics* 7, no. 1 (July 2016): 118, [https://doi.org/10.1386/stic.7.1.99\\_1](https://doi.org/10.1386/stic.7.1.99_1).

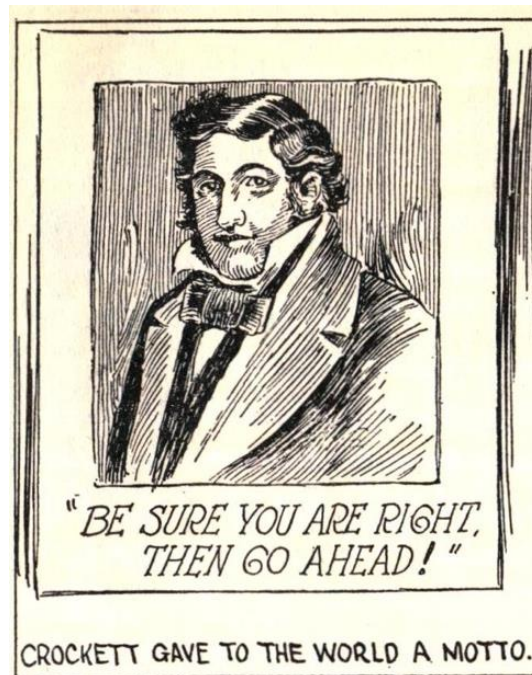


Figure 2: *Texas History Movies* p. 166.

Crockett's role within the text as a purely mythological entity is further verified by the function of the piece and later revisions of *Texas History Movies*. It is clear Patton and Rosenfield created what Eisner denotes as an "Attitudinal Instruction Comic." According to Eisner the attitudinal instruction comics train the reader how to regard a certain action or value, as "the identification evoked by the acting out or dramatization in a sequence of pictures is in itself instructional."<sup>128</sup> *Texas History Movies* does not seek to simply illuminate the Texas' past; the text also seeks to illustrate morals, values, and other pro-Texas sentiments. Within the text Crockett represents the ideal American: He is a white, Anglo-American man who is presented as a pure patriot. However, Crockett's role in revised versions of *Texas History Movies* is drastically different. In 1974 the Texas State Historical Association allowed for a republishing of

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<sup>128</sup> Eisner, *Comics and Sequential Art: Principles and Practices from the Legendary Cartoonist*, 153.

*Texas History Movies*, as a multi-racial panel of investigators sought to revise, “anything that was found to be offensive in the drawings or text,”<sup>129</sup> while also correcting, “historical errors in the text.”<sup>130</sup> Within the revised texts, Crockett retains only one panel—that panel being the most historically accurate of all the panels in the original text, which presents Crockett’s death at the Alamo. The reduced presence of Crockett within the revised editions of *Texas History Movies* speak to the characters role as mythological fodder within the text.



Figure 3: *Texas History Movies* p. 174.

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<sup>129</sup> Ward, *Texas History Movies*, 2.

<sup>130</sup> Ward, 2.

## Crockett on the Television

More than one hundred and twenty years after his death Davy Crockett reached what is arguably the pinnacle of his fame in America, courtesy of the Walt Disney Corporation. Originally airing in 1954 the television show *Davy Crockett* amassed a massive following, being viewed by more than ninety-million Americans on the silver screen. In 1955 and 1956 Crockett was revived by Disney, as the original television shows were formatted into the movie productions of *Davy Crockett, King of the Wild Frontier*, and *Davy Crockett and the River Pirates*.<sup>131</sup> This section seeks to study *Davy Crockett, King of the Wild Frontier*, as it is comprised of three out of five television episodes, and also bears a striking similarity to the earliest, most foundational Crockett texts—the legitimate and illegitimate biographies written in the 1830s. However, as Richard Dorson notes, Disney’s Davy, “bears only a small and skimpy resemblance to his fabulous nineteenth-century portrait.”<sup>132</sup>

Created as what Davis Blair calls a “Made from TV Movie”, *Davy Crockett, King of the Wild Frontier* stars Fess Parker as the titular Davy Crockett. Essentially a film comprised of three television episodes, the film depicts Crockett throughout three stages of the man’s life: his efforts as a frontiersman, rife with Native American combat and the settle experience, Crockett as a virtuous statesman in Washington D.C., and finally his valiant last stand at the Alamo. Published alongside a slurry of other Western style films and television shows, such as *Westward Ho*, *The Wagons* (1956) and *Tonka* (1960), the Disney Western, “proved an ideal vehicle to carry core values to American children hungry for role models.”<sup>133</sup>

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<sup>131</sup> Davis, “Made-From-TV Movies,” 204.

<sup>132</sup> Richard Dorson, *American Folklore* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1959).

<sup>133</sup> J. G. O’Boyle, “‘Be Sure You’re Right, Then Go Ahead’: The Early Disney Westerns,” *Journal of Popular Film & Television*; *Washington* 24, no. 2 (Summer 1996): 74.

Prior to tackling the themes present within the film, one needs to understand the means by which Crockett manifested as a mythological vector of ideals. Throughout Crockett lore the character is constantly characterized as a mythological figure; the biographies portray him as an ideal American man, the almanacs display his surreal frontier abilities, and the dime novels self-impose a sense of legend. This sense of mythic self-maintenance continues within *Davy Crockett, King of the Wild Frontier*. Before Davy ambushes an Indian troop, the audience hears of the “old Crockett charge”<sup>134</sup>; after shooting two bullets on top of each other in a competition, a town magistrate declares, “Davy Crockett. Well, it’s no wonder you won Bigfoot’s beef,”<sup>135</sup>; lastly in Congress, Capt. Norton, Crockett’s former commander, declares him to be the prime subject for campaigning, as he is a “national figure,”<sup>136</sup>. The Davy Crockett of Disney’s film world perhaps presents the best manifestation of myth, and its role within Pierre Bourdieu’s habitus. The audience, most notably an audience comprised of primarily children, watch as Davy Crockett completes a variety of outlandish, yet virtuous, actions, which are verified as being virtuous, as Crockett is simultaneously described by the film as a mythic, American hero. However, the ideals posited to children were more than simply a visually experienced phenomena, as these values were acted out on a daily basis. Western films such as *Davy Crockett, King of the Wild Frontier*, “had a cultural significance far beyond their aesthetic merits precisely because they focused on driving themes—values—rather than locale and were positioned before an audience hungry to act them out, again and again, in backyard and playgrounds across the nation.”<sup>137</sup> Children watch Davy; Children then proceed to act Davy; Finally, children, in a sense, become Davy, as they act out and manifest the ideals the character

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<sup>134</sup> Norman Foster, *Davy Crockett: King of the Wild Frontier* (Walt Disney Productions, 1955), fig. 10:02.

<sup>135</sup> Norman Foster, fig. 35:18.

<sup>136</sup> Norman Foster, fig. 55:06.

<sup>137</sup> O’Boyle, “Be Sure You’re Right, Then Go Ahead,” 74.

represents. Cowboys and Indians becomes more than a simple childhood pastime, it becomes a tool for presenting and cementing ideology.

*Davy Crockett, King of the Wild Frontier* presents the mythologization of Crockett on a microscopic scale. Over the course of the film the audience watches Fess Parker display many facets of the man's lore: Crockett as a bear hunter, as a settler, as a statesman, and Crockett as a warrior. On the whole the film grapples with three central themes as Crockett's development is portrayed: protection and provision, political honesty, and patriotism. The first section of the film depicts Crockett's wisdom within the wilderness, as he contends with the murderous Native American Chief Red-Stick, and the vile settler known as Bigfoot Mason. Secondly, Crockett displays his political sagacity within the confines of a meddling, expansionist government.

The first section of the film deals with two primary conflicts: Crockett's experiences within the wilderness, and his relationship in and amongst other frontier peoples. While both conflicts present very different issues regarding frontier life, thematically Crockett is presented as a judicious defender and provider. One of the most central pillars of Crockett lore is his reputation as a hunter, an aspect of which the Disney film was keenly aware. As the film begins, the audience watches as Crockett partakes in his most famous pastime—hunting “b’ar”. Assigned to a garrison of soldiers led by General Andrew Jackson, Crockett sets off to bring back food for his fellow men, claiming he wants to “grin down a bear”<sup>138</sup>. After Crockett's commander, Major Tobias Norton spooks Crockett's prized bear, Davy exclaims, “Now I gotta do it the old fashioned way,”<sup>139</sup>, as he unsheathes a long-bladed knife, and leaps into the Mississippi canebrake. Further along, after Crockett returns home to his wife and children for a

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<sup>138</sup> Norman Foster, *Davy Crockett: King of the Wild Frontier*, fig. 2:48.

<sup>139</sup> Norman Foster, fig. 3:08.

brief stint, he claims his main order of business is to, “Get in a supply of meat for you and the young’uns,”<sup>140</sup> before returning back to combat. The sentiment of provision even presents itself when Crockett engages in combat with Chief Red-Stick, the main foe of the American troops. During a lengthy discussion upon the merits of war with the Native American leader, Crockett claims, “Well, I ain’t a solider. I’m a settler. I’m a hunter like you,”<sup>141</sup>. In relating to Chief Red-Stick, hunting is seemingly a lifestyle, an honorable task to provide for those in your tribe. From the onset of the film Crockett’s most noble trait is his capacity to contribute food to those around him, specifically regarding the hunting of bear. It is this hunting of bear that solidifies Crockett as the supreme masculine figure within the film. As David Ingram writes, “the central dramatic function of the animal is to provide the object against which patriarchal masculinity can be tested.”<sup>142</sup> Though Crockett operates in a wild, dangerous wilderness, he functions as a rather domestic character—his main goal is to put food on the table.

Furthermore, Crockett represents a sense of justice in the lawless, wild frontier. Crockett’s interactions with the other people on the frontier, specifically Native Americans and other white settlers, help to bolster Crockett as an egalitarian, inclusive entity. The first instance of Crockett as a force of judicial harmony takes place after Chief Red-Stick takes George Russel, Crockett’s best friend, as a hostage. In effort to reason for Russel’s life, Crockett begins a speech noting the absurdity of the war being fought, claiming that, “white man’s law’d be good for Injun if you gave it half a chance,”<sup>143</sup>. After the Indian chief rebukes Crockett’s peace offering, the two take part in a to-the-death style tomahawk fight, which Crockett wins in merciful fashion.

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<sup>140</sup> Norman Foster, fig. 19:42.

<sup>141</sup> Norman Foster, fig. 24:57.

<sup>142</sup> David Ingram, *Green Screen: Environmentalism and Hollywood Cinema* (Great Britain: University of Exeter Press, 2000), 116–17.

<sup>143</sup> Norman Foster, *Davy Crockett: King of the Wild Frontier*, fig. 26:00.



Claiming he did not kill the chief because, “thou shalt not kill,” Crockett urges the chief to end the war and free Russel. Chief Red-Stick willingly obliges, only because “Davy Crockett don’t lie,”<sup>144</sup>. Secondly, after setting off to Mississippi with Russel, the duo begins the construction of a log cabin in a small settlement rife with crime and injustice. After winning a riflery competition in Robin Hood like fashion—placing two bullets atop one another—Crockett makes his acquaintance with Bigfoot Mason, a rough, gruff man who is fixed upon stealing the land of Charlie Two-Shirts, a soft-spoken, Native American landowner. After learning of Bigfoot’s willingness to unrelentingly evict local Indians, Crockett vows to “take on the job of magistrate right now,”<sup>145</sup>. After assuming the duty of being a magistrate, Crockett and Two-Shirts ensue in a brawl with Bigfoot and his men, with Crockett swiftly beating Bigfoot into submission. “You’re gonna stand trial. You two varmints have got a lot to answer for,”<sup>146</sup> proclaims Crockett, as he triumphantly returns to the small settlement.

In the initial part of the film, Crockett is shown as a provider and a protector of justice. His main priority is the maintain the well-being of others, whether that be by providing the necessities for life, or protecting the pursuit of happiness for others. This sentiment is especially important regarding Davy Crockett’s relationship with Native Americans in the film. Edward Buscombe writes that, “if a film includes Indians, they will be shown in some sort of relationship with whites,” claiming that more often than not, “Indians are found interesting only in so far as they relate to us, the whites, and not in and of themselves.”<sup>147</sup> Crockett’s relationship with Indians is that of a taxed, yet charitable amicability. Crockett is shown as far superior to the likes

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<sup>144</sup> Norman Foster, fig. 28:48.

<sup>145</sup> Norman Foster, fig. 38:38.

<sup>146</sup> Norman Foster, fig. 41:46.

<sup>147</sup> Edward Buscombe, *“Injuns!” Native Americans in the Movies* (Great Britain: Reaction Books Ltd., 2006), 28.

of Chief Red-Stick; morally he is elevated as a result of his semi-religious beliefs, while he is also physically superior, defeating the Chief at his own style of fighting. Charlie Two-Shirts' role in the film is to help amplify the notion of Crockett's inclusive, egalitarian beliefs. Crockett does not balk at the opportunity to help a fellow, law abiding settler, regardless of his past experiences with Indians on the frontier; right and wrong is simply right and wrong. Furthermore, Crockett's relationship to Native Americans becomes innumerable more important as the hero travels to Washington D.C. to serve in the United States Congress.

Depicted in a way never before imagined, Crockett attempts to trade in his buckskin wares for a suit and tie as the second chapter of the film commences. While serving in D.C. the film documents the mythologization process of Davy Crockett, while juxtaposing it against his political morality. This juxtaposition begins as soon as Crockett meets with presidential candidate Andrew Jackson; in a tactful fashion, the formal general simultaneously asks Crockett to run for Congress, while also showing him *The Exploits of Davy Crockett in the Rocky Mountains*, a fictitious analogue for Clark's biography, written by George Russel. Motivated by his alleged national fame, Crockett agrees, on the caveat that, "I wouldn't be takin' orders from you, general. I'd be takin' em from them that elected me,"<sup>148</sup>. This intersection of mythology and politics continues after Crockett wins the election. Appearing on Capitol Hill in his trademark buckskins, Crockett reacquaints with Russel, claiming his friend's text prohibits him from looking like a "self-respectin'" Congressman. Instead, Crockett needs to live up to his mythological fame, costumed as "the king of the wild frontier,"<sup>149</sup>. Crockett's campaigning nets his wide renown, as his, "politickin' was their favorite brand,"<sup>150</sup>, and Davy delivers poetic,

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<sup>148</sup> Norman Foster, *Davy Crockett: King of the Wild Frontier*, fig. 51:06.

<sup>149</sup> Norman Foster, fig. 52:05.

<sup>150</sup> Norman Foster, 56:03.

eloquent speeches in the halls on Congress. The section culminates in Davy's politically suicidal opposition to the Indian Removal Act of 1830, the genocidal bill passed by Andrew Jackson that permitted acts such as the Trail of Tears.

Mythologically, this section represents an exoteric reimagination about the esoteric mythologization of Crockett; the film recreates the act of building lore around Crockett, however it is from an outsider's perspective, removed from not only the era of Crockett, but also the specific groups who facilitated Crockett's mythologization. Rhetorically, this section serves to grant the film authority over the Crockett lore—to know how one came to be a myth displays knowledge of the entirety of the lore. More importantly however, the esoteric recreation of myth building, especially in the context of Crockett's political achievements help to bolster the preexisting myth of Crockett's political uprightness. Unlike the texts from Clark and Crockett himself, the film does not seek out to gain Crockett political vantage. Instead, the film seeks to make it abundantly clear that Crockett was a Congressional legend: he stood for what his constituents believed, and he stood for what was right.

### **Cinematic Crockett**

Released in 1960, John Wayne's epic American film *The Alamo* delves into the Crockett's final moments as he gave his life in sacrifice for the independence of Texas. Sprawling and encompassing, Wayne's film etches out as many details as possibly as it can from the event. Clocking in at a nearly three-hour run time, Wayne spares no expense in dissecting the totality of the siege. Moreover, Wayne himself acts as Davy Crockett, driving the lore of the character to its depths.

In order to discuss the film, a brief summary is in order. The film follows Crockett's arrival in Texas, and discusses his relations with those present at the battle. Just one member of the acting triumvirate, Crockett delves into combat with other legendary figures such as James Bowie, famed for knife fighting in Arkansas, and Col. William B. Travis, a young Texas military man with a great love for the country. Simultaneously, Crockett discovers love in Texas, this time in the form of Graciela Carmela Maria de Lopez y Vejar. Affectionately known to Crockett as "Flaca," Crockett wins the widow's heart after stopping Emile Sande, another suitor, from forcing her to remain in Bexar. As the film progresses, the trio begin preparations for combat: they steal ammunition from a Mexican cache; they rally hordes of men, both American and Mexican (the film references all allies to the cause as "Texicans"); and, finally, they convert the Alamo from a lowly mission to a fortified battle-station. The film ends in an epic climax, as the siege finally begins. One by one, Travis, then Crockett, then Bowie are slain by the Mexican soldiers, as they pour over the walls of the mission. The film finally ends to great fanfare, as the three remaining survivors of the siege are mercifully allowed to leave, while "The Eyes of Texas" blares triumphantly—yes, the Alamo was lost, but inklings of Texan independence were born.

Undoubtedly epic in nature, Wayne's film begins by setting a universal tone regarding liberty. The opening crawl of the film establishes its high-stakes nature: "They now faced the decision that all men in all times must face... the eternal choice of men... to endure oppression or to resist."<sup>151</sup> Faced with the "tyrannical rule" of General Santa Anna, the citizens of Texas faced the gravest of decisions: to fight, or to lay down. Historical happenstance reveals the need for such momentous dialogue. As Phillip Swanson notes, "the changing face of the Hollywood

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<sup>151</sup> John Wayne, *The Alamo* (United Artists, 1960), fig. 2:41.

Western” during the 1960s revealed many public fears regarding sweeping cultural changes: “values or affective assumptions shift from and between unquestioned certainties rooted in Christianity and perceived family or community values to Cold War anxiety and cynicism, Vietnam-era alienation and protest, psychedelia and the sexual revolution.”<sup>152</sup> *The Alamo* asserted American Exceptionalism during a time of social unrest. Specifically, Wayne’s film quells any notions of American inferiority—independence has been fought for before, and it can most certainly be achieved again.

If *The Alamo* presents the song of American Exceptionalism, than Wayne’s Davy Crockett is the bugle that plays the tune. Crockett functionally serves as a mouth piece for Wayne’s philosophy, espousing the good tidings of America. However, Wayne’s Crockett is also nuanced in a way never seen in previous iterations. One critical position the film takes is the juxtaposition between Crockett’s mythology, and Crockett as a man. Throughout the film, Crockett attempts to distance himself from his mythology, while attempting to depict himself as relatable to all. Upon meeting Col. Travis, the two begin a dialogue regarding what to do about the Alamo. Crockett insists upon dropping the formalities of calling one another colonel, claiming it makes them sound like “a couple of marsh shield birds.” Crockett further states, “Just speak right up and call me Crockett. Don’t bother to use my title. Old drunken General Flatford gave it to me in the Choctaw Indian war.”<sup>153</sup>. Crockett renounces the formality of his title, going as far as to slyly nod to the fact that his rank may be illegitimate, and just the debauched action of an intoxicated superior.

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<sup>152</sup> Philip Swanson, “Remember the Alamo? Mexicans, Texans and Americans in 1960s Hollywood,” *IBEROAMERICANA* 11, no. 44 (2011): 85, <https://doi.org/10.18441/ibam.11.2011.44.85-100>.

<sup>153</sup> John Wayne, *The Alamo*, fig. 26:25.

However, this is not the only instance where Crockett, or the film, renounces his legacy. As their conversation concludes, Laurence Harvey's Travis notes that, "You're not the illiterate country bumpkin you would have people to believe. You speak an excellent and concise English."<sup>154</sup> Harvey's lines are a direct allusion to Crockett's language in his early biographies and almanac articles. The film directly states the false nature of this language, permitting it to be a characteristic of Crockett's political merit. Crockett's almanac stories are mentioned briefly one other time in the film. After fortifying the Alamo, a random Texan asks Davy whether or not he fought Mike Fink, a relic of Crockett's almanac, for four days straight. Crockett condemns the statement as a lie: "One of them stories loose-mouthed people tell around. Mike and me quit at sundown!"<sup>155</sup> Crockett humorously engages with the myth, claiming his triumph over Fink. Throughout the film myths surrounding Crockett's likeness are cautiously refuted; he is not an Indian slaying berserker, a fast-talking politician, nor a basic tall-tale. It appears as if Wayne's film attempts to elevate Crockett from the folkloric muck that has muddied his public perception; Wayne wants Crockett to be perceived as an American hero, equal in relevance to other independence fighters like Washington and Hamilton.

However, this is not to say that the film does not attempt to mythologically elevate Crockett. While the film quashes some past mythological ideas, it still lionizes Crockett in some aspects. Whilst in the early stages of courting Flaca, the widowed woman asks why she should ever trust in Crockett. Crockett replies, "Only modesty restrains me from telling you that I am widely known for my truthfulness."<sup>156</sup> While Crockett eschews past folkloric happenings, the character still venerates the virtues with which his myth is associated. Further along in the film Crockett

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<sup>154</sup> John Wayne, fig. 31:47.

<sup>155</sup> John Wayne, fig. 1:01:05.

<sup>156</sup> John Wayne, fig. 41:22.

meets Col. Dickinson and his wife, Mrs. Dickinson, who claims to be a massive fan of Crockett: “I feel as if I know you already. You see, part of my family is from Tennessee, and, well, your name is a household word there. At least in our house it was.”<sup>157</sup> Once again, the film alludes to Crockett’s previous renown in frontier states. Finally, whilst perusing the Texas wilderness with Graciela, the woman claims that, “All I hear about is Crockett the bear-killer... Crockett the Indian-fighter...Crockett the brawler... Crockett has brains.”<sup>158</sup> The film elects to downplay the importance of Crockett’s past mythological achievements, opting instead to view Crockett as a hero as a result of his virtuosity. The film mythologizes Crockett by means of lionization; the film distances Crockett from his past lore, utilizing a self-reciprocating action to present him as a folkloric hero as a result of his status as a folkloric hero.

One means of explanation for Crockett’s quickly changing mythology relates to his structural role in the film. As Holly Beachely Brear notes, Crockett, Travis, and Bowie all relate to different aspects of the Holy Trinity: Bowie represents the “ancient ancestor”; Travis is the son that “brings the new order to the world”; and Crockett is the “ageless spirit,”<sup>159</sup>. However, for a thing to be ageless, it must have one of two qualities: either it must be firmly unchangeable, or it must be continually amorphous. As demonstrated, it is clear that Crockett’s lore has assumed a role of amorphous continuity—it is a lore that is constantly in flux. It is this amorphism, and continual need to adapt and change, that drives Crockett’s mythology to this virtuous state. As Brear further notes, “A model frontier hero, Crockett serves as a mediator between the old order and the new and between savagery and civilization.”<sup>160</sup> Mythologically, Crockett serves to bridge

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<sup>157</sup> John Wayne, fig. 57:14.

<sup>158</sup> John Wayne, fig. 1:06:44.

<sup>159</sup> Holly Beachley Brear, *Inherit the Alamo: Myth and Ritual at an American Shrine*, 1st ed (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1995), 39.

<sup>160</sup> Brear, 42.

the gap between past lore, ripe with uncouth false narratives, and a new type of lore, a lore that insists upon righteous American virtuosity. More importantly, Crockett in *The Alamo* manipulates past myths associated with the hero, and molds them for twentieth century utility.

One central change to Crockett's lore delineates itself from his relationship to nature. As always, it plays a critical role to Crockett, however this film approaches it rather differently. In the film Crockett is removed from his native Tennessee, and is found in the foreign land of Texas, a land that he initially believed to be "burnt-over desert most of the time."<sup>161</sup> However, Jim Bowie thinks quite contrarily; both historically and folklorically, Bowie had been a Mexican citizen for a several years up until this point, and even married a Mexican woman. Whilst discussing Mexico over a nip of whisky, Bowie explains his love for the region: "Big valleys between high mountains. Just everything a man could want in way of country."<sup>162</sup>

Environmentally, Texas represents an abundantly arable, wide open land of freedom. However, Bowie attributes his love of country not to the land, but to the people: "It's the people Davy. They got courage and they got dignity. They ain't afraid to die."<sup>163</sup> In this iteration of Crockett mythology, the people that inhabit a land are centrally tied to the beauty of that place. It differs from Crockett's relation to Indians and the Kentucky wilderness in the fact Crockett's relationship with Indians is an extension of his mythological prowess in the wilderness; In this instance, Crockett's appreciation for the Texian wilderness is comingled with Crockett's love for the Texian people.

This relationship manifests most clearly with Graciela, Crockett's love-interest within the film. Crockett and Flaca find common-ground as a result of the shared interest in an independent

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<sup>161</sup> John Wayne, *The Alamo*, fig. 45:29.

<sup>162</sup> John Wayne, fig. 45:38.

<sup>163</sup> John Wayne, fig. 46:00.



Texas. Flaca alerts Crockett to a Mexican ammo cache, and proves instrumental in convincing Crockett's Tennesseans to fight. Their relationship blooms over the course of the film, culminating in arguably the most symbolic scene. Clearly in love, Crockett asks Graciela to join him on a *pasear* through the woods. Crockett comes to discuss the beauty of the landscape with his lover: "And I once said this country was burnt-over sand. It's green and growing. Like those green pastures they talk about."<sup>164</sup> Crockett's statement clearly comes to glorify the beauty and potential prosperity of the Texan landscape, identifying the place as a flourishing wilderness. However, Crockett also conflates the beauty of Texas with the beauty of its people—"Texicans." Caught in an awkward transitive state, those who inhabit Texas float in limbo between Mexican foreignness, and Texian patriotism. Crockett's relationship with Graciela resolves this issue, as the couple's relationship consummates Mexican-American relations and American sovereignty over the region. Crockett furthers his dialogue with Flaca, stating, "That's one beautiful tree! This tree must've been growed...before man put his first dirty footprints on this prairie. Kind of a tree Adam and Eve must have met under."<sup>165</sup> Crockett identifies Texas as an Edenic landscape; it is an idyllic, Godly place, but more importantly, it is the cradle of American westward expansion. Graciela and Crockett's relationship represents a multi-cultural marriage which exudes inclusivity, an action conducive to a diversification of the American west.

Overall, Crockett's relationship with nature helps to reinforce an idea of cultural homogeneity in order to allow for the burgeoning of Texan independence. However, Crockett's role in the film at times can be rather lackluster. As Phillip Swanson notes, "the eliding of

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<sup>164</sup> John Wayne, fig. 1:07:25.

<sup>165</sup> John Wayne, fig. 1:08:10.

difficulties is an essential part of promoting identification with an unproblematically patriotic version of fair and inclusive Americanness.”<sup>166</sup> Crockett represents cultural mingling, but at time the movie portrays this sentiment in basic fashion. Graciela herself notes Crockett’s silver-tongued demeanor: “Would you offer to defend me if I were sixty years old and wrinkled? Or is it because I am young and a widow, and you are far from home and your loved ones?”<sup>167</sup> The film undoubtedly attempts to create a positive relationship between both Americans and Mexicans; however, it is clear that at times this relationship is strained. Even representation within the film itself is at times flawed; Linda Cristal, the actress who played Graciela, is of Argentine, not Mexican, descent. Regardless, the film attempts to extrapolate upon Crockett’s relationship with wilderness, in order to present him as binder between Mexican and American relations.

Finally, Crockett’s sacrificial death shall be discussed. First, however, it should be important to note what it is exactly the Crockett and the other men sacrifice themselves for. The obvious answer is to buy Sam Houston and the rest of the Texas army more time to defend against Santa Anna’s onslaught; however, the answer lies much deeper. In the initial moments of the film, when Crockett and Travis first become acquainted, Travis alerts Crockett to the true nature of his business: to help Texas become an independent Republic. Crockett responds in an incredibly patriotic fashion, stating:

“Republic. I like the sound of the word. It means people can live free, talk free, go or come, buy or sell, be drunk or sober, however they choose. Some words give you a feeling. Republic is one of those words that...makes me tight in the throat. Same tightness a man gets when his baby takes

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<sup>166</sup> Swanson, “Remember the Alamo?,” 93.

<sup>167</sup> John Wayne, *The Alamo*, fig. 41:40.

his first step or, his first baby shaves and makes his first sound like a man. Some words can give you a feeling that makes your heart warm. Republic is one of those words.”<sup>168</sup>

Crockett serves as a mouthpiece for Wayne, who takes the opportunity to extol the greatness of the American Republic. Crockett comes to represent an altruistic virtuosity, as he comes to understand the greater good present at the Alamo. The film glosses over the reality that Crockett left Tennessee in angst, irate over his past loss in a Congressional election. Instead, Davy Crockett perpetuates the need for expansionism, as he becomes a siren disseminating the glory of Manifest Destiny.

Finally, the movie enters the climactic final scene, as the siege of the Alamo begins. Wayne sets the scene by dramatically panning over the vast Mexican army, shown to greatly outnumber the small brigade in the mission. The siege starts, and the two-and-a-half hour set up ends blisteringly fast. William B. Travis throws his sword through a solidier, as he receives his death blow via bullet. Jim Bowie, the final member of the triumvirate to die, lies sick in the infirmary, and dies blasting every firearm at his disposal until he receives a bayonet to the abdomen. The death of Davy Crockett is the most ceremonious of all, as he slashes, whacks, shoots, and bludgeons his way through the chaos of the siege. In his final moments, he is stabbed by a Mexican soldier, but has the wherewithal to grab an enflamed torch. He stumbles to the mission’s armory, falling onto the large expanse of gun powder reserves; Crockett dies exploding the Alamo.<sup>169</sup> The symbolism imbued into Crockett’s martyrdom is blatant; he is the white-knight, the hero with a cause, falling on his sword (gunpowder) for the survivability of Texas’s independence.

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<sup>168</sup> John Wayne, fig. 31:29.

<sup>169</sup> John Wayne, fig. 2:37:24.

The night before the start of the siege, one of Crockett's fellow Tennesseans inquires, "What are you thinking, Davy?" Davy Crockett's response is solemn: "Not thinking. Just remembering."<sup>170</sup> While one can never know the conversations that occurred the night before the siege of the Alamo, this scene does pose a wonderful question. What would Crockett reminisce over the night before his death? Both the historical and literary Crockett have resumes the length of the Mississippi river, a list that surely could not be covered in a single night. Perhaps the more easily answered question is what do we, the group that interacts with Crockett's lore, remember about Davy?

Throughout this twentieth century turn of the lore cycle, the most integral aspect of the modern Crockett myth burgeoned. Crockett became mythologized in a very specific manner, a manner I have deemed mythologization via idolization. All three of the artifacts investigated in this chapter have dealt specifically with some aspect of the narrative of Davy Crockett: *Texas History Movies* and *The Alamo* delve into his role in the siege of the Alamo, while *Davy Crockett, King of the Wild Frontier* investigates his life on the whole. While these pieces extol the story of Crockett, they do so while continually reassuring the reader that Crockett is in fact a mythological entity. *Texas History Movies* discusses how Crockett "gave the world a saying,"<sup>171</sup> elevating his mythology to an international status. As previously discussed, *Davy Crockett, King of the Wild Frontier* incessantly makes references to the mythological Davy. The Alamo, on the other hand, attempts to destabilize past aspects of Crockett's lore, while also insisting that his death at the Alamo elevated Crockett to an almost untouchable mythological status. The

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<sup>170</sup> John Wayne, fig. 2:21:54.

<sup>171</sup> Rosenfield Jr. and Patton, *Texas History Movies*, 166.

difference here, compared to past iterations, is that Crockett's mythology is not being discussed within the vacuum of a completely fictional story; the stories of the twentieth century, while fictional to a degree, still retain some sentiments of historical accuracy. Why then, must the audience be directly told, not simply shown, of Crockett's greatness?

Mythologization via idolization occurs when a myth is constructed on the simple basis that it is presently considered a myth. These artifacts elevate Crockett, but that elevation only occurs because Crockett has already been elevated mythologically—these iterations of Crockett lore stand firmly on the mere presence of earlier representations. Functionally, mythologization via idolization insulates the Crockett lore from outside attack; numerous investigations of Crockett lore occurred following the Disney productions. If Davy Crockett is considered a myth because he is a myth, a logical Catch-22 occurs, wherein it becomes impossible to separate Crockett from his mythology. More importantly, mythologization via idolization personalizes the myth for the audience. Crockett is revered by these texts, molding the figure into a mythological form. Because of this reverence, Crockett becomes internalized by the audience, formed into an integral aspect of identity. Mythologization via idolization transforms Crockett lore into a critical aspect of the self for the audience: Crockett is an idol, Crockett becomes a part of the self, a part of the self becomes an idol. Crockett, in a sense, is eternalized: he becomes a part of the idyllic self, exempt from any further investigation.

## B'ars and Catamounts

The defining difference between mythology and any other narrative is the way in which it embodies the ideologies of a people. Mythology subsumes the assumptions, opinions, biases, and beliefs of a people. Mythology narrates the identity of a people. Davy Crockett, is no exception. In my first chapter I identified the means by which David Crockett came to represent the most basic mythologies of America. Forty years removed from independence, Crockett's historical accomplishments were amplified in order to create the formative ideals of the myths of the self-made man, American frontier, and American service. In my second chapter, I investigated how Crockett's mythology distanced itself from these cardinal myths, and assumed a role as a mediator of economic and classist sentiments. Crockett's likeness took on a sense of duality; When depicted raucously, he represents a coarse, surreal reflection of American capital. When depicted chivalrously, he came to embody the perfected ideal of the American man—he is dutiful, clear-spoken, and morally upright. My third chapter sought to understand Crockett when depicted through industrial capital. Whether it be through a twenty-first century comic book, television show, or film, Crockett became representational of American Exceptionalism—America has great heroes, so America must be a great place.

These twists, turns, divergences, and convergences of myth are a result of the lore cycle. Different groups of people interact with the mythology; these groups are separated regionally, temporally, and economically, allowing for a variety of ideas and beliefs so vast as to demand the lore to evolve. Not only are these groups different, but they discuss lore through many different means and modes. Where some groups apply Subversive humor, others apply melodrama; One group may discuss through autobiography, another converses through the comic book. These differences in genre and medium tweak and tinker with the mythology, forcing it to

contort to different positions, positions that effectively change the function of the lore. However, the lore of Davy Crockett did not disappear after the twentieth century. In today's world Crockett is still ever-present, hidden in the dusty corners of the American psyche, quietly mediating feuds about what it means to be an American.

Perhaps one of the most widely viewed aspects of Crockett in a modern interpretation lies in ABC's hit sit-com, *Modern Family*. Titled "Blasts from the Past," the twelfth episode of Season 10 delves into the nature of family ties and ancestral lineages. One side plot of the episode deals with Jay Pritchett, the patriarch of the Pritchett family, and his wife, Gloria Marie Delgado-Pritchett, who is of Columbian descent. The couple have a young, pre-school aged son named Joe, who takes center stage in this episode.

At the heart of the issue lies the nature of lineage: What ancestral family member should Joe idolize? In one week's time Joe has to attend class dressed up as one of his heroes, which both Jay and Gloria vehemently argue should be one of their respective uncles. On one hand you have great Uncle Erasmus Pritchett, a Texan freedom fighter who lost his life at the Battle of the Alamo. On the opposite, you have great Uncle Albero Delgado, a Columbian independence fighter who climbed ranks amongst the likes of *Símon Bolívar*. The episode initially presents both fictional uncles very similarly to the tall-tales of Davy Crockett's past: these uncles are presented as great heroes, caricatured for their past achievements. Gloria describes Uncle Albero not only as a war hero, but as a "celebrated matador," "Frida Kahlo's tango instructor" and "two-time winner of the Bogota Herald cartoon caption contest."<sup>172</sup> Uncle Erasmus, similarly, is described with the undertones of Subversive humor that came to dominate

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<sup>172</sup> Fred Savage, "Modern Family," *Blasts from the Past* (ABC, January 16, 2019), fig. 4:19.

Crockett's early lore. As Jay Pritchett notes of the man he had boots which were, "made from a nine-foot Texas diamondback he stomped to death while arm-wrestling Davy Crockett."<sup>173</sup> Both parental figures go to great lengths to defend their uncle's honor, as Uncle Erasmus and Uncle Albero come to represent the lineage of one's past. What Crockett and Bolívar are to their respective countries lore's, Erasmus and Albero are to the family: they help explain one's past, and fortify a sense of excellency, in this case, familial excellency.

As the episode continues, Gloria and her other son, Manny, decided to investigate the factuality of Erasmus Pritchett's story. Gloria astutely notes that "history is written by the victors,"<sup>174</sup> and therefore the duo finds themselves at an old mission, reading texts about the battle from the Mexican perspective. They come to find out that Erasmus's story is completely fraudulent; while he was at the Alamo prior to the siege, he decided to escape under the guise of being a prostitute, saving his life. Gloria and Manny return to their house, to find Jay has dressed Joe up in typical Crockett gear: he is adorned in a racoon skin cap and a buckskin suit. Upon telling Joe and Jay about that the legend of Uncle Erasmus was phony, Joe exclaims "I can't believe I named my lizard Erasmus!"<sup>175</sup> Defiled and devoid of any meaning, the myth of Uncle Erasmus functionally dies here, as even Jay claims "I have no uncle."<sup>176</sup> However, what dies here is not important, it is what is spared. After this incident Jay decides to do his own muckraking, to find that Uncle Albero's story is as crooked as that of Uncle Erasmus: Albero did not fight for Columbian independence, but he used a fake uniform as a rouse to steal money from wealthy widows, "frittering away their fortunes on drink and dice."<sup>177</sup>

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<sup>173</sup> Savage, fig. 4:31.

<sup>174</sup> Savage, fig. 5:30.

<sup>175</sup> Savage, fig. 10:34.

<sup>176</sup> Savage, fig. 10:43.

<sup>177</sup> Savage, fig. 16:50.



Excited about his new-found knowledge, Jay returns to his family room to deliver the news to the rest of the family. However, Joe is now clad in the red and white pompous uniform worn by *Símon Bolívar*, as he proclaims, “The yoke of Spanish oppression will chafe Colombian shoulders no longer! My saber thirsts for European blood!”<sup>178</sup> Joe claims to love Uncle Albero, as, like Joe, they are both extraordinarily short, something which Joe’s peers heckle him about. He proudly shouts “Uncle Albero was only five feet tall and he led a whole army! I’m gonna be brave like him.”<sup>179</sup> Unwilling to sully his son’s beliefs, Jay refrains from delivering the news, allowing the legend of Uncle Albero to continue.

On a structural level, the episode negates ideas surrounding the Alamo and Latin American inferiority. Uncle Albero, the Latin American hero, succeeds over the American Uncle Erasmus, inverting the relationship typically displayed in Alamo lore. The mythology of *Bolívar* and *Crockett* are posited in syntagmatic opposition to one another, as both uncles come to represent both national and familial pride. Moreover, it is critical to understand Jay’s role in the episode. In the fourth season, Jay turns sixty-five years of age, placing him at an age where he most certainly would have been exposed to content such as Disney’s *Davy Crockett, King of the Wild Frontier*. Jay reluctantly examines his family and childhood past, realizing that conservative, ultra-American lore of the past does not fit in a modern, inclusivity-based society. The show attempts to reconcile the past exclusivity of *Crockett* mythology, utilizing his lore as a sacrificial lamb in the name of unity. The progressive nature of the show comes to define *Crockett*, utilizing him as a reflective lens, allowing for an introspective review of American mythological identity.

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<sup>178</sup> Savage, fig. 17:13.

<sup>179</sup> Savage, 17:32.

Quite converse to this sentiment is the use of Crockett's symbology in Donald Trump's 2020 State of the Union address. Delivered just a month before the advance of COVID-19 on American soil, Trump's speech effaces the greatness of America. To briefly summarize, the former President's speech touts the excellency of the American-state: he notes America's "roaring economy," describes the American military as being "unmatched anywhere in the world," and claims to have "shattered the mentality of American decline."<sup>180</sup> Not only does Trump's speech invoke a sense of American greatness, it refutes any notions of American devolution, as the former President promulgates the idea that, "The state of our Union is stronger than ever before."

It is this language of glorification that lends itself to Crockett's utilization within the speech. As the former President begins to conclude his speech, he states that America "is the country where children learn names like Wyatt Earp, Davy Crockett, and Annie Oakley." Trump here utilizes Crockett's mythology as a paradigmatic signifier, alluding to Crockett's relation to other American frontier heroes; Wyatt Earp famously negotiated peace through the barrel of a six-shooter at the O.K. corral, while Annie Oakley gained notoriety as a master sharpshooter in *Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show*. Trump casts Crockett into a specific type of American hero, one who literally lived and died by the gun on the frontier. These are great Americans, Americans which the former President argues should be known from coast to coast.

Within the speech, the use of such mythological inflections helps to bolster the anecdotes that Trump utilizes. Throughout the speech, Trump notes many achievements and feats of resilience that modern Americans have achieved. He discusses Iain Lanphier, a thirteen-year old

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<sup>180</sup> "Full Transcript: Trump's 2020 State of the Union Address," *The New York Times*, February 5, 2020, sec. U.S., <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/02/05/us/politics/state-of-union-transcript.html>.

boy who dreams of eventually working in the Space Force. Lanphier's inspiration belays itself from his grandfather, Charles McGee, one of the few remaining members of the World War II Tuskegee Airmen, present at the address. He also discusses Raul Ortiz, the freshly appointed Deputy Chief of Border Control, who was responsible for preventing copious amounts of foreign drugs from entering the country. Finally, Trump discusses the resilience of Amy Williams, a military spouse whose husband, Sergeant First Class Townsend Williams, had been serving a fourth tour of duty in Afghanistan. Accompanied by thundering applause, Trump announces that the soldier has returned from duty, and is also present for the address. Throughout the speech, Trump delivers these anecdotes as a means for solidifying the idea of American prosperity—real Americans are doing great American things. By employing the use of mythological figures such as Crockett, the former President expands upon this idea, associating all Americans with notions of greatness. However, Trump does not only espouse the ideals of American frontier heroes and modern American greatness, but the idea that “America is a land of heroes.” He expands upon the idea of the American heroism, noting generals like “Washington, Pershing, Patton and MacArthur,”; freedom fighters, such as “Abraham Lincoln, Frederick Douglass, Emelia Earhardt, and Harriet Tubman”; and, pioneers, such as the “Wright Brothers and Neil Armstrong.” Trump juxtaposes these famed American heroes with those of the modern day, in order to typify the soul of the nation as that of a vast, untapped potential of greatness.

However, one does have to call into question what the American child actually “learns” about their mythology, such as Davy Crockett. As Trump concludes the section, he states that, “This is the place where pilgrims landed at Plymouth and where Texas patriots made their last stand at the Alamo—the beautiful, beautiful Alamo.” As previously discussed, the myth of the last stand has the truth-function of a snake oil salesman's product—it only works if you think it

does. The former President's address forces one to question the lore of America: Why do we know this lore? Who taught us this lore? Why were we taught this lore? More importantly, one has to wonder what American lore truly espouses. Donald Trump began this State of the Union address claiming to construct "the world's most prosperous and inclusive society." If the American people allow ideas such as this to promulgate as easily and non-fastidiously as the lore of David Crockett, then the idea of American greatness will follow the path of Crockett into a state of fractured nothingness.

Of the dense battery of sayings attributed to Davy Crockett, perhaps one of the most famous is the interjection, "B'ars and catamounts!" It is an interjection that simultaneously signifies wonder and panic. "B'ars" represents the wondrous occurrence of a trophy, the appearance of a bear, animals engrained into the soul of Crockett lore. "Catamounts," conversely, represent fear; catamounts are large cats, apex predators, deadly nuisances, ever-present on Crockett's hunts, but widely devoid of any depiction in most mythological material. Symbolically, those who have interacted with the lore of Davy Crockett can also be classified as b'ars and catamounts. There are the b'ars, the widely white male audience that has consistently been at the forefront of association with the Crockett myth. They were included, recruited even, into the mythology, posed as harbingers of the Great American identity. Conversely, you have the catamounts, those who have been excluded, defamed, and outcast as a result of mythology. Looking most notably at Mexicans and Native Americans, these groups have been pushed aside through mythological means, viewed as oppositional to the Crockett narrative. As the lore cycle continues to turn into the twenty-first century and on, it is imperative the American people make more b'ars of catamounts, and push for a mythological narrative that helps all people identify

with American greatness. Instead, let's utilize Crockett's likeness as he intended it, as "the people's faithful representative, and the public's most obedient, very humble servant."<sup>181</sup>

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<sup>181</sup> David Crockett, *A Narrative of the Life of David Crockett, Of the State of Tennessee* (Philadelphia, E. L. Carey and A. Hart; Baltimore, Carey, Hart & co., 1834), 211.

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