

masculine idol speaks to the mythology of American rugged individualism and “pioneering spirit” as well as the larger historical narrative of Anglo-Saxon conquest. As such, films about cowboys, rather than reflecting historic accuracy, serve as popular mediums and vehicles for crystallizing norms about race.¹ In other words, cowboys in popular culture serve to define core American culture and values, to characterize its heroes and villains, and to represent what types of people are central to the U.S. nation-state and what types are not. A popular figure for patriotic heroism, the cowboy is consolidated as “pure white identity.”² Thus, most do not think of cowboys as Spanish vaqueros (the original cowboys) but as Anglos such as John Wayne and Clint Eastwood, legendary definitive figures in the Western genre.

While racialized as white, cowboys are also gendered and sexualized. According to feminist film theorist Laura Mulvey, films generally position spectators in a “masculine subject position” so as to identify with male characters while the role of women is largely reduced.³ Western cowboys are part and parcel of a larger male-centered industry that predominately subordinates the presence of women to the omnipotence of men protagonists. For films like *Brokeback Mountain*, the minor role of women in the film plot, production, and promotion allows for a particularly masculinist articulation.⁴ Thus, the relegation of women and racial minorities to the sidelines allows for the expression of dominant sociocultural conventions around race, gender, and sexuality.

In line with academic scholarship and criticism on “white studies,” “whiteness” refers to that unmarked racial category for a homogeneous Anglo identity.⁵ Whiteness in short is a *social* construction that stands for a system of racial power and inequality. As an ideological construct, whiteness places whites at the center of American consciousness through “racializing projects” while minorities are posited at the margins.⁶ In this paradigm, blacks, Latinos, Asians, Arabs, and other groups are regarded as having “race” or an “ethnicity” but not whites who are seen as having no racial identity when in fact they actually do — an oversight owing to the inconspicuousness of groups in power. Consequently, the transparency of whiteness inhibits an awareness of “white” as a racial category. Recognizing whiteness entails an understanding of not only racial operations but also sexuality because ascribed racial identities are *always* sexualized and gendered (e.g., the effeminate Asian, the misogynistic Arab). In regards to *Brokeback Mountain*, it does not come off at first as a film about race but, behind its homosexual premise, there is an important message about the symbolic power of whiteness in America as well as a message about oppression of minorities in general. Yet, the popular misreading of *Brokeback Mountain* as solely a “gay thing” keeps in place an epistemological gap between race and homosexuality — two classifications usually

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Whiteness of a Different Kind of Love: Letting Race and Sexuality Talk

by Long T. Bui

It is ironic that *Crash*, a film about tense race relations in Los Angeles, bested *Brokeback Mountain*, a film about two men who fall in love during the Stonewall era, for the 2006 Best Picture Academy Award. The former may be seen as an attempt at salving the lingering enmities of the 1992 L.A. riots while the latter offers a paean to the old Westerns of the past situated within a homoerotic fantasy. In 2005, both works were top contenders for top film prizes in a “maverick” year of political filmmaking that also included *Syriana*, *Munich*, *The Constant Gardener*, *North Country*, and *Good Night, and Good Luck*. Unfortunately, the two films were counterposed in opposition to each other based on “different” subject matter (since one apparently deals with racism while the other homosexuality), and so popular media missed how race and sexuality were central issues in *both* films. Specifically for *Brokeback Mountain*, it contains its own racial motif in the form of whiteness, but this aspect was obscured by the many television junkets, talk show comedians, and weekly magazines that referred to the film as the “gay cowboy movie.”

In taking the pastoral life of cowboys as the setting for a gay drama, *Brokeback Mountain* forces a reevaluation of commonplace notions of cowboys. Because the movie is *about* cowboys, it is nearly impossible to ignore precedents Billy the Kid, Wild Bill Hickok, Roy Rogers, Gene Autry, and the Lone Ranger — definitive icons in history and film that solidified the cowboy as a white archetype. Even if it tries to break away from the stereotypical mold of the cowboy by giving it a gay twist, *Brokeback* invokes the standard racial cast of this all-American male hero as white. Indeed, the cowboy as

seen as totally unrelated. Such a misinterpretation divorces the issue of race from any grounded discussion of sexuality as it renders the existence of white identity inconsequential.

The Whiteness of Queerness

Examining *Brokeback Mountain* through the lens of whiteness, the film can be seen as part of a larger history where whiteness is institutionalized through social representation. In the post-World War II period, television featured cowboy shows like *Bonanza* in conjunction with family sitcoms such as *Leave It to Beaver* to reinforce a view of American culture as monolithically WASPish. In many ways, *Brokeback Mountain* has both a contemporary and nostalgic "feel" to it. The film harks back to the suburban innocence of the baby-boom era and to the Western settlement frontiers fantasized by historian Frederick Jackson Turner. Through cowboy iconography, films like *Brokeback Mountain* retain their function as what Jane Hill calls "white public space" — a "morally significant site for the practices of a racializing hegemony, in which whites are invisibly normal and in which racialized populations are visibly marginal."⁷

At the same time as *Brokeback Mountain* evokes an imagined past for "things that never were," it merges with the current commercialism of gay mass culture.⁸ Whereas the fictional story is set during the Stonewall period — a formative period for the coming-of-age consciousness for U.S.-based lesbians, gays, transgenders, and queers — the *Brokeback Mountain* film itself explodes onto a gay scene entrenched within an age of global capitalism. According to Donald Morton, "If in the moment of Stonewall the closet was a set of life-limiting material conditions, in the Reagan years ... it became a space of post-materialist desire, when coming out moved up the social ladder, a moment extending throughout the decade of the 1980's and into the early 1990s." Morton elucidates here the transition from early modes of queer liberation where "coming out" meant joining "a political movement in recognition of the reality of social injustice"⁹ to the present-day moment concentrated on the conspicuous consumption and "class habitus" of a gay community seen largely as gentrified and middle-class.¹⁰

Commodification of queer identity is most visible in U.S. pop culture wherein gays are encoded as privileged whites (an encoding that belies the social complexity and stratification of queer culture). Indeed, the media's celebration of *Brokeback Mountain* follows in the wake of a gay cultural revolution that began in the 1990s marked by the advent of TV shows such as *Will and Grace* and *Queer as Folk*. The currency of those programs made gay cultural products trendy and hip and posed the gay community as having "made

it," often at the expense of ignoring the ongoing political battles waged by the LGBT community. Put another way, current representations of "diversity" do not reveal the complex processes of social oppression. Thus according to Sarah Banet-Weiser, "As much as *Brokeback Mountain* (partly) subverts the myth of the cowboy through the inclusion of gay identity, other commercial forms such as advertising and souvenirs offer an opportunity to reflect on how the boundaries of consumer culture are policed and monitored in terms of sexuality."¹¹ This perspective on gay identity hinders a comprehension of social factors (such as homophobia) which created that identity in the first place and discounts the difficulties of openly gay actors to procure leading roles in Hollywood. The contradictory practice of championing minority groups while continuing to marginalize them continues today so that in the "year of the gay Oscars," many LGBT-related offerings such as *Transamerica* and *Capote* effaced queer people of color at the same time they disavowed real-life struggling gay actors in their preference for decidedly heterosexual ones. Historically, none of the Academy Awards given for LGBT roles were played by self-identified queers, including recently Charlize Theron for *Monster*, Philip Seymour Hoffman for *Capote*, Hilary Swank for *Boys Don't Cry*, Tom Hanks for *Philadelphia*, and Liza Minnelli for *Cabaret*.¹²

To be sure, Hollywood yields to the dictates of the milieu in which it is working as much as it militates against social norms. Considering the pervasiveness of homophobia in the U.S., it is not surprising that marketers for *Brokeback Mountain* avoided hyping it explicitly as a gay film (even though that was exactly what it was). Advertisements brokered the movie as "a love story" to a mainstream audience not accustomed to seeing gay cowboys but familiar with seeing white cowboys (all the more reason why a black country music star like Cowboy Troy is such a novelty).

Does Homophobia Beat Out Racism?

Despite this country's ethnic diversity, multicultural ideals run up against the historic image of a white "America" (the land of the Pilgrims). This reality is evident when comparing director Ang Lee's gay cowboy opus to his previous gay drama, *The Wedding Banquet* (*Hsi yen*). Such a comparison shows how race plays disparate functions in demarcating different minority subjects. Whereas *Brokeback*'s white-on-white love evinces a domestic (as in American) love affair, *Banquet*'s white-and-Asian romance projects an "international" liaison if only for the fact that Asian Americans are still usually thought of as "perpetual foreigners" despite having lived in the U.S. for many generations.¹³ *The Wedding Banquet* garnered attention as a "foreign film" although most of the dialogue is in English and all of the action takes place

entirely in New York City. Even if the 1993 film *Wedding Banquet* was not technically classified as a “foreign” film, it would still be seen as one only because most American audiences do not see a Chinese male protagonist as an “all-American” hero with whom to identify.¹⁴ Gay romances are typically about whites loving whites but if there is an interracial relationship involving an Asian, he/she must have a white lover. It is not unreasonable then to suggest that one potential source for the film’s marketability to North American audiences is stereotypes about “rice-potato” (Asian-white) romances — despite all that the film actually presents in contradiction to those assumptions. Simply put, *Banquet’s* interracial theme acted as the overarching “cultural” lens through which audiences could watch two men in love in which one of them is not your average GWM (gay white male).

In Hollywood, differential markings of race manifest themselves most clearly in casting. Despite the few well-known faces that have supposedly “made it,” actors of color (especially those who are not the requisite African American) continue to occupy a peripheral role in the film industry. This marginalization accounts for the tokenism of colored people in film and the frequent charges of racial discrimination by civil rights groups like the NAACP. Given the fact that the leading and featured actors in *Brokeback Mountain* are all white,¹⁵ its racial homogeneity creates what is called *homophily* — the tendency for people to identify affectively with someone who resembles them or appears to have a common ancestry with them (this is opposite to psychological *dissonance* from encountering someone who appears “different”). If the basis for identifying with *Brokeback’s* characters through sexual orientation is not feasible (since not all of the audience are queer or even comfortable with gay simulated sex), the film’s whiteness enables the essential homophilia for white viewers to identify with the characters. (Minorities have received the movie in variegated ways.) Whereas *The Wedding Banquet’s* popular appeal was tempered by its “foreignness” (and low budget), *Brokeback Mountain’s* depiction of a tale of love between two regular white guys who happen to be “gay Americans” made it more receptive to mainstream viewers. Incidentally, the overt addition of an *interracial* element in *Brokeback* would have worked against it as the contentious issue of race would have conflicted with the simple commercial sell of a gay film. Adding race then might possibly fracture its cogent marketing strategy and imbue it with too much perplexity for mass consumption, *even though race was there all along* under the specter of whiteness.

Needless to say, the subject of race doesn’t even come up in media discussions about Ang Lee’s film since the overarching singular topic of homosexuality hides the work’s oblique racial dimensions. This obliviousness conforms to what Morton calls “the Age of Difference” where public attention ... has canceled any sense of the ‘common’ [for] utterly incommensurate

differences.¹⁶ Difference, rather than something that unifies communities, appears to isolate them from one another; thus resulting in the misunderstanding of gay politics as *disparate* from the struggles of racial minorities, especially since race and sexuality are generally strangers in public discourse. Additionally, current gay civil right demands are generally seen as *supererogating* racial politics, and this erroneous conception makes it difficult to talk about race in the context of gay rights as the “New Civil Rights” battle.¹⁷

In the very same year that “It’s Hard Out Here for a Pimp” the hip-hop theme song to *Hustle & Flow* won for Best Song, Hollywood producers didn’t even consider the radical alternative of making a story about two gay pimps in love — notwithstanding the cliché and stereotype of the pimp. Thus, while *Brokeback Mountain* destroyed the illusion of the macho and always heterosexual cowboy (not a difficult enterprise since the cowboy is already loaded with homosocial possibility), the black male pimp was excluded from the queer treatment because of deeply engrained, stereotypical perceptions about black hyper-heterosexuality (that is, the black stud, the promiscuous black woman). Moreover, homosexual expression in the black community is impeded by social denigration of black same-gender love and the media scrutiny of the “Down-Lo” (which in popular culture refers to black men who have both male and female sex partners but keep their sex lives secret).¹⁸ Such impediments restrict a positive gay black identity from surfacing in social consciousness, according to Gary Young. However, Young is quick to point out the relevance of *Brokeback* to the black community because it is “a film that sensitively illustrated how even our most intimate human relationships are framed and shaped in no small part by the power, prejudices and conventions of the world around us.”¹⁹ Overcoming insurmountable odds, especially those stacked against people who are unable to love whoever they want, remains the universal message of the “gay cowboy” movie. Still, this generative point is not able to insert itself within the ideological trappings of public debate, particularly the one that ensued after *Crash’s* victory over *Brokeback* in the Academy Awards, the fallout from which included highly-charged accusations of homophobia in the film industry that passed over smaller gay triumphs.²⁰ For many working in the entertainment sector *Crash* provided the “perfect safe harbor” for which the Academy members “could vote for it in good conscience ... and not feel that there was any stain on their liberal credentials for shunning what *Brokeback* had to offer.” Thus, Hollywood’s “liberal” moment in dishonoring racism served as an expedient “cop-out” from supporting homosexuality. Such a view however overlooks the rooted presence of racism in Hollywood and how *Crash* was *also* about *socially unsanctioned* forms of sexual desire (for example, the white cop molests the black woman, the white housewife fears rape around the Latino repairman resembling a

gang banger). Likewise, *Brokeback Mountain* is political not just because it is about homosexuality *ipso facto*, but because it disrupts the heterosexual normalcy of *whiteness* in conservative “red” states—a heteronormativity that is implicitly racist because it is antagonistic toward *any* form of diversity. In that regard, the suggestion that racism is a “safe harbor” from homophobia forgets their imbrications: how the two actually overlap.

This overlap is evident when looking at *Crash*, a film which needs to employ racial (and thus sexualized) stereotypes to navigate its mosaic of interracial conflict: black male criminals; bigoted white male cop; shrill, middle-class white suburban housewife; tough, cool-headed city black police chief; successful, light-skinned mulatto couple; diffident, sassy black female bureaucrat officer (her name is Shaniqua!); and the list of trite representations goes on. Ultimately, *Crash*'s narration of racial identity (and racism) is able to appear “culturally authentic” only by speaking through gender and sexual stereotypes. Summarily, racial identities are atomized, reduced to caricatures, bounded and fixed.

In this configuration, Los Angeles epitomizes the racialized heterosexism of urban blight inasmuch as Wyoming and Texas (the settings for *Brokeback Mountain*) symbolize idyllic places for unperturbed whiteness. Consequently, the sexual orientation of the black car thieves in *Crash* is not questioned just as the racial identities of *Brokeback*'s cowboys are not. Following through with this line of thinking: What if those two carjacking buddies in *Crash* were gay? It's hard to imagine a film about two queer black thugs since media representations of gay African Americans in general are so few and far in between. Moreover, the black homo-thug remains implausible because black men are commonly depicted as *innately* heterosexual. This bears similarity to the manner in which the imagery of the cowboy is wrapped up in its own whiteness. In cultural representation, for cowboys to be gay, those cowboys must somehow *also* be white since in the U.S. gays and cowboys are usually envisaged as white. A gay Anglo cowboy then follows the racial scripts of whiteness even if it breaks from *sexual* scripts for gays (seen as wimpy) and cowboys (seen as hetero!)

Because it examines dominant norms of social behavior, cultural “scripting” is an important concept to consider here. Indeed, a comprehensive apprehension of *Brokeback Mountain*'s cultural impact must extend beyond the immediate frame of homosexuality and unearth the role of whiteness and heterosexism in defining social templates. Biased cultural representations makes race incommensurable to homosexuality; when in fact racism suffuses homophobia and heterosexism (the presumption that everyone is or has to be heterosexual). For many racial minorities, their constant struggles against social oppression sometimes forces an acceptance of heterosexism so much so

that the admittance of homosexuality as a gay person of color amounts to a betrayal of one's racial community as well as a rejection of ethnic identity. As Cathy Cohen writes, “We have to recognize that a gay sexual identity has been seen in black communities as mitigating one's racial identity and deflating one's community standing.”²¹ The supposed boundary between gay and ethnic identity stands so firmly that an endorsement of one appears as a negation or disavowal of the other. It is for this reason a gay *black* cowboy film cannot happen because it goes against certain racial scripts (the whiteness of the cowboy figure) as well as sexual scripts (the presumed heterosexuality of African-American identity). Yet, as Cohen observes, this choosing one-or-the-other option is not viable or realistic because racial and sexual identities are not so easily disentangled. They are sometimes one and the same; therefore *cross-cutting* linkages are required to wrestle with this ontological dilemma of self-identity. Moreover, just as people have “multiple identities” across racial, religious, and sexual lines, films possess multiple, sometimes conflicting connotations as clearly shown in *Brokeback* as cinema and as cultural phenomenon. In both its story and its broader impact, the film is so much more than a “gay thing” since it relates to other social conditions such as classism, sexism, familial paternalism, racism, and religious intolerance, but until those conditions are brought to light in public consciousness, the film remains encased in the boundaries of gay whiteness.

Bridging the Race and Sexuality Divide

In summary, the media's presentation of *Brokeback Mountain* as a “gay cowboy film” and *Crash* as a film about racism created barriers to inter-sectional dialogue on issues of race and homosexuality. This impasse also stems from debates about which movie was “better”—a proxy for the bigger debate on which movie was more *politically* significant in terms of addressing contentious social issues like racism and homophobia. Absent from all the brouhaha was a discussion of what is hidden from our field of vision, what we are all not seeing as a result of just focusing on the movies' *main* themes. Such focus explains the increasing use of *Crash* for teaching about “racism” on college campuses and the utilization of *Brokeback* for gay-related seminars, even though more fruitful discussions and creative insights may be garnered by switching the two so that students of race will look at *Crash* through a queer perspective and *Brokeback* from the vantage point of race and ethnicity. Limiting the broader social meanings of those films—since the former portrays only “racism” while the latter illustrates homophobia—reduces social relations to a superficial level (after all, racism oftentimes bears elements of homophobia and vice versa). The juxtaposition of racism and homophobia

as equally similar controversies fails to distinguish among various levels of oppression (for example, discussing racism may be controversial but it is no longer taboo whereas for many, homosexuality still is). All of this then impels a reassessment of public discourse and its social terrains.

If the megalopolis in *Crash* allows us to picture "racialized sexualities" in an urban environ, the mountains of *Brokeback* provide the natural setting for a movie about the alienation of white gays. Racial minorities are metaphorically encased in the segregated enclaves of a Balkanized city like Los Angeles, where they embattle one another in a kind of Southern Californian Yugoslavia; whereas gays find solace and sanctuary and vistas of the outback. Unfortunately, because whiteness in *Brokeback Mountain* and heterosexism in *Crash* go unnoticed, the coterminous relationship between race and sexuality remains indiscernible. Once those dormant things are exposed, however, it is possible to entertain the idea of *Brokeback Mountain* as a film about the racial isolation of whites living in the American hinterlands and *Crash* as a story about racialized sexuality. In the imaginary division between race and homosexuality however these social constructs are cancelled out by one another because of our inattention to people of color as *sexualized* beings and whites as *racialized* subjects. In that regard, the year of *Brokeback Mountain* was not a "breakout" year in "queer film" just as the year when Halle Berry and Denzel Washington received lead statuettes for their respective portrayals of a single-mother super-freak and a shady cop did not "open the door" or create a watershed moment for African Americans in the film industry. Indeed, the very act of declaring "breakout" moments for these two groups ignores a rich history of black influence on queer life as well as queerness on black arts/politics — a history not openly acknowledged because of the way we departmentalize and think of identity.²² Until there is a critical interrogation of racial minorities as sexualized "queer" subjects and an exploration of the whiteness that shores up Anglo performance (in film, TV, and other media), intersectional understandings of race and sexuality are foreclosed. Despite their admirable critiques of racism and homophobia, *Crash's* heterosexism and *Brokeback's* whiteness are still left unexplored in popular media and discourse. And despite proclamations that these films opened up public dialogue on race and sexuality, many believe that we have not begun to talk about these things through more nuanced angles. So let's give them something to talk about ... how about black thug love?

Notes

1. R. Philip Loy, *Westerns and American Culture, 1930-1955* (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland, 2001); Andrew Brodie Smith, *Shooting Cowboys and Indians: Silent Western Films, American Culture, and the Birth of Hollywood* (Boulder: University Press of Colorado, 2003); Scott Simmon,

The Invention of the Western Film: A Cultural History of the Genre's First Half-Century (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2003); Dan Moos, *Outside America: Race, Ethnicity, and the Role of the American West in National Belonging* (Hanover, N.H.: Dartmouth College Press, 2005); Arnoldo De León, *Racial Frontiers: Africans, Chinese, and Mexicans in Western America, 1848-1890* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2002).

2. Quoted in Shirley Geok-lin Lim, "Gender Transformation in Asian/American Representations," in *Gender and Culture in Literature and Film East and West: Issues of Perception and Interpretation*, ed. Nitaya Masavaut, George Simson, and Larry E. Smith (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1994), 77. See original in Alexander Saxton, "The Racial Trajectory of the Western Hero" *Amerasia Journal* 2, no. 11 (Fall-Winter 1984): 67-79.

3. Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," *Screen* 16, no. 3 (1975): 6-13.

4. Once the film hit mainstream attention, however, the promotional campaign began to utilize its female actresses more and more in posters and photos in order to attract a wider audience.

5. Matthew Frye Jacobson, *Whiteness of a Different Color: European Immigrants and the Alchemy of Race* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1998); Noel Ignatiev, *How the Irish Became White: Race and the Making of the American Working Class* (New York: Routledge, 1995); George Lipsitz, *The Possessive Investment in Whiteness: How White People Profit from Identity Politics* (Temple University Press, 1998); David R. Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class* (New York: Verso, 1991).

6. Racial formation is defined as "the sociohistorical process by which racial categories are created, inhabited, transformed, and destroyed ... a process of historically situated projects in which human bodies and social structures are represented and organized." Altogether, racial projects are those institutional and social forces that construct, institute, and promulgate racial categories. See Michael Omi and Howard Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States: From the 1960s to the 1980s* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 55-57.

7. Jane H. Hill, "Language, Race, and White Public Space," *Contemporary Issues Forum, American Anthropologist* 100, no. 3 (1998): 682.

8. Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 77.

9. Donald Morton, "Paraphysics of the Closet," in *Marxism, Queer Theory, Gender*, ed. M. Zavarzadeh, Theresa L. Ebert, and Donald Morton (Red Factory: New York, 2001), 15-17. These days what sometimes passes as civil rights victories come in the form of commercial benefits, social concessions, and advertising products from major companies who merely target gays and lesbians as a viable and lucrative consumer market.

10. Pierre Bourdieu defines habitus as the "system of acquired dispositions" that function as principles of organizing action, in which embodied practices are sedimented onto the individual from cultural institutions and social conditions; see Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice* (Cambridge, UK: Polity, 1990), 58. Class habitus then is the particular adopted and embodied modes of taste, preference, sensibility, and body language corresponding to the historically contingent expectations, adaptations, and operationalized social rules of a class. Bourdieu's discussion of "social classes" of course does not neatly align with the specificity of American queer/racial culture but there are generative insights to be gained from Bourdieu's work on domination, capital, culture, and aesthetics. See also Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1984).

11. Sarah Banet-Weiser, "The Business of Representing," *American Quarterly* 58, no. 2 (2006): 496.

12. Sir Ian McKellan, possibly the most famous gay actor in the world, says, "It is very, very difficult for an American actor who wants a film career to be open about his sexuality ... and even more difficult for a woman if she's lesbian. It's very distressing to me that that should be the case." See "Hollywood Resists Gay US actors," *BBCnews.com*, Feb. 12, 2006, <<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/entertainment/4706092.stm>> (accessed Aug. 18, 2006).

13. Ronald T. Takaki, *A Different Mirror: A History of Multicultural America* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1993).

14. Well-known "Asian American" male actors like Russell Wong are of mixed ancestry

with Caucasian features, and Asia-imported actors like Jackie Chan and Jet Li obviously fill America's narrow niche for Kung-Fu action, but in general, these actors are not seen as sexually appealing for American audiences.

15. In *Brokeback Mountain* the only speaking non-white characters in the film are the Basque servant who delivers supplies and the Mexican street hustler — two stereotypical roles for racial minorities.

16. Morton, 14.

17. The advent of the modern gay movement dates back to the time of Black Power during the late 1960s and continues to draw inspiration from it. In this regard, the fight for gay rights is not a new civil rights movement but because the issue of same-sex marriage is a contemporary hot topic that appears in the post-civil rights era, many people, especially in the conservative parts of the African American community, feel gays are inappropriately appropriating the struggles for equality for blacks. See *Daisy Hernandez*, "Gaily Ever After: Is gay marriage the new civil rights struggle or has it co-opted a legacy?" *Colorlines Magazine: Race, Action, Culture* (Fall 2004).

18. "Down-low" men do not identify with a gay identity and might instead call themselves bisexual, sometimes out of internalized homophobia. Gary Younger however expands the semantic meaning of "down-low" by describing *Brokeback Mountain* as a film about "the down-low up high in the hills." See Younger, "Why There Will Never Be a Black Brokeback Mountain." *The Guardian*, Jan. 23, 2006, <<http://film.guardian.co.uk/features/featurepages/0..1692946.00.html>> (accessed Aug. 18, 2006).

19. *Ibid.*

20. There was of course Logo, the first gay cable station on TV. For the Academy Awards, there is no consensus on why underdog *Crash* beat out forerunner *Brokeback Mountain* for Best Picture, especially in various awards shows leading up to the Academy Awards. Many observers, including Annie Proulx herself, have cited the generally conservative character and age of the Academy's voters or general homophobia in Hollywood but there are still too many conspiracy theories around this issue to reach a firm conclusion. Roger Ebert points out that the single-minded battle over best picture may be more about ideology than genuine sentiment as few people talked about the implications of Felicity Huffman's loss for lead actress (when she won for that same role in the Golden Globes) or Philip Seymour Hoffman's win. His contention that *Crash* is a better movie than *Brokeback* however is questionable and underestimates the level of homophobia extant in society. See Ebert, "The Fury of the 'Crash'-lash," *Chicago Sun-Times*, Mar. 6, 2006.

21. Cathy Cohen, *The Boundaries of Blackness: AIDS and the Breakdown of Black Politics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 14.

22. Examples of cross-influence between the gay movement and the civil rights movement are too numerous to list fully but some major leading figures of this interaction include James Baldwin, Bayard Rustin, Alice Walker, Robert Mapplethorpe, Audre Lorde, Barbara Smith, Little Richard, Grace Jones, Billie Holiday, and Bessie Smith.

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The Queerness of Country: *Brokeback's* Soundscape

by Noah Tsika

In a movie largely responsive to the complexity of the queer experience, no song encourages the survival of same-sex, socially objectionable romantic relationships quite like "A Love That Will Never Grow Old," by Gustavo Santaolalla and Bernie Taupin. Sung in the film by a prominent recording artist, Emmylou Harris, who gives a female (though not necessarily straight) voice to the lyrics, the song can seem, like a number of others in *Brokeback Mountain*, to effectively "side" with one of the film's pair of male homosexual lovers. On the face of it, "A Love That Will Never Grow Old" would seem to speak for Jack Twist (Jake Gyllenhaal), the poignantly optimistic ex-ropedeo rider in love with the largely fearful, chronically reticent Ennis del Mar (Heath Ledger). But on reflection the song, uniquely among the majority of ballads on the movie's soundtrack, works to affirm, on the one hand, the youthful optimism of Jack Twist while pointing toward another, intractable and adamant response to social prejudice — a brave response neither man shares: who gives a toss about bigotry? When we're together, we're free.

If the movie is a romance, so is the song. It speaks more for the spectator, living presumably safely in the early years of the "enlightened" twenty-first century, than it does for either of the film's paired men (though Jack in all his blind yearning is more readily accommodating an "heir" of the song than Ennis, who infrequently speaks; for the record, neither says "love"). "A Love That Will Never Grow Old" is not *their* song, but the spectator's. One of the fascinating aspects of *Brokeback's* song track is that it creates — verbally determines — an atmosphere of classical romance around these boys (and eventual men) who cannot, for a whole host of reasons — and quite literally — speak the language of love. "A Love That Will Never Grow Old," one of five songs